**The Bluebeard Fairy Tale and the Action Heroine**

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**Abstract**

This thesis examines a set of films where the figure of the Hollywood action heroine is a mother. The action heroine films that this thesis examines are: *Gloria* (John Cassavetes, 1980), *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986), *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (James Cameron, 1991), *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Renny Harlin, 1993), *The River Wild* (Curtis Hanson, 1994), *The Cell* (Tarsem Singh, 2000), *Panic Room* (David Fincher, 2002), *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003 and 2004), *Æon Flux* (Karyn Kusama, 2005), *Elektra* (Rob Bowman, 2005), *Flightplan* (Robert Schwentke, 2005), and *Maleficent* (Robert Stromberg, 2014). The framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale and the gothic mode are used to read familial figurations and gender in these films. The thesis shows that the Bluebeard fairy tale continues to have a presence in Hollywood films and contemporary story-telling. Film genre theory, Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's (2000) feminist literary criticism are also used as reference points. Each of the chapters focus on a dimension of the familial figurations that recur in these films. Chapter 1 reads and explains the presence of the Bluebeard-husband figure in the films and his problematic relationship with the action heroine. Chapter 2 reads the symbolic husband as a bad father, who persecutes the figure of the gothic child in the films, and is thus the "killer" father. Chapter 3 examines the figure of the action heroine and understands that her gaslighting, trauma and mental instability are a consequence of her complicated relationship with the symbolic husband. Chapter 4 examines the ambiguous nature of the action heroine's motherhood, and her emergence as the "final" mother in the climax of the films. It is concluded that child abuse and inter-generational trauma are central to the familial dysfunction in the films. It is argued that it is the action heroine's feminism that leads to the formation of the alternative family unit in the films; simultaneously, the action heroine is also read as a politically conservative figure.

**In the memory of Brij Mohan Sharma. And for little P, who now plays with his daddy all the time.**

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**Introduction**

Walt Disney's *Maleficent* (Robert Stromberg, 2014) is an example of the fallacy that fairy tales are exclusively for children. *Maleficent* is not Walt Disney's first treatment of the fairy tale. Its sixteenth animated feature film was made in the heyday of Walt's career, the classic *Sleeping Beauty* (Clyde Geronimi, 1959). Like most contemporary retellings of fairy tales via the Disney franchise whether animated or live-action, an attempt is made to keep up to times via addressing diversity and political correctness.[1] Rather than retelling the story as faithfully as possible to the original fairy tale, the film is retold from the perspective of the ugly witch who curses a child, which in most accounts is merely because of her false vanity. In this instance, it is the usefulness of the Bluebeard fairy tale that I would like to draw attention to. This connection between the cinema and fairy tales has time and again been addressed by scholars like Marina Warner (1993, 1994), Maria Tatar (2004), Kristian Moen (Moen, 2013) and Sue Short (2015). Building on such work, this thesis argues for the significance of the Bluebeard fairy tale, and how it can be used as a framework to study representations of the action heroine, a figure that has sought attention in feminist debate.

In my research on the Bluebeard fairy tale from 2014 till recently, studying it as a fairy tale and using the critical work around it to analyse the films of this thesis, this comment by Tatar is particularly striking:

> Bluebeard, on the face of things, does not appear to enjoy the rich cinematic afterlife of tales such as "Cinderella" or "Beauty and the Beast." Its seeming failure to invigorate cultural production in this country [United States of America] can be traced to its effacement by two British rescriptings of the story which have dominated our cultural imaginary, producing plots that have had a powerful popular appeal (Tatar, 2004, p.67).

Tatar's observations and analysis point out that the Bluebeard fairy tale is not as popular as some other fairy tales. My conversations with the laypeople and even intellectuals about my research produce fascination, when I point out that I have found a fairy tale

[1] This seems like a well-informed move given the retrospective allegations against Walt Disney for being racist.

narrative in the films that I examine. However, any mention of Bluebeard is treated with astonishment, even as to the existence of such a fairy tale. Counterarguing Tatar's observation on the lesser popularity of the Bluebeard fairy tale adaptations in the commercialised American film industry, and those who have not heard of Bluebeard, is this doctoral study.

Although the Bluebeard fairy tale may not seem to enjoy an afterlife like Cinderella and Beauty and the Beast, this research shows that it has its important place in Hollywood cinematic images, which are inspired by works of fiction, myth, and the imagination of filmmakers. The presence of the Bluebeard myth in Hollywood pictures is more silent, secretive and encrypted, one that needs the shrewd mind of a dedicated researcher to bring this mythical connection to light. As this thesis shows, the Bluebeard fairy tale has a rich but often overlooked presence within the cultural imagination. It is made obvious in the titles of the films, or understood to the media literate audiences, or is under the close examination of critics and scholars: that for instance *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990) and *Maid in Manhattan* (Wayne Wang, 2002) retell a modern version of Cinderella. In the same manner, *Sydney White* (Joe Nussbaum, 2007) and *Mirror Mirror* (Tarsem Singh, 2012) retell Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. The gothic horror *Crimson Peak* (2015) by Guillermo del Toro most apparently retells the Bluebeard fairy tale. Perhaps not surprisingly then the film was the focus of several discussions at the conference 'Gothic Feminism: Women-in-Peril or Final Girls? Representing Women in Gothic and Horror Cinema' at the University of Kent in May 2017. But yet, there are fewer such instances of contemporary Hollywood genre films using the Bluebeard figure.

This thesis makes a case for the Bluebeard fairy tale, for critical work that has defined it in terms of its obscurity compared to its much redacted and retold counterparts, or for those who had not heard of it like myself until recently. It looks at how the Bluebeard fairy tale can be used as a framework to read the figure of the action heroine explored by Yvonne Tasker (1993) among other significant scholars. The theoretical interest in the fascinating figure of the empowered action heroine then disseminated has been studied by numerous other scholars writing on film, television, comic books and videogames. This includes Elizabeth Hills (1999), Martha McCaughey

and Neal King (2001), Sherrie A. Inness (1999, 2004), Yvonne D. Sims' (2006), Stephanie Dunn (2008), Gladys L. Knight (2010) and Jeffrey A. Brown (2011). This critical interest has given the action heroine the academic status similar to the femme fatale archetype of Hollywood films; that is, the action heroine is a figure of fascination who is understood to speak to ideas about gender in important ways. The action heroine films that this study examines are: *Gloria* (John Cassavetes, 1980), *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986), *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (James Cameron, 1991), *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Renny Harlin, 1993), *The River Wild* (Curtis Hanson, 1994), *The Cell* (Tarsem Singh, 2000), *Panic Room* (David Fincher, 2002), *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003 and 2004), *Æon Flux* (Karyn Kusama, 2005), *Elektra* (Rob Bowman, 2005), *Flightplan* (Robert Schwentke, 2005), and *Maleficent*. A few of the films have direct similarities to the Bluebeard fairy tale and others do not, thereby highlighting the intertextual quality of the fairy tale. However, this was not a criterion in selecting the films. Some of the films have prequels and sequels, which are also analysed in a few instances. Structurally, the thesis aims to discuss the films chronologically wherever possible. The corpus films are discussed in each chapter, with the chapters organised thematically as detailed at the end of this Introduction. These films are spread over three decades; the earliest film is from 1980 and the most recent film was released in 2015.

These films are marked by the advent of a backlash against second-wave feminism and the wake of postfeminism, a cultural movement analysed by the American feminist journalist Faludi (1992). Despite the historical position of the corpus films, this thesis does not evoke this context (although it does not dismiss it either) as particularly useful for understanding the films within the framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale. This point of methodology will be taken on further along in the Introduction. These films are still being produced by Hollywood, the most recent example of such a film is *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller, 2015). This film indicates the ongoing resonance of the Bluebeard fairy tale as a framework for thinking about the action heroine figure.

This selection of action heroine films includes some that have been part of numerous academic discussions on the action heroine: *Aliens*, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, and *The Long Kiss Goodnight*. These and other films referred to above have been chosen because they present as either a surrogate or a biological mother. These

characters' skills and intelligence are mobilised towards challenging and fighting the manifestation of patriarchy or evil or both conflated into one representation. Most importantly the action heroine's courage and resourcefulness are directed among other things to rescue and protect an innocent child, who is also a significant protagonist of these films. This pre-requisite of what can be read as a mother-and-child relationship has meant excluding action heroine films like *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (Doug Liman, 2005), *Salt* (Phillip Noyce, 2010), *Prometheus* (Ridley Scott, 2012), *Lucy* (Luc Besson, 2014), *Wonder Woman* (Patty Jenkins, 2017) among others. By the same principle older and much discussed films like *Red Sonja* (Richard Fleischer, 1985), *Nikita* (Luc Besson, 1990), *G.I. Jane* (Ridley Scott, 1997) among others have also been excluded from the focus of this work. As part of the research into representations of action heroines as mothers, this study also located the action-cum-vampire/gothic film *Blade: Trinity* (David S. Goyer, 2004). The film represents the familial dimension as the blind character of Sommerfield (Natasha Lyonne) has a daughter in the film. In *Gravity* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013), Dr Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock) mourns the death of her daughter. These films, although not akin to the corpus films, suffice as a comment on the significance of the mother-child relationship in films featuring an active protagonist at its centre.

These corpus films were primarily singled out to study the representation of the action heroine as a mother. My initial intentions were to attend to the maternal dimensions of the character and the narrative that frames her as a mother. It has been acknowledged time and again that the action heroine is frequently, if not always, portrayed within a nurturing relationship to a child. Tasker explains: "The figure of Ripley also provides an interesting instance of the ways in which imagemakers have dealt with the 'problem' of the action heroine, mobilising configurations of motherhood, for example" (Tasker, 1993, p.15). Continuing her line of argument and throwing new light on her discussion on the action heroine, Tasker later argues: "The maternal recurs as a motivating factor, with female heroes acting to protect their children, whether biological or adoptive *(Terminator 2, Aliens, Strange Days)* or in memory of them *(Fatal Beauty)*" (Tasker, 1998, p.69). In her work on *The Long Kiss Goodnight* and *Kill Bill*, Angela Dancey uses the conventions of the maternal melodrama to read the active protagonists as maternal subjects. She explains how the key paradigms of the woman's film recur in the films, as the two genres of the woman's film and the action film

converge and collide to represent postfeminist anxieties about working women (Dancey, 2009). Lisa Purse refers to the action heroine's motherhood only very briefly. She understands it as an explanatory device, where the action heroine is "under the sway of an instinctive, irrepressible maternal drive" that undermines her agency and subjectivity (Purse, 2011, p.77). In his monograph, Brown has dedicated an entire chapter to the representation of action heroines as mothers in comic books (Brown, 2015).

Learning of and reading the representations in the corpus films from the frame of the Bluebeard fairy tale has enabled me to bring to fore the triad of the father, mother and child(ren), which are none other than figurations of the patriarchal nuclear family albeit in altered forms. This research took a step away from the main subject of its focus (the action heroine and her motherhood) and preoccupied itself with what lies in different interests of the spectrum. This involved examining in great detail the antagonist (whom I read as a symbolic husband to the action heroine in Chapter 1) instead of primarily focusing on the protagonist, the action heroine. This research has had to concern itself with and prioritise the devious masculine figure's fatherhood in order to set the foundation to the action heroine's motherhood. The critical analysis presented in this thesis also foregrounds the dysfunctional relationship between the action heroine and the symbolic husband figure. This throws light on why in the scenarios reiterated in these films the action heroine comes out as the primary care giver to the child.

This re-theorisation has allowed me to progress to a consideration of the action heroine's role as a nurturer in the films in an original way. It has made room to address the familial figurations that are presented in these films. Therefore, this work stands out compared to other critical accounts that examine the action heroine's motherhood in isolation. In its building of familial dimensions that surround the maternal subject, the thesis is unable to fulfil a possible premise that the research began with, that of providing a comprehensive account of the action heroine's motherhood.

It is important to briefly contextualise the Hollywood films focused on in this thesis. This thesis analyses these mainstream films that generate revenue as Hollywood

blockbusters. The films are marketed via the star image of female actresses' like Gena Rowlands, Sigourney Weaver, Meryl Streep, Geena Davis, Jennifer Lopez, Uma Thurman, Charlize Theron, Jodie Foster and Angelina Jolie. These actresses popular and critical success assures and affirms a loyal fan base and success to these films. Only adding to the critical acclaim of the selection of films, Gena Rowlands was nominated for an Oscar Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role for *Gloria*. While Sigourney Weaver received an Oscar nomination for Best Actress for *Aliens,* this is somewhat of an anomaly. Although this project is not a star study (Dyer, 1998) or uses star study as a key methodology, star images are mentioned at different points to support the arguments presented.

Without a doubt, the films that this thesis examines are genre films produced for entertainment. But yet the position of genre in this doctoral thesis is less overt. This project is not a genre study, a theoretical investigation focused on films of a particular genre. The thesis explores films drawn from various generic locations and traditions. *Gloria* is a gangster picture. *Alien* is a science fiction horror. *Aliens* builds on the science fiction and horror aspects of its prequel and redirects the terrestrial marines to the terrain of action-adventure in space. Most interestingly, Thomas Doherty (1996) has dedicated an entire sub-section to the generic lineage of *Aliens*. This attests to the generically hybrid status of the film. *The Terminator* is an apocalyptic science fiction film which has drawn inspiration from the slasher film. *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* takes the story of *The Terminator* towards big budget action entertainment, while still staying true to its science fiction infusion. *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is an action thriller that introduced a female character as a central protagonist to the terrain of the action film. *The River Wild* is an action-adventure film tied in with the tradition of the maternal and the family melodrama. *The Cell* with its gore is a slasher/gothic horror film. *Panic Room* is a home invasion film, where a woman is in peril. In her article, which is one of the first most significant readings of familial discourses and their significance in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2*, feminist film critic B. Ruby Rich only very briefly alludes to the genres that the film draws on: "chop-sockey films", "spaghetti Westerns", "grindhouse movies", "kung-fu gems", "wushu", "Hong Fist kung fu", "Japanese bushido", "Chinese martial-arts traditions" references that Rich mentions are available in the "press section of the Miramax website" (Rich, 2004, p.25; Coulthard, 2007, p.161). *Æon Flux* is a cheapy

science fiction action film. *Elektra* originates from comic books and also draws from martial arts films. *Flightplan* is a contemporary thriller. *Maleficent* is a fantasy action-adventure film. Despite the diversity of generic elements, this thesis points to areas of commonality, namely the figure of the action heroine caught within particular familial dynamics, and the purchase of the Bluebeard fairy tale for making sense of these films.

The discussion of genre in relation to the corpus films and especially the highly publicised generic references of *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* mentioned above, explain the significance of generic hybridity to this thesis. Rick Altman explains the use of semantic and syntactic elements of a text, that is what he classifies as the linguistic and textual, in his approach to genre (Altman, 2009). His work is particularly useful in addressing the fluid nature of genre films. Tom Ryall cites Steve Neale's (1990) work on generic hybridity. Neale argues that all Hollywood plots are generically hybrid as they combine several generic plots with another like romance (Ryall, 1998, pp.335-6). Theorists like Doherty have addressed the subject of genre among others in relation to the *Alien* franchise. Doherty associates the breakdown, of what he understands as formerly pure genres, as a "post-classical Hollywood" phenomenon. He accounts this to audiences well acquainted with television, who readily accept the fusion of genres, and also the "transfer of generic allegiances" (Doherty, 1996, p.189). The corpus films are examples of what Jim Collins (1993) refers to as "ironic hybridisation" (Grant, 2007, p.23). Genre theorist Barry Keith Grant cites Collins' work on this phenomenon that the later observed in relation to Hollywood films from the 1980s onwards. This process "seeks to combine elements from previously pure or discrete genres" (Grant, 2007, p.23). This study agrees with the definition of generic hybridity as provided by these scholarly works, that any given film text brings together elements of more than one genre.

However, this thesis is not a genre study that investigates films of a particular genre. Yet genre theory on the action, gothic, science fiction, thriller, melodrama along with other frameworks are used to read the films. Specifically using Altman's work on the semantic and syntactic approach to genre films, the semantic elements of the corpus films are those of the genres discussed above (Altman, 2009). Whereas the syntax (Altman, 2009) of the corpus films is that of the literary female gothic, where the

ideological premise of the gothic heroine actively resisting patriarchy (Wheatley, 2006, p.92; Hanson, 2007, p.131, p.180; Wallace and Smith, 2009, p.8) is deployed via the figure of the action heroine. Yet at the same time, the reigns of "genre as ritualised endorsements of dominant ideology" are at work in the corpus films (Grant, 2007, p.33). For instance, when the action heroine is represented as deranged, she is further reigned in via maternity, and the climax of the films reinforces the myth of the patriarchal nuclear family. These ideas will be explored further in the thesis, and it is to this end that this project engages with works on genre theory.

The figure of the action heroine also poses a further problem of genre for this thesis. The term action heroine refers to the generic territory of Hollywood action films. But as discussed earlier, none of the corpus films fit into Grant's definition above of "pure" action films (Grant, 2007, p.23). Even films like *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* are action films infused with science fiction, signified by the tropes like a dystopian future, a Frankenstein's monster, among others. This thesis studies the enigmatic and intelligent figure of the action heroine that has disseminated to a wide variety of genres partly due to generic hybridity and the desire of filmmakers to capture this fascinating character type onscreen. I examine the figure of the action heroine in films that belong to different genres and are generically hybrid. The rationale of bringing together this selection of films is to study the action heroine and how she is framed within familial figurations, when she plays the role of the mother. Accordingly, the action heroine has been defined in complex scholarly terms, which I discuss below to aid my own usage of this designation.

Tasker defines the action heroine via examples of Linda Hamilton in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and Thelma Dickinson (Geena Davis) and Louise Sawyer (Susan Sarandon) in the acclaimed *Thelma and Louise*. In the process of defining and historicising the action heroine, Tasker harks back to much older definitions of active women on the Hollywood screen. She relates the emergence of the action heroine as "a response of some kind to feminism" in circulation in popular culture (Tasker, 1993, p.15). The association of the action heroine to feminism gains common consensus in other definitions by media and other critical literature scholars. However, what this feminism consists of is a contested subject matter in relation to the figure of the action heroine.

Tasker relates the action heroine via generic hybridity to the figure of the final girl of the slasher film (Tasker, 1993, p.15) and also cites the influence of world cinema including Hong Kong cinema (Tasker, 1993). For Tasker, the term action heroine gives female characters agency and casts them out of passivity of gender stereotypes perpetuated by classical Hollywood cinema, which is addressed by subsequent theorisation (Tasker, 1993, p.18).

Further on, Tasker associates the action heroine with the stereotypes of tomboy, cowboy, mother and Other (Tasker, 1998). She also addresses the action heroine as an object of lesbian desire (Tasker, 1998, p.71). This study does not consider action heroine's sexuality and her appeal for same sex audiences, which is the subject of argument for Tasker (Tasker, 1993; Tasker 1998). Moving away from the subject of same sex desire, Hills has counterargued against the feminist film theory tradition of gender binaries to study the action heroine. According to Hills: "As female characters who take up the central spaces in the traditionally 'masculine' genre of action cinema, they [action heroines] derive their power from their ability to think and live creatively, their physical courage and their strategic uses of technology" (Hills, 1999, p.39). Hills' work proposes a new framework to read the action heroine and acknowledge this new female character for its face value, rather than the then-tradition of feminist film theory, where empowered female characters are read as phallacized (Hills, 1999). McCaughey and King likewise study "violent women in the movies" and label them as "mean women" (McCaughey and King, 2001, p.2). The women that McCaughey and King (2001) refer to also defy the boundaries of genre like the action heroine of Tasker's discussion. The mean women of their definition also include villainous heroines rather than merely righteous heroines fighting for justice (McCaughey and King, 2001). In her edited collection Inness and the contributors examine "action chicks" in popular culture (Inness, 2004). Brown's monograph, a more recent in-depth study of the action heroine relies on established definitions of the action heroine within film studies and popular press (Brown, 2011).

This thesis also understands the action heroine in the corpus films in line with these scholarly discourses. The action heroines of this thesis are not villainous like the mean women of McCaughey and King's discussion (2001). The subject of race is central

to the argument presented by Dunn (2008). Likewise, Sims' work traces the lineage of the mainstream action heroine to the black action heroines of blaxploitation (Sims, 2006). There is hardly any work of scholarship that does not acknowledge the action heroine's blaxploitation predecessors via the central characters of *Coffy* (Jack Hill, 1973) and *Foxy Brown* (Jack Hill, 1974), both starring blaxploitation heroine Pam Grier (Inness, 2004, Goren, 2009, Brown, 2011). This thesis unlike the work of these scholars does not examine the subject of race via the constructions of whiteness that are presented in the corpus films. This is an issue I am aware of and I intend to explore it in the future. It is worth noting that both Coffy and Foxy transform into the action heroine in order to avenge the unjust murders of the vulnerable and to protect the family, thereby resonating the themes of the corpus films. This project like Sims' work traces a lineage but one that traces the action heroine to the literary predecessor of the gothic heroine. Rather the figure of the action heroine is approached via the framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale and is understood within the heterosexual contract. This has its own limitations as the hegemony of heterosexuality is reinstated by this reading. However, what is also brought out in the reading of the films being studied is the action heroine's place at the margins or even outside of a stable heterosexual relationship.

The study of the action heroine is limited to Hollywood films in this thesis. Unlike Knight's (2010) encyclopaedic and chronological treatment of the action heroine, this thesis does not examine other media like television, comic books, and video games. It is also not exclusively focused on action television series like the essays presented in Bill Osgerby and Anna Gough-Yates' edited collection (2001). Yet at the same time, one cannot ignore the representation of the action heroine in these media and the impact of this lineage on the action heroine in film. This thesis agrees with the definition of the action heroine employed by scholarly discourse discussed above as a courageous, resourceful and active subject onscreen. However, in the corpus films the action heroine's representation is marked by the traditionally feminine role of motherhood. As the arguments presented in the thesis will show, tensions are represented via the action heroine, herself considered to be a problem figure. In contrast to the majority of the work discussed thus far, the action heroine in the corpus films is not limited to the Hollywood action film, but branches out to films from other genres. The active woman has a pivotal place in the stories that Hollywood narrates through its entertainment

oriented productions. Despite the diversity of generic elements, this thesis points to areas of commonality, namely the figure of the action heroine caught within particular familial dynamics, and the purchase of the Bluebeard fairy tale for making sense of these films.

Turning the attention back to the Bluebeard fairy tale, the main framework of this project which is also suggested in the title of this thesis is the Bluebeard fairy tale. The thesis statement of this study is that "high concept" films can be usefully examined via the framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale (Wyatt, 1994, p.7; Lacey, 2000, p.53). This thesis does not argue that the films are a retelling of the Bluebeard fairy tale although some films do involve elements of that. The Bluebeard fairy tale is rather used as a framework to think about patriarchy. This allows the thesis to explore the complexities of gendered hierarchies and patriarchal relations in the corpus films. The original title of the fairy tale is *La Barbe bleue* in French and was written and published by Charles Perrault in 1697 (Warner, 1994, p.241; Tatar, 2004). The various retellings of the Bluebeard story over centuries have been in the form of folklore, ballads, sonnets, novels, librettos, operas, theatre, children's books, and also Hollywood cinema. Warner (1994) and Tatar (2004) respectively engage with the various retellings of the Bluebeard fairy tale in great detail.

The Bluebeard fairy tale can be summarised as follows: A wealthy old aristocrat, the Bluebeard, marries a young woman from an underprivileged social and economic background. Before pursuing his travels, he hands over a key to his wife and forbids her to use the key to access the room it opens. On her husband's departure, the curious young wife disobeys her husband's authority, and seeks to find the secrets that lay beyond the door. To her shock, she finds dead bodies of what she learns are her husband's previous wives. The young woman shudders in fear and makes her way out, but is unable to disguise her betrayal of the husband's authority. Her access to the room of secrets leaves a bloody stain on the key, which she is unable to get rid of, despite her persistent attempts in doing so. On his return, the Bluebeard learns of his new wife's disobedience, and is only willing to subject her to the fate of her predecessors. It is the wife's good fortune that one of her sisters is staying over with them at the time. The sister alerts the brothers, who in the nick of time come to slay the Bluebeard, and rescue

the young wife. The story ends happily when the wife is remarried to a new, more suitable, match (Warner, 1994, p.241; Tatar, 2004). This brief summary of the tale as it appears from Warner and Tatar's historical account is the key framework on which this doctoral work rests.

Warner's historical account of the Bluebeard fairy tale recounts the different media via which the fairy tale is retold and the variations of the fairy tale over the centuries (Warner, 1994). Her historicisation points out that via the variations, the fairy tale formed new meaning and an otherwise obsolete story gained new life. Warner explains how these variations in the fairy tale have to do with the socio-historical and socio-political contexts in which the Bluebeard fairy tale is retold. Her most recent historical account of the metamorphoses of the story of Bluebeard are slasher films (Warner, 1994, p.270). In deploying the Bluebeard fairy tale as a framework, it is these variations of the tale that are used to produce readings of the films. When referring to the Bluebeard myth in analysis, the reference is not to one particular version of the tale, but to the various versions of the Bluebeard fairy tale that Warner and Tatar historicise about. The thesis shows the significance of this fairy tale as a framework through which to read contemporary stories such as the corpus films. Tatar's work engages in much more detail with Hollywood films of the female gothic cycle from the 1950s where the Bluebeard fairy tale is retold (Tatar, 2004). Her engagement with Hollywood films and her historical account of the variations of the Bluebeard fairy tale also informs my readings.

Critical interest in the Bluebeard fairy tale explains its unlikely position in a collection of bedtime stories for children (Warner, 1994, p.269; Tatar, 2004, p.13). They have especially addressed its fear-provoking nature, although all fairy tales have elements of cruelty especially abuse directed towards children (Short, 2015, p.112). As a tale of marital infidelity either on the husband or wife's part or their infidelity to each other, it is no surprise that scholars writing on the Bluebeard fairy tale have acknowledged its obscenity and odd place in the nursery (Warner, 1994, p.269; Tatar, 2004, p.13). The question that quite obviously emerges is: what potential could a patriarchal myth that warns about the ills of marrying a stranger offer as a framework to study the transgressive figure of the action heroine? As discussed earlier, the

variations of the Bluebeard tale are used to read the films. However, what is most interesting for this project in Warner's historicisation is that the Bluebeard fairy tale is reformulated over the centuries and retold to contain a feminist message. This includes a stance against the arranged marriages of seventeenth-century France and the "right of women to administer their own wealth" (Warner, 1994, pp.266-7). In his libretto, *Bluebeard's Castle* (1918) Béla Bartók wrote of his belief in equality between men and women, thereby making female emancipation a key aspect in the retellings of the Bluebeard fairy tale (Warner, 1994, p.269). Warner observes that a version of the Bluebeard tale written by Victorian children's writer Juliana Horatia Ewing has "female independence" as central to the tale (Warner, 1994, p.266).

This thesis thus uses the Bluebeard fairy tale to explore themes which have been central to both feminist and postfeminist scholarship. Female independence has different meanings since the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s compared to Warner's context. The term second-wave feminism as it appears in this thesis concurs with Joanne Hollows definition. Hollows explains: "it is generally accepted that feminism is a form of politics which aims to intervene in, and transform, the unequal power relations between men and women" (Hollows, 2000, p.3). This study also engages with the idea of backlash against feminism and postfeminism. For the term backlash, this project relies on Faludi's understanding. Faludi argues that backlash is "an undeclared war" against women because of the gains made by women during second-wave feminism. She argues that this backlash is propagated by popular culture, politics and popular psychology (Faludi, 1992). The idea of postfeminism is also in the background of Faludi's work. This work agrees with Hollows and Moseley's derivation of Faludi's theorisation that "post-feminism is used to mark a negative and retrogressive move and refers to a cultural shift during the Reagan era in the US where an emphasis on 'family values' created a backlash against feminism" (Hollows and Moseley, 2006, p.7).

In some variations of the tale, the story is told from the wife's perspective like in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) and Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) (Tatar, 2004, p.9; Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p.103; Short, 2015, p.100). These feminist strands are owed to the historical feminist revisions of the misogynistic and patriarchal Bluebeard fairy tale. This thesis begins with identifying the Bluebeard figure as the action heroine's

symbolic husband, a relationship which unfolds in the background in the films. The idea of genre films as a myth in their own right or retelling myths, which is central to this thesis, is a concept that has been explored by genre theorists like Grant (Grant, 2007). Through the discourse of the Bluebeard fairy tale, the thesis investigates representations of family and gender in action heroine films. This framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale, despite its crude ideology and inherently misogynistic nature, is useful for this thesis because it allows me to bring out and read the familial dimensions that are present in the films.

Despite historical accounts of the variations of the fairy tale that are used to study the films, there is key terminology from the Bluebeard fairy tale that is used throughout this thesis. The Bluebeard's bloody chamber refers to the secret room where the Bluebeard's wife finds the dead bodies of the remaining wives. In most instances, this includes seven wives. The blood stained key refers to the key that the husband hands over to the new wife before he leaves for this travels. It develops a bloody stain as the wife curiously opens the forbidden chamber.

The corpus films under scrutiny have been directed by a varied range of directors. From John Cassavetes, who is known to have disliked gangsters and violence and did not want to direct *Gloria* even though he wrote it (Charity, 2001, p.169, p.171, p.180); to director Quentin Tarantino whose filmmaking practice constantly relies on stylistic displays of violence, and who is acknowledged by critics to be "a fascinating but horrible symptom of a violent culture" (Botting and Wilson, 2001, pp.9-10; Rich, 2004, p.25; Gallafent, 2006; Garrett, 2007, p.13; Coulthard, 2007, p.161). The corpus films can be read via the Bluebeard story, the most violent and unlikely of fairy tales, almost an "anti-fairy tale" (Warner, 1994, p.269; Tatar, 2004, p.5, p.19). From this point of view, it is no surprise that the Bluebeard fairy tale is an important touchstone to read the corpus films. They provide an acceptable and unproblematic representational outlet to violence and brutality that is endemic, as Short reminds the reader, of the Bluebeard legend (Short, 2015, p.107).

The third intertextual framework employed in this thesis is derived from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* published in 1847. *Jane Eyre* is a landmark gothic novel that draws on

both the Bluebeard fairy tale and the tale of Beauty and the Beast. The narrative, themes and character types in the novel are used to read the corpus films. The use of *Jane Eyre* as a framework is yet another example of how the novel has disseminated into wider (and global) popular culture via films as diverse as *Interlude* (Douglas Sirk, 1957), *The Sound of Music* (Robert Wise, 1965), *Kramer vs. Kramer* (Robert Benton, 1979), *Maid in Manhattan, Howl's Moving Castle* (Hayao Miyazaki, 2004) and *An Education* (Lone Scherfig, 2009) and indeed the corpus films. The purpose and benefit of using *Jane Eyre* as a framework are numerous. It has allowed me to bring to fore the gothic intertext of the corpus films, which contributes to the originality of this work. More importantly, like the Bluebeard fairy tale, the novel allows a reading of familial dimensions of the films, one of the key aims of this project. The challenge of the project was to integrate these approaches that were not necessarily combined and explore disciplines other than film.

I would like to note here that several textbook introductions to film studies (such as Nelmes, 2007; Cook, 2007; Hill and Gibson, 2008) do not have a section historicising gothic as a film genre or the impact of literary gothic on the cinema. In fact, the two words gothic and genre to my knowledge are not written together. This issue has also been addressed by Misha Kavka (2002, p.249). My observation thus points to a certain absence within the disciplinary terrain of film studies. References to gothic literature, gothic tropes theorised in literary theory and film theory, especially via Helen Hanson's (2007) work, provide a framework to address how gothic themes have a nuanced and often overlooked presence in the corpus films.

The heroine Jane in the novel is a prototype of a feminist hero based on the gothic heroine. Theorists like Fred Botting (1996) have clearly stated that the action heroine owes her onscreen existence to the gothic heroine. Despite the knowledge of this lineage, the action heroine has never been theorised concerning her ancestor. The use of the gothic novel *Jane Eyre* again offers originality to this thesis as it allows me to bring out the action heroine's lineage and to study her in relation to this past. The action heroines in the corpus films are read not just via the character of Jane. Adding to the originality of this work, the action heroine is also examined by the other significant character, the hidden and seemingly deranged first wife of Edward Fairfax Rochester, Bertha Antoinetta Mason. Equally important for this work are the film adaptations of

the novel and critical works on *Jane Eyre.* This especially includes the seminal feminist text by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The title of their work refers to Rochester's first wife Bertha. Gilbert and Gubar's monograph is another framework that is used in this study. This text and its place within feminist works will be discussed further along in the Introduction.

This is a feminist thesis that clearly places itself within the tradition of feminist film theory. It differs from that foundation in several ways (detailed later in this Introduction); but it is significant here to very briefly summarise that history in order to establish the basis of this project. In her account of feminist film theory, Karen Hollinger summarises that there are two approaches via which feminist film theorists challenged the position of women in the cinema. The first, she argues is via exposing patriarchal ideology weaved into mainstream films by critiquing the films. The second route of feminist film theory is that of propagating an alternative film making practice, mostly to be undertaken by female directors. The end result of this art form would be to break through the patriarchal coding of women on screen by male filmmakers and the patriarchal Hollywood system (Hollinger, 2012, p.7). This thesis then continues in the first line of thought by critiquing mainstream films in order to expose how patriarchal ideology frames the active figure of the action heroine. The analysis also examines whether the narrative gives these female characters moments of resistance and agency in the films. Via analysing the selected corpus films, gender, one of the key concerns of feminist film theory is also a key, if not the only subject of scrutiny of this project.

The "images-of-women" approach or reflection theory was pioneered by theorists such as Molly Haskell, Marjorie Rosen, among others. Haskell argues that Hollywood films mirror how society really treats women. These onscreen images Haskell argues are distortions of "how women 'really are' and what they 'really want'" (White, 1998, p.118). See also Hollinger, 2012, p.8. White and Hollinger respectively argue that the most significant part of Haskell's images-of-women approach was her identification of the woman's film, which became a critical canon of study for feminist film theorists. Corresponding with some of Haskell's discussion of the 1930s and 1940s woman's film, this study examines films where the female protagonists are at the centre of the narrative (Haskell, 1999, p.21). Kaplan's (1992) work on motherhood and film develops

Haskell's idea on the maternal woman's films thus resonating with the theme of the mother and the child in the corpus films. Haskell further writes: "The woman's film, its themes appropriated by the man's film, has died out" (Haskell, 1999, p.30). In a similar manner, the themes of the thesis show that the themes of the woman's films namely marriage, family, children and motherhood are portrayed in the action heroine films, action traditionally being understood as a male genre. The approach of this thesis that centres on the figure of the action heroine allows the discussion range across genres and to move past these gendered genre designations.

Hollinger explains that because of the limited nature of Haskell and Marjorie Rosen's reflection theory came into existence cine-psychoanalysis. This methodology drew on "semiotics and psychoanalysis" (Hollinger, 2012, p.10; White, 1998, p.118). Their approach unlike reflection theory drew on "contemporary philosophy and literary theory" (Hollinger, 2012, p.10). Like the work of these theorists, this thesis also understands the representation of the action heroine as an ideological product of Hollywood filmmaking, despite the feminist pleasures that a transgressive figure like the action heroine has to offer. This doctoral work shares with this tradition the value placed on female agency. However, it does not adopt a psychoanalytic frame for my analysis. Although it does centralise myth, symbolic understanding and a reading of narrative in terms of gender and power.

In her 1973 essay, Clare Johnston argues that the representations of women on screen have nothing to do with reality as Haskell discussed. Instead, using Roland Barthes' approach on myth, she argues that representations of women in the cinema are informed by mythological constructions of women. She notes: "Myth then, as a form of speech or discourse, represents the major means in which women have been used in the cinema: myth transmits and transforms the ideology of sexism and renders it invisible – when it is made visible it evaporates – and therefore natural" (Johnston, 1999, p.32). This idea that representations of women are informed by myth and thus represent dominant ideology that Hollywood cinema naturalises also informs the approach of this study. This study takes a step further and uses the Bluebeard fairy tale to deconstruct representations of the action heroine and the family. Johnston's work also very briefly investigates a feminist "counter-cinema" by exploring the work of female directors in

the Hollywood system. Studying closely the work of female directors became a subject of subsequent concern for feminist film theorists. While earlier in the Introduction, I did touch on the subject of feminist leanings of the auteur directors as circulated in popular media, this thesis does not engage with this viewpoint.

Mulvey's work (1975) is often cited as the first essay of feminist film theory, and indeed, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic film theory that deconstructs the sexual and gender politics of classical narrative cinema (Mulvey, 1992). It especially focuses on the position of women in Hollywood cinema. As discussed earlier, this thesis unlike Mulvey's does not use psychoanalysis as an approach to read the corpus films. However, like Mulvey's work, this thesis is concerned with the representation of women, in this instance the action heroine. The key premise of Mulvey's theoretical account is that ideology is at work in Hollywood's representation of women onscreen. For Mulvey, this is canvassed via the "active gaze" of the male spectator (different from the male audience in the cinema auditorium) or the male character. She approaches the woman on screen as a construct of male fantasies perpetuated by monolithic practices of Hollywood filmmaking (Mulvey, 1992, p.748). The underlying reason for this "passive" positioning of women is understood by Mulvey via the Freudian idea of "castration anxiety" (Mulvey, 1992, p.750, p.753, p.746). Her work posits a place for the male spectator, while addressing the absence of a position for the female spectator. Mulvey's landmark essay led feminist film theory in several directions: negotiating room for the female spectator, challenging the patriarchal filmmaking practice via alternative cinema and bringing to fore the work of female directors (like Johnston's argument discussed above). These lines of argument however are not significant to the subject of this thesis and hence are not scrutinised in this overview. This thesis too approaches representation as ideological, but it seeks to explore looking relations in ways that centre the action heroine as well as the patriarchal Bluebeard figure.

Although it does make some use of psychoanalytic terms, this work takes a step away from arguments of spectatorship pleasures, whether male or female. Instead it takes a step away from the acknowledged discourse of psychoanalysis to analyse the representation of women in Hollywood films. The Bluebeard fairy tale is used to examine representations of the action heroine in contrast to the use made by Mulvey and others,

via Freud, of the Oedipus myth. Mulvey further uses myth in her 1981 paper to address the earlier ignored subject of female spectatorship. Again, she relies on psychoanalysis as much as she relies on the use of myth to support her arguments. She uses the myth of Andromeda and Perseus and also Vladimir Propp's monograph (1958) in her work. Much in line of Mulvey's Freudian-mythical and other Greek myths framework to study the sexual politics of mainstream films, this thesis uses the Bluebeard fairy tale as a framework. This study thereby argues for a wider purchase of myths to study cinematic representations.

With this in mind, psychoanalysis as a framework is hinted at in Chapters 2 and 4 via the passing reference to Karen Horney's (1973) concept of womb envy. Psychoanalysis has been a useful means of making sense of gendered representations with the purpose of understanding the sexual politics of Hollywood cinema. Meanwhile, other representational theories have developed and built from these foundational studies in a way that proved more beneficial for this project's specific discussions, for instance, the psychoanalytical concept of womb envy, and its use as a tool to study film. As such, the thesis privileges the Bluebeard myth as a structuring factor in these films, while nonetheless often factoring in and complementing existing feminist film theory based on psychoanalysis. This proactive choice has been made because the psychoanalytical frameworks of feminist film theorists are insufficient to address the action heroine in the familial dynamics that are present in the corpus films. This includes: the romantic/antagonistic relationship between the action heroine and the symbolic husband, the very substantial themes of a devious fatherhood, which is counterbalanced with a righteous motherhood, and the familial figurations that are consistent in these texts.

A fairy tale reading, like a psychoanalytical reading tends to downplay the historical. These limitations of psychoanalysis have clearly been stated by scholars like Barbara Creed, who have used psychoanalysis as an approach (1998, p.86). Indeed, other scholars have addressed shortcomings of existing scholarship standing on the foundations laid by psychoanalysis, like for instance Hills' study of the action heroine (1999) and Jacinda Read's study of the rape-revenge avenger (2000, p.11). I am fully aware that a reading and understanding of the corpus films produced through the lenses

of the fairy tale, one of the key lenses that the study employs, produces a reading that is not primarily focused on historical reactions to the films. Despite this limitation, the reading produced through the discourse of the fairy tale allows a rare insight into the familial dimensions presented in the action heroine films. This thesis thereby puts forward a distinctive and original way of thinking about the action heroine, a figure of cultural visibility. As discussed earlier, the postfeminist context in which the films were produced, which has become key to much feminist criticism of mainstream media in recent decades, is referred to but is not central to the analysis.

Most significant to this thesis is feminist works on genre films, like the woman's film and the gothic woman's film. According to Haskell and Mary Ann Doane, the woman's film is a specific sub-genre of films that were at the peak of Hollywood production from the 1930s to the 1950s (Doane, 1987, p.3). These were films that primarily featured a female protagonist at its centre and the narrative is about her overcoming of her woes and survival in the imaginary world of the film (Haskell, 1999, p.21). On account of its subject matter, these films were primarily targeted to female audiences (Doane, 1987, p.3), and are ancestors of the television soap opera (Haskell, 1999, p.23). The common consensus is that these films addressed female problems of romance, family, heterosexuality and motherhood (Doane, 1987, p.3). Genre theory on the family melodrama and woman's film would have been an ideal theoretical framework to analyse and address the representations in the corpus film. However, it is in search of the malicious masculinity in the films that I was directed to the Bluebeard myth, and its use in feminist film theory in relation to the gothic woman's film. The intertwining of the action and melodrama genres has been explored through several works in the volume edited by Tasker (2004).

In her work on the 1930s and 1940s Hollywood woman's film Doane discusses the issue of female spectatorship in the woman's film by using psychoanalysis as an approach (Doane, 1987). Although this thesis does not consider the subject of female spectatorship, theoretical work on some of the medical woman's films, films on motherhood and paranoid woman's films of Doane's work are themes that are central to the arguments presented in this thesis. Doane specifically addresses the context of

the literary gothic in relation to the paranoid woman's film, and the place of these films under the category of women's picture:

> The paranoid gothic woman's films of the 1940s have not been consistently allied with the label, the "woman's film". For the woman's film is usually associated with excessive emotionality but not fear, love and sacrifice but not violence or aggression. And in fact, the paranoid films are themselves instances of a kind of generic miscegenation – a transgression of generic boundaries. They are infiltrated by the conventions of the film noir and the horror film (Doane, 1987, p.125).

Doane categorises the paranoid woman's film under the corpus of the woman's film. This theorisation can be used to read the action heroine corpus films as contemporary woman's film, despite their awkward position within the male action genre. Doane's work also allows me to address the mixed lineage of the woman's film, film noir, and the gothic horror, among other genres in the action heroine corpus films. Using the Bluebeard fairy tale to read these films and genre theory from various genres allows to address and bring out this complex and interesting lineage. The paranoid discourse regarding femininity and the subject of marital abuse are explored at length in relation to the corpus action heroines in Chapter 3. Doane's work like Haskell's also brings to fore the neglected figure of the mother, which was later studied at length by scholars like Kaplan in the maternal melodrama and Lucy Fischer (1996). This body of work has allowed scholars to critically address the action heroine's motherhood.

While conventional theoretical work has one view of the Hollywood woman's film, contemporary genre criticism has brought other dynamics to the fore. Hollinger has argued how critics such as Steve Neale (2000) have theoretically addressed the problem of the woman's film as the sub-genre of the melodrama (Hollinger, 2012, p.35). Indeed, Linda Williams (2001) has argued that the dominant rhetoric of American cinema is the melodramatic mode (Williams, 2001, p.13). Furthermore, Williams' work argues that historically the term melodrama was used to describe the male genre films consisting of "westerns, gangster films, war films, cop films, Clint Eastwood films" (Williams, 2001, p.25). Hollinger likewise points out that Neale's findings coincide with Williams' argument (Hollinger, 2012, p.36).

The classical definition of the woman's film defines it in terms of female passivity within patriarchy and women's "contradictory experience in the patriarchal family" (White, 1998, p.122). However, as Williams' and Neale's work demonstrates, it also referred to the woman's adventure film. Hollinger further argues that this knowledge allows us to understand that the woman's film traditionally also links back to the adventure films, which explains the revival of "contemporary action-adventure films with female heroines" (Hollinger, 2012, p.36). Hollinger's theorisation by drawing on Neale's and Williams' work and harking back to Haskell's work cited earlier allows us to understand why women's issues, like relationships and motherhood, consistently recur in the action heroine films under scrutiny. Building on this work, this project also directs the reader to yet another lineage of the action heroine films: the Bluebeard fairy tale and the literary gothic. I would now like to focus on some recent works that discuss the Bluebeard fairy tale.

Hanson's work investigates the representation of femininity, masculinity and gender relations in the 1940s female gothic cycle (2007). Her monograph has a chapter on the representation of masculinity in the woman's film, where she addresses the subject of the gothic male via an analysis of cinematic sound. In other instances when discussing the representation of femininity, she also analyses the representation of the gothic male and the other male character, who is the antithesis to the gothic male. Her discussion on the representation of gender relations in these films, even when they do not extend to the family like in this project, and of gothic style provide a solid basis for this study. Hanson's work uses the Bluebeard fairy tale with reference to Warner's work but only to the extent that it is part of the generic framework of the gothic. Unlike Hanson's work, this thesis extensively uses Warner and Tatar's work on the Bluebeard fairy tale as a framework.

Like Hanson's work, this thesis taps into the literary gothic and the gothic novel as a framework. Hanson's work is particularly relevant not only because of her investigation of gendered dimensions of the gothic cycle of the 1940s but because of her identification and analysis of the postfeminist neo-gothic cycle. Her work on neo-gothic films show the purchase of the gothic framework for more recent films. A film like *Enough* (Michael Apted, 2000) that is part of Hanson's neo-gothic corpus is

examined by Diane L. Shoos (2017) in the context of domestic violence in Hollywood films and the transformation of the abused wife into an action heroine. This coinciding of Hanson's discussion with Shoos and with this thesis is very interesting, as it sees the blurring of identities of the powerless victim of the female gothic and the empowered figure of the action heroine. Indeed, Hollinger has accounted for how the paranoid gothic woman's film has transformed in recent years:

> The paranoid gothic woman's film was largely transformed into the victimized-woman's-revenge film in *The Accused* (Jonathan Kaplan, 1988), *Sleeping with the Enemy* (Joseph Rubin *[sic]*, 1991), and *Enough* (Hollinger, 2012, p.44).

Hollinger's observation then points out how the themes of Doane's paranoid gothic woman's film diversified into other Hollywood genres, thereby blurring the boundaries between different genres. The Bluebeard myth is limitedly addressed in works of gothic woman's film like in Hanson's, yet it is via the gothic woman's film that it has maintained some presence in works of feminist film theory.

Sue Short's monograph looks at how fairy tales are retold in the cinema (2015). She has an entire chapter dedicated to how the Bluebeard fairy tale is retold in films. The subject of her examination are some films from the female gothic cycle, for instance, *Secret Beyond the Door* (Fritz Lang, 1947) and feminist retellings like Campion's *The Piano* and *In the Cut* (2003), and also *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (Richard Brooks, 1977). She discusses films from Hanson's neo-gothic cycle like *What Lies Beneath* (Robert Zemeckis, 2000) and other films like the gothic thriller *The Bone Collector* (Phillip Noyce, 1999) and *The Gift* (Sam Raimi, 2000). Her work is very useful for this thesis as via her very diverse corpus films, she like Warner addresses how the Bluebeard fairy tale has metamorphosed with each retelling. Despite her array into recent films, she does not examine any of the corpus films. She only briefly refers *to Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* (Short, 2015, p.111). Her work is a testament of how the stories told via film are in constant dialogue with the ancient repertoire of fairy tales and the purchase of fairy tales in wider popular culture.

Sue Thornham's recent work on Campion's television series *Top of the Lake* uses the Bluebeard fairy tale as one of the frameworks to study the television series (2017). Thornham's work draws attention to how Campion regularly draws on the myth of the

Bluebeard in her work. The title of her paper is suggestive hence I am citing it here: 'Beyond Bluebeard: feminist nostalgia and *Top of the Lake* (2013)'. Thornham's work begins with the Bluebeard myth as a framework to examine the text. However, in order to examine the mother-and-daughter relationship in the series, she uses the "related" Greek myth of Demeter and Proserpine (Thornham, 2017, p.1, p.3). She also refers to the myth of Perseus like Mulvey in her 1981 paper (Thornham, 2007, p.9).

Thornham's work, unlike most film scholarship, clearly addresses the Bluebeard fairy tale as the deeper ancestor of the paranoid gothic woman's film and the slasher film (Thornham, 2017, p.1). She also brings to the fore the Oedipus myth, as does this thesis, but not in relation to the myth of the Bluebeard (Thornham, 2017, pp.2-4). Her work also very briefly refers to the novel *Jane Eyre* (Thornham, 2017, p.7). While this thesis is essentially concerned with the framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale and how it can be used to read the corpus films and areas of academic debate like the representation of the action heroine, domestic violence, patriarchy in crisis, among others, Thornham's essay is concerned with issues of feminist critical theory, for instance, the gaze and feminist nostalgia. Thornham's essay however is a very important contribution towards the significance of the Bluebeard fairy tale in the terrain of feminist film theory.

Feminist theory from the 1990s onwards has become interdisciplinary with the dissemination into cultural studies and media studies (Hollinger, 2012, p.19). The investigation of the representation of women in genre films has moved in several directions. Feminist film theory was interested in the figure of the femme fatale in the film noir cycle that appeared along with the female gothic cycle of the 1940s. This fascination resonates even in recent publications on the figure of the contemporary femme fatale as in Katherine Farrimond (2018). Hollinger argues that the term woman's film may have gone out of fashion but the phenomenon of chick flicks, a contemporary version of the woman's films, is significant (Hollinger, 2012, p.35). Tasker's work dedicates a chapter each to different female character types in Hollywood genre films like the western, action, comedy, among others (Tasker, 1998). The mid-1980s saw the emergence of the action heroine in the male genre of action films. Scholars like Tasker (1993, 1998), Inness (2004), Brown (2011) have investigated the figure of the action

heroine and her ambiguous relationship to traditional gender boundaries. All these accounts of theorisations and the ongoing dialogue provide an up-to-date and insightful account of the debates on the representation of women in Hollywood films.

Hence, the structure of the thesis is broken down into distinct themes. Chapter 1 examines the representations of masculinity in the corpus films via the framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale and the gothic mode. It is argued that the male antagonist to the action heroine can be read as the action heroine's symbolic husband. The chapter reads these representations as the many faces of negative patriarchal force in the films that the action heroine has to face and stand against. These films are primarily studied by existing scholarship to address the dynamic figure of the action heroine as a mother. A key aim of the focus of the chapter is to address the theoretical marginalisation of masculinity in the corpus films.

Continuing to address the marginalisation of masculinity in critical debate on the corpus films are the arguments that are presented in Chapter 2. The focus of this chapter is the Bluebeard's bad fatherhood to the child characters in the films. The chapter analyses the different forms that the Bluebeard's demonic paternal relationship is manifested as including murdering and kidnapping children. Drawing on Clover's work on the slasher film, he is identified as the "killer" father. The analysis brings to fore the opportunity to theorise this mythical figure's psyche. It is argued that the abuse that he inflicts on the wife like action heroine and the child are likely to be rooted in his own abusive and traumatic childhood. The dysfunctional familial figurations in the corpus films are thus linked to inter-generational trauma.

Chapter 3 investigates the figure of the action heroine and her position in the familial figurations that appear in the corpus films. It is pointed out that the gothic trope of a woman who is not in control of her mind is frequently deployed to represent the action heroine in these films. The action heroine is hence associated to Rochester's hidden wife, who is the mad woman in the attic of Gilbert and Gubar's discussion. This implied insanity is investigated as being more than a convenient gothic device. It is brought to light that what appears to be the action heroine's lack of control over narrative events is actually the gaslighting and trauma that she is subjected to which

causes mental instability. These forms of abuse are associated with her problematic relationship with the Bluebeard-husband in the corpus films. Drawing on several feminist frameworks on female madness, it is argued that madness is the place from which the action heroine deconstructs the patriarchal agenda that is aimed at subjugating her. Like her ancestor the gothic heroine, the action heroine resists the patriarchal hegemony that the Bluebeard figure represents.

The action heroine's motherhood, reproductive discourses, and the representation of maternity in the corpus films is discussed at length in Chapter 4. It is argued that unlike the Bluebeard's last wife, who remarries in several retellings of the fairy tale, the action heroine is re-assimilated into the community via motherhood. The chapter understands the action heroine as a mother and a non-mother via the frame of cognitive dissonance. The discussion of the action heroine's shifting subjectivity in the corpus films as a gothic device moves away from the generic framework of the maternal melodrama that is used to study the representation of motherhood in the corpus films. It is argued that the action heroine takes on the role of the symbolic mother, when she transforms into the "final" mother to face off and protect the child from the killer father. It is concluded that the action heroine's role as a mother is a signifier of conservative gender ideology and essentialism in the corpus films.

## Chapter 1

## The Action Heroine's Husband, Count Bluebeard: Deconstructing Masculinity and Identifying the Bluebeard Fairy Tale and Gothic Mode in Action Heroine Films

### Introduction

This doctoral study argues that the Hollywood action heroine can be read as being in a symbolic marriage with the mythical figure of Bluebeard in the role of husband. This chapter thus investigates the representations of masculinity in the action heroine corpus films. In reading the action heroine films via the framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale and theorising the representation of the family and gender, this chapter identifies the presence of a Bluebeard figure and his various incarnations in the films. These incarnations include Bluebeard as blueblood, Bluebeard as king of the underworld, Bluebeard as a lawman, Bluebeard as lowlife, Bluebeard as a serial killer and an artist, and gothic male as a man of science. Theoretical debates on the Bluebeard fairy tale, gothic mode, and gothic horror are employed to deconstruct these multifaceted representations. The critical analysis reveals these male figures as the many faces of patriarchy. Subsequently, the argument explores the complex nature of the action heroine's relationship with the all-powerful and demonic male figure.

For Short, drawing on Tatar's monograph on the countless retellings of the Bluebeard fairy tale, Bluebeard represents an enigmatic figure. Short cites Tatar:

> The villain and his bloodthirsty deeds, in other words, have a narrative verve that exceeds that of the prospective victim and her act of defiance. Folktales never let us see inside the minds of their protagonists, but given the choice to read the mind of either the Bluebeard or his wife, most readers would elect to enter the taboo regions of Bluebeard's thoughts (Short, 2015, p.104).

In the explanation above, Short explains the significance of the figure of Bluebeard. In several recent retellings, the story of Bluebeard is told from the wife's perspective (Tatar, 2004, p.9; Short, 2015, p.100). When the action heroine corpus films are examined via the frame of the Bluebeard fairy tale, it is argued that the action heroine as symbolic wife takes centre stage in the narrative of the films.

However, in the manner of Short's explanation above, this chapter probes into the Bluebeard figure even though he takes the background in the films under investigation. This is done in order to establish Count Bluebeard and indeed the Bluebeard fairy tale's worth for this thesis. This perspective is also taken in order to address the critical neglect in studying the representations of masculinity in the films under investigation. The significance of the Bluebeard or the gothic husband in the narrative of gothic woman's film is explained by Hanson (2007). Hanson cites Murray Smith and points out that in the film noir and the female gothic, two genres that are "inverse of each other", it is the "sexual other as an enigma" that the narrative investigates (Hanson, 2007, p.42). The sexual other being investigated in the film noir is the "duplicitous" femme fatale, and in the gothic melodrama the "mysterious husband" is under investigation (Hanson, 2007, p.42). A similar observation is made by Read in her monograph in relation to maternal avenger films (Read, 2000, p.221). This dark and secretive male figure of the gothic mode also has a very compelling presence in the action heroine corpus.

**Who is Bill?: The opening sequences of *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2***

The opening sequence of *Kill Bill: Volume 1* with black and white cinematography, that gives the sequence a "realistic" quality offers several clues about Bill (Gallafent, 2006, p.101; Rich, 2004, p.27).[2] This sequence is also reiterated in the opening of *Kill Bill: Volume 2.* We hear heavy distressed breathing over the titles of the film. The sequence begins with a tilted close-up of Beatrix lying on the floor, the sound of heavy breathing continues, now associated with Beatrix. The heavy breathing is juxtaposed with approaching footsteps thumping on the wooden floor. The black and white film stock disguises the heroine's physical state, but does not leave it indecipherable. The heavy breathing that dominates aurally inevitably draws attention to the heroine's plight and suffering. She is quite clearly in distress, withering away in great pain, and fear grips her soul. Beatrix's eyes are squinted and the eyebrows meet in between signifying the extent of her anguish. Her face is bruised and bloody, the blood runs to her neck and shoulders, nose bleeding, and both face and hair are drenched in perspiration. The camera is static for a while, so that it captures the full extent of the heroine's agony. The

[2] Rich, as opposed to Gallafent, has read the "black-and-white" cinematography as "irreality" (Rich, 2004, p.27).

source of the sound of footsteps is now made visible, as the camera cuts to a close up of cowboy boots tapping on the wooden floor. The footsteps are moving towards a certain direction, which we soon find out is the direction of Beatrix, the battered action heroine. As the footsteps approach the heroine, the camera cuts to the heroine again. The reaction shot captures Beatrix's body flinching, she literally moves in fear of the person and the danger he poses. Beatrix's reaction to the character, who we now assume is to her left, is exemplary of the power dynamic. Bill is partially framed in this sequence by positioning him on the left of the heroine, while the camera is static on a close-up of the heroine. The person whose footsteps we have previously heard and have now seen, who is yet off-screen, and is now standing next to the heroine is suggested by a hand and a handkerchief that approaches towards the heroine's face.

The handkerchief is embroidered with 'BiLL', in the same upper and lowercase style. Even though Bill is absent from the visual world of the narrative, the text offers powerful aural and fragmented visual hints of Bill's existence. A fragmented and less visual presence does not make Bill's character insignificant. This fragmented presence asserts a powerful and forceful presence, so much so that, his absence is not really an absence but an unconditional, uncanny, menacing presence which evokes tension, threat, and anxiety. Because Bill is not captured by the camera, his motives, his capacity to act, and the extent of his actions are left to the imagination, thus making him a compelling figure. The handkerchief with Bill's name gives Bill a very potent presence and captures his influence. A bespoke monogrammed men's accessory signifies wealth and social stature. The embroidered name with a mix of upper and lowercase letters are also signifiers of flamboyance, and style, with a dash of playfulness. The hand and the handkerchief wipes the blood and sweat off the heroine's face, not in sympathy of her victimisation, but as part of reinstating presence and power, and thereby leaving no doubt about her victim status. Following a few lines of Bill's dialogue, is his most important line, the one that gives puzzling messages about his apathy, "This is me at my most masochistic." This is followed by the unmistakable rattle of bullets, and the sound of bullets being loaded into the gun. The heroine flinches in fear and in terror, yet again, and the words she utters are close to a plea, "Bill it's your baby." Even before she finishes saying "baby", the overpowering sound of a gunshot is heard, the blood spatters on the floor, and before any reactions can be registered, the text cuts to the titles of the film.

The title sequence thus brings out the problematic relationship of the action heroine with Bill, whom we take is the villain. We witness the tutelage the heroine is subjected to, and are informed that the unborn child is his, thereby establishing the old and wealthy man as a sexual partner of the younger woman, whom he clearly desires and yet subjugates.

*Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* are films with "mythic quest-plots" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.336) or a "quest narrative" (Lacey, 2000, p.47, p.51, p.59). The action heroine Beatrix Kiddo is constantly enquiring about husband Bill's (David Carradine) whereabouts, in order to accomplish the mission of the titles of the films. Beatrix's first spoken words after being in a coma for four years are: "Where is Bill?", an enquiry that the text leads into. Of great significance to this chapter is the question: who is Bill? Who is this enigmatic male figure the empowered action heroine first escapes and then is determined to kill? An observation to this end is made by Adrienne McCormick in her paper that studies the representation of motherhood in *Flightplan*.[3] In making a case for her reading of the films that she studies as twenty-first century maternal melodramas, she makes an observation of great significance to this chapter and the underlying argument of this thesis. *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* are also supermother films like *Flightplan*. While this observation made by McCormick counters her own approach and argument at a certain level, it does not fully disqualify the argument:

> 'Supermother' films coming out of Hollywood in the twenty-first century thus far feature mothers having to prove their mettle once again, no longer against insensitive husbands, racism, limited employment opportunities, and the like, but rather against terrorists, the supernatural, and aliens from outer space, to name but a few of their contemporary challenges (McCormick, 2010, pp.144-5).

McCormick argues in recent maternal melodrama films the figure of the mother has to face enemies other than insensitive husbands. However, I argue that the husband figure persists.

[3] *Flightplan:* Special Features, 2005. [DVD] Directed by Robert Schwentke.

This chapter investigates these "terrorist, aliens, and the supernatural" as "insensitive husbands" that McCormick only briefly alludes to in her paper. The intellectual enquiry of this chapter has semblances to a question asked in relation to Rochester in a feminist reading of Brontë's fiction *Jane Eyre. Jane Eyre* is a gothic novel that draws heavily on the Bluebeard fairy tale (Progney, 2010). The question that Gilbert and Gubar ask are:

> What, in other words, are the real relationships between the master of Thornfield and all these women [female characters in the novel] whose lives revolve around his? None of these questions can, of course, be answered without reference to the central character of the Thornfield episode, Edward Fairfax Rochester (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.351).

Gilbert and Gubar point out the centrality of villainous Rochester's character to the novel *Jane Eyre*. The subject of enquiry of this chapter is very similar to the question asked by Gilbert and Gubar.

**Bluebeard as Blue Blood**

It is an original finding of this study that the action heroine's husband figure is a Bluebeard-inspired character. The action heroine corpus that this thesis investigates are examined via the framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale. Despite the points of commonalities between the Bluebeard fairy tale and the gothic, this study clearly addresses representations of masculinity as Bluebeard rather than a gothic husband. This distinction is made by Hanson. The typical gothic husband, for instance Maxim de Winter (Lawrence Oliver), in Alfred Hitchcock's filmic adaptation of Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) is defined by his temperamental, moody, and unpredictable behaviour. Hanson argues that the Bluebeard embodies all these quirks including murderous intentions, which Hanson reads as "Bluebeardian intentions" (Hanson, 2007, p.84). Although not in the context of the films under investigation, Hanson explains that the neo-gothic films bring out scenarios of horror as the female protagonists confront violent men. This also validates the reading of the "tyrannical male figures" in the action heroine films as Bluebeards (Hanson, 2007, p.180).

Count Bluebeard's many defining characteristics are embodied in contemporary reincarnations that are seen in the action heroine film corpus. The representations of

masculinity in the corpus are undeniably informed by this figure of fairy tale monstrosity and gothic decadence that has taken several forms in the four centuries after it was first written. How has the Bluebeard/gothic husband been reimagined for the mainstream genre picture designed to be consumed by Hollywood's global audiences? These roles have been played by: Basilio Franchina, Ian Holm, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Robert Patrick, Kevin Bacon, Craig Beirko, Vincent D'Onfrio, Patrick Bauchau, David Carradine, Marton Csokas, Johnny Lee Miller, Will Yun Lee, Peter Sarsgaard and Sharlto Copley. Hence, their significance cannot be overlooked. These representations have something to say about Hollywood's attitudes towards masculinity. Bluebeard, the patriarch, is a wealthy aristocrat of noble descent, and has "blue blood" associating him with nobility and stature in society (Warner, 1994, p.243, p.265; Short, 2015, p.102). He is wealthy and privileged, hence has an authoritative presence that is controlling of those whom he perceives as lesser than him. Short draws on Warner's analysis and reminds us that the fairy tale itself was based on the lives and many scandals of French noblemen of the time (Short, 2015, p.102, p.185). While in most retellings the Bluebeard's privilege and domineering position are because of his noble descent, in some other retellings the privilege is part of his life because he is the king of the crime "underworld", which by implication associates him with the evil in the world of the story (Warner, 1994, p.247; Tatar, 2004, p.7). Such is also the case with Bill, who is associated with the mafia.

The sequences analysed from *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* is representative of the title suggested by James Bell for gothic gender relationships: "love is a devil" (Bell, 2013, pp.124-5). In the sequence above, Bill is never fully captured by the camera, the monogrammed bespoke handkerchief associates him with opulence and grandeur. In his uncanny invisibility, he is a reminder of Carol J. Clover's killer of the slasher film: "Nor are they [killers] clearly seen. We catch sight of them only in glimpses – few and far between in the beginning, more frequent toward the end" (Clover, 1992, p.30). Clover's analysis thereby gives one possible source of Bill's invisibility almost throughout *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and some of *Volume 2*. In reference to the slasher film, Bill's name has reference to the serial killer Buffalo Bill/Jame Gumb (Ted Levine) in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991). Rich, in her brief article, comes closest to acknowledging Bill as a gothic male. However, she does this in absence of a gothic framework. To this end, her article is influential to my thinking and research:

> When David Carradine's Bill finally appears in *KB2*, he's revealed as a Hugh-Heffner-redux playboy, a mac-daddy of violence, one-upping *Charlie's Angels* with a hit-squad harem of deadly women (plus his brother, Budd). Like a pimp who makes his money from death instead of sex, he turns his women out via the 'tricks' they're taught to turn by the master Pai Mei (Rich, 2004, p.26).

Referring to Rich's article helps address how significant the Bluebeard fairy tale and the literary gothic is to study the corpus action heroine films.

When in the film the camera captures Bill in *Kill Bill: Volume 2*, we see him in broad daylight visiting estranged brother Budd's (Michael Madsen) trailer. Warner explains about Bluebeard's appearance:

> Bluebeard inherits the features of the satyr and his close kin, the devils, who in the Bible are called 'pilosoi', the hairy ones, and sometimes appear ambiguously coloured blue (Warner, 1994, no pagination).

Much like Warner explains, Bill is seen in a paisley silk shirt, blue and purple in colour, and a burgundy velvet blazer. The blue clothing that the male antagonists wear in several sequences of the texts, and the instances where blue or night filters are used to capture them are signifiers of their Bluebeard heritage, a point that will be referred throughout the thesis. The automobile that Bill drives to visit Budd is the Italian De Tomaso Mangusta. The automobile was especially used in the sequence to capture the essence of Bill's showy masculinity.

The first and most frequently retold instance associates Bluebeard with privilege by birth. The second instance, the one that is less frequent, as it appears from reading Warner's monograph, associates Bluebeard with illegal activities and immoral professional excursions, thereby associating him with amoralities, perversions, and sinful indulgences. Undeniably the king of the underworld, the underworld from the Bluebeard story, Bill is the leader of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad, a powerful posse of highly-paid glamourous assassins (Warner, 1994, p.247). Warner points out that in a certain retelling of the Bluebeard fairy tale:

> The lecherous Moonen (the devil in disguise) woos Mary of Nijmegen and wins her with his promises of an education – and riches (Warner, 1994, p.247).

Warner's historicisation is very useful to read the romantic relationship in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2*. Of the many levels in the relationship between Bill and Beatrix, Bill is also Beatrix's mentor, who has trained her as a deadly assassin, thereby giving her access to limitless knowledge and power. Bill's mentorship also involves introducing Beatrix to his mentor, the misogynist Pai Mei (Gordon Liu).

Similarly, *Gloria* can also be read within the frame of the Bluebeard fairy tale. The film is acknowledged as a "feminist twist on the gangster thriller" (Charity, 2001, pp.169-70). It has the aging Mr Tony Tanzini played by Basilio Franchina as the leader of the mob, the patriarchal "*cosa nostra*" is also Gloria's former lover (Charity, 2001, pp.174-5). In his age and his role as the mob leader, like Bill, Tanzini is also a Bluebeard-inspired character. The film was framed discursively in media accounts as an adult fairy tale by Cassavetes (Charity, 2001, p.178). Warner explains that in a version of the Bluebeard fairy tale:

> Mary's mind soon turns to riches rather than learning and he promises to shower her with jewels (Warner, 1994, p.248).

Much like Warner's account of the fairy tale above, in the climax of the film, when we very briefly see Mr Tanzini, he reminds Gloria that he made love to her and brought her jewels. Their relationship is further resonant when read via the framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale.

*The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* are most popular for their depiction of Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton), the action heroine who wields guns and defies boundaries of gender without hesitation. Most noticeable is Hamilton's pumped up body for the reprisal of her role as Sarah in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day,* a representation that Tasker defines as "butch-*femme*" (Tasker, 1993, p.143). The film uses military aesthetics via Hamilton's training by an ex-Israeli commando, thereby adding credence to her role as a warrior (Tasker, 1993, p.143; *Terminator 2: Judgment*

*Day* DVD Digitally Remastered Special Edition Director's Cut; Brown, 2011, pp.28-9).[4] Any discussion on the action heroine is incomplete without the acknowledgement of Sarah's unique characterisation. The action genre pre-Lieutenant Ellen Ripley in *Alien* and pre-Sarah in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* was a genre that primarily, if not necessarily, featured men as heroes and women as the object of love interest and in need of rescue (Tasker, 1993, pp.16-7). This observation has been the starting point of discussion for scholars like Tasker.

But yet the many discussions on Sarah in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* have failed to place the terminators who want to erase Sarah and John Connor (Edward Furlong) in any discernible context. They are thereby unable to scrutinise the relationship between the male antagonist and female protagonist, who constantly defy boundaries of gender because of their lineage of the gothic and slasher film. One reason perhaps for this critical neglect is that the robotic antagonists with "machine vision", data assimilating point-of-view shots, and minimalistic speech, who are recklessly determined at fulfilling their mission and will kill ruthlessly.

This is even truer for the malleable T1000 played by Robert Patrick in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day.* His analysis by scholars like Tasker (1993, p.83, p.150) and Nicola Rehling (2009, p.106) as "catlike" and by J.P. Telotte as a "shape-shifter" (1992, p.32) suggests the gender ambiguity associated with his character. This gender ambiguity is, I will argue, central to representations of masculinity and femininity in the corpus films and is argued throughout the thesis. The T1000 constantly "doubles", a motif of the gothic mode (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.78, p.80, pp.348-9; Punter and Byron, 2004, p.266; Hanson, 2007, p.34, pp.92-3). He stabs others to death and is even more superficial than the terminator in *The Terminator* because the former's minimalistic dialogue is not even catchy one-liners (French, 1996, pp.45-6). French reminds us that in order to reinstate the T101's image as the protector and good terminator, the T1000's character was purposefully written in a way so that it fails to generate even the slightest possibility of sympathetic identification from the viewers (French, 1996, pp.44-6).

[4] *Terminator 2: Judgment Day:* Digitally Remastered Special Edition Director's Cut, 1991. [DVD] Directed by James Cameron.

French further explains that: “He’s (T1000) given feeble pistols to fire as well, always a sign of moral inadequacy in the world of James Cameron” (French, 1996, p.45). This further highlights the evil status of the terminator characters and the lack of interest in theorising these characters beyond the scope of the obvious.

Despite the problematic characterisation of the killing machines, the historical background of the Bluebeard fairy tale provides a valuable framework to contextualise the actions of the pre-programmed cyborgs in *The Terminator* films. It is an original finding of this study that the killer terminators who first want to kill Sarah and her unborn child, and then John when he is 10-years-old, are contemporary characterisations of the Bluebeard in the form of cinematic cyborgs of the science fiction film, a Hollywood film genre that draws heavily on the gothic’s anti-excessive rationality and anti-automata stance (Clemens, 1999, p.218; Punter and Byron, 2004, pp.20-5; Wells, 2000, p.38). The gothic’s stance against the so-called forces of reason is briefly historicised further along in the chapter. James Finlan’s article is useful for the argument presented here (Finlan, 1999, p.49). Under the section titled ‘gore and abortion’, Finlan writes:

> The idea of Arnie as a surgeon is planted in the famous eyeball scene where he operates on himself, removing his damaged eye. The first gory image involves Arnie, (for ‘terminator’, substitute ‘abortionist’) ripping out the heart of a punk who’s annoying him. A crude analogy of an abortionist clutching a foetus? (Finlan, 1999, p.49)

Karen B. Mann’s study is also insightful for the argument presented here:

> According to the *discourse*, the central character of the film is the terminator – after all, he is the eponymous hero. …He has a male form with a steel chassis that will ‘tear the heart out’ of a woman; he is made obviously phallic with his guns and his fist capable of penetrating the belly of the first human he meets. Other men in the film are incapable of stopping him. His ability to ‘rise from the ashes’ of every attack on him becomes a monumental reverse synecdoche (whole for the part) for erection after erection. Sarah’s final words to him rightly focus not on his machine-like but in his sexual identity: ‘You’re terminated, fucker’ (Mann, 1989-90, p.21, original emphasis).

Finlan's analysis in particular can be juxtaposed to Marie-Mulvey Roberts essay, which is revelatory at several levels:

> In Carter's retelling the bloody chamber has walls which are compared to skin sweating in fright. It is also visceral in being a metonymy for bodily organs. In a stage adaptation by Bryony Lavery the Marquis pulls out the heart and womb of his opera singer wife to prepare her body for embalming (Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p.101).

Despite Finlan's summarisation cited above, there is the need to analyse the sequence and the themes with respect to Mulvey-Roberts chapter. Most interesting is Schwarzenegger's birth scene in *The Terminator* during midnight in Los Angeles. The cyborg's search for clothes leads him to a terrace where a group of punks are watching the night sky on a telescope. Since the terminator's, "Your clothes, give them to me, now" is warded off by the punks, it makes him indulge in violent behaviour. In the confrontation, the terminator reaches out for one of thugs, slits the area around his heart, and extends his hand to reach for the heart and pulls out the thug's heart. While the camera cuts away from the gore, the killing machine proudly holds the heart in his closed fist. In reference to the quotation cited above, the Marquis' act of pulling off the wife's heart is transferred onto the unsuspecting punk in *The Terminator*. The terminator's programmed action and the one that he recklessly pursues is to kill Sarah. Kyle explains to the bewildered Sarah that it is her role as the mother of John, the leader of the future resistance, that gives the terminator a reason to end Sarah's life at any cost. The terminator's programming to terminate the pregnancy shares the essence of the Marquis' act of pulling out his wife's womb. Perhaps not surprisingly scholars such as Nigel Whittaker have read the terminator as "a villain who is more than a villain" (Whittaker, 2000, p.48). This suggests a certain supernatural and undefeatable quality of the terminator. The Bluebeard character's problematic relationship with children in the films is read through the discourse of the Bluebeard fairy tale and psychoanalytical writings on womb envy in Chapter 2.

There are several other signs in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* of the heritage of the Bluebeard fairy tale of the murdering husband and courageous wife. Gilbert and Gubar write of Anne Brontë's, the most "modest" of three Brontë siblings, *The Tenant of the Wildfell Hall* (1848), where the protagonist Helen Graham

escapes her bad marriage, but despite her flight remains “incognito in order to elude her husband” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp.80-1). The action heroine Beatrix Kiddo consciously changes her name to Arlene Machiavelli to escape detection from Bill. Action heroines Samantha Caine, Æon Flux, and Gail Hartman have changed names, but have done so unconsciously, or just happen to have another name that they are known by, depending upon how the gothic mode’s motifs have been exploited by the genre picture’s narrative. The significance of the heroines’ pseudonyms, which at times are gender-neutral, their place within gothic writing, and its relationship to the representation of the action heroine will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The analysis above has established the terminator as the Bluebeard-husband figure. In that respect, Sarah can be read as the persecuted wife who has escaped her violent and jealous husband figure, the terminator. But since Sarah has not changed her name, she is unable to escape the pseudo husband’s detection. When analysed from this point of view, a great deal is made of Sarah’s name in the first half of *The Terminator*. The phonebook has Sarah’s name. Other Sarah Connors are killed in the course of the terminator’s search, which is exemplary of the motif of the previously killed wives. The police are on the case because two female victims of the same name are killed on the same day. Because of this a couple of announcements are made on local news about the murders of Sarah Connors. It has been suggested in several interpretations of the Bluebeard fairy tale that the bloodstain on the key to the bloody chamber after the curious wife’s excursion to the prohibited zone is suggestive of the breaking of the hymen and the wife’s wanderings in the husband’s absence (Warner, 1994, p.262; Tatar, 2004, p.20, p.24; Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p.101; Short, 2015, p.94). The wife’s wanderings refer to her infidelity when her husband is away. The gothic husband’s desire for his wife is known to take the form of jealousy (Warner, 1994, p.262). In the course of Sarah’s persecution by the terminator, she forms a bond with Kyle and their relationship is consummated. The presumption of the wife’s infidelity then actually becomes true in the course of the terminator’s persecution of Sarah. Kyle, Sarah’s emotional rescuer gets the jealous husband figure’s wrath and is killed.

In *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, the T1000’s Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) uniform suffices as a suitable disguise. This disguise is a signifier at several levels.

The unmissable navy blue of the uniform is a stand-in for the T1000's Bluebeard status. Short has commented that "modern-day police m[e]n" replace "ignoble noblemen of centuries past" in contemporary retellings of the Bluebeard fairy tale (Short, 2015, p.102). Bluebeard figures are portrayed as law officials in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* and *Flightplan*. For Short, in contemporary retellings of the fairy tale of "demon lovers", it is the lawman's insider knowledge that enables him to subjugate his hapless victims (Warner, 1994; Short, 2015). This replaces the Count's supremacy with the lawman's abuse of power that is vested upon him. He uses it to manipulate people and information (Short, 2015, p.102). In this light, it is not surprising that the T1000's violence and malice always escape detection because of his policeman disguise. Having the T1000 dressed as the policeman is also reflective of popular filmmaker Cameron's "anti-establishment" stance (French, 1996, p.48), which has been commented upon by critics as ascertaining the director's ideological stance (Whittaker, 2000, p.79). French has explained that this viewpoint is "distrusting the traditional paternalistic role of the police" (French, 1996, pp.48-9, p.45). His analysis brings out the symbolic role of the police as the father and thereby associates this role to the T1000, a reading of great significance that will be unravelled in Chapter 2.

Not only is the T1000 a Bluebeard-inspired figure who masquerades as a member of the police force. The T1000 is the returning husband figure and his, and even those of the terminator in *The Terminator*, travels are hinted through the motif of time travel in the films. There is visually one suggestion of the T1000 being the returning husband. The disintegration of the T1000 in the climax of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* has visual similarities to the metamorphosis and disintegration of the returning husband in the cinematic adaptation of Angela Carter's revisionist tale *The Company of Wolves* (Neil Jordan, 1984). There is a clear visual association between the disintegration of the T1000, and the returning husband who is a travelling man (Stephen Rea) and the village woman's (Kathryn Pogson) first husband, who is eventually shot dead by the village woman's second husband (Jim Carter), is made in Figures 1 and 2. The endoskeleton that the terminator bares to in *The Terminator,* also has visual similarities to one of the stages of metamorphosis of the returning husband in *The Company of Wolves*. The terminator's endoskeleton is a solid metal frame. The returning husband's metamorphic changes are visually organic, who is inhuman or at best an animal, true to the lineage of

**Figure 1:** The village woman's (Kathryn Pogson) returning husband beheaded (Stephen Rea) in *The Company of Wolves* (Neil Jordan, 1984).

**Figure 2:** The physical metamorphosis of Robert Patrick's T1000 in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (James Cameron, 1991).

**Figure 3:** Bodily disintegration of the village woman's returning husband in *The Company of Wolves*.

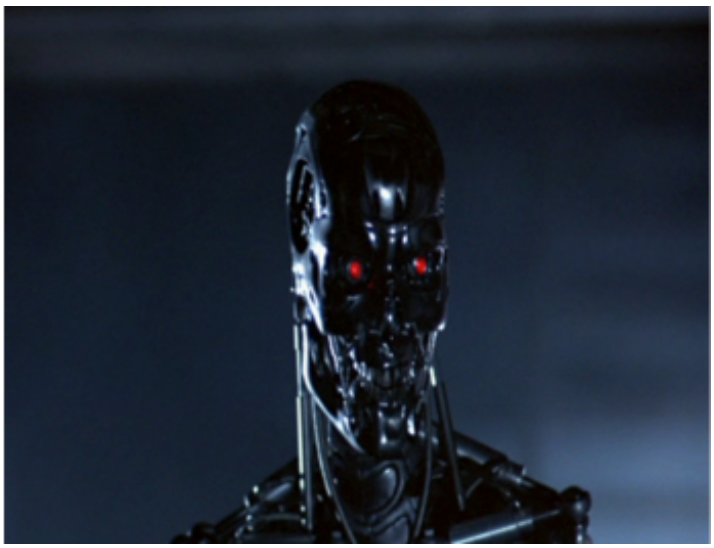

**Figure 4:** The terminator's endoskeleton in *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984) has a visual connection to the village woman's returning husband in *The Company of Wolves*.

the gothic and the horror, and the transformative stages are a reminder of childbirth. Despite the differences observed, the visual similarity between the two figures is impossible to overlook (see Figures 3 and 4 for detail). The extent of the visual similarities of the two bad terminators to the metamorphosis of the returning husband clearly associates the cyborgs in the action heroine film to Bluebeard Gothic via the intertext of *The Company of Wolves.*

"I can tell when someone's lying to me" is the statement of Samantha Caine/Charlene Elizabeth Baltimore/Charly's former lover Timothy (Craig Beirko) in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*. The dialogue and the points at which it is rendered in the narrative, perhaps even as a narrative device, is evocative of the Bluebeard legend, whereby the wives meet their end because they cannot conceal their deceit from the husband. Timothy's ability to detect lies has been commented on by Brown (2011, p.226). The Bluebeard-inspired husband seeks "the undisputed truth", the aptly titled serum that Bill gives Beatrix a shot of in the climax of *Kill Bill: Volume 2*. A typical anti-hero, Timothy is suave but dangerous, dangerously sexy, a ruthless terrorist who sadistically and stylishly kills characters and rides around in a helicopter in pursuit of criminal activities.

Timothy's charming and handsome yet violent persona is Byronic in nature. His atheism is particularly confirmed when he kidnaps Samantha's daughter after a nativity play from a church. Timothy has connections with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) thereby extending his criminality to the White House and American politics. His karma resonates with Tatar's analysis of the dissemination of the Bluebeard figure in popular culture: "Bluebeard has come to be celebrated as a cultural hero, either as the master criminal who kills in order to create a higher moral order" (Tatar, 2004, p.172). In much the same way, Timothy is a master criminal who murders for thrills and pleasure. The Bluebeard-inspired character's corrupt activities in the film are not a product of his aristocracy. But in this film, it is a consequence of his association with the dark side and the underbelly of the American political scene. After all, Timothy is employed by the CIA to carry out a job aimed at extorting money from Congress and the brunt of the fake terrorist attack is to be borne by the Muslims, thereby pre-empting something of a 9/11 terrorist attack.

**Figure 5:** The charismatic yet violent Timothy (Craig Beirko) in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Renny Harlin, 1996).

Timothy's unusually privileged place in society, one that goes unscrutinised by the law and law enforcement officials, is closely associated with his deviance and criminality.

Davis' first appearance in the film is as Father Christmas' much younger wife in a Christmas parade. This represents her as a much older patriarch's attractive young wife thereby resonating the relationship of the older husband and younger wife of the Bluebeard fairy tale. What Brown has written of the action heroine and Samantha specifically becomes even more resonant when approached via the Bluebeard myth:

> The action heroine story likewise refuses to treat her voluntary sexual relationships with men as a means to question her autonomy or her ability to carry out her mission. In a variation on the theme, the action heroine is often portrayed as either having a current or past sexual relationship with the villain. Rather than being at a disadvantage because of these relationships with the bad guys, the action heroine manages to rebuke her lover and kill him (Brown, 2011, pp.225-6).

Brown's analysis shows that the action heroine in several instances has had sexual relationships with the villain, who she ends up dispatching. The framework of the Bluebeard myth and the gothic in this instance allows a recontextualising of the action heroine's fraught relationship with her lover.

The action heroine's search and act of killing the Bluebeard-husband by the end of the film is climactic of her personal crisis. However, it is also exemplary of how a personal crisis is associated with a national emergency. In the mission, the action heroine and her feminism expose acts of corruption in the American political system as represented in a mainstream Hollywood film. The representation of the action heroine thus mobilises the feminist message of "the personal is political". Hollows has explained what this statement means in the second-wave feminist context:

> Central to second-wave feminism in general, and the consciousness-raising groups in particular, was the idea that 'the personal is political': what appeared to be individual, private problems that women endured in isolation were, it was quickly recognised, common problems experienced by all women in the groups. Whereas other forms of politics had often distinguished between the 'public' realm of politics and the 'private' realm

> of the family, feminists came to see the family as a key source of their oppression and, therefore, political (Hollows, 2000, p.4).

Resembling the blurring of personal and private of Hollows' historicisation is Samantha's identity and familial crisis in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*. Samantha's source of oppression is her former lover, who also fathered her child. The action heroine's trauma visible in her amnesiac state is directly associated with her bad family. In the film, this extends to the American government, which both Samantha and Timothy are part of, albeit in different ways. While the bad 'public' family that is political in nature is problematic, the good 'private' family, whose existence is literally a secret provides solace to the action heroine. In the finale of the film, Samantha not only dispatches Timothy, but she also refuses the President's request to return to work for the government.

Gene Carson (Peter Sarsgaard), an air marshal, takes undue advantage of his authority as an officer appointed to uphold the law in *Flightplan.* In the course of the film, he is revealed to be the hijacker and extorter. Like the terminators, Carson is largely silent. His silence is a technique employed to conceal the secret that he harbours. The only words that he speaks show authority, professionalism and apathy, not interest and concern. When he does speak, his banter and verbalisations are merely a façade to conceal his internal monologue and vicious plans. Complementing his concealed speech is his expressionless face. This does not show any signs of emotion either positive or negative. He does not show anger, hurt, irritation, tears, disappointment, joy or happiness, despite the desperate and tragic drama that unfolds in the film. The minimalistic speech, dispassionate disposition, lack of facial expression and passive body language captures the idea of a character without emotion, almost an automaton. The bad terminators and Ash (Ian Holm) in *Alien* are cyborgs that are designed to look human. In his article, Alan Jones discusses: "Cameron has explained that the terminator in *The Terminator* was never evil but only morally blank" (Jones, 1991, p.17). Similarly, Carson is a human being who is suggested to be like a machine underneath because his insensitivity and ruthlessness signify a moral vacuum. Sarsgaard's performance of Carson is rendered to give the impression of a human terminator. In the tradition of the Bluebeard fairy tale, and like the bad terminators, Carson's primary victims are a child and woman, a victimisation that, in the context of these films relies on the absence or

the incapacitation of the good father. This argument will be elaborated upon in Chapter 2.

In the thriller and gothic horror *The Cell*, Carl Rudolph Starger (Vincent D'Onfrio) is a serial killer.[5] Serial killers have been widely acknowledged by writers to be a "contemporary counterpart of the Bluebeard" (Warner, 1994, p.241, p.246, p.257, p.269), especially drawing on the trope of the Bluebeard as a man with "intimacy issues" (Short, 2015, p.101). Carl like his ancestors Mark Lewis (Carl Boehm) in *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960) and Count Dracula (Gary Oldman) in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1992) is a voyeur. Their voyeurisms in the films are clearly associated to their repressed sexual energy. Director Singh is a great admirer of the costumes designed by the late Japanese designer Eiko Ishioka. There are several homages in *The Cell* to *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. However, the most noticeable is Dracula's extraordinary suit that resembles muscle fibres. It is one of the key costumes in *The Cell* and is worn by all three stars and the child actor: Jennifer Lopez, Vincent D'Onofrio, Vince Vaughn and Colton James. Singh very fondly calls it the "Batman suit" (*The Cell* DVD Features).[6] Via this costume and its connection to *Bram Stoker's Dracula* the gothic lineage has a definite presence in the film.

Singh has likewise referred to the sequences as having an incoherent "Frankenstein like quality" (*The Cell* DVD Features) and describes the epilogue of *The Cell* as "Hitchcockian" (*The Cell* DVD Features), evoking Hitchcock's widespread reputation as the 'master of suspense'. The Gothic influence in Hitchcock's films has been read and argued by Hanson in her monograph (Hanson, 2007). Singh's indirect verbalisation of the gothic inspiration and reference to several horror and science fiction films, such as *The Tenant* (Roman Polanski, 1976) and *Jacob's Ladder* (Adrian Lyne, 1990) is exemplary of some of his influences for the film, further supporting a gothic lineage as an inspiration for *The Cell*.

[5] Carl's representation corresponds with accepted definitions of a serial killer in the horror film. For instance, see Paul Wells (2000, p.14, p.115).
[6] *The Cell*: Features, 2000. [DVD] Directed by Tarsem Singh.

While appearing to be a contemporary serial killer film characterised by recurrent "sex-crimes", a film like *The Cell* would quite obviously call for the lenses and discourse of the well-established film genre of the horror (Hanson, 2007, p.157; Warner, 1994, p.270). Here the reference is to Robin Wood's paper (1984), Clover's seminal monograph (1992), Creed's *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror and the Primal Uncanny* (2005) and Linda Williams' paper (1996). These suffice as frameworks to investigate a dimension of the corpus films, specifically its representation of men with murderous intentions and women in peril.[7] However, the literature in itself, provide sketchy rather than an in-depth, sight to the relationship between the deviant antagonist and feisty and resourceful protagonist. Most importantly they do not provide a frame to approach the dysfunctional and violent familial relationships that are played out through these two characters in the action heroine films.

The popular genre of the horror film is quite clearly an antecedent of the gothic (Wells, 2000, p.38, p.108; Arnold, 2013, p.91), a lineage that is generally known and acknowledged within the discipline. The scholarship mentioned above on the horror film fail to draw out this lineage, or perhaps in the context and limitations of these writings, there is no need to bring out this lineage. From this point of view, the discourse of the horror film only allows Carl's reading as the "killer" of Clover's study, who indiscriminately slashes promiscuous female victims post-coitus, and the only one who survives his wrath is the virginal bookworm.[8] While this is a suitable framework, it is insufficient in that it does not provide a model to deconstruct the even more familial roles played by the "killer" and the "final girl" types in the corpus films, and the fragmented familial relationships that are recurrently played out in the film corpus (Clover, 1992, pp.26-30, pp.35-41).[9]

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[7] It was originally the intention to engage with these critical debates in some length in order to analyse the representation of masculinity in the corpus. However, this was ultimately beyond the scope of this project.

[8] This led some critics to dub the slasher film as misogynistic and as a product of backlash against second-wave feminism. This includes Clover (1992, pp.26-30), Faludi (1992, p.3), Goscilo (1987-88, p.38), Rapping (1986), and Wood (2003, pp.183-5). Short has observed how in some films the usual survivor, the final girl is killed off, a narrative development that she associates to the backlash against feminism (Short, 2015, p.99).

[9] The transference of these types into mainstream Hollywood films and especially action films has been addressed by critics like Clover after the release of *Alien* (Clover, 1992, pp.5-6, p.20). Film theorists like Tasker, also address this in her second and sought after monograph (Tasker, 1998, p.81). Other scholars who have theorised this development mostly in relation to the action genre include Xinema Gallardo-C and C. Jason Smith (2006), Mark Browning (2010, pp.44-7), Brown (2011).

Through the framework of the literary gothic and its transference in the popular female action picture, the "*tableaux vivants*" of Carl's seven victims who are immortalised as bleached dolls with red metal collars on their neck, allows for the reading of the bloody chamber where the seven wives are hidden (Warner, 1994, p.271). *The Cell* is a gothic horror film where the male serial killer victimises and mutilates beautiful young women, who are his victims. When Catherine is held captive by King Carl, she is not merely a victim of a deranged serial killer, but his eighth wife, her collar cuffed to the marital bed as a sex slave. The original reading of the films that this thesis investigates including of *The Cell* has materialised by taking one step backwards and by embracing the horror and melodrama's lineage of the Bluebeard fairy tale and the gothic (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.19; Wells, 2000, p.38, p.108; Arnold, 2013, p.91).

Carl is a middle-aged white man whose deviant desires, psychological abnormalities, and social maladjustment are associated with sexual repression. He is the unfortunate progeny of a dysfunctional family, an extremely abusive father and absent mother. The film thereby represents the breakdown of the sanctified patriarchal institute of the traditional nuclear family. In the dream world of *The Cell*, Carl moves between three identities: his adult self who is a serial killer, boy-Carl (Jake Thomas) as his six-year-old self, and King Carl, who is a conflated representation of adult Carl and his biological father. Penley and Goscilio use the Freudian term of family romance to study *The Terminator* (Penley, 1990, p.121; Goscilio, 1987). Similarly, adult Carl in his comatose imagines a "family romance", which allows him to become King Carl. He punishes women most likely because his mother abandoned him at youth. King Carl is represented as the king of a "twisted kingdom", further associating the incarnation with Bluebeard's male sovereignty and autocracy. Most of the "mysterious husband" figures in the corpus are one-dimensional and unsympathetically portrayed as figures embodying pathological hatred and malice at its pinnacle, almost hinging on the inhumane (Hanson, 2007, p.42). The source of their violent and unnatural behaviour is not given a psychological motivation. The lack of an accessible psychology makes it impossible to comprehend what exactly it is that drives their actions. The dream sequences in *The Cell* are about accessing this psychology. They represent the real motivation behind the serial killer's "megalomaniac" (Wells, 2000, p.47, p.49) pursuits, acts of the "isolated male hubris" (Freeland, 2000, p.28) that have a certain ritualistic

quality to them. The murderer's psychology is inaccessible through the spoken word because Carl has suffered from an acute kind of schizophrenia that has left him comatose in a sleep-like death. What Singh has identified as certain "operatic" qualities to *The Cell* draws it miles away from reality (*The Cell* DVD Features). This allows access to the Bluebeard serial killer's subconscious mind in the form of hallucinatory encounters assisted through the use of drugs, both favoured motifs of the gothic mode (Punter and Byron, 2004).

The split identities of Carl in the dream sequences give the serial killer styled after the Bluebeard, some subjectivity and a backstory. It is the backstory rendered in the tradition and style of "Byronic Satan" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.233) and Milton-Satan. In his demon incarnation, Carl visually resembles the fictional representation of Polidori (Timothy Spall) in *Gothic*. Like Satan in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Mr Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, and the tradition of "troubled Byronesque figures", the backstory given to Carl through the split-identities leads to a more sympathetic portrayal (Punter and Byron, 2004, pp.157-8). Short and Botting explore this idea of abuse in literature as originating in some form of trauma (Short, 2015, pp.95-6; Botting, 1996, p.179). Via this backstory boy-Carl is identified as an innocent abused child who grows up to become the abuser. It is through this multifaceted portrayal that Carl's "megalomania" is explained (Wells, 2000, p.47, p.49). The traumatic male figure and his excessive phallic energy are given some form of subjectivity through the representation of his "pathos" (Williams, 2001, p.11). This paves the way for his redemption, and in this instance, this is achieved only through death.

To this point, this chapter has identified male anti-heroes in the corpus films who are: Mafia leaders, a cyborg, a cyborg disguised as a policeman, a terrorist, an air marshal, and a serial killer. What are these representations saying and what is their place in the action heroine corpus? To this point, this chapter has unravelled the novel finding that the action heroine is in a symbolic marriage. Before this investigation on the representation of masculinities is pursued further, a few observations need to be made. Whether their power seeks wealth or subjugates women and children or both, an argument pursued in length Chapter 2, that like Bluebeard "the patriarch" these male

figures stand for the different faces of patriarchy in these films (Warner, 1994, p.246).[10] Indeed in her chapter, Lily J. Goren has aptly pointed out that Bill represents patriarchy in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* (Goren, 2009, p.170; Coulthard, 2007, p.170). Like the Bluebeard, the wealth and power of these satanical figures do not just make them wealthy and powerful, it makes them perverse, as the phallic glory corrupts instead of transforming, empowering or enlightening them. The various forms of subjugation take place through the patriarchal institutions of courtship, marriage, and motherhood. The female gothic's central premise of exposing patriarchy is thereby channelled through the action heroine film corpus (Wheatley, 2006, p.92; Hanson, 2007, p.131, p.180; Wallace and Smith, 2009, p.8).

Dwelling on a certain simplistic yet potent Freudian reading of *Jane Eyre* is of great significance to this argument (Warner, 1994, p.246). The reading suggests that *Jane Eyre* is about Rochester's castration (Pyrhönen, 2010, pp.30-3). It is true that Rochester is castrated by the climax of the novel. He is castrated symbolically by being maimed and blinded. Blindness in the scope of Vienna born Freud's work, who is acknowledged as the father of psychoanalysis, is truly being castrated. This is a reading perpetuated by Freud and critical theorists employing Freud's work in various academic disciplines (Freud, 1919, p.7; Creed, 1993b, p.53; Krzywinska, 2000, p.63). The metaphoric castration is symbolised through the outcome of the climactic tragedy. This climax liberates Rochester at one level as fate deals with his former wife Bertha, who prohibits his union with more eligible and suitable women. It also strips him of his wealth and social stature as Thornfield Halls is burnt to the ground and its grandeur is turned to ashes and memory. Rochester's first appearance in the novel is when Rochester, through a chance and fairy tale encounter, meets Jane, who is on her way to post letters at Mrs. Alice Fairfax's request (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.351). Their meeting is marked by Rochester's fall from his horse and Jane's act of rescuing him. No matter how momentary or trivial the crisis, it sets the scene for the power dynamics and the nature of events that are to unfold in the novel. Gilbert and Gubar have written:

[10] The definition of patriarchy and the key discourses around the concept are discussed by Margaret Whitford (1992, pp.300-3). Her discussion of the patriarchy begins with the idea of the "domination of women by men" (Whitford, 1992, p.300).

> Yet what are we to think of the fact that the prince's first action is to fall on the ice, together with his horse, and exclaim prosaically: 'What the deuce is to do now?' Clearly the master's mastery is not universal (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp.351-2)

Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of Rochester's symbolic status on his entry in the novel is very useful for this argument. It is symbolic not merely of the castration that is referred to in the Freudian reading above, but of the derailment, downfall, and most importantly the feminisation, which precedes Rochester's literal and metaphoric castration. The journey to Rochester's castration is perhaps more significant than the climatic absences that signify his castration. For the purpose of this argument and the conclusion it leads to, there is a need to deconstruct the idea of Rochester's feminisation.

Rochester's portrayal paints a picture of a man clinging on for his survival. His glamourous aura thus makes way for decadence. He is quite clearly coded as a damsel in distress. Very far from a figure of power; underneath the mood swings and abruptness lays instability, uncertainty, hurt, guilt, and failure of power. It is almost as if the heightened illusion of power itself is an assurance of its failure. The more powerful he is or appears to be, the more likely his fall and his demise. The text is not the story of a man rising to glory. It is a text that exposes a man who had no sight of former glory either and whatever power he does have eventually burns down to ashes, literally in this particular instance. One is inevitably reminded of *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), which is also a quest narrative much like *Kill Bill* and *Jane Eyre,* a point of view discussed earlier in the chapter. In the film, the Wizard of Oz's (Frank Morgan) outward appearance, mystified, sublime and inexplicable is reinforced by an aggressive controlling voice that talks its seekers down. The wizard's outward shrine of fearful reverence supersedes the man hiding behind as a conductor of the performance. He is barely anymore courageous or directed than the ones who have travelled to seek his assistance. The feminisation and eventual castration of the seemingly vicious Rochester are the rites of passage to his redemption.

For the purposes of this chapter, it is Rochester's feminisation, castration, and most importantly the message that it embodies, that is significant. Rochester's masculinity represents a patriarchy in crisis, a patriarchy in need of redemption, either

through its emasculation, rescue, near-death experiences or even death. Through the employment of Rochester's masculinity as a theoretical framework that underpins the reading in this chapter, the representations in action heroine films discussed above signify the many faces of patriarchy. But these many patriarchal incarnations, no matter how potent their outward appearance, are only representations in decay and decrepitude. Their outward glory like Rochester is merely symptomatic of the turmoil and chaos underneath. A different dimension to the finding of patriarchy in crisis in the action heroine film corpus is discussed in Chapter 2.[11] When the films are examined via the framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale, it comes to the fore that Count Bluebeard can either be a lowlife or a figure on ascendancy to a throne. The representation as lowlife cuts the frills from the archetype and reduces this cinematic representation to what lies in the Bluebeard's core. That is, a masculinity that is on the precipice and its overindulgence slowly but inevitably paving the way to its demise. Via Rochester's masculinity as a framework, this notion of Bluebeard as a lowlife is discussed in relation to the corpus films in the section below.

**Bluebeard as a Lowlife**

Bill, Tanzini and Timothy are wicked husbands already in their prime, and the ploys they are involved in are merely measures that keep the myth of their power and omnipotence alive and circulating. However, there are several other films in the corpus where the masculine figures are only making their way up to reach the peaks of phallic power. In instances where the Bluebeardian figure is not already in power, his journey in the course of the narrative is about his ascendancy to a throne, or seeking acceptance in a clan mostly known for its phallic power. It is in such instances that the reading of masculinity in crisis becomes more obvious than in representations where the fairy tale-inspired male characters seem to maintain an aura of power and omnipotence. The pursuit derives its perversity, whether or not the object being pursued is perverse, from masculinity. It is the representation of male gender in the films that is coded as perverse and degenerate. It is ascendancy to a throne, or the process of seeking power and

[11] Vivian Sobchack's essay (Sobchack, 1996) discusses the theme of patriarchy in crisis in the American horror film and the family melodrama from the mid-1970s to 1985. I originally located Sobchack's earlier paper: 'Child/Alien/Father: Patriarchal Crisis and Generic Exchange' (1987). The title of the latter makes the patriarchy in crisis theme of the argument much more explicit. Also relevant to this discussion is Marina Heung's article (Heung, 1983).

wealth, that is significant to the Bluebeard figure's masculinity. There is no exception; in all the films that are case studies in this thesis, his masculinity hinges on this pursuit, and his success in fulfilment of the same.

The befriending ski bum and wanderer Wade (Kevin Bacon) in the action-adventure film *The River Wild* is not a Bluebeard lover to the action heroine Gail. However, his gaze towards the married Gail is undoubtedly sexual. This specific text rescues the marriage and the American nuclear family unlike the other films in the corpus that represent the disintegration of the white bourgeois patriarchal hegemonic nuclear family. The perverse sexual gaze is combined with instances where Wade tries to drown Tom Hartman (David Strathairn) underwater, thereby attempting to replace Tom as the man of the family and Gail's sexual partner. Wade, a dangerous fugitive, is not a Lord or figure of authority. Whatever power he does represent in the text is associated with his criminal mastermind. However, his single-minded pursuit of money, drifting nature, avoidant carefree attitude, ruthless murders, short-term thinking and impulsive knee-jerk actions and reactions, indifference to humanity and nature, corrupt and shallow character, emotional, verbal and physical abuse of people he encounters rewrites the Bluebeard as a lowlife. His insinuating racist remarks towards Ranger Johnny (Benjamin Bratt) as "Indian Johnny" also associate Bluebeard with colonial racism. Wade is as goal-oriented and ruthless as the terminators. He is also the "people" of Gail and his conversation, the people who pollute the river. Unlike his mad scientist counterparts discussed later in this chapter, Wade does not pollute through scientific excursions. Wade pollutes humanity through his greed, deceitful nature, by threatening the happy American family, and by killing innocent people. Not surprisingly, he is also shown littering in a shot, thereby confirming his polluter status. The Bluebeard-influenced character Wade is associated with corruption, transgression, depravity and a patriarchy in crisis.

Likewise, when it comes to ascendancy of the throne, the commercially unsuccessful *Elektra* makes a good case study (Brown, 2011, p.9). The Hollywood film draws on the Marvel Comics character Elektra Natchios, who is superhero Daredevil's girlfriend in her previous life. This story is told in the Hollywood adaptation *Daredevil*

(Mark Steven Johnson, 2003) (*Elektra* DVD Director's Cut).[12] Elektra, is one of the two action heroines in the corpus who have their origins in comic books. Comic books have provided source material for the representation of the action heroine on the big and the small screen (Tasker, 1993, pp.28-31; Brown, 2011). Bluebeard Kirigi (Will Yun Lee) is not Elektra's lover but he is connected to her past because he murdered Elektra's mother when she was a young girl. Kirigi plays the part of the attractive villain typically found in the thriller film (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013, p.335) or what Pirie has in another context defined as the "prince of darkness" (Pirie, 2013). Elektra, however, does not have any memory of Kirigi murdering her mother for three-quarters of the film, although she has repeated flashbacks of finding her mother dead. The recurrence of amnesia and aphasia in the corpus is addressed in Chapter 3. Elektra's second encounter with Kirigi is because of his pursuit of a motherless young girl, Abby Miller (Kirsten Prout), also referred to as the "treasure", thereby linking Kirigi's pursuit of Abby to wealth. The Bluebeard's ruthless pursuit of the child in the films and the association of the child with wealth will be discussed in Chapter 2. The title of the council, the Hand, led by Kirigi's father Master Roshi (Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa), is an obvious reference to the uncanny "severed hand", a gothic motif, which repeatedly recurs in the corpus films (Short, 2015, p.99).

*Maleficent* literally takes the corpus in the direction of fairy tales, thereby supporting the reading of this thesis. The story of the Bluebeard is told through live-action retelling of the fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty*. Through the character of Stefan (Sharlto Copley), the Bluebeard is written as a lowlife who makes his way to the throne. Stefan is an orphan peasant boy who dreams of living in the king's castle. Human Stefan's chance encounter with the young fairy Maleficent, also an orphan who lives in the Moors occupied by the fairies and other kinds of magical creatures, is because of his greed for the jewels in the river of the Moors. Stefan tries to steal the jewels and gets apprehended in doing so. This theft by the young Stefan is only but a sign of how the narrative unfolds. Stefan's ambition takes him to serve King Henry (Kenneth Cranham) as an adult, and he ruthlessly chooses to be a successor to the king. Stefan's desire of elevating his social standing without performing any manifest deeds that qualify and

[12] *Elektra:* Director's Cut, 2005. [DVD] Directed by Rob Bowman.

support this elevation is clearly indicative that he will only rely on fraudulent means and villainy to achieve this goal. He manages to climb the ladder from serving Henry to replacing him and marrying his daughter Princess Leila (Hannah New), by deceiving his childhood sweetheart Maleficent. Stefan's deeds are akin to that of Rochester, who was married off to Bertha only for her fortune. Maleficent and Leila, both Stefan's wives, are used by him to climb the socio-economic ladder. Women's personal wealth is used to promulgate the status quo of patriarchy in the text. Simultaneously, the power of patriarchy in this film is maintained by the abuse and subjugation of female characters.

Despite being king, once Maleficent has cursed Stefan's newborn baby Aurora to fall into an eternal sleep on her sixteenth birthday, Stefan is haunted, traumatised and persecuted only through the paranoid fantasy of how Maleficent's curse will unfold in the scheme of things. Maleficent, introduced as a fairy transforms into a wicked witch because of being deceived and betrayed. Her first witch-like deed is when she curses Aurora. Stefan's fear of Maleficent after the curse is bestowed upon his daughter can be framed via Creed's argument on the witch as the monstrous-feminine in Hollywood films:

> The crime that ensured that witches would be burnt at the stake was, as Walker points out, a crime of which they were actually innocent because it was impossible to commit – this was the crime of collaborating literally with the devil (Walker, 1983, 1084). The most common form of collaboration of which they were accused was that of having intercourse with the devil. Detailed information contained in *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1484)… makes it clear that a central reason for the persecution of witches was morbid interest in the witch as 'other' and a fear of the witch/woman as an agent of castration (Creed, 1993, p.74).

With respect to this insight, Maleficent's position as the witch makes Stefan the devil. The metaphor of the devil in relation to the Bluebeard-husband recurs throughout this thesis. Maleficent did not collaborate with the devil, but she is Stefan's former lover. She may not have had intercourse with the devil, but his violent removal of her wings can certainly be read as rape as is discussed in the following chapters. By the theft of her wings, it may seem that Stefan has castrated Maleficent. However, despite his power and status, his fear of Maleficent suggests that there is more to this than meets

the eye. In the film, the world of the fairies is established as a different world led by love, magic purity, kindness, friendship and happiness. It is represented as a far cry from the greed and patriarchal values of the human world. This difference is also suggested by mise-en-scène. The fairy world is represented in pastel colours and low contrast, thereby giving it a heavenly and mystical appearance. In contrast, the human world is portrayed in dark colours and high contrast thereby making it appear as an unhappy place. Thus Maleficent as a female character, a fairy, and a witch is "othered" in the text. Stefan also fears castration at her hands. This may not be a literal castration but Maleficent's ability to defeat him as a king in battle, dethrone him from his position, and make public the façade of his masculinity. Also, Stefan's emotional state and his subjugation merely at the knowledge of Maleficent's existence and the possibility of her devious schemes resemble Rochester's subjugation and fearful responses at the hands of the seemingly powerless and deranged Bertha. Like Bertha, Maleficent controls Stefan merely through her somewhat meandering presence and what this might bring about. Maleficent's effect on Stefan is pathological, subduing, excruciating and powerful. Stefan's emotional subjugation and consumption at the hands of his former victim represents masculinity on the brink of a breakdown.

*Panic Room* is perhaps more Hitchcockian than any film in the corpus. Fincher equated the score of *Panic Room* written by Howard Shore, who also composed the score for *The Cell*, to having a Bernard Hermann (frequent Hitchcock musical collaborator) quality. The reference to Hitchcock and his films again emphasises a gothic connection. The mise-en-scène and especially the score of action heroine films also heighten and exasperate our fear and anxiety. The opening sequence in *Panic Room* visually resembles the opening sequence of *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968). The viewer is filled with a sense of terror and fright on account of the score, even before we are introduced to the characters of the film and before the plot unfolds. At one level, the film has elements of the Bluebeard fairy tale. A young woman Meg Altman (Jodie Foster) is recently divorced from an older wealthy pharmaceutical magnate Stephen Altman (Patrick Bauchau). In her first night in the new house with her daughter the Goth kid Sarah (Kristen Stewart), three burglars Junior (Jared Leto), Burnham (Forest Whittaker), and Raoul (Dwight Yoakam) break into the four-storey brownstone for the secret inheritance hidden in the panic room. But there is more of the Bluebeard fairy

tale in the film than the obvious connection of the philandering wealthy old husband abandoning his wife for a younger woman. The framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale allows to read the seemingly minor character Raoul as the wife-and child-murdering Bluebeard figure.

The second Bluebeard connection is made directly through Raoul's personality and the generic lineage it draws on. The gun-crazy and sadistic Raoul is a monster and more. The balaclava that Raoul wears is an indication that he is concealing more than his face. While Junior and Burnham are far from criminals, Raoul is abusive, a deviant, a killer, a psychopath with no other definable quality than his violent aggressive nature, anger, and unreasonable hatred towards people, which automatically disqualifies any context for a sympathetic reading or redemption within the text.

He is often shown using a sledgehammer in his attempts to break the roof or rather the floor of the panic room in which Meg and Sarah eventually hide, the phone connection box, and finally to try and kill Meg. His weapon is suggestive of his minuscule intelligence and aggression as the only available substitute. Both the balaclava and the sledgehammer bring an intertextual reference of great significance. The sledgehammer is dimensionally similar to a chainsaw, such as the chainsaw that Leatherface (Gunner Hanson) in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hopper, 1974) roars around in the glory of phallic power. The chainsaw is also a symbol of the failure of patriarchy in the light of second-wave feminism and the breakdown of the nuclear family (Wood, 1984, p.189). Wood has read *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and has credited its aesthetic richness as nightmarish (Wood, 1984, p.187, p.190). In another article, he describes *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as a "comedy of despair" (Wood, 1979, p.9, p.11).[13] The threat, horror, and phallic connotations of the two power tools are unavoidable. A regular hammer is also Leatherface's weapon of choice.

Raoul does not just have Leatherface's equivalent power tool. In his full monstrous glory, Raoul is even a reminder of Leatherface. The balaclava that Raoul wears functions

[13] *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is also a subject of investigation in Tony Williams' monograph (Williams, 1996a). The Gothic, "perverted fairy tale" and the body horror connection in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is brought out by Martin Myrone (Myrone, 2013, p.81). Wells reads *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as "rural Gothic" (Wells, 2000, p.87).

at two levels. Like Leatherface's face, or what we see of it, is a mask that conceals the face underneath. Much in the same way, via the mask, he also resembles Jason in *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980), Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund) in *A Nightmare on Elm* Street (Wes Craven, 1984) or even Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) in *The Silence of the Lambs*. His face reflects corruption and the scars on his face are representative of inner conflict. The balaclava hides Raoul's face for around three-quarters of the running time of the film. Once the balaclava is off and we see Yoakam the pale skin, angry and aggressive gestures, and balding head further make him resemble Leatherface's masked face. In the course of the film, the balaclava-clad bus driver robber visually transforms into a twenty-first century incarnation of Leatherface, the serial killer. Through Raoul's presence and violence, the subtleness of the thriller in *Panic Room* gives way to the excess of the horror (Short, 2015, p.104). The much-debated discourse of the breakdown of the traditional nuclear family in American horror film and American film from the 1970s onwards is a viewpoint propagated by Wood (1979, 1984) and several other theorists such as Williams (1980, 1996a, 1996b), Greg Keeler (1981), Sobchack (1987, 1996), Susan Faludi (1992), Stella Bruzzi (2005) and Creed (2005). Insightful critiques of the institutionalised patriarchal nuclear family in Hollywood films are issues very clearly channelled through the action heroine corpus films.

Continuing the reflection on approach and critical engagement with theoretical discourses, Raoul's monstrosity is clearly established within the tradition of the "killer" of the low budget slasher film (Clover, 1992, pp.26-30). Scholars writing within the discourse of the horror film have not drawn out this ancestral connection of the male monster to the Bluebeard fairy tale and the gothic. However, scholars working within the discourse of the fairy tale and gothic, such as Warner (1994), Tatar (2004), and Short (2015) have very clearly acknowledged the slasher killer's Bluebeardian connections.

Hidden under layers of disguise is the third Bluebeard connection, which is again made through Raoul. This association makes way to reading Raoul as Stephen's double.[14] In his conversation with David Koepp on *Panic Room*, William Goldman has

[14] Stephen also plays Edward Baines' (Colton James) wealthy father Lucien Baines in *The Cell*. The most obvious Bluebeardian relationship in *The Cell* is played between the action heroine Catherine Deane and

commented that Stephen's character is largely ineffectual (*Panic Room* DVD 3 Disc Special Edition).[15] It is significant to acknowledge the storyteller's choice of the absence of an effective male family member in the film. The question that comes to mind is whether Stephen's ineffectiveness signify perhaps a different role that he fulfils.

The stressful narrative developments and the leading characters' fearful reactions to these situations masquerades the parallels drawn between the psychotic Raoul and the seemingly decent Stephen. The Bluebeard's tropes in the film are split between the men: Raoul the killer and Stephen the man of science, who is recently divorced and is drawn out to be closer to a gothic husband (Hanson, 2007, p.84). Warner explains that in a certain retelling of the misogynistic fairy tale, the wife's husbands looked alike:

> By a mischievous fairy's enchantment, these two men in her life look exactly alike, and she never could tell 'to whom she should address her lamentations for fear of mistaking the object of her hatred for the object of her love' (Warner, 1994, pp.253-4).

That a lowlife, aggressive and violent character can stand as a wealthy and sophisticated man's double does not seem like a grotesquely strange reading, once the connection established by the film is deconstructed and understood. At a certain level, they are opposites: Raoul is a low wage earner, Stephen a wealthy businessman. Raoul is one of the three burglars who break into the house for the inheritance, Stephen's wealth brought the house and he owns it. Raoul has the intentions to hurt Meg and Sarah, Stephen's entered the house with the intention to help and rescue his former wife and only daughter. The doubling is achieved by the visual connection established between the two disparate figures through the gothic motif of the "severed hand" (Short, 2015, p.99). Once Stephen enters his former wife's new home, he is severely beaten by Raoul. The beating breaks Stephen's arm and seriously injures his wrist. Raoul's entry into the panic room is marked by his hand getting caught in the door and the agony the accident causes him. The injured wrists and arms draw parallels between the two male characters.

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the serial killer Carl. The relationship of an older wealthy man and younger attractive woman is also very briefly played out, through Edward's parents: Lucien and his much younger wife Ella Baines (Museta Vander).

[15] *Panic Room:* 3 Disc Special Edition, 2002. [DVD] Directed by David Fincher.

There is another association between Raoul and Stephen. Raoul swaps his clothing with that of the injured Stephen, who has no option but to comply with Raoul's orders at gunpoint. The reason for swapping the clothing is to deceive Meg and Sarah can only see the events unfold through close circuit cameras in the panic room. Raoul wears Stephen's classic trench coat and Stephen is made to wear Raoul's balaclava. Through an exchange of clothing, they symbolically exchange characters and places. Raoul becomes Stephen and Stephen becomes Raoul. By disguising himself in the injured Stephen's trench coat, and pretending to be left outside the panic room by the robbers, the man who enters the panic room is not Raoul but Stephen. Thereby all acts committed by Raoul including the articulations of his desires are not that of Raoul but are of Stephen. Raoul acts on Stephen's unconscious desires: to hold Sarah hostage for seeking the inheritance in the panic room and be left undisturbed in the process. He is unwilling to give the diabetic Sarah the insulin shot that will save her life. Raoul insists that he wants to kill Sarah, whether it is because Meg has chosen to call the police or because he dislikes the fact that Sarah has seen his face. He slaps Sarah, who comes to rescue her mother. And finally, he attempts to kill Meg by landing a blow on her face with his sledgehammer. Through the juxtapositioning with Raoul, Stephen's disguised Bluebeardian intentions are unveiled. He is exposed to be a violent and murdering husband and a bad and abusive father. This line of enquiry will be further taken up in some detail in Chapter 2. Actors Yoakam and Bauchau with their balding foreheads, grey hair and aging faces look similar if not alike, thereby reinforcing the reading as doubles. By the climax, the two male characters are again made to look alike by the sheer amount of blood on their faces and their bloodstained clothes.

The Bluebeardian connection is drawn further by the intertextual reference to the B-horror film *The Stepfather* (Joseph Ruben, 1987). Interestingly, Hanson has read *The Stepfather* as a neo-gothic film (Hanson, 2007, pp.176-7). When talking of *Panic Room*, Fincher refers to the film as being very close to a B-movie (*Panic Room* DVD 3 Disc Special Edition). *The Stepfather* tells the tale of a "merry widow murderer" Jerry Blake (Terry O'Quinn), closely modelled after the wicked Charles Oakley (Joseph Cotten) in Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), Preacher Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum) in *The Night of the Hunter* (Charles Laughton, 1955) sociopath Carter Hayes (Michael Keaton)

in *Pacific Heights* (John Schlesinger, 1990) (Warner, 1994, p.264; Erens, 1996). Jerry is always on the lookout for the perfect family.

The climax of *Panic Room* is a reminder of the climatic confrontation on the staircase in *The Stepfather,* where the injured wife Susan (Shelley Hack) tries to murder Jerry, and the final blow is landed by the maturing Stephanie (Jill Schoelen). In his reading of *The Stepfather*, Williams writes: "Donald Westlake's intelligent script [for *The Stepfather*] reveals patriarchy as an ideological creation dependent on violence against women for its very existence" (Williams, 1996a, p.260). In the context of the 1980s American horror film, Williams states that the monster in the films is the patriarchal father (Williams, 1996a, p.211). That the climax of *Panic Room* pays homage to *The Stepfather* further supports the reading that in *Panic Room* it is the father who is committing the ungodly deeds against his own family. The corpus films under investigation draw heavily on the lineage of the family in horror to represent the fractured family. It is to this end that scholars like Clover have proposed and read mainstream American cinema and its representations of the action heroine, for instance Ripley, as that which represses their very obvious horror lineage (Clover, 1992, p.20. A similar viewpoint is also expressed by Wells (2000, pp.107-8). The reading of *Panic Room* both updates Clover's reading, and moves beyond her reading of the "killer" driven merely by "psychosexual" fury (Clover, 1992, p.27). In its reference to *The Stepfather* and on its own, *Panic Room* retells the story of patriarchal crisis. The issues that *Panic Room* addresses also include the failure of marriage as an institute, the collapse of the nuclear family, and the formation of the alternative family unit of Heung (1983), Sobchack (1996) and Tasker's (2004) discussion, which in these case studies are led by women.

**Gothic Male as a Man of Science**

Phallic power and perverse energy reach its peak in the incarnation of the mad scientist. The "isolated" male "overreacher" (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.278) in a select number of films in the corpus is an arbiter of reason, and a "man of science" (Robbins, 1993, p.134). These representations tap into the Bluebeard fairy tale's successor, the gothic mode (Wells, 2000, p.38; Botting, 1996, p.14). Instances of male overreachers in the corpus under investigation are Ash in *Alien*, Carter J. Burke (Paul Reiser) in *Aliens*, Dr

Peter Silberman (Earl Boen) in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, Miles Bennett Dyson (Joe Morton) in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, the bad terminators in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, Trevor Goodchild (Marton Csokas), Oren Goodchild (Johnny Lee Miller), Claudius (Nikolai Kinski), and Keeper (Pete Postlethwaite), Stephen in *Panic Room*, and Bill in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2*.

Before this argument moves towards the direction of exploring what these gothic masculinities bring into the action heroine corpus, there is a need to historicise the place of masculinities associated with scientific transgressions within gothic writing and its eventual transference into products of popular culture that draw on the gothic mode. Historical accounts of the gothic explain that gothic fiction written by both men and women was meant to act as a backlash to Enlightenment, industrialisation, scientific, medical, and technological development, which were still gaining momentum in eighteenth-century Victorian England (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.20). Of significance in this period inundated by changes, is a certain development and shift in theories of human existence. The shift was marked by a move from "traditional metaphysical and theological" to "secular and materialist" investigations of human existence's origins and nature (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.20). Much controversy was caused by William Lawrence's monograph *Lectures on Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man* published in 1819 because Lawrence's findings were "hostile to natural and revealed religion" (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.21). The notoriety of Lawrence's arguments had an impact on the revisions that Shelley made to her novel. Punter and Byron remark:

> *Frankenstein* can be seen to set out for the first time the concern that dominates Gothic's engagement with both science and industry over the following centuries: the disruption of accepted notions of the human (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.21).

The result of this surge of changes was that the human race, its existence and even its discontents, came to be placed in the discourses of the rational and the explicable. It came to be acknowledged in mid-nineteenth century, however dismissively and defensively, that human beings were not unique, and that the survival of the human race depended on "material causes" (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.20).

Gothic fiction thus firmly rooted itself in opposition to these new developments, through its scepticism, by taking side with the irrational, inexplicable, superstitious, supernatural, religion and God, fate, an anti-automata stance, and through scenarios of distrust of science. Gothic literature firmly placed itself against the forces of reason. This ideological canon became firmly rooted as the ethos in gothic writing, and hence most fiction and films that draw on this mode inevitably stage the conflict between the bad, rationality of science, technology, capitalism and male; and the good, irrationality of nature, fate, religion, and female. Freeland explains: "feminist philosophers and historians have argued that in Western thought, and more explicitly during the early period of modern science, rationality and science were represented or gendered as *male*, and nature as *female*" (Freeland, 2000, p.30). The "ideological charge" of the films is that of "a Romantic opposition between the organic and the mechanical" (Hanson, 2007, p.175; Penley, 1990, p.118). This stands true for gender ideology too.

This essentialist framework of representation of gender and gender relationships inevitably informs the action heroine corpus. The relentless conflict of the bad and the good with farfetched moralistic duality is associated with gender in the films. Reading this essentialist framework and producing a critical understanding of it is one of the aims of this study. The account above is a historical background of a possible source of these representations. Although the contextual and historical background is one source point of masculinities that transgress nature and God, there is another. This is the trope of the "mad science", which Mark Kermode and Christopher Frayling argue cinema has created (Kermode and Frayling, 2013, p.64). The mad scientist lineage, despite being camouflaged, inevitably feeds into the corpus and its representations of masculinities.

In addressing the science fiction lineage of some of the films in the corpus, it may seem that the futuristic world, a trope of science fiction literature and film, is in conflict with the fairy tale reading of the films, which suggests a primitive and barbaric past being represented in the action heroine films. The approach and the reading propagated here may appear to conflict with the imagined future of the filmmakers' vision. But further critical analysis highlights the interrelation of these primitive associations of chauvinism, misogyny and infanticide and the imagined futuristic settings. Valdine Clemens writes: "*Alien* thus demonstrates in a multiplicity of ways how science fiction

can express the Gothic impulse" (Clemens, 1999, p.218). Although the films being investigated are not horror films but generic hybrids, Grant has argued: "Horror films have been seen as nothing less than grand metaphysical morality plays that embody the residual manifestation of ancient religious thinking in the age of science or that bring us to an acceptance of inevitability of death" (Grant, 1996, pp.5-6). This marriage of the uncivilised past and clinical futures in literary and cinema genre can also be associated with the contextualisation above, through which it is clear that gothic writing was a backlash to the Enlightenment.

Notably, the imagined future in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* is dystopian, also read by Constance Penley as "critical dystopia" (Penley, 1990).[16] Penley, however, is quick to point out that the discourse of the films is not nihilistic either (Penley, 1990, p.118). The dystopian scenarios in the films do not look like a future but are definitely a reminder of a past. In his discussion of ideology in *The Terminator*, Whittaker cites Doran Larson, who for the purpose of his own reading reads the future represented in *The Terminator* as the past (Whittaker, 2000, p.75; Mann, 1989-90, p.24).[17] Despite Kusama's choice of a futuristic utopia, Bregna is far from utopia and bliss. The perfect mirror that Bregna holds through the futuristic architecture of Berlin is far from seamless. As the narrative unfolds, this mirror can no longer camouflage its flaws either through repression or proliferating secrets. Bregna's cracks are represented by the prevalence of a monarchy led by a cloning scientist, the disappearance of its female citizens, the emotional disintegration of all its citizens and the presence of a rebel group called the Monicans. The future in *Æon Flux* may be post-apocalyptic but the after-effects of the apocalypse are not fully dealt with. The consequences of the apocalypse are shrouded in secrecy which troubles its people.

These nihilistic scenarios portrayed in popular American films provide the space to play out the gothic husband's transgressions. In the futuristic settings, the

[16] In her chapter, Penley reads dystopia in *The Terminator* as critical dystopia because the narrative locates the cause of dystopia in the present day world (Penley, 1990, p.117).

[17] Cinematic narratives that represent dystopian futures are mostly informed by anxiety related to technological developments and are very often read by scholars from this point of view. These technological anxieties that lead to the retelling of the Frankenstein story can be seen in *The Terminator* and *Æon Flux*. A similar contextual account for 1930s mad scientist films is given by Wells (2000, p.47, p.48).

Bluebeard's depravity takes the form of monstrous, uncontrollable and mad science. Science, and the perverse power that its exploitation bestows, becomes the gothic scientist's obsessive outlet. Here, the misogyny directed towards the many wives and the bloodbaths in the Bluebeard fairy tale is displaced by power bestowed by the abuse of science. This patriarchal science attempts to tame nature, women, their sexuality and their reproductive bodies. The arenas of science and technology bestow relentless power, control, intelligence, and superiority upon the gothic scientist, which he exploits at will. Despite the power of science, the fall both moral and psychological is apparent. The mad scientist thereby emerges as the patriarch and the story that the generically hybrid films of the corpus narrate clearly come out as those of masculine domination. Freeland's citation of Ludmilla Jordanova discussion is enlightening to this end:

> It has been suggested that the 'mad scientist' is a literary type in Gothic and Utopian novels, and there do indeed appear to be a number of recurrent themes that bear… on the relationships between science, medicine, and gender. Five issues in relation to the 'mad scientist' are of especial importance here: masculinity; power, control, and over-reaching; secrecy; experimentalism; and science and magic (Freeland, 2000, p.29).

The key themes of Jordanova's argument appear in representations of masculinity and perpetuate gender ideology in the corpus films as will be discussed below.

In *Alien*, Ash the science-officer wears a pale blue shirt and trousers thereby referring to the Bluebeard figure. He is an android that represents the company's interest, and is hell-bent at procuring the alien species for the company's bio-weapons division. He is quite literally the insidious company man; his synthetic person status is one of the many gothic secrets kept from the Captain of the Nostromo (Dallas played by Tom Skerritt) and its crew members. Affirming the reading of a masculinity in crisis is Chad Hermann's analysis of Ash's character:

> Ash, an android in the guise of a man, is the ship's secondary source of horror, representing a latent power of betrayal lying beneath the masculine facade; he is not, as it were, a *real* man (Hermann, 1997, p.39).

Ash's science-officer may be the most rational and unemotional, the latter attribute most sought after in professionals. But the revelation of his android status, merely an

electric appliance that needs to be plugged in, thoroughly feminises him and underlines his castration.

In *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, the terminator is a monster created by man and his science. Through the representations of androids that look like human beings, the distinction between man and machine disappears. Man becomes machine and machine becomes man. This reproducing and self-reproducing fantasy that recurs in these films will be addressed in depth in Chapter 2. In *Aliens*, the company's representatives falsify Ripley's account of the aliens as a deadly species, and the company's hidden interests in procuring it at the cost of expending her late crew members and her. Carter, who also uses treacherous ways to procure the alien species in the hope of returning them to earth, represents the company's interests. The company man Carter replaces the stereotypical science-officer, thus linking perverse scientific excursions to capitalistic greed and power.

In *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, Dr Silberman is a psychologist, a man of excessive rationality. Chapter 3 has a detailed discussion on Silberman's exaggerated rationality and the action heroine's active opposition to this excessive reasoning. The preoccupied scientist Dyson is like Dr Henry Frankenstein, who unknowingly is on the path of creating the terminator monster. Dyson, who is seen in a denim blue shirt, a character variation of the gothic husband, has a small but significant part in the film. In the story, he represents what Freeland has called the "isolated male hubris", whereas the plot is significantly about his transformation (Freeland, 2000, p.28). Dyson's transformation can be read with Freeland's reading of Victor in *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*:

> He [Victor] stands in for the Romantic hero as he gradually acquires consciousness of this overreaching and begins to repent (Freeland, 2000, p.36).

Dyson, the overinvested researcher supported by capitalistic greed, changes the course of his journey and is redeemed only through death. The repenting is a narrative thread through which the Bluebeard character is redeemed. The popular film's employment of gothic modalities gives shape to masculine representations that symbolise the patriarchal order through their overreaching.

In *Æon Flux*, cloning scientists Trevor and his brother Oren, represent the Goodchild regime that has ruled Bregna for 400 years. The Goodchild brothers represent a monarchy that came into power after Bregna was inflicted by an industrial disease. Bregna, a city of five million, the only habitat for the human race in this science fiction action film future is led by a scientific leader. He replaces the traditional route of a monarch chosen for his noble blood or a religious leader chosen for his spiritual inclination. Here Trevor's scientific research has ensured the survival of the human race. This is an essential philosophy of life that the citizens of Bregna have embraced, even though Trevor's experiments are shrouded by "secrecy" (Freeland, 2000, p.29). Although a specific reason is not provided for the industrial disease, it would not be farfetched to assume that the industrial disease was perhaps led by man's own greed and exploitation of nature, a recurring trope of Hollywood science fiction (Penley, 1990, pp.116-7). The industrial disease, as the title suggests was quite possibly led by excessive unethical capitalistic and scientific pursuits thereby signifying "a rape of the natural world" (Crichton, 1991, p.284). The industrial development from the ideological standpoint of the films is a fruit of masculine energy. That this development is the reason for the near annihilation of the human race represents masculine dishonour.

The remains of the human race are rescued by the genius scientist Trevor by mastering and achieving success with cloning on human beings. Trevor's reasons for overreaching like that of Victor in *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein,* are "to defeat death and disease" (Freeland, 2000, p.42). Thus Trevor "is a male figure who begins with plausible and commendable goals" (Freeland, 2000, pp.33-4). In order to save the remaining human race from extinction due to sterility that was the side effect of the vaccination formulated to cure the industrial disease, the Goodchilds have cloned the human race and themselves. This is also done so that Trevor can survive to find a cure to the sterility. *Æon Flux* is an instance of what Lucy Fischer defines as "gynaecological gothic" (Fischer, 1996, p.415). Feminist scholars have read masculine medley with female reproduction and the profession of the obstetrician as male usurpation of the female capacity to reproduce; an act motivated by a perceived subconscious lack. Eva Feder Kittay (1983), Azizah al-Hibri (1983), Gena Corea (1988) discuss this subject in great detail. Whereas others like Rita Arditti, Renate Duelli Klein and Shelley Minden (1984), Michelle Stanworth (1987), Tania Modleski (1988), Creed (1990; 1993a; 1993b, p.57; 2005), E.

Ann Kaplan (1992), Helen W. Robbins (1993), Lucy Fischer (1996, p.419) and Jill Nelmes (2007) discuss this subject in the larger context of their work. This medley with the female body feminises Trevor.

*Æon Flux* like *The Terminator* is a "time-loop paradox" a staple of the science fiction literature (Penley, 1990, p.119).[18] The industrial disease, the unintended side effect and its cure, when thought of carefully, are some kind of "unconscious wish-fulfilment" (Penley, 1990, p.120) on part of the male characters, as Penley analysis it in another context. They have conveniently gotten rid of their parents and are orchestrating their own "primal scene fantasy" (Penley, 1990, p.121), one "inflected by a family romance" (Penley, 1990, p.121), thereby ensuring their reproduction and rebirth for seven generations (Goscilo, 1987-88, p.38). Penley reads *The Terminator*:

> Kyle is thus both the father of John Conner [*sic*] and, in his youth and inexperience, Sarah's son, John Conner [*sic*]. The work of fantasy allows the fact of incest to be both stated and dissimulated (Penley, 1990, p.122).

"And within the structure of fantasy that shapes the film" Trevor and Oren are their own fathers who choose to impregnate their female partners with cloned embryos consisting of their DNA (Deoxyribonucleic acid) (Penley, 1990, p.121). They are also the child/children as Goodchild is their family name. The Goodchild brothers like Oedipus have gotten rid of their father, are having sexual intercourse with their mother, and also ensure that they continue living forever. Warner's use of the Oedipus myth in relation to the story of Bluebeard will recur in the reading of these films in Chapter 2.

By reproducing themselves and a world of people around them without the consent of the women and sexual intercourse with women, the Goodchild brothers in *Æon Flux* have reduced women to the role of sexual objects or any other social role that they deem fit. In his article Wood argues that the butcher family in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is an all-male family, which lacks the humanising presence of a woman (Wood, 1984, p.188). In the same way, the only "humanizing" female presence in the "all-male

[18] While almost every work of scholarship that discusses *The Terminator films* does refer to the reiterative and circular narrative of the film, it has been discussed in great detail by Mann (1989-90) and Hermann (1997, p.50).

family" was Æon as Trevor's former wife Catherine. She had her DNA almost destroyed, so that the young brother Oren can ensure his regeneration and have elder brother Trevor to follow the cause (Wood, 1984, p.188). Misogyny is an unmissable subtext of the action heroine corpus under investigation. The Goodchild brothers are emasculated by usurping the woman's role, their constant interference in the reproductive process, and especially by getting rid of their father and fathering themselves. In the Hollywood film, the figure of the mad scientist brings to fore the subconscious and repressed masculine desire to become a woman. The latter viewpoint is expressed by theorists like Kittay (1983), al-Hibri (1983), Arditti, Klein and Minden (1984), Evelyn Fox Keller (1986, 1990), Stanworth (1987), Corea (1988), Modleski (1988), Creed (1990, 1993a, 2005), Clover (1992, pp.26-30, p.44), Kaplan (1992), Robbins (1993), Fischer (1996, p.419), Ignacio L. Götz (1999) and Nelmes (2007), who in their analysis lay emphasis on the male desire to appropriate female biological functions.

Æon and Trevor's romance is represented as having semblances to a gothic romance. Wood, Goscilio and Freeland in different contexts discuss the Freudian idea of the connection between the libido and sublimated sexual energy. Similarly, the absence of Æon's humanising presence, who is established as Trevor's true love and soul mate, allows for Trevor's "libidinal energy to be transformed into subliminal energy" (Wood, 1979, p.7, p.11; Wood, 1984, p.166; Goscilio, 1987, p.43; Freeland, 2000, p.42). Freeland's analysis of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* is useful to read Trevor's character. He thereby relentlessly and single-mindedly pursues the "scientific hubris" (Freeland, 2000, p.3). Thus Trevor's "plausible and commendable goals" discussed earlier cross "the borders that separate" Trevor "from nature" (Freeland, 2000, pp.33-4). Although in this particular instance, unlike Freeland's theorisation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* the decision is not of Trevor's own accord. As Trevor gets closer to nature in an attempt either to match, control and overcome it. It becomes clear that he perceives of himself as inferior and thus castrated, when compared to this unfathomable other that he so diligently works to conquer. These male characters replace their parents not only in reproduction but also in instruction, as they seem to determine what their younger selves learn and implement.

Patriarchy in these films is a fantasy of self-reproduction and guaranteed self-perpetuation of masculinity and of male intellectual pursuits that take the form of "experimentalism" (Freeland, 2000, p.29). By ensuring their own reproduction, the Goodchild brothers ensure the perpetuation of patriarchy. Trevor and Oren subscribe to what Keller has called to make "gender visible in the pursuit of nature's secrets" (Keller, 1986, p.78). The intellectual pursuits of these male characters have a "magical" quality as they ensure the continued rebirth of themselves and those around them (Freeland, 2000, p.29; Wells, 2000, p.49). The Goodchild brothers' uninterrupted and unscrutinised self-reproduction fantasy also takes the form of dictatorship. They represent the "male dynastic structure" of the gothic mode (Hanson, 2007, p.185). The explosive colourful contemporary portraiture in the film, those of Trevor pensive looking, are assets of dictatorship. They are *also signifiers* of self-reproduction in the form of the endless copying of one's glorified self through portraits. The portraits also maintain the aura of phallic glory and the portraiture becomes the equivalent of religious idolism. Unlike gothic portrait's which in appear in the gothic woman's film and neo-gothic films of Hanson's discussion, the portraits are not that of a woman or a child, but that of a man.

Trevor as a scientist, working in the field of cloning and methods of artificial reproduction is coded as a man who has evaded the boundaries of nature by aligning himself to excessive rationality and science. Trevor's scientific excursions are in course of narrative development disclosed as being anti-scientific in principle because of his moral inclination, and intention to restore nature to its original course and not to replace or destroy it. The benevolent Trevor is quite simply imposed to his own science and thus redeemed like Miles in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Trevor's redemption does not take the form of death. But by allowing Æon to destroy the sperm shaped relical, where cloning takes place, without the foresight of the cured sterility, Trevor accepts death as a way of life and knows that death awaits him. By accepting his mortality, Trevor is redeemed. While Trevor willingly wants to surrender to life and death, his brother Oren is the Bluebeard figure who shoots several women who either become pregnant because of Trevor's experiments or naturally become pregnant as they heal. These women are not his wives but in his ruthless pursuit of their lives, the Bluebeard fairy tale narrative is apparent. Oren is also the mad scientist who wants to make nature obsolete by embracing and continuing human cloning as the way to move forward. His ambition

is to continue living forever. Freeland writes about the subject of nature in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*:

> The transition from alchemy to the new science brought with it new conceptions of the scientist's relation to nature: from a sort of eroticized respect to a controlling goal (Freeland, 2000, p.30).

In accord with Freeland's theorisation, Trevor is redeemed for his "eroticized respect" of nature, whereas his brother Oren is punished by death for his "controlling goal" (Freeland, 2000, p.30). Control here is a sign of decline and power at its precipice. The scientist in these genre pictures is a polluter, who is seen polluting nature and its course.

In these films, patriarchy takes form in the megalomaniac mad scientist who seeks to be feared rather than be loved (Wells, 2000, p.47, p.49). The mad scientist lineage in *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, *Volume 2* and *Panic Room* is not blindingly obvious but is influential and significant for this thesis. This chapter began with reading Bill as a Bluebeard. Popular critics and film scholars alike have specifically commented on the postmodern genre pastiche in Tarantino's *Kill Bill*. Rich only very briefly alludes to the genres that the film draws on: "chop-sockey films", "spaghetti Westerns", "grindhouse movies", "kung-fu gems", "wushu", "Hong Fist kung fu", "Japanese bushido", "Chinese martial-arts traditions" (Rich, 2004, p.25; Coulthard, 2007, p.161).

In this extensive array of references, Rich is not able to refer to the less obvious but most significant sub-generic strand of the mad scientist. *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* draw on the tropes of the mad scientist films. The screenplay of both volumes have references to concoctions mixed by Bill. Of Bill's many inventions were the mix that Bill had created to kill Beatrix in coma, which was to be dispensed by Beatrix's arch-nemesis Elle Driver aka California Mountain Snake (Daryl Hannah) and the truth serum in *Kill Bill: Volume 2*. Bill's master chemist brings to mind Geoffrey's dark meetings with the scar-faced chemist Horace Blagdon (Barry Bernard) in *The Two Mrs. Carroll's* (Peter Godfrey, 1947), who secretly supplies Geoffrey the poison to kill his first and then his second wife. As discussed earlier, Stephen's role as a man of science in *Panic Room* through his profession as a pharmaceutical magnate is underdeveloped but is unmissable, and ascertains the tropes of storytelling. John Kitterman (2003) discusses Fincher's film via two intertextualities at work in the film: that of the works of gothic

writer Edgar Allan Poe (Punter and Byron, 2004, pp.155-6) and the idea of being buried alive. Kitterman explains:

> Both story and film do raise the suspicion that science and technology have failed us. Medical science in Poe's era could not stop premature burial, and security systems in 2002 cannot stop home invasions, random sniper shootings, or terrorist attacks, but these technologies also suggest that we can somehow overcome these fears if we just take further precautions (Kitterman, 2003, p.241).

Thus in *Panic Room*, the anti-science discourse is not propagated via Stephen's character as a dubious man of science but because of a failure of technology.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has thrown light on the antagonist male character in the corpus films. The argument has demonstrated that the unique framework that is suggested in this thesis is a relevant and useful tool for critical analysis, supporting the use of the Bluebeard fairy tale to read the films. While analysing the films, the arguments presented have shown the need to approach the corpus film's horror intertext via the lineage of the literary and cinematic gothic as a framework. It is argued that even though the films favour the wife's perspective, the Bluebeard-inspired character is very significant and has been overlooked by critical debate on these films. The purposes of addressing the representations of masculinity in a feminist project are manifold. It shows that the empowered action heroine is constructed within the realm of a problematic and even violent domestic relationship. It is argued while examining these representations that these male characters are driven by the need for perverse power and in the process break the barriers of their biological sex, which includes their desire to incorporate the feminine. The misogyny both towards the action heroine and other female characters that is concealed in these films is brought to the surface for analysis. The patriarchy as represented in the films that are being studied is concluded to be a patriarchy in crisis. The following chapter will analyse another leaf in the patriarchy-in-crisis argument, that of the Bluebeard as bad father and the dysfunctional family in the action heroine corpus.

## Chapter 2

## The Bluebeard as the Bad Father: Fatherhood, Masculine Jealousy, and the Abused Gothic Child

"I am not a complete ogre!"
*The Long Kiss Goodnight*

### Introduction

This chapter brings to light another dimension of the masculinity in crisis argument presented in Chapter 1. In historical work on the Bluebeard fairy tale and cinematic retellings of the tale, the Bluebeard is primarily understood as a tyrant, antichrist, jealous husband and wife murderer. This chapter develops upon the much briefer and less known historical accounts of the fairy tale on the Bluebeard as a child murderer and investigates the different forms in which Bluebeard's bad fatherhood manifests in the corpus films. The arguments presented consider the idea of Bluebeard as an abortionist. Bluebeard's murder of the children, in some instances unborn children, takes the form of Oedipal rivalry. His jealousy of the action heroine's sexuality and the suspicion of the illegitimacy of the children also motivates his murderous rampage. Hence, the Bluebeard's literal or metaphoric desire to devour the children is acknowledged and theorised.

Contradictory to the idea of obliterating the child figure is also the desire to gain control of the child. This chapter also looks at the Bluebeard's pursuit and kidnapping of children in search of a male heir for his empire. He is motivated to use the child for his own personal or professional advancement in order to perpetuate his phallic power. The theme of Bluebeard's treasure that appears in several retellings is therefore investigated via the figure of the child. The idea of the child figure as being used as a pawn between the rivalry of the action heroine and the Bluebeard is also explored as a reason for the persecution of the child figure. The figuring of the Bluebeard as evil father, the tropes of the gothic mode in combination with feminist work on the evolution of patriarchy and the psychoanalytical concept of womb envy, theoretical work on the slasher film, and the gothic novel *Jane Eyre* are all used as

frameworks to examine this complicated paternal relationship. It is concluded that the desire for the child, whether to destroy or possess it, is on account of some perceived psychological shortcoming of this monstrous patriarchal figure.

**Bluebeard as Bad Father**

In *The Cell*, when the slightly hesitant social worker and child psychologist Catherine enters the mind of the comatose serial killer Carl, she finds herself walking into a world of unknown adult frenzies. Both visually and thematically this is a degenerate world. Its features are rapacious male desire, degradation of the female body, mutilated artwork that is the creation of an ill mind, lust, loathing, a pornographic and sadistic objectification of women and orgies of flesh. In this grim kingdom, the life-giving revered and feared female body is reduced to a shrine of X-rated male fantasy. This disillusioned world is reminiscent of a regrettable past and emotional damage of adult Carl's mind. Victoria Nelson has argued that: "The task of the heroine in a gothic romance novel is to transform the *homme fatale'*s darkness into light" (Nelson, 2013, p.138). Similarly, Carl is portrayed as seeing "light" and hope in the form of boy-Carl, whom we learn is how Carl's subconscious perceives himself.

In *The Cell*, boy-Carl guides Catherine through the turmoil of adult Carl's mind during her trips to his world. She visits his mind to seek the answer that will save Julia Hickson (Tara Subkoff), Carl's most recent victim, whose whereabouts are unknown. In the hope of finding clues to Julia's whereabouts, the social worker gets caught in a kitchen closet with shutter doors and witnesses boy-Carl's emotional, physical and verbal abuse at the hands of his father in retrospect. As detective Peter Novak (Vince Vaughn) also enters adult Carl's mind to search for clues to Julia's whereabouts, it emerges that boy-Carl is a prisoner of King Carl. In adult Carl's mind, King Carl persecutes and holds boy-Carl captive. As discussed in Chapter 1, King Carl is a conflated representation of adult Carl and his biological father.

Particularly poignant to this end is the interior sequence of the cell which resembles the actual cell, where Carl holds his victims captive. In a wide shot, King Carl played by the physically imposing D'Onofrio descends out of the darkness and slowly summersaults towards boy-Carl. A frightened boy-Carl who is facing away from King Carl

is inadvertently pulling back towards him, as he witnesses Peter pull Catherine away. King Carl's huge arm reaches for the boy and he kidnaps him. The multiple point-of-view shots establish a struggle, almost a tug of war, between Peter pulling Catherine away as she is reaching for boy-Carl and boy-Carl being pulled away by King Carl. King Carl makes a squawking sound and a selfish gesture signal with his finger pointing towards himself. This gesture can be read as him saying that he has won the war. As briefly discussed in Chapter 1, these films involve misogyny directed towards female characters, the exploitation of their sexuality and their reproductive bodies. In addition to these subjects is the issue of hatred directed towards the cinematic children of that body. The theme of the bad father and kidnapper is foregrounded in this sequence.

Along with women in peril, which is characteristic of the gothic, a pre-pubescent child in danger is also a recurrent narrative thread of the films under investigation. David Punter and Glennis Byron have observed:

> If the women are abused in the Gothic, then it is perhaps unsurprising to find that the fate of children, their powerlessness in the face of persecution, is another recurring Gothic theme (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.289).

Punter and Byron explain the significance and recurrence of the abused child in gothic narratives. Their analysis shows the abusive structures of domination that are at work in gothic narratives via the figure of the gothic heroine and the abused child. Similarly, Williams has explained that the figure of the mother and the child are the symbolic terrain over which the melodrama's battle of good and evil is waged (Williams, 2001). "The theme of children's and mothers' deaths" of "the Bluebeard group of fairy tales" of Warner's discussion is also prevalent in the action heroine films that this thesis investigates (Warner, 1994, p.260).

Fred Botting uses Mark Frost and David Lynch's television series *Twin Peaks* (1990-91) and the film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (David Lynch, 1992) illustrate the significance of the father in the gothic mode:

> The evil in the woods alludes to Hawthorne [Nathaniel]; the evil father resonates throughout the Gothic, as does the identification with psychopathology. The figure of evil, the vagrant face of Bob [Leland Palmer

> played by Ray Wise], appears as the mirror image of the paternal perpetrator, a reflection that haunts the series (Botting, 1996, p.176).

Botting thus underlines the importance of the father in the gothic mode. As discussed in Chapter 1, in several retellings, Bluebeard is a "merry widower" (Warner, 1994, p.264). In other retellings, despite having many wives, he is heirless. In such instances, upon his death, the last wife uses his wealth for the welfare of her maternal family (Warner, 1994, p.264). In other versions he is a father, like the anti-hero in the action heroine film corpus. Warner has explained the possible source of Perrault's tale:

> Perrault's immediate source for 'La Barbe bleue' is not known, but Gilles de Rais, the Breton nobleman, Marshal of France and companion at arms of Joan of Arc, who was hanged in 1440 for satanism and the murder of hundreds of children, has been long associated with the fairytale [*sic*] ogre, especially in Brittany and the Vendée, where Gilles de Rais's castle of Tiffauages stood (Warner, 1994, p.260).

Warner's historical account points out that the Bluebeard's role as a child murderer is too significant to be overlooked in critical enquiries of the retelling of the tale. Botting uses the following terms to describe the Bluebeard figure: "antichrist", "vicious aristocrat", "bad father" and "beast" (Botting, 1996, p.178). The terms employed by Warner for contemporary retellings of the Bluebeard are: "ogre", "mass murderer", "kidnapper", "serial killer", "collector", and "obsessive", (Warner, 1994, p.269). Of this array of descriptions, the terms "bad father", "ogre", and "kidnapper" underpin the arguments presented in this chapter. This chapter therefore investigates the Bluebeard-inspired male antagonist as a bad father, the different forms in which his bad fatherhood manifests and the threat that he poses to the figure of the child.

In Chapter 1, the argument explored meaning around the question asked by Gilbert and Gubar about the relationship and significance of Rochester in the lives of women in the novel *Jane Eyre*. Very similar to the question explored in Chapter 1, is Tanya Krzywinska's analysis of the representation of the father in the possession film. Krzywinska acknowledges the presence of a "demon daddy", "an awesome dread of a primal anarchic and hyper-masculine force" (Krzywinska, 2000, p.35). Among few of the films she analyses are: *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), *Twin Peaks Fire Walk with*

*Me* (David Lynch, 1992), *Demon Seed* and *Lost Highway* (David Lynch, 1997). Krzywinska uses Freud's concept of the "primal father" to study the "demon daddy":

> The strong male was lord and father of the entire horde and unrestricted in his power, which he exercised with violence. All the females were his property – wives and daughters of his own horde and some perhaps robbed from other hordes …Freud maintains that the bad, primal father is central to the structure of the masculine (Krzywinska, 2000, p.39).

Krzywinska's analysis is useful in her use of Freud's concept of the primal father to analyse the possession film. Yet her analysis does not extend to the gothic male and his significance as a figure of fatherhood. I take these ideas further, arguing that it is the gothic that provides the key to understanding. The similarity between the father figures that in the myth of Freud's case study and that of the possession film and even the gothic mode is not very surprising. Freud read gothic novels for his case studies and his thinking was significantly influenced by them (Mighall, 1999, p.252). Gothic novels are also widely acknowledged as being pre-Freudian (Volk, 2013, p.62). It is most interesting that Krzywinska's argument cited above answers Gilbert and Gubar's question, as cited in Chapter 1. Significantly, Krzywinska recognises the all-powerful male character, who dictates the life of women in Freud's myth, and via this juxtapositioning to *Jane Eyre,* as a father figure. Although Gilbert and Gubar do not discuss this, Rochester is also a father, despite how uncommitted and ambivalent his feelings are about his fatherhood.

Bluebeard as tyrant husband has long been part of popular imagination, and Hollywood has repeatedly told this story in gothic melodramas and thriller films. Hanson has effectively argued that the female gothic cycle was related to the "social shifts" of the period (Hanson, 2007, p.47). Among these were changes in perception about the institution of marriage, hasty courtships and unions due to the Second World War, marital and domestic problems caused by the "long separation" of couples, increase in divorce rates, and most pertinently, traumatic experiences of war heroes who returned home (Hanson, 2007, p.47, pp.128-9, p.190). The theme of "marrying a stranger" emerged from this political and social crisis, which conveniently converged with the generic formula of the female gothic films (Hanson, 2007, p.47, pp.128-9, p.190). This female gothic plot, when revisited in Hollywood action heroine films post-second-wave feminism, means that the abusive husband plot of the fairy tale is downplayed. In such

instances, the narrative emphasis is laid instead on the anti-hero as a bad father. The corpus films under investigation are set during and after the popular backlash against feminism (Faludi, 1992). This influenced the narrative of the popular female action films which are focused on the child, the mother and the family (Faludi, 1992). Via the framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale, this thesis reads the problematic romantic relationship as the action heroine's past, and hence unfolds in the background in the films. Despite their subtle nature, these relationships and their significance to the representation of the family in the corpus films is investigated further in Chapter 3.

Most Hollywood retellings of the Bluebeard fairy tale are focused on the representation of what Hanson identifies as the "whirlwind romance", referring to the tumultuous relationship between the couple (Hanson, 2007, p.64). However, some Hollywood retellings also focus on Bluebeard as a bad father. The 1940s female gothic cycle and the neo-gothic films located by Hanson has a few films that emphasise the gothic male's bad fatherhood. However, Hanson does not reflect upon the antagonistic parent in the films. In analysing the Bluebeard figure as "evil father", this chapter insists on the importance of paternity for an understanding of the Bluebeard fairy tale, and indeed cinema's extensive use of the fairy tale repertoire (Botting, 1996, p.176). The neglect of the bad father as a Bluebeard fairy tale film trope remains evident in Short's recent study (Short, 2015). The lack of theorisation is evident on both studies of Bluebeard in Hollywood film and in in-depth historical accounts of fairy tales (Tatar, 2004). The absence or brief length of the historical work on the Count's problematic relationship with his progeny perhaps explains why critical work on Hollywood films has proven unable to address this thread of representation. This critical neglect is surprising as the gothic-inspired Hollywood films have repeatedly played on the significance of the child and that of the bad daddy as a kidnapper.

**Bluebeard as Abortionist**

This section looks into the subject of the Bluebeard as bad father by exploring the motif of Bluebeard as abortionist. This idea is approached via themes of the Bluebeard-husband's Oedipal rivalry with the children, his jealousy of his wife's sexuality, his suspicion of his wife's infidelity and the possible illegitimacy of the children that she

bears. The theme of the Bluebeard-husband's literal or implied cannibalistic devouring of the children is also investigated.

In several reprisals of the fairy tale, the Bluebeard-husband not only murders his betrothed because she has disobeyed him by accessing the chamber that hides his previous wives, but because she has become pregnant (Warner, 1994). Her pregnancy stirs his anger and is the reason for his enmity that displays itself in action. He pursues her, not merely to kill her but also the unborn child. He thus aborts the child by killing the mother. Warner elaborates on this scenario:

> When she went to pray by the family tombs in the ancestral chapel, they spoke of her; there, in this foreshadowing of Bluebeard's secret chamber, they told her that Cunmar killed his wives as soon as they became pregnant. As Triphine knew that she was expecting a child, she tried to escape, but Cunmar pursued her into a wood and killed her – and with her their unborn child (Warner, 1994, p.261).

Warner's historicisation points out that the murders of the Bluebeard's pregnant wives to get rid of the children are a significant trope of the Bluebeard fairy tale. The subject of the action heroine's death (or near-death) and resurrection is discussed in Chapter 3.

In line with Warner's historicisation, the themes of abortion, life-threatening abuse, violence, and murder of children are central to the representation of the family in the action heroine films under investigation. Bill's uncanny presence in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* analysed in Chapter 1 climaxes with the near-death of Beatrix and her unborn child. John L. Cobbs argues that abortion is the "fundamental leitmotif" in *Alien* and *Aliens*. He arrives at this conclusion because of the "reproductive overtones" of sexuality in the film (Cobbs, 1990, p.198). He also considers the sexual nature of Swiss painter and artist H.R. Giger's work on which the alien creature is based and points out the semblances of the mise-en-scène of the films to the insides of the human body and the urgent need to expel the reptile from the spacecraft (Cobbs, 1990). Finally, he refers to Ripley's unhesitant job lot abortion of queen alien's eggs using a flame thrower in *Aliens* (Cobbs, 1990, p.201). In addition to Finlan's article, his staccato analysis of *The Terminator* is worth citing to support this reading:

> THE NAME Terminator = Termination = Abortion

> THE PLOT Cyborg travels back through time to kill a woman so that her unborn child won't be born (Finlan, 1999, p.49).

Finlan's work therefore points out that abortion is the subtext of *The Terminator*. While abortion is not explicitly mentioned in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, the police officers who request Sarah's knowledge of the terminator's whereabouts explain to her that he murdered men with families and children (further discussed in Chapter 4). The terminator then is clearly presented as a threat to children.

Similarly, the introductory montage of *Æon Flux* with the voiceover of rebel Æon introduces audiences to the highly civilised futuristic Bregna. We are introduced to its hidden problems, one of which is the case of the disappearing citizens that is hushed by the congress of scientists. In what appears to be a tilted medium shot, but only so because of the inclined pillars of the Mexican embassy in Berlin, a female character walking is pulled towards the hollow space between the pillars. This sort of visual imagery suggests that Bregna is a society that is out of kilter. The market place sequence where Æon meets her sister Una Flux (Amelia Warner) has a point of view shot of the two characters witnessing this specific problem: an old man carrying a photo of his daughter in amber resembling *Jurassic Park*'s (Steven Spielberg, 1993) fossilised dinosaur DNA. The narrative, or characters, are unable to acknowledge, but the disappearing citizens of Bregna are only women. It is revealed that these female characters, including Æon's sister Una, were murdered because they became pregnant through Trevor's attempts to cure the infertility induced by medication or had healed themselves naturally.

Upon Trevor's visit to the relical, the image of Una, who is member of test group 7B, which can be read as Bluebeard's seven wives, is projected for his scrutiny. Thus pregnant women and their children in *Æon Flux* fall victim to the Bluebeard figure's plans. Götz has read womb envy as the male envy of the female capacity to receive. This for him among other things includes women's capacity to bear the seed and give birth. The power dynamics implicit in this scene ties into the wider discourse of womb envy. Götz argues that it is the female capacity to receive that is the root cause of sexist ideology (Götz, 1999). This also rings true of the gender politics portrayed in *Æon Flux*. Æon, formerly Catherine, had her DNA nearly destroyed because her love for Trevor

would most likely stop him from pursuing the unnatural cause of cloning. Æon is thus set not only on a rebellious mission against the deceiving government and to seek vengeance for Una's homicide, but unknowingly also on a feminist mission to save the pregnant women and the children of Bregna.

Similarly, in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, Samantha is nearly killed after she becomes pregnant and wakes up carrying a child when rescued. If the action heroine is not pregnant, then the hostility is directed towards the children. The mob in *Gloria* wants Phil Dawn (John Adames) dead because they are under the impression that the boy has witnessed his family being murdered. The psychotic Raoul in *Panic Room* read as Stephen's double in Chapter 1, is stubbornly determined to kill Sarah. While it is the witch Maleficent's curse that leads to Princess Aurora (Elle Fanning) falling into a sleep-like death, it is her father Stephan's duplicitous nature that confers this bad luck upon her. These examples show the Bluebeard figure's animosity towards the children in the corpus films.

Scholarly engagement has produced many interpretations of the Bluebeard's murderous intentions towards his wives and the last wife's disobedience, on account of popular circulation and purchase. Here I argue that the part of the fairy tale about Bluebeard's animosity with children is less told, hence is less known and is relatively less scrutinised. Warner's explanation is enlightening and situates reason in myth:

> The Bluebeard figure's animus against his pregnant wives has been ascribed to the Oedipal rivalry so often dramatized in mythology: he wishes, like Oedipus' father Laius, to do away with a son before he grows up to threaten him (Warner, 1994, p.262).

Like Warner, Krzywinska's analysis also draws attention to the Oedipus myth:

> The lot of his [strong male of Krzywinska's discussion] sons was a hard one: if they roused their father's jealousy they were killed or castrated or driven out…the expelled brothers…united to overpower their father, and, as was the custom in those days, devoured him raw (Krzywinska, 2000, p.39).

Both Warner and Krzywinska's theorisation is rooted in Freudian psychoanalysis. Their analysis suggests that the rivalry between the Bluebeard anti-hero of the female action

pictures and child characters, both boy and girl, is Oedipal. I will explore the theme of Oedpial rivalry in the corpus films via Warner's argument.

For instance, in *Gloria*, the mob wants possession of Phil because they believe that he has witnessed the murders. The Hollywood-literate audience is assumed to know that in the convention of genre storytelling, the mob eradicates family members of any character who double-crosses them. The ruthless pursuit of Phil is to not allow the possibility of official identification or a personal vengeance mission. The mob acts out on its insecurity and does not leave any chances of how Phil might grow to threaten and compromise the mob's identity, integrity and growth either through incrimination or personal revenge. Thus, what John Mercer and Martin Shingler have identified as "elements of Freudian repression", in another context, are represented in the film through this "oedipal conflict" (Mercer and Shingler, 2004, p.13). The representational politics in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* is more blatant than in any other case study that this thesis deconstructs. It is quite clear from the outset that the bad terminators read as Sarah's returning husband figures in Chapter 1 are sent back in time to kill John. In a certain future, John through his fearless persona and his ability to fight cause with intelligence can rise up to the machines.

In *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, Samantha's resurrection, so to speak, holds the dangerous possibility of jeopardising the terrorist attack nicknamed Operation Honeymoon, of which she has advanced knowledge. This leads to the persecution of Samantha and the concurrent victimisation of daughter Caitlin as the villains use the child to control her. The murder of the mother-and-child will overcome the possibility of Samantha standing up to them and will ensure that Operation Honeymoon will be executed as planned, thus supplanting paternal authority. Much in the same way, in *Elektra*, an Oedipal rivalry is enmeshed with other complexities in the narrative which will be addressed later in this chapter. The "famous or infamous French Count" rewritten as the sexy and suave martial arts experts Kirigi with supernatural powers, in Abby's words literally "hunts" her down (Tatar, 2004, p.13). Elektra fights and dispatches Kirigi in a showdown despite his supernatural powers.[19] The only other villainous force

[19] *Elektra* and *Maleficent* are the only films in the corpus that directly draw on the supernatural. The latter on account of its clearly established position as a retelling of another classical fairy tale written by Perrault

that survives from Kirigi's clan of dark forces is Typhoid (Natassia Malthe). Although pursuing and assisting Kirigi's cause, Typhoid's, what James Bell has identified as "dark art" in another context, is that she can bring disease and death to anything or any character by a flying kiss or a touch (Bell, 2013, pp.46-7). Typhoid, however, has an underhand in the pursuit for Abby. Abby as the treasure, the special child, the chosen 'one' of the prophecy that the narrative upholds will replace Typhoid who was the treasure once. Her grudge against Abby means that although Kirigi's clan relentless pursues Abby to possess her for their advancement, there is also this hidden desire to dispatch her. And that Typhoid surpasses the death of all the dark forces including the leader Kirigi allows to read the threat that Abby poses to Typhoid as significant. Typhoid's dark secret thus allows to be read as the clan's reason for Abby's persecution, that is, to kill her because she threatens their ego, social status and sense of entitlement. This rivalry can be understood within the frame of Oedipus myth.

A similar dynamic is employed in *Panic Room*. Raoul enters the panic room in a state of rage because of his injured hand. He then gets a moment or two to calm himself as Burnham opens the safe. In his moments of calm, Raoul realises that his balaclava is off due to the equivalent of a cat-and-mouse chase that ensued before they make their entry into the room. He is further agitated, when he catches an eye with Sarah looking at him. From that moment on he becomes obsessed with the idea of killing her. While his unwanted hatred towards Sarah can be attributed to his violent psychopathy read in Chapter 1, his logic perhaps is not as perverted as his sadistic violence. He wants to dispatch Sarah because she has seen his face and could identify him to the police. The Goth kid Sarah then becomes the object of Raoul's "animus" as in Warner's discussion of the Count and the unborn children (Warner, 1994, p.262). As discussed in Chapter 1, perhaps only because of his inconsiderate and selfish nature and his disdain for life,

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and its production by Hollywood's fairy tale and animation franchise. Reading in between the lines allows to reveal possible supernatural elements in other corpus films. These films are not populated by ghosts, spirits and possession of innocent children. However, phantasmagoric alien creatures (*Alien* films), machines that cannot be distinguished from human beings (*Alien* films and *The Terminator* films), and human beings that are not very far from machines (*Flightplan*) run abound. Carl's father and adult Carl metamorphosed as King Carl is not very far from a supernatural patriarchal avatar (*The Cell*). The perpetuation of human race in *Æon Flux* despite being framed within the scientific development of cloning is on second thought nothing but magic shading into science and supernatural intervention led by the paterfamilias Trevor. The supernatural association only strengthens the gothic connection of these films.

Raoul even refuses and unsuccessfully tries to stop Burnham from administering the injection that will save Sarah from going into a coma. Either through direct action or inaction, Raoul seeks satisfaction in Sarah's suffering, when her life hangs by a thread in near-death encounters. The cure for infertility in *Æon Flux* means that Oren will not be reborn as cloning will be brought to light and rejected. The new babies that will be born without chemically induced pregnancies threaten Oren's existence. In the very different context of the 1940s gothic woman's films, Hanson discusses the subject of the "dissolving dynasties" (Hanson, 2007, p.129). It thereby emerges that in these action heroine films, the Bluebeard anti-heroes are struggling to protect their "dissolving dynasties." However, in *Æon Flux* this false aura of power is maintained through the "eradication of the feminine", a term that Fischer uses in the context of the representation of the mother, and subjugation of innocents (Fischer, 1996, p.123).

The discussion will now focus on how the Bluebeard-husband's jealousy, suspicion of his wife's infidelity and fears of the legitimacy of the child that she bears feed into the idea of Bluebeard as abortionist. The threat to the Bluebeard-husband's potency is visible through the symptom of jealousy. This jealousy may be latent in some of the narratives, whereas in some others it acts as the driving force. Nevertheless, it is a recurring theme according to Warner, who explains:

> Or it [animosity towards the children] has been attributed to jealousy: in a European ballad known over a large part of Europe (in French, '*Renaud le tueur des femmes*'), the verses follow the usual plot about the murderous husband, but explain that when he returns, after a long absence, to find his wife has had a child, he suspects her of infidelity: his rage is the unreasoning, maddened response of the man who fear cuckoldry, and believes that a child who is not his is being foisted on him (Warner, 1994, p.262).

Warner points out that, other than the Oedipal rivalry, a possible reason for the husband's animosity towards the children is jealousy. In gothic novels, the 1940s female gothic cycle, and neo-gothic films of Hanson's discussion, the gothic husband's desire for the attractive and much younger wife, usually played by beautiful female stars, also takes the form of jealousy. This trope is significantly played out in action heroine film corpus as well. In *The River Wild*, the older, less outgoing and somewhat asocial company man Tom is jealous of his wife's interactions with the young, carefree and

attractive looking drifter Wade. Tom's point-of-view shots include American actor Bacon, who is shot shirtless in the sequence with Streep's Gail. The "sexual jealousy" that Short (2015, p.102) identifies in the Bluebeard fairy tale, is both "stated and dissimulated" in the text, a phrasing that Penley (1990, p.122) uses in another context. *The River Wild* concludes with the reinstatement of heterosexual monogamy and the survival of the bourgeois patriarchal nuclear family reunited in the face of an extreme familial crisis.

This alluded jealousy in some films takes the form of Bluebeard's wrath, which as Warner points out, is when he suspects infidelity and that an illegitimate child is disguised as his heir. This resonates with the scenarios presented in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2.* The opening sequences analysed in Chapter 1 demonstrated that that Bill's character is Bluebeardesque. The sequence is also poignant as it gives access to Bill's psychology. Thurman's Beatrix is injured by repeated blows and immobilised by her very large pregnant belly as she utters her last words: "Bill it's your baby!" The courageous action heroine becomes a victim of domestic violence like many of her filmic predecessors. Uttered at a desperate moment, the second of diegetic time before life transitions into death, the message that these last words contain is not a plea to Bill to spare the unborn child and her life (which it is), but is an answer to a question that Bill seeks. The secrecy undoubtedly drives his violent revenge towards his escaped lover. Her words reinstate a significant piece of information that may make Bill rethink his actions – knowledge that the child she is carrying is his, despite her attempt to marry someone else. For Bill, the predicament, anger and hatred lie around: Beatrix's escape, the patriarchal morality surrounding the father of the child, the question of who is the person of the action heroine's desire, whether anyone else has access to her sexuality, and contemplating why the child was taken away from him in the first place.

Thus the issues of this relationship come to the surface, notably that Bill exercises inappropriate and overwhelming levels of control. It also allows a reading of Bill and Beatrix to be in a relationship that is kept due to lack of choices and is abusive in some form. It is thus driven by secrecy and jealousy. Goren has likewise mentioned that the Bill-Beatrix relationship is "fraught" (Goren 2009, p.170). Bill is at least three decades older from the blonde and attractive Beatrix, thus bringing into play the dynamic of the

older wealthy suitor and the naïve young maiden of the Bluebeard fairy tale. When Beatrix introduces Bill to her fiancé Tommy Plympton (Christopher Allen Nelson), she introduces him as her father. This is not merely a situational coincidence to save face or a "hasty introduction" as Rich has pointed out in her analysis (Rich, 2004, p.26). Similar observations are also made by Goren about Bill and Beatrix's relationship (Goren, 2009, p.170). Bill is not only the father of the unborn child but also the father of the bride. Ruth Bienstock Anolik (2003, pp.25-6) and Punter and Byron (2004, p.279, p.281) point out that the gothic heroine is mostly an orphan or is motherless, a gothic motif that will be discussed throughout the thesis. This chimes with Beatrix's situation as presented in the film.

As discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to *Gloria*, in a certain retelling, the bridegroom offers the beggar maiden wealth and education on entering marriage (Warner, 1994, p.247). On eloping from Bill, Beatrix rejects the wealth that comes from working with Bill (which they acknowledge in speech) and the knowledge, intelligence and power that he has bestowed upon her (she is trained as the deadliest assassin in the world). Earlier in the chapter, I cited Krzywinska's citation of Freud to examine the figure of the demon daddy. Within the scope of her argument, it could be argued that Beatrix is one of the daughters from the "horde" of women Bill owns (Krzywinska, 2000, p.39).[20] Patriarchal ideology takes the form of Bluebeard's tyranny in the film and reveals him as a figure who is crudely patriarchal. Bill as the volatile husband is guilty of feticide by killing the mother of the child in a jealous rage because of an imagined betrayal. Feminist theory has critiqued such blatant misogyny as represented in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2*.

[20] Beatrix's backstory in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* is unclear. Towards the climax of *Kill Bill: Volume 2,* she reveals that the reason she ran away is because she feared that once Bill knew of B.B., he would claim her. It is not clearly spelt out what 'claim' means within the context of the film and its representation of patriarchal order and male domination. However it validates the reading that B.B. would be added to the horde of glamourous female assassins, who are also sexually involved with Bill, comparable to Beatrix, Sophie Fatale (Julie Dreyfus), Elle, Vernita Green (Vivica A. Fox) and O-Ren Ishii (Lucy Liu). Being part of Bill's enterprise, does not suppress Beatrix from being critical. She expresses her disdain for Bill's world of violence and chaos, and how eloping from Bill would have allowed B.B. to detach from her father's inferno and mother's former choices.

In her insightful chapter of feminist philosophy, al-Hibri theorises how patriarchy came into existence (1984). One of her hypotheses is that patriarchy came into being because of male fear of death and their desire for immortality (al-Hibri, 1984, pp.83-5). She argues that in man's eyes women were naturally designed to achieve immortality because of giving birth and feeding children. This she argues stirred envy in men and made them find ways of controlling women, and thus subordinating them through patriarchal dominance and even the development of technology. al-Hibri elaborates:

> he could appropriate the gifts of the female and her offspring; this action would integrate him into the cycle of life, if only indirectly. Hence the male appropriate the female's womb and breasts, making them his and divorcing them from their biological functions. As a result, they no longer appeared as valuable potential natural resources for humanity. Instead, they became problems to be dealt with: how can one ensure that the womb grows only the 'right' patriarchal child? (al-Hibri, 1984, p.86).

This account of patriarchy resonates with the Bluebeard myth and brings the two together. In line with al-Hibri's argument, the Hollywood action heroine's person and body are subjected to abusive strictures of patriarchal ideology in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2.* They are implemented through the unwarranted scrutiny of her sexuality and via spousal abuse. Patriarchal control takes a violent charge in these action heroine films. That this masculine drive is perverse, lest there be any doubt of its perversity, is easily seen as the person/s or object they pursue (later in the chapter) are either innocent or inanimate like wealth, jewels or a treasure. Thus, gendered violence is inflicted upon the action heroine's maternal body because of perceived patriarchal insufficiency.

The sadistic super male's suspicion of his wife's adultery and illegitimacy of the progeny fuels his persecutory and tyrannical nature. Children that are naturally conceived in *Æon Flux* without secretive assistance of the masculine endeavour of cloning are treated as illegitimate as Oren is not their father. When Oren is the patriarchal father, only off-spring born through, what Creed has described in another context as "artificial birth, are treated as legitimate children, as cloning has ensured his perpetuation for generations (Creed, 2005, pp.xii-xiii). It is the female characters who mother in this narrative that are hapless unsuspecting victims of Oren's, what Yates has

described in another context as “violent misogyny” (Yates, 2007, p.2). Oren’s anti-hero is representative of feminist cynicism in the notion of “father as sole parent” expressed in Jane Murphy’s chapter ‘From Mice to Men? Implications of Progress in Cloning Research’ (Murphy, 1984, p.84). In his relentless pursuit of unborn children and their mothers who have naturally conceived, Oren becomes “an embodied fearsome, castratory primal father” of Krzywinksa’s analysis (Krzywinska, 2000, p.66). He castrates through what Dr Silberman (Earl Boen) in *The Terminator* appropriately analysis as serial “retroactive abortions”.

Chapter 1 reads the villainous terminators in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* as Sarah’s returning (time)travelling husband figures. Within the purview of this reading, it is the terminator’s persecution of Sarah and the confirmation from Kyle the “male saviour” of Goscilio’s discussion (1987, p.40) that the terminator is set on a mission to kill her that makes her couple with him and consummate their relationship. Kyle is “a gentler, more democratic type” like the antithesis to the patriarchal gothic male of Hanson’s discussion (Hanson, 2007, p.131). The relationship is also consummated because of Sarah’s sympathy for Kyle in the futuristic world of the past ruled by tyrannical figures like Sarah’s time travelling husband. When understood within the frame of the female gothic narrative, Kyle is a victim of brute Bluebeard’s anarchy.

Robbins addresses the subject of womb envy and jealousy in the representations of masculinity in two films by Cronenberg (Robbins, 1993). The idea of “womb envy,” a corollary to Freudian “penis envy,” was first developed by psychoanalyst Karen Horney (1973). It has also been discussed by Kittay (1983), Keller (1990, p.186), Estelle Roith (1992, pp.161-2), Phillipa Berry (1992, pp.303-6), and Fischer (1996). Horney establishes the premise of her thesis by stating that “psychoanalysis is creation of a male genius, and almost all of those who have developed his ideas have been men” (Horney, 1973, p.54). Robbins’ argument does not extend to gothic-inspired representations. However, building on Robbins’ argument, I argue that womb envy is endemic to the psychological dispositions of Hollywood’s gothic masculinities. This desire to control female sexuality, the fantasised adultery of female characters and its consequences are central to the

narrative of the Cronenberg films *The Fly* (1986) and *Dead Ringers* (1988), as Robbins discusses:

> In both films the source of disaster is not female inconstancy, but the inevitable failure of patriarchy – the law binding the female Other – to live up to the impossible task for which it was instituted: maintaining the illusion of fixed paternity. And jeopardised paternity breeds womb envy (Robbins, 1993, p.137).

Robbins' theoretical viewpoint allows reading Sarah's, what Warner and Tatar have identified in the context of the fairy tale as, "roaming" (Warner, 1994, p.262, p.269; Tatar, 2004, p.20) as instigated by the "failure of patriarchy" (Robbins, 1993, p.137).

Indeed, Sarah's appearance and the kind of life she leads at the beginning of *The Terminator* has unfailingly been the subject of scholarly discourse, her character read variously as follows: "childlike", "fluffiness", "damsel in distress" (Goscilio, 1987, p.39); "soft and feminine with styled, poofy hair" (Lentz, 2001, p.12); "angelic" (Finlan, 1999, p.49); "independent", "dresses conservatively" (Whittaker, 2000, pp.48-9); "working woman", "fun-seeking sexual adventuress" (French, 1996, p.51). Sarah's life at the beginning of *The Terminator* can be reanalysed. From within these multiple readings, there also emerges another significant reading. Sarah's life is not very dissimilar to the life of "housewife" (Hanson, 2007, pp.184-5) Laura Burney/Sara Waters (Julia Roberts) in the "Americana Gothic" (Brown, 1991, p.55) *Sleeping with the Enemy*, who is in a "new and idealised re-located home" (Hanson, 2007, pp.184-5) on escaping from her abusive husband (Read, 2000, p.65). Through the insight of this generic lineage, it is plausible to read Sarah's life before the intrusion of the villainous cyborg as similar to the life that Laura leads in the second half of *Sleeping with the Enemy,* who has faked her own death.

Similarly, Beatrix in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* fakes her own death. She looks for the moment to escape her husband Bill and escapes like Laura. Samantha in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* does not fake her own death but her husband Timothy and his henchmen assume that she has passed on. Within the scope of the frame, *The Terminator* begins with the ideal life lived by Sarah who has escaped or her husband has vanished like the village woman's first husband in *The Company of Wolves*. Driven by "male fury" or/and "sadistic passion" of Hanson's analysis, Laura's husband Martin Burney (Patrick Bergin)

and the terminator retrieve information by scamming both the character's mothers or through the mother (Hanson, 2007, p.186).

Samantha's idyllic life as the suburban primary school teacher in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* can also be understood within this framework. She can recall her daughter Caitlin Caine's (Yvonne Zima) true parentage in the second half of the film. This is brought to Timothy's knowledge towards the climax in the bloody chamber, which is a walk-in freezer. However, this fails to have an impact on his disposition towards Caitlin. Hot and cold spaces abound in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* and other corpus texts under study. Gilbert and Gubar's discussion of gothic novels foreground these hot and cold spaces, which also abound in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* and other corpus texts (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.86, p.235). When the bad terminator in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* checks the LAPD database for John's whereabouts, the database reads: "Natural Father: Unknown." John is the illegitimate son whose biological father Kyle is dismissed merely as a figment of Sarah's imagination and delusional mind, as she is repeatedly misinformed in the process of being gaslighted in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. John was born because of his mother's disobedience and "inconstancy" of Robbins' discussion (Robbins, 1993, p.137). Much in line with Krzywinska's discussion of the possession film, in the future, John rises to his tyrant father and seeks revenge on behalf of his coerced mother, his mother's lover, and subjects harassed under his father's dictatorship (Krzywinska, 2000, p.39).

Cannibalism can also be tied into these discourses as a form of abortion of the child characters. This section will discuss the references in the corpus films to the Bluebeard-husband's cannibalism. Dressed as an angel for the Christmas nativity play, a reminder of Flora (Anna Paquin) in *The Piano*, Caitlin is made unconscious and kidnapped from the church by her biological father Timothy in order to hook her mother Samantha. When the head of CIA Leland Perkins (Patrick Malahide) visits Timothy at the hideout next to Niagara Falls, he brings Caitlin a baby doll that pees. His dialogue is revelatory for the sake of this argument: "My God we are monsters... I'm not a complete ogre. The young one gets a doll to play with at Christmas." When Timothy finds out that Samantha and Mitch have secretly circled the hideout to rescue Caitlin, Timothy goes behind Mitch, who is monitoring Samantha's execution through night vision binoculars,

and catches him out saying “bogey”. Timothy then locks the mother and the child in the cold storage, as though they were a piece of meat that he would like to devour.

In *The Cell*, it is the bogeyman that has psychologically trapped Edward as he repeatedly says: “Mocky-Lock is the bogeyman, Mocky-Lock wants me where I am!” While these are merely references in speech, critical engagement allows us to read these villains as ogres and bogeymen. Warner’s discussion of Bluebeard’s antagonistic paternity is part of the chapter ‘The Ogre’s Appetite: Bluebeard II’, which is also the chapter where his Oedipal rivalry with the children and jealousy are discussed. Warner identifies Bluebeard the bad father as an “ogre” following which she defines what ogre means:

> In a chapter book of 1796, the author adds a helpful footnote to explain the word ‘ogre’: ‘An Ogree [*sic*] is a Giant with long teeth and claws, with a raw head and bloody bones, [who]runs away with naughty Boys and Girls and eats them all up’ (Warner, 1994, p.259).

She further elaborates on the “ogre husband’s” appetite for infants (Warner, 1994, p.246):

> the woman’s body, especially pregnant is particularly delicious to beasts, it seems. For the greedy villains of fairy tale relish babies: their appetite first aims at women, but with an ulterior motive of devouring their offspring (Warner, 1994, p.260).

Warner’s identification of Bluebeard the bad father as an ogre allows a reading of the villainous figures in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* as ogres.

Pirie’s article also cited earlier also ties into these discussions of the Bluebeard figure in the cinema. Pirie makes an interesting observation concerning Bluebeard as ogre:

> The Prince of Darkness is usually a handsome, formidable figure but it is not essential. Freddy Krueger in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) has the appearance of an ogre, but his energy, demonic cruelty and humour, as well as his supernatural aspiration (“I am God”), entitles him to be a member of this club (Pirie, 2013, p.131).

Williams cites Wes Craven's views about Krueger: [He is a] "paradigm of the threatening adult: the savage side of male adulthood, the ultimate bad father" (Williams, 1996b, p.175; Creed, 2005, p.172). The theorisations about Krueger as a contemporary Bluebeard figure as an ogre (the devouring of his victims is a metaphor) and a bad father links a character like Timothy to cannibalistic cinematic monsters like Krueger. It also extends the significance of the framework of the literary gothic and the Bluebeard fairy tale for reading characters like Krueger, who are usually theorised within the scope of horror.

Mercer and Shingler write that in Douglas Sirk's *Written on the Wind* (1956), Marylee Hadley's (Dorothy Malone) excessive sexual energy "was a subject that a 1950s film could not possibly depict naturalistically" (Mercer and Shingler, 2000, p.24). Hence it is transmuted into a hysterical dance sequence, which is parallel edited with her father Jasper Hadley's (Robert Keith) death. What is implicit in the Sirkian reference is the transgressive desires of the characters that could not be made explicit either due to censorship or reasons of taste. In a comparable manner, I propose that because of the mainstream nature of the action heroine corpus films, where violence is stylised, gore is disruptive to the visual and financial economy. Although *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* have gory sequences and the gothic horror *The Cell* is gory rather than violent as Singh has openly acknowledged in the director's commentary on the DVD of the film (*The Cell* DVD Features). Mainstream Hollywood female action-adventure films with leading female stars as mothers or taking on a mothering role are made to appease audiences and sooth ideologically. We cannot imagine child stars such as John Adames, Carrie Henn being eaten despite these films' exploitation lineage. Hence this reference is nuanced in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* as a metaphor as Caitlin is not devoured or no attempts are made at this by the villainous characters. This is not my principal focus but it is noteworthy that the theme of devouring the figure of the child also signifies the Bluebeard figure's desire to incorporate the child and to strengthen and replenish the self with the child's youth. This also feminises him via his desire to incorporate the child, imagine himself as pregnant and appropriate the female capacity to reproduce. Thus is manifest his desire to eradicate the feminine, appropriate the feminine and become the mother. The Bluebeard's desire to become the mother is pursued further in Chapter 4.

While not exactly the Bluebeard but rather a species that a company is obsessed about procuring for its financial and phallic power, the aliens in the *Alien* films do not literally devour their victims. But the sharp teeth and dragon-like appearance make him/her a monster that poses the threat of consumption and death from it.[21] The abduction of Rebecca Jorden/Newt (Carrie Henn) in the climax of *Aliens* makes the threat of devouring children plausible in the films. Thus via such subtle references to cannibalism, the Bluebeard figure is shown to pose a threat to children. Wade in *The River Wild* is not a cannibal and cannibalism is not hinted at in the film. Gail ensures that the two thugs reach their destination at the cost of risking her son and her life. However, despite having safely reached his destination, Wade is hellbent on killing Roarke Hartman (Joseph Mazzello). Wade then is an everyday cannibal of capitalistic and industrialised nations, who thrives at the margins of rural America as a suave hillbilly. He thrives at the margins most likely because of his inability and lack of motivation to succeed economically. He is a cannibal of personal gain, greed, selfishness, disrespect for human life and the environment. Hence, he seeks thrills from murdering innocents including Roarke to achieve his goals. As the analysis presented above has shown, the child in the corpus films is a threatened figure. This idea is further explored in Chapter 4. When the Bluebeard-inspired villain relies on murdering innocents for his survival, he represents a masculinity gone awry and patriarchal insecurity. These scenarios then set up the opposition of personalities and ideologies between the action heroine and the Bluebeard-husband. He is represented as cruel and wants to destroy the child, whereas she gives birth and/or is protective towards the figure of the child. This is the setting frame of the arguments that will be developed in the remainder of the thesis.

**Hunting and Kidnapping Children for Advancement, Male Heir, and Wealth**

The idea of hunting children to procure them for advancement is clearly different from merciless obliteration. Yet these two themes exist in the action heroine corpus

[21] It has been the subject of significant academic debate as to how the partial appearance of the alien monster, a creature of the "uncanny", has allowed the creative visions of different directors to take shape in how they portray the alien (Freud, 1919; Greenberg, 1988, p.171). The key design of the alien is based on Giger's work which "consistently borders on pornography" and is also very gothic (Cobbs, 1990, p.199). It has been argued that the alien creature "mutates" by Greenberg (1988, p.171), Joseph Chien (1994, pp.7-8), Doherty (1996, p.196). The alien creature's sex whether it is male or female or whether it is male in one film and female in another is a subject that has been closely monitored by Kavanaugh (1980, p.94), Cobbs (1990), Creed (1993b, pp.16-30), Doherty (1996, p.196) and Hermann (1997, pp.36-7).

films concomitantly, even if unsettlingly so, thereby allowing for contradictory readings. The murderous acts of Oedipal tension that recur in these action heroine films are closely bound to the idea of Bluebeard's advancement: whether personal, of what Geoffrey O'Brien has identified in another context as his "coven", his career, monetary gain, or for his undisturbed and continued phallic domination (O'Brien, 2013, p.156). The Oedipal murders or attempts at it are executed to put to rest the fears of his mind, whether or not the threat to his potency is real or imagined. Similarly, the Bluebeard figure's reason for stealing children is not for some enriching life experience or the formation of close attachments, but to fulfil their devious obsessions. The question re-emerges and is contrary to that asked in the previous section: what is it of the pre-pubescent "gothic child", of Margarita Georgieva's discussion, in the films that attracts these villainous figures towards them (Georgieva, 2013)? Lest we forget, these gothic children are barely in control of their own actions and destinies. Just as a significant duration of the running time is devoted to captivating visual sequences of the persecution of the child to annihilate her/him, so there are also more than a handful of scenarios of this desire to secure the child for a dark and selfish goal of limitless power.

Krzywinska's analysis of the "demon daddy" provides a vital frame to theorise and understand these scenarios: "All the females were his property – wives and daughters of his own horde and some perhaps robbed from other hordes" (Krzywinska, 2000, p.39). Krzywinska's citation of Freud only makes room for the girl child. However, the same idea can also be used for the boy child, as there are an equal number of children of both genders in the corpus. Earlier, I argued that a plausible reason why Beatrix escaped from Bill is that she was a daughter from his horde. On learning of her pregnancy, she could foresee a similar future for B.B., which would allow Bill to violate what Krzywinska has in another context identified as the "Oedipal law", again (Krzywinska, 2000, p.67). The whisking away of B.B., almost as if plucked from Beatrix's womb without the mother's knowledge and consent, allows one to come to the possible conclusion that B.B. was stolen. This is especially because of the secrecy and silence that surrounds her existence. It can also be argued that Bill purposefully made an attempt at Beatrix's life so that he could take off with the child and let her grow up to become one of his trained assassins.

The subject matter of the ascendancy to a throne regarding Kirigi in *Elektra* was briefly touched upon in Chapter 1. Kirigi does not fall short in rejuvenating the forces of the Hand and in ensuring his upward mobility. This means that he hunts down a white teenager of the American bourgeois and kills her mother in the process. The pursuit of Abby is important because legend and prophecy have it that Abby is prodigy killer. The Hand wants to possess Abby to reinstate its power. This will allow Kirigi's father Master Roshi to step down as leader of the council of the Hand and Kirigi to become the successor. Kirigi thereby resorts to what he describes as aggressive means to obtain Abby. He seeks assistance from his clan of dark predatory forces, who stop at nothing to complete the mission.

The airplane in *Flightplan* is a masculine space because of its phallic shape. It is also a symbol of technological advancement. In her account on the origins of patriarchy cited earlier, al-Hibri associates the development of technology to the perceived lack that man felt because of his inability to give birth (al-Hibri, 1984). Carson kidnaps a child, thereby attempting to appropriate the female body and its functions. This gender transgression may not exactly be advancement but it allows him to transgress the potential of his gendered body, and covet the feminine. These are the unconscious desires of the gothic masculinities in the corpus films. The child is kidnapped from the mother's gaze and forced to sleep in the father's technological womb in *Flightplan*. Gender transgressions then lie at the heart of representations of masculinity and femininity in the films and inform the representation of the family in the corpus films.

The following section will discuss the significance of the gender of the child by the Bluebeard figure either to obliterate or to possess the child. From a feminist critical point of view, significant thinking has been devoted to understanding the implication of gender of these persecuted children. Feminist thinkers across disciplines have pointed out that crude patriarchal ideology has rooted and upheld the need for a boy child (Kittay, 1983; al-Hibri, 1983; Arditti, Klein and Minden, 1984; Oakley, 1987, p.38; Modleski, 1988, pp.77-8). Feminist film scholar Tania Modleski in her paper has devoted considerable thought to the significance of a boy child in John Ford's repressive America as represented in *3 Godfathers* (1948), which she builds on in her discussion of *Three*

*Men and a Baby* (Leonard Nimoy, 1987) (Modleski, 1988, pp.77-8).[22] This patriarchal ideology has been significant in the West, although relatively outmoded in the last century due to the impact of the Anglo-American first- second-wave feminist movements. However, there is no reason to dismiss investigating the corpus to ascertain if the gender of the gothic child has any special significance to the representation of monstrous patriarchy in these films.

Chapter 1 discussed feminist film scholarship on *The Terminator* films and its heralding of Sarah's representation and its potential for feminist engagement and debate. This includes the work of Goscilio (1987), Mann (1989-90, p.22) Jones (1991, p.17), Telotte (1992, p.31), Tasker (1993, p.143), Sean French (1996, pp.47-8), David M. Lubin (1999, p.85), Whittaker (2000, p.51, pp.76-7), Robert J. Lentz (2001, pp.12-3) and Brown (2011, pp.28-9). However, some of this scholarship has also pointed out that the feminist message in the films is both made and undercut (French, 1996, p.53). These are views expressed by Goscilio (1987), who boldly repudiates and undermines seemingly feminist readings of *The Terminator*, a reading also acknowledged by Whittaker (Whittaker, 2000, p.78). For Goscilio, even though *The Terminator* climaxes by empowering Sarah through a shift of power from Kyle to Sarah, this involves making the unborn son John and his life as more significant than Sarah's (Goscilio, 1987, p.49). Such views are also expressed by Mann (1989-90, p.24). Her insightful analysis not only challenges feminist readings of the film, but also does not refrain from questioning why the futuristic messiah of the human race is not a girl child (Goscilio, 1987, pp.46-7). She remarks:

> Thus both psychological structures and the hierarchies of the patriarchal world at large insist on Sarah's motherhood and the maleness of her child (Goscilio, 1987, p.47).

Goscilio's comments associate the male child with the patriarchal blindfold in *The Terminator*. The action heroine's motherhood will be addressed at length in Chapter 4. In line with this argument, writers such as Goscilio (1987, p.48), Finlan (1999, p.49), French (1996, pp.49-50, p.54) and Whittaker (2000, p.80), who have addressed the

[22] Modleski refers to the film as *3 Godfathers*. The pairing of three same sex parental figures also reminds one of the trio of fairies who have to mother Princess Aurora in the animated *Sleeping Beauty* and *Maleficent*.

significance of religious themes in *The Terminator* films, have identified that John Connor shares his initials with Jesus Christ (and also director James Cameron), the supremely male Christian redeemer. This further reinstates the patriarchal undertone in *The Terminator*. In Chapter 1, I use Penley's argument on the Freudian primal scene in *The Terminator* to highlight the "disruption of conventional story time" in *Æon Flux* (Mann, 1989-90, p.18).

This analysis brings out the misogynistic undercurrents in the narrative by showing that women and their reproductive bodies in *Æon Flux* and *The Terminator* are merely passive objects of male exchange and subjugated for a definitive patriarchal agenda. The latter observation is also made by Goscilio, who also cites Penley's chapter in her analysis of *The Terminator* (Goscilio, 1987, pp.46-7). Sarah, who is pulled out from her mundane life, a conclusion made by existing debates addressed earlier in this chapter, is according to Goscilio a "mere conduit of male power", who receives the "symbolic phallus" only to pass on its powers to her son (Goscilio, 1987, p.46). It is apparent that in the fictional dimensions and sexual politics of the films, Sarah is framed by "patriarchal myths" which the films retell. This is so because in the film it is only a boy child whose mother will sacrifice her life for him, will rise to become the courageous world leader (Goscilio, 1987, p.38).

A new set of issues emerge in the contemporary setting of *Gloria* as opposed to the science fiction futurism that underpins *The Terminator*. The "shrill six year old" Phil in *Gloria* is unlike other child counterparts in the corpus films (Charity, 2001, p.170). But with them, he shares his innocence in the face of personal tragedy, persecution and danger. The Oedipal threat for the pursuit of Phil is explicit. A closer look at the climax of the film, which involves Gloria's visit to her former lover to return the book allows us to ascertain another reason for Phil's pursuit. Gloria's meeting with Tanzini is a step into a very different world than that portrayed in the first 90 minutes of the film. The two "fugitives" the "ex-showgirl" Gloria and Phil, make their way through the ghetto, the unclean flat with silk sheets in a seedy locality and cheap motels (Charity, 2001, p.174). They board buses and taxis, eat at diners and the pub, and move around the streets of New York (Charity, 2001, p.174, p.177).

In this constant hustle and bustle, confusion, and indecisiveness, there are also quieter moments that allow for some introspection for the otherwise shell shocked characters. They consist of Gloria and Phil's visit to the graveyard, their frequent reference to meeting there, and the climax of the film when they are finally reunited at the cemetery. Gloria's reason for the first visit to the cemetery is to make Phil see his dead parents and say his prayers, even though they are not actually buried there. In their visit and rendezvous at the gravesite, which could be in just about any location, the director shows a peculiar, out of context, and surreal fascination for death. Phil summarises it perfectly: "I don't think I should do this [praying at the graveyard] …I don't mind a lot of things. But this is a little gruesome." Ray Carney has also addressed the oddness of the graveyard sequences in the film:

> to the unexpected spirituality of the cemetery scenes (when did a gangster movie last include scenes about souls?)… in his strangely spiritual but 'simple' gangster picture (Carney, 2001, p.450, p.454).

Carney associates the graveyard sequences to spirituality. However, it is to my understanding that while *Gloria* is a "woman's movie" of Dawn Esposito's discussion, it most certainly has gothic influences. This is signified by Gloria's black suits and somewhat dislocated visits and meetings at the graveyard (Esposito, 2003, p.104).

Despite the filmmaker's artistic and instinctual leaning towards realism in spite of what Tom Charity has described as *Gloria's* "conventionality", the realistic and the somewhat fantastic are convincingly braided together in the film (Charity, 2001, p.178). Other gothic motifs recur in *Gloria*. Rowlands has insisted in interviews that she "tried very hard not to make her [Gloria] appear to be a hooker" (Charity, 2001, p.175). However, like some action heroines in the corpus films, for instance Beatrix in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* via Rich's reading of the trained assassins as whores, and the overarching idea of the older man and the younger woman that informs the action heroine's relationship to the antagonistic figure, Gloria is undoubtedly the "gangster's moll" (Charity, 2001, p.175). She is the "broad" who even went to prison for the mafia; Rowlands herself has evoked "Virginia Hill" as a reference for her character (Charity, 2001, pp.174-5). Imprisonment, any form of incarceration, or death have significant gothic implication, which are themes that recur in the corpus films. This further

demonstrates the significance of the literary gothic for studying these familial representations in popular female action pictures.

The inner turmoil, anxiety and uncertainty of the two escapees in *Gloria* is represented outwardly as they run through buzzing New York and fleet past her culture and masses, as they seek protection from the trigger-happy gangsters. As their tentativeness turns to inner resolution especially in Gloria's case, the location changes too. Gloria smoothly glides in the taxi in the early hours of a sunny morning with the deceased accountant's book in tow to make a deal with her former lover in his "uptown pad" in "Manhattan" (Charity, 2001, p.171, p.177). The cab pulls in and parks outside a court of luxury apartments that are established through an overview shot. She does not need to give any introductions to the concierge as she walks into the familiar territory of her former life. The film lets the audience take a stroll with Gloria, this time a more relaxed stroll. However, there is still repressed tension in Gloria and us, as we are unsure of the future of the unlikely Madonna and child pair. She walks into a posh top floor apartment with a massive living space, high ceilings, fine old furniture, wooden flooring, crystal table wear, Italian cooking, fine cigarettes, cigar and wines and half-dressed women in one of the rooms in the background.

The "mafiosi's" hideout is well-lit and filled with daylight (Charity, 2001, p.171). Cassavetes' camera captures the Italian American gangsters, a world of men, and patriarchs, who are surely and certainly ageing.[23] Rowlands as an actress of approximately 50-years-old at the time of the release of the film, is younger than any of the mob men in this sequence. It seems improbable that these male characters could bear witnessing the murder of a child without any physical or psychological cost to themselves. This is further supported by Tanzini's wisdom: "You think I want to kill you, I made love to you. I brought you jewels. Life is too dear." Tanzini, Gloria's ex-boyfriend is seen superseded by a much older gentleman whom he consults before going into the other room to meet Gloria. This is a clan of fragile elderly men, with power and wealth,

[23] In her paper Esposito observes of Gloria's former boyfriend: "Tony is an old man who requires magnifying glasses to see" (Esposito, 2003, p.106). Even though Esposito's reading coincides with mine, despite having viewed the film several times, I have not found any shot representing her observation.

and the role of women in the hideout and the film is merely that of pleasure giving bodies.[24]

In understanding the "*cosa nostra"* as aging and acknowledging the relegation of women in the film as a source of sexual pleasure, it could be argued that they want to keep boy Phil forever. It is significant that he is a boy and not a girl, as to be added to the horde as a worthy successor (Charity, 2001, p.175). Because of Phil's youth and vulnerability in the absence of primary caregivers, he could be taught their ways and become one of them. He could be raised as an heir of the crime bosses. Films like *The Godfather* trilogy (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972, 1974, 1990) show the patriarchal ideology of the mobsters make them relegate women to the role of a vessel of a boy child, who will assure the continuation of their family business. From this point of view, they want Phil not only because he should have been assassinated or he has seen the murders. The fact is that he has not seen the murders but because capturing Phil will allow them to have a possible successor in him.

This part section focuses on the Bluebeard-father's pursuit of children for wealth. In classical Hollywood, and even recent Hollywood Bluebeard narratives, the two-faced husband attempts to murder or murders the wife to inherit her fortune. This is also true of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, *Panic Room* and *Maleficent*. Unlike this feature motif of the gothic mode, this section will discuss the Bluebeard figure's desire to possess the child for wealth. "Avarice" according to Short is one of the reasons that motivate a Bluebeard antagonist (Short, 2015, p.103). Using the framework of the nursery tale to read female action pictures, this character's pursuit for gold is also intertwined with the fates of these "precocious" gothic children (Heung, 1983, p.81; Tatar, 2004, p.5). The Bluebeard's treasure is also found in the corpus films, in which this treasure is associated with the figure of the child; the child is the treasure or the treasure is in possession of the child.

[24] The representation of women in *Gloria* and indeed most of the corpus is illustrative of Tasker's argument. She argues that the figure of the prostitute is an archetype for most representations of active women across various genres in popular Hollywood cinema. For her, these mainstream images link women's work to a kind of "sexualised performance" (Tasker, 1998, pp.3-4). This sexist ideology that underpins these onscreen femininities is also reflected in the title of her monograph. Her argument is further developed by Brown to show that the modern action heroine is likely to go undercover as a "dominatrix" (Brown, 2011, p.225).

Matthew Spellberg analyses music in Béla Bartók's libretto *Bluebeard's Castle* (1918), written by Béla Balázs (Spellberg, 2015). His article also briefly mentions the appearance of Bluebeard's treasure in the opera (Spellberg, 2015). Tatar recounts what consists of the treasure in more detail:

> The second door is awash in yellow-red light and contains 'instruments of terrible war.' A golden beam of light emanates from the third door, behind which is Bluebeard's treasure chamber, filled with golden coins, diamonds, emeralds, and rubies (Tatar, 2004, pp.147-8).

Tatar points out that the Bluebeard's treasure appears in some retellings of the fairy tale. In *Gloria*, before pairing him with the unlikely neighbour and Gloria, Phil's father Jack Dawn (Buck Henry) bequeaths upon him the book which he calls the Bible. The dons frantically track down the book and its possessor as it spells out their dirty dealing in black and white.

In *The River Wild*, Wade gives Roarke $200 of stolen money for his birthday. He also secretly shows the impressionable Roarke the gun he has in his possession. The treasure and other secrets are only revealed to the child. Even though Wade and Terry have robbed the cattle auction, they have Roarke involved in the plot so that they can control his mother. Gail the former white-water guide will assure their safe journey across the waters to the Canadian border. In *The Long Kiss Goodnight,* Catlin's bear Mr Perkins is wearing the charm bracelet with the key to the safety deposit box. Catlin is thus in possession of the treasure and by that logic is also the treasure. In *Panic Room*, Sarah is separated from her newly divorced mother and is locked in with the two burglars as they manage to enter the safe room. As they make their way out from the modern version of a medieval catacomb with bearer bonds worth $22 million, they hold Sarah hostage to seek protection from her enraged parents.

Similarly, in *Flightplan*, the terrorists kidnap the fatherless and sombre-looking Julia Pratt (Marlene Lawston). They also portray her mother, the former aircraft propulsion engineer Kyle, as the hijacker, to blackmail the airline to wire $50 million as ransom. In this instance, it is via the child that the treasure will be secured. Born in the barns, the boy jewel thief Stefan in *Maleficent* was briefly discussed in Chapter 1. Stefan transforms from rags to riches by clipping his former lover's massive wings. This act is

coded as rape, and has also popularly read as a reference to Jolie's mastectomy surgery. Damsel Aurora, played by Elle Fanning, stumbles upon and leads the audiences to the family secret in the climax of the film. Her surrogate mother's wings, the curio that secured Aurora's estranged father's fortune, are kept in the glass showcase like a stuffed bear. In this example, it is the child that is able to locate the treasure as family secret. Some other films like *Elektra* make a more explicit connection between the figure of the child and prosperity. The adolescent Abby who is harassed because she is a prodigy, is referred to as the "treasure" by the immoral forces, who are on a quest to track her down. Stick played by English actor Terence Stamp informs Elektra that "they [the Hand] tried to steal her [Abby]." As Abby's kidnapping is referred as a theft, and the allusion of her being the treasure makes the child occupy the generic space of the precious object sought by the representatives of evil in the story told in the action heroine film.

The pursuit of valuable possessions and even children in the action heroine films are also clear instances of "Hitchcockian MacGuffins", as discussed by Short in relation to the neo-gothic *What Lies Beneath*, inserted by their makers for narrative momentum (Short, 2015, p.105; Spoto, 1994, p.285). The Bluebeard figure's pursuit for wealth in narratives where he does not already possess it, and the sheer energy and force with which he pursues it, reveals his vulnerability that demeans him as a pitiful figure with a perceived deep-seated psychological and character flaw. The outward phallic glory combined with these unhelpful insecure displays of avarice, which are debasing have to be given strong credence and psychological bearing. Through closer critical evaluation, Tatar makes the point when reading the American remake of *Gaslight* (George Cukor, 1944). In both the British and American versions, the husbands are fixated on the rubies and the "Russian imperial jewels" (Hanson, 2007, p.84). Even the 105.62 carats Kohinoor makes its way into the American version, when the husband Gregory Anton (Charles Boyer) and the beautiful wife taken as prisoner Paula Alquist (Ingrid Bergman) take a trip to the Tower of London.

These men are lost in their search and nothing holds them back. As Tatar suggests, the husbands lust after these jewels at the price of compromising their character and intoxicating matrimonial bliss:

> Psychoanalytic critics will be quick to point out the phallic connection and to read Gregory's quest for jewels as the search for a missing fetish object that will turn him into a real man at last (Tatar, 2004, p.95).

Tatar's reading gives a psychoanalytic perspective on the Bluebeard-husband's relentless obsession with jewels. This analysis resonates with the Bluebeard villains' pursuit of treasure in the corpus films. The discussion of masculinity in crisis has been a thread that has run through Chapter 1 and this chapter. This search for a missing object that will restore some nostalgic version of his self or a perfect state of life, that is, the attainment of a higher self, does not seek an end in the attainment of jewels or children or both.

There is more to this account of bad fatherhood as the story moves beyond how the children threaten this neopatriarch or become a source of his omnipotence. The female protagonist of these films, the Hollywood action heroine interrupts this twisted equation of a father figure keen on abusing children, thereby revealing a different dimension to this endless "Manichaean" struggle between good and evil that is represented in the films (Krzywinska, 2000, p.67).

**The "Killer" Father: Kidnapping of the Child to Settle a Score with the Action Heroine**

Fincher has mentioned that the character of Meg was originally written as being disconnected from her daughter. The screenplay was further rewritten so that the daughter was a pawn between the divorced couple (*Panic Room* DVD 3 Disc Special Edition). The two themes Fincher mentions are recurrent in the corpus more broadly and, as I will demonstrate, have significant implications for the representation of the family. These two themes are part of these films' formulaic makeup; the latter is elaborated upon in detail Chapter 4. Fincher has further mentioned that *Panic Room* is his version of *Kramer vs. Kramer* and Foster has commented that "divorce" is Fincher's metaphor for the film (*Panic Room* DVD 3 Disc Special Edition).

In the reference to *Kramer vs. Kramer*, the character of Billy Kramer (Justin Henry) comes to mind. His role in the film is that of a pawn between the embittered, separated and estranged white middle-class couple. This family has a breadwinner professional husband and a housewife, who services the family almost with a stiff upper lip. Quite

simply labelled as "the child orphaned by feminism" by Imogen Tyler it is through Billy that the couple enacts its revenge, resentment and anger (Tyler, 2007, p.183; Heung, 1983, p.80).[25] Tyler sees this logic as a critique of feminism expressed through the figure of the child.

*Kramer vs. Kramer* is a dated "social document" film (Bruzzi, 2005, p.79, pp.108-9). The key ideas that have been subject of critical and popular scrutiny on and after the release of the film include: marriage, family, parenting, the role of men and women in and outside the house, childcare, the legal rights of parents, desire and sexuality outside of marriage, among others. The analogy has not only directed attention towards the very essence of *Panic Room,* but most importantly the kind of Hollywood family and fictional familial relationships that are represented in this post 9/11 thriller. By overtly connecting *Panic Room* to one of its rightful ancestors, it is made explicit that a seemingly benign Hollywood text with standard approval seeking ideological closure, both from the studios and the global fans that it is mass-marketed to (the copy of *Panic Room* DVD subtitles the film in three languages, including Hindi), contains a certain hidden charge that sits safely underneath its disguised exterior.

Not stretching this connection to Benton's film too far and within the scope of this thesis is Greg Keeler's '*The Shining*: Ted Kramer has a Nightmare' that was also very briefly mentioned in Chapter 1 (Keeler, 1981, pp.2-8). This analogy abstractly associates Ted Kramer's repressed rage to *The Shining's* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980) failing writer Jack Torrance's violent tendencies. As a consistent pattern established through my research, fairy tale and gothic scholars like Clemens (1999), Hoile (1984) and Tatar (2004, pp.4-5, p.48) have almost always pointed that the film is a retelling of the "sexually violent" fairy tale (Clemens, 1999, p.29). However, film scholars like Bruzzi (2005, pp.124-6) and Sobchack (1996), who have employed discourses of the horror to look at the film have

[25] Undisputedly told in the generic space of the family melodrama at the cost of repudiating the mother and punishing her for what the film represents as her transgressions, the "male weepie" *Kramer vs. Kramer* has several well concealed and overlooked gothic undercurrents (Tyler, 2007, pp.184-5). The film is also read as a male weepie by Kehr (1983) and Sobchack (1996). The film despite modernisation of the Victorian plot and its ambivalent relationship to second-wave feminism falls into the category of what Karen O'Brien has identified as "the ongoing global transmission of *Jane Eyre*" (Bragg, 2015). The overarching plot of *Kramer vs. Kramer* makes it a twentieth-century Hollywood version of Brontë's enduring English classic.

managed to overlooked this critical angle.[26] Tatar refers to Stephen King's novel *The Shining* (1978), where Jack reads the Bluebeard fairy tale to Danny, and it recurs in the novel time and again as an intertext (Tatar, 2004, pp.4-5, p.48). Keeler comes very close to acknowledging the film as a retelling of the Bluebeard fairy tale by making a connection to the Oedipus myth. He writes of the connection between *The Shining* and *Kramer vs. Kramer*:

> The boy [Billy Kramer] could easily have a nightmare where his father chases him around a horrible maze with an axe… The characters of *The Shining* take seriously the casual language of *Kramer vs. Kramer*. Perhaps Mr. Torrance's message to Mr. Kramer on parenting might be "Sure, we all want to kill our kids. It's healthy-natural, especially when you have the 'sperm bank' around to make sure they stay alive… This is the midnight version of the Kramers' little spat over the table in the restaurant, except Jack Torrance doesn't want permission to keep the kid; he wants the wife out of the way so he can kill him (Keeler, 1981, p.4, p.5, p.7).

Keeler's analogy brings out the dark underbelly of *Kramer vs. Kramer*. It also brings to fore the problematic relationship between the husband and wife figures in *Kramer vs. Kramer* and *The Shining*. Most importantly it foregrounds the repressed desire of the father to dispatch the child, which is merely represented as neglect in *Kramer vs. Kramer*. In addressing the dark underbelly of a film like *Kramer vs. Kramer* allows to question and look at the underside of a film like *Panic Room*.

The action heroine as the Bluebeard's victim-hero wife and their complicated relationship that blurs the boundaries of love and hate was examined in Chapter 1 and will further be explored in Chapter 3. This problematic relationship is examined in this section only to bring to light the Bluebeard's, what Modleski has described in another context, "phallic paternity" (Modleski, 1988, p.79). The action heroine is the Bluebeard-husband figure's arch enemy. The scenarios however brief or prolonged have a credible place in the films in duration, drama and how the plot unfolds. These can be summarised as follows: either (a) the Bluebeard-husband attempts to abscond the child as a part of his ungodly and sinful deeds and has to overcome the action heroine in the process, or

[26] Christopher Hoile's article on *The Shining* looks at the film from the perspective of fairy tales but not the Bluebeard fairy tale in specific.

(b) he apprehends the child to tease, reach, get to and get even with his main opponent, the action heroine. Or in some instances, this device achieves both points of action. In some instances, both options can be discerned at work.

Kristin Bordwell and David Thompson remind us that "a crime is at the center of the thriller plot" (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013, p.334). In the corpus films, it is the kidnapping of the child that puts all the characters on high alert. Returning to the scene in *The Cell*, analysed earlier, in which we see a tug-of-war between King Carl and Catherine, it is striking that the violator pulls boy-Carl towards him, teasing Catherine for her inability to reach and rescue the boy. In the climax, Catherine reverses the feed and returns for boy-Carl dressed as the Virgin Mary. The serenity of her world gives way to darkness, as King Carl manifests as a dark cloud, massive spiders, leeches and finally a serpent. Catherine herself transforms into the vengeful gothic action heroine as Lopez's mid-length blonde hair and naturalistic facial makeup give way to dark long curly hair with deeper shades of makeup, and weapons for the final showdown as good and evil unmistakably collide. In the *Gloria*, the mob feverously moves around during summer in New York City, to subdue and overcome Gloria. They want to get closer to the recently orphaned Phil, but Gloria diligently protects him. The Italian American gangsters may or may not have anything against Gloria, but are left with no option and have to face her. Despite being aware of the pitfalls, Gloria infiltrates their system and they only end up chasing their tails.

The gap between mother-and-child blurs in *The Terminator*, as the time-travelling cyborg attempts to impale Sarah for her textual infidelity, discussed earlier in this chapter. In the process, it attempts to destroy the son who will be born out of Sarah's adulterous extra-marital relationship with a mere rebel soldier. In *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, the "smooth phallic" futuristic monster hides undisguised as a policeman (Sears, 2003, p.107). He even transforms into the mother to get to John: first by copying and murdering the surrogate mother and then as Sarah in the climax. But none of this endless doubling means that he does not have to overcome the action heroine in the climax in an attempt to complete the programmed mission. The subject matter of the mother's murder will be investigated at some length in Chapters 3 and 4.

In *Aliens*, the queen alien kidnaps Newt during the slightest inattentiveness of her new surrogate family (Gabbard, 1988), constituting of Ripley and Corporal Dwayne Hicks (Michael Biehn). They are metaphorically engaged through the exchange of a futuristic satellite navigator wristwatch. The queen alien is hardly the Bluebeard or a representative of the company like Ash or Burke. James H. Kavanaugh (1980, p.97), Harvey R. Greenberg (1988, p.170) and Hermann's (1997, p.40) analysis points out that the company is the "bad father" in the films. It has deceived its children: the colonists and the rescue team, including and especially Newt on account of her infantile vulnerability. When the marines enquire about the nature of the mission Sergeant Apone (Al Matthews) jokingly describes it as a mission where "they have to recuse the juicy colonist's daughters from their virginity." This joke comments on the old aristocrat's sin consisting of sexual desire for younger women. However, the marines are called upon to correct another one of the husband's sins, that of rescuing a child, Newt, from her bad father's atrocities. While the company can't be seen or heard as it occupies the space of the "paranoid" of the gothic, Ripley squares up the mother alien before she can reach Newt (Punter and Byron, 2004, pp.273-77).

Beatrix casts a sharp shadow in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2*. She is the mire of Bill's thoughts. He hasn't stolen her wealth but he has kidnapped her child. Snatched away from her mother's womb when she was unconscious, little B.B. is safely tucked away in the attic or the bloody chamber in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2*. It is perhaps not surprising then that Bill is absent for most of the two volumes, much like Bertha and Rebecca in *Rebecca*. He has the most important member of the family – B.B. in his possession, almost incarcerated due to her juvenile incapacity. Clover explains of the killer in the slasher film:

> Again, it is through the killer's eyes (I-camera) that we saw the Final Girl at the beginning of the film, and through the Final Girl's eyes that we see the killer, often for the first time with any clarity, toward the end. The gaze becomes, at least for a while, female. More to the point, the female exercise of scopic control results not in her annihilation, in the manner of classic cinema, but in her triumph; indeed, her triumph *depends* on her assumption of the gaze (Clover, 1992, p.60).

Resonating with Clover's analysis, it is through Bill's eyes that we first see Beatrix and it is through Beatrix's eyes that we see Bill at his hacienda. It is her assumption of the gaze that allows her to locate Bill and her seemingly dead daughter. In Bill's positioning as the "active force of absence" of Hanson's argument (Hanson, 2007, p.100) or like Roger Daudon's discussion on Dracula as "non-presence" (Creed, 1993b, p.20), there is assurance that the action heroine will find this berserk figure and bring him to light for the audiences to see him in his lair. She also seeks revenge which has been coded as morally justified in Hollywood rape-revenge narratives of female empowerment. With a twist of fate in the film, she reclaims her separated child. In transforming into the avenger, Beatrix assumes the gaze.

In *Æon Flux,* Oren has to overcome the resourceful rebel Æon for his continual success in assassinating the pregnant women of Bregna. Oren has to overcome not only Æon's investigation but also her action. Similarly in *Elektra*, when Abby's father Mark Miller (Goran Visnjic) is reluctant to request Elektra's assistance in seeking protection from the Hand, Abby reminds him: "They're gonna hunt us down. Just like mom!" thereby referring to the homicide of her biological mother. It is clear that it is not merely the child who is hunted but also the mother, and that she lost her life guarding the child. The morally misguided Elektra is coded as Abby's surrogate mother in the film or as her mother reborn. Elektra strikes a deal with Kirigi that in an open battle with him her success would leave Abby free to go. In the process, Elektra also overcomes her past tensions with the Bluebeard figure. While there isn't a past between Gail and Wade in *The River Wild*, there is a certain amount of created sexual tension between the two, at least on Wade's part, which was briefly touched upon in Chapter 1. Gail, on the other hand, has to stand up to these unwanted sexual advances, protect her son who is being used as a pawn to control her, muster all her strength to save her family, and overcome the currents of the unpredictable and merciless river.

Similarly, using his daughter as leverage allows old flame Timothy to catch the otherwise sharp as a tack assassin Samantha and subject her to his whims in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*. Tasker has drawn our attention to the "cliché" of Hollywood action films, where women need to be rescued if alive or their death is the reason for the hero's revenge, which was also brought up in Chapter 1 (Tasker, 1993, pp.16-7). The attractive

and smooth Timothy is unable to love himself and love others. Instead, he thrives on control and seeks thrills from the destruction of those he should rightfully love and cherish. Freakish and inconsiderate are his goals because they bring sorrow to others. In this faulty psychological premise, his behaviour and attitudes are attuned to someone, who has a death wish or a desire to self-destruct for no apparent reason. His evil deeds are a symptom of what has been defined in other contexts as: “megalomania” (Wells, 2000, p.47), “thirst for violence” (Tatar, 2004, p.14) and “overreaching” (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.278) ideologies typically associated with “gothic villains” of Garrett (2007, p.41) and Clemens’ discussion in another context (1999, p.219).

The ordeal does not end so easily for Caitlin. In her father’s bloody chamber, not only family secrets but also political secrets are revealed. Soon after she manages to escape from the chamber, she finds herself entangled in another one of her unsympathetic father’s devious plots. She mistakenly seeks refuge in the toolbox of the tanker containing explosives and timed to explode. In this fictionalised 9/11 attack, the CIA has deceived the American government, thereby revealing a system that has disintegrated through corruption from within. The action heroine then rises to protect her child, overcome the bad father who represents the corrupt state of patriarchy and the White House, and is set to save the nation from its people, including and especially from her dangerous husband rather than any foreign enemies like Arab terrorists. The action heroine overcomes her familial crisis and in course saves the world, a line of argument also briefly raised in Chapter 1 and will be pursued in great depth Chapters 3 and 4.

Bus driver Raoul who is an obnoxious character in *Panic Room* is neither out to get the divorcee Meg or tomboy Sarah, but this soon changes. Once he comes out of the castle keep having jammed his hand on its steel door, he is enraged over the suspicion that Meg may have tipped the police. In what appears to be merely a hold-up to assure their safe exit with the bearer bonds, Raoul does not let go off Sarah even on Burnham’s insistence. At first, it appears as though Meg is overreacting by planning a counterattack for this hold-up, but it becomes apparent that she hasn’t. Raoul goes a step further and punches Sarah on the face, which sends her underneath a chimney. He then tries to kill Meg with his sledgehammer literally trying to bash her brains out. Meg and Sarah then

become involved in a plot with dubious characters, where both their lives are at stake. Similarly, it is Kyle in *Flightplan* who is taken advantage of. The terrorists also use her mildly depressed six-year-old daughter Julia, who recently lost her father to control the unsuspecting widow. In a turn of events and mostly in a change of heart in *Maleficent*, the villainous witch develops a soft spot for the child she cursed in her anger against her former lover. Even after Maleficent awakens the Sleeping Beauty in a gesture of true love, Stephan does not fall short or rethink his ugly ways and repeatedly confronts her even when she lets go of him. The action heroine's intervention in these instances of abusive, what Creed has described in another context as, "patrilineal filiation" fuels his ego and motivates her action (Creed, 1993b, p.43). The action heroines in the films shoot guns and rifles, assemble bombs, brandish power loaders or artillery, builds up her musculature, train early hours in the morning, are secretly recruited by the CIA, have brilliant careers, can transform small kitchen gadgets like a gaslighter into a weapon, have martial art expertise, are training as a rebel, battle to protect their motherland, among others. These, on the face, perversions of traditional gender roles are to stand up to this villainous figure and are meant to resolve this infernal abuse that the Bluebeard-father inflicts cruelly on his family members.

Using the theoretical framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale and the gothic, I have theorised the masculine antagonist of this thesis, who in the master discourse is an abusive husband and a dominating father. In the process, I have demonstrated how Clover's gender-confused "killer" has disseminated into the action heroine film corpus and become the "killer" father (Clover, 1992, p.27). In engaging with the Bluebeard fairy tale and the gothic, this theoretical account has surpassed Clover's identification of Hitchcock's masterpiece *Psycho* (1960) as the slasher's formulaic predecessor (Clover, 1992, p.23). Clover's own response to the familial undertones in *Psycho* and the slasher film is summarised in a footnote:

> For an account of the ways the 'family horror' aspect of the *Psycho* formula has evolved over the decades, see Patricia [Brett] Erens, 'The Stepfather[: Father as Monster in the Contemporary Horror Film]' (Clover, 1992, p.24).

In the years of being familiar with Clover's monograph and its reach, I have come across in published work and at conferences a sort of academic obsession with the figure of the final girl. The many papers presented at 'Gothic Feminism: Women-in-Peril or Final

Girls? Representing Women in Gothic and Horror Cinema' in 2017 is a testament to this end. Not surprisingly, the female victim-hero is constantly the subject of scrutiny and debate, especially because of her feminist potential, despite Clover's dissenting figurative interpretation of her, much to the dismay of other scholars (Clover, 1992, pp.51-64). Although Clover's discussion about the male spectator and his identification with the female victim-hero is beyond the scope of this research, I am yet to come across critical engagement or even critical fire and academic conferences paralleling the interest in the final girl. In between the lines of these two chapters is the aim to ignite such critical thinking concerning the killer and draw attention to how this figure has proliferated in Hollywood genre pictures.

Within the scope of this argument, Clover states of the stalker films: "the killer is the psychotic product of a sick family" (Clover, 1992, p.23). Whether or not the killer father is an adult progeny of a violent and dysfunctional family is not fully established by its makers, with the exception of *The Cell* and sketchily in *Kill Bill: Volume 1, Volume 2* and *Maleficent.* But it surely appears that the Bluebeard anti-hero's psychosis and criminal mind are perhaps only on the verge of duplicating what he experienced as a child, as the abused becomes the abuser without much premeditation. The killer father, after all, is not afforded the same subjectivity in the films as the action heroine or the gothic child, as he is an agreed-upon rendition of evil in the narratives. His extremities allow for closure only in death. Tasker has developed Clover's ideas further and pointed out that "child abuse" is the reason for Gumb's sadistic perversions in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Tasker, 2002, p.56). Tasker's analysis resonates with Wells' definition of a serial killer: "The serial killer's background is often characterised by childhood sexual abuse, and his actions are motivated by the need for power, status and recognition" (Wells, 2000, p.14). The trauma could also be afflicted by a non-familial and external source like in the case of Hannibal Lecter (Gaspard Ulliel) in *Hannibal Rising* (Peter Webber, 2007). Similar views about the representation of the patriarchal family in the horror films and its creation of the adult monster are expressed by Williams (1996b). These theoretical viewpoints I believe also ring true for the killer father. Revisiting Clover's writing, it becomes clear that the killer is a victim of devastating familial or non-familial abuse and was once a lost child much like the voyeur Mark in *Peeping Tom* (Clover, 1992, p.28, p.50). What emerges from this analysis is the question whether he abuses because the

killer father sees his own helplessness in these children. Is the pain of the past so unbearable that this figure inflicts the very condition?

In the cinematic rendering of these stories that are guaranteed to appease ideologically, the misfortune of the killer father is not shared by terrified gothic children who populate the film corpus. These child characters include: Phil, John, Newt, Roarke, Caitlin, boy-Carl, B.B., Abby, Julia and Aurora. Clover states that the killer comes from an all-male family (Clover, 1992, p.27). As cited in Chapter 1, Wood has discussed the all-male family in relation to horror films (Wood, 1984, p.188). Here the mother is dead and her corpse is mummified, in a manner not dissimilar to the gothic portrait (Clover herself mentions a portrait of the mother). Or the killer struggles to break free from the pre-Oedipal bond with the over-controlling mother, which makes him sexually repressive (Clover, 1992, pp.26-8). A similar point is also made by Creed in her analysis of *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976) (Creed, 1998, p.78). *Crimson Peak* implies that Bluebeard is the son of an abusive mother. Such is also presented to be the case in *Psycho* and *Red Dragon* (Brett Ratner, 2002). This is also suggested by Tatar in her analysis of *Secrets Beyond the Door* (Fritz Lang, 1947) (Short, 2015, p.97), although Tatar points out that Mark Lamphere's (Michael Redgrave) problematic relationship with the mother is only one "root" cause to his psychosis in *Secrets Beyond the Door*.

In stark contrast, the filmic gothic children in the corpus films although terrified have a mother whether by blood or not, who knows the killer because she was once part of his system and was once a victim. Unlike the killer who had an absent or problem mother, the fates of these children are unclear as the daring damsel will ensure that cinematic history doesn't repeat itself. The makers and the audiences know only too well that the action heroine has strength and determination and supernatural is on her side, which even allows her to rise from her Hollywood burial and overcome her adversary. The killer father and the action heroine both see in the child themselves. He is a raving monster and he sees childhood as a weakness. Whereas she sees in the child her sadness and seeks out to protect the child. The death of both the action heroine and the child's mothers defines them and makes the action heroine empathise with the child's circumstances. The action heroine has experienced the most "abject" death, of Creed's argument, and seen its face only to realise and understand that there is nothing

much to it (Creed, 1993b, pp.8-9). Upon her metaphorical or literal resurrection, she will fight to her last breath fearlessly, and dispatch this monster once and for all. His death as the bogeyman of the unconscious puts an end to the terrorising of children.

**Conclusion**

The arguments presented have highlighted the significance of Bluebeard as problem paternal figure in the corpus films. The figure of the child is analysed as a site of power struggle for the Bluebeard-father via scenarios where he oppresses the child. He poses a psychological or life threat to the mythical figure of the innocent child, who is also found in the corpus films. The arguments thereby demonstrate that the children in the films under investigation are Bluebeard's children. Popular readings of the films by Dancey (2009), Goren (2009), McCormick (2010) and others have read the child in the corpus films as the action heroine's child. This thesis chimes with the significance of the mother-and-child relationship that is presented in the films. However, it also puts forward a unique perspective of the Bluebeard's unfatherly relationship with the child. In other instances of scholarship, only marginal accounts of masculinity have been provided. By theorising the representation of masculinity and fatherhood, a unique dimension is brought to light in the study of the corpus films. The devious fatherhood is understood as a source of dysfunctionality to the family presented in the corpus films.

A brief yet potent attempt is made to understand the Bluebeard-husband's psychology. As in Chapter 1, it is concluded at various stages that the persecution of the child represents the unconscious desire to appropriate the feminine and thus feminises this lethal patriarchal figure. The arguments also advance the use of womb envy in the study of gender and representation in the action heroine films. By using Clover's framework on the killer of the slasher film, it is concluded that the abuse that is inflicted by the "killer" father is most likely symptomatic of his abusive and/or traumatic childhood. It is thus presented that child abuse is a central driving force of the corpus films.

## Chapter 3

## The Action Heroine as the Madwoman in the Attic: Gothic Heroine, Female Disobedience and Resistance to Patriarchy

### Introduction

To this point, this thesis has analysed the representations of masculinity and the figure of the child in relation to masculinity. This chapter will present the third side of the story in the familial figurations that recur in the corpus films, that represented by the action heroine. In investigating the theme of mental instability that is deployed to represent the action heroine in the corpus films, the analysis associates the action heroine's implied insanity with the frame of Gilbert and Gubar's feminist critique of the madwoman in the attic. The implied madness is read as female disobedience within the framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale. Theoretical writings on the gothic heroine and figures of gothic monstrosity like Rochester's first wife Bertha, Mr Hyde in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1931) and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Victor Fleming, 1941), the birds in *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963) among others are used to read the action heroine. It is argued that the trope of madness is a form of feminist resistance on part of the action heroine. In these readings, what appears to be madness appears to be madness is actually the Bluebeard-husband's gaslighting of the action heroine. It is further argued that the action heroine is traumatised because of the Bluebeard-husband's abuse and suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome. The mental instability that the action heroine exhibits is also addressed at length. It is concluded that the action heroine is a survivor of abuse and, like the gothic heroine, actively resists patriarchal domination and hierarchal order represented by the Bluebeard male and his system.

### Sarah Connor: The Madwoman in the Attic

When the film makes us privy to the young John in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, we very clearly hear his opinion of his mother Sarah. She emerged as a lone female hero on a mission to save the world in the climax of *The Terminator*. Instead of seeing the leader of the future in line with audience expectations established in the original, the film portrays John as "problem child" (Sears, 2003, p.107), and a juvenile delinquent. He

describes his mother as “a complete psycho. That is why she is at the Pescadero, it’s a mental institute”. The hero Sarah seems to have disappeared into oblivion in this dystopian future. John’s dialogue also constructs Sarah as a bad mother, a recurrent trope used to judge non-conforming women in mainstream cinema (Kaplan, 1992). The audiences, however, have a different approach since they are aware that the events Sarah describes (and which are attributed to madness) are those watched in *The Terminator*. Soon after we hear of this from John, the film makes us privy to Sarah’s life.

We first see Sarah in an indoor location established as Pescadero State Hospital. The camera zooms in from daylight through to a small ventilator window of an interior, panning to an extreme close-up of Sarah’s well-built hands, forearms, shoulders, and long hair. Sarah’s transformation from feminine damsel waitress to action heroine in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* has been well documented. Telotte has read Sarah’s character as “ultra-feminist” (Telotte, 1992, p.31); Tasker reads her as “butch-*femme*” (Tasker, 1993, p.143) and as a body “without a place in American society” (Tasker, 1993, p.27); French understands Sarah’s change in the scene as representative of “crackpot survivalism” (French, 1996, p.52). Like Sarah, other action heroines such as Gail in *The River Wild*, Elektra in *Elektra*, and Æon in *Æon Flux* incorporate physical and psychological training as part of their routines. Sarah in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* is an emancipated figure, a woman who has cut loose from the feminine ways of patriarchy on learning of her role in the future. She transforms from an attractive white “patriarchal feminine”, of Kaplan’s (1992, p.152) theorisation in another context, to the “action heroine” of Tasker’s (1993) discussion. The transformation that we see Sarah undergo in the last quarter of *The Terminator* fully materialises in the sequel. Punter and Byron explain that this kind of transformation is typical of the gothic heroine:

> Initially, she is usually depicted enjoying an idyllic and secluded life; this is followed by a period of imprisonment when she is confined to a great house or castle (q.v.) under the authority of a powerful male figure or his female surrogate (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.279).

Punter and Byron’s discussion of the scenarios in which the gothic heroine is involved resonates with Sarah’s narrative trajectory in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. In *The Terminator*, like the gothic heroine of Punter and Byron’s analysis, Sarah lives an idyllic and somewhat secluded life. In the opening sequence of *Terminator*

*2: Judgment Day* analysed above, she is incarcerated in a correction centre under the observation of Dr Silberman. These similarities link Sarah the action heroine to the ancestral connection of the gothic heroine. Hanson cites Botting and explains: "the castle gradually gave way to the old house" (Hanson, 2007, p.35). Sarah is neither imprisoned in a castle or an old house but her incarceration can be compared to that of the gothic heroine. This connection to the gothic heroine is crucial for the argument I seek to develop in this chapter, and indeed the thesis as a whole, with its emphasis on the Bluebeard myth as a route into the action heroine.

After her round of chin-ups, when spoken to by her psychologist over the intercommunications system, Sarah's first spoken words are, "Good morning Dr Silberman, how's the knee?" Dr Silberman switches off the intercom and explains to his research assistants that Sarah violently attacked him not very long ago and injured his knee in the process. The exchange neatly establishes a power relationship between the inmate and the doctor. Punter and Byron note that "the scientist who began to appear in twentieth-century Gothic fiction is frequently a psychologist" (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.24). This gothic scenario of Punter and Byron's analysis resonates with Sarah's situation. Sarah is kept locked up like an animal in a zoo under the tutelage of Dr Silberman. The three research assistants, two of whom are women, peer at Sarah from the peep window as if looking at something other, the monstrous double of the gothic text, the uncivilised Other, over-identification with whom will disrupt their own identity as professional women. This subject of over-identification with the Other and its place in gothic narratives is discussed by Punter and Byron at some length in other contexts (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.266). Hence, they closely align themselves with the rationality of science and the male doctor. Thus, Sarah becomes the object of a male doctor's investigative gaze.

The gender and power imbalance in the ward set out in the sequence frames Sarah's condition as a female malady inflicted by this imbalance. While men fulfil important roles in the psychiatric ward, women occupy secondary positions. They are either patients or assistants who support Dr Silberman's analysis. His analysis contextualises distinctive female behaviour, which allows him to pass a verdict on the mental stability of patients under his supervision. The need for Dr Silberman's scientific

and rational intervention in Sarah's life upholds science as a phallocentric discourse that reinstates patriarchal dominance. This gender inequality is a reminder of the feminist argument of the usurpation of the gynaecological and obstetrical profession by male doctors, who have claimed to know more about the female body at the cost of marginalising the expertise of midwives. Feminist writing has pointed out how women are rendered powerless in the sciences by merely fulfilling roles of clerical and nursing staff (Kittay, 1983, p.114; Stanworth, 1987, p.13; Fischer, 1996, p.419).

Warner and Mulvey-Roberts respectively explain that in the Bluebeard fairy tale the wife's disobedience of the husband's authority or "female disobedience" is a significant trope (Warner, 1994, p.246; Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p.98). Female disobedience of the Bluebeard fairy tale is associated with madness in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. We hear Sarah's heavy breathing in the background. Sarah's direct unflinching gaze, laboured breathing, and dishevelled hair falling on the face are signs of not having enough mental and physical control to look after one's upkeep, and most significantly of anger-related depression. The new exercise routine then also comes across as a method of coping with the anxiety about the future. Sarah's wild animal-like snarl, violent lashing out and disobedient behaviour are merely hysterical responses to ill-fate. Not only does the male doctor exercise "a ruthless male control over the marital home" like in the female gothic cycle of Hanson's discussion, but also "attempt[s] to discredit the heroine's sanity" (Hanson, 2007, p.72). Using the novel *Jane Eyre* as a framework, the incarcerated action heroine Sarah can be usefully coupled to the figure madwoman in the attic of Gilbert and Gubar discussion, which refers to Rochester's wife Bertha. This scenario calls for addressing the events that led to Sarah's specific plight.

**The Bluebeard-Husband's Atrocities as Gaslighting, Trauma, and Mental Instability**

The discourses surrounding *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* also accentuate the female protagonist's implied madness, citing Hamilton's desire to make the character "crazy" (*Terminator 2: Judgment Day* DVD Digitally Remastered Special Edition Director's Cut; Lentz, 2001, p.13). What emerges via these discourses is the emphasis on madness concerning Sarah's character in the film. Director Cameron describes Sarah's disposition as follows:

> She's messed up emotionally, a tough person to understand, and very hard to like. Yet she evokes sympathy because she's carrying the weight of the world on her shoulders. So she's a complex, tragic character (Jones, 1991, p.17).

While the hysterical behaviour seems from this perspective a discourse that he wanted to delve into as a psychological response of the character, it is most interesting to consider the reaction of scholarly discourse to this effect. After all, the mother of the future is incarcerated and initially presented as deranged. As noted earlier, scholars have cited the significance of Sarah's transformation; however, less attention has been paid to the significance of her relocation to the psychiatric hospital. Almost none of the scholars are able to put the heroine's move to a mental asylum into a contextual framework that can provide an explanation for her new disposition. By contrast, my reading of the asylum and madness give a more critical account rather than understanding female madness as merely a narrative device.

The heroine's disruptive madness and disobedience are also central to other corpus films. In some corpus films, the madness is implied, whereas in others the madness and violence are more explicit. I will now briefly reflect upon these scenarios of implied madness in the corpus films. In *Gloria*, the brief conversation that Gloria has with Uncle Joe (Michael Proscia) on the bus begins and ends with him saying to Gloria, "You got to be out of your mind!" and another a slight variation of the same statement. The extra-textual reference that Rowlands brings into *Gloria* and the idea of madness under discussion is clear because of her lead in *A Woman Under the Influence* (John Cassavetes, 1974). In the remake of *Gloria* (Sidney Lumet, 1999), the reference to madness is much more explicit as Gloria (Sharon Stone) says: "Now I have lost it twice how about that!"

Similarly, in *Aliens*, as part of the enquiry the representatives of Weyland and Yutani, mostly referred to as the company conclude that Ripley made a misinformed judgement by setting the freighter on self-destruct. She is stripped off her practising licence and is referred for psychiatric evaluation for six months. David Lubin explains that Ripley and Sarah, alongside *Titanic's* (James Cameron, 1997) Rose Dewitt Bukater (Kate Winslet), are axe-wielding warriors. For Lubin, the role of the axe-wielder is

associated with the American male. He associates the act of axe-wielding by women as a "breakdown of natural and social order" (Lubin, 1999, p.85). He explains:

> Ripley in *Aliens* and Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2* are women warriors portrayed, not as demented for their desire and ability to wield an axe (or its science-fiction, heavy-metal equivalent), but actually heroic (Lubin, 1999, p.85).

It is this stereotypical association between female wielding of assertion and power, and madness that Lubin both makes and undermines that is the subject matter for this chapter. In addition, the image of the axe-wielding woman brings associations of horror film a generic association also explored in this thesis.

In *The Long Kiss Goodnight* in an attempt to check if Henessey's office phone is tapped, Samantha asks him to make a call to his office from a public phone booth. The message he leaves for his partner Trin (Melina Kanakaredes) is: "The lady's whacked [referring to Samantha], Trin. She's lost it!" Although Catherine in *The Cell* is not incarcerated like Sarah, she works in a neurological institute as a child psychologist for the schizophrenic Edward. In this way, connections between female action/agency and the scene of madness and violence are drawn. The coincidental location shooting in a neurological institute only supports the discussion of madness and its implications in this chapter (*The Cell* DVD Features). A side-effect of the emotionally intensive nature of her work is that Catherine gets disturbing nightmares that keep her awake at night and cause fatigue during the day, further linking to the significant feature of delusion that also appear in a number of films explored in this study. In *Panic Room*, the half-conscious Sarah says to Burnham: "Dad's rich, mum's just mad!" Sarah's comments thus link Meg the action heroine to madness.

Captain Rich (Sean Bean) the Captain of the aircraft that Kyle and her daughter Julia have boarded in *Flightplan*, explains to Kyle: "I am responsible for the safety of every passenger on this plane, including the delusional ones." The discourse surrounding the film also underlines the madness of the discussion. *Flightplan* makes sense in relation to traditions of representation that frame questioning or disruptive women in terms of hysteria. The thematic associations drawn on Foster acquire a further nuance when linked to motherhood. McCormick writes of *Flightplan* that: "In casting Pratt as a

mother rather than as a father [referring to how Kyle's character was originally written for a man], the film puts into play the familiar figure of the madwoman" (McCormick, 2010, p.146). Reilly further goes on to elaborate that this choice of portraying a mother as possibly mentally unstable and not a reliable narrator is "clearly gendered" (McCormick, 2010, p.144).

This sexist portrayal of an active mother in film parallels a question raised by feminist sociologist Ann Oakley. Oakley enquires of the relationship between women's role as mothers and its marginalisation in the drive towards reproductive technologies. The question she asks is: "Do mothers have minds?" (Oakley, 1987, pp.38-40). This chapter develops further the madwoman in relation to the action heroine. In an interview on *Maleficent*, Jolie has described her character as slightly insane (Hollywoodstreams, 2014). Maleficent's character embodies the mad woman via her positioning as witch, a face of the monstrous-feminine discussed in Chapter 1. In addressing the representation of the action heroine in recent films, Purse has argued that "explanatory devices usually characterised the heroine as in some way less rational; for example, under the sway of an instinctive, irrepressible maternal drive, or the hysteria of a mentally strained mind" (Purse, 2011, p.77). While far from exhaustive, this brief overview provides a starting point to probe into the recurrence of madness in female action films, its possible significance for feminist debate and its function as a form of patriarchal scapegoating. I ask then, what is the place of female madness in the Hollywood action heroine films? The arguments explore whether these representations merely undermine the tough female action heroine, or if they represent potential sites of transgressions and to what effect.

Catherine Clinch provides a critical insight into the action heroines' disorderly behaviour and emotional response in 1990s action films, identifying the "psycho-babe syndrome":

> Here, the woman is displayed as the most ruthless of all villains (*Passenger 57*, *True Lies*, *Golden Eye*). Yet, the confident male hero does not perceive her to be a real threat. She is merely a sexual challenge to him – a challenge that he will surely conquer in the last reel (Clinch, 1995, p.5).

Clinch further explains that this syndrome is represented in the utmost form in *La Femme Nikita* (Luc Besson, 1990) and the American remake *Point of No Return* (John Badham, 1993) (Clinch, 1995, p.5). Clinch's analysis thus points out the role of madness and its place as legitimatising the representation of active women in the action genre. Her analysis shows that the female protagonist's divergence from femininity, heterosexuality and marriage in these genre films is associated with masculine activity, aggressive sexuality, outlaw criminality, and a disdain for the synonymic American, Christian, and heterosexual traditional ideologies. The heroines of the thesis' corpus played by prominent female stars are far from "psycho-babes" of Clinch's discussion. Yet Clinch's observations provide a way into the representation of female madness in action heroine films.

There are further dimensions to Sarah's mental state in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* than have thus far been explored in scholarship. Most significantly, she is unscrupulously and consciously abused through gaslighting by the patriarchal institutions in the films. Gaslighting is defined by Theo L. Dorpat (1996) in the context of the written, onstage and cinematic tradition. Because of the significance of the term, I will cite the definition at length:

> The concept of gaslighting was derived first from Hamilton's (1939) play *Angel Street* and later from the 1944 movie *Gaslight* starring Charles Boyer and Ingrid Bergman. In both the play and the movie, the victim's husband manipulated the gaslight in a way that made his wife's complaint about it seem as if she were going insane. The husband's aim was to have her committed in a mental hospital so that he could gain her property for himself. Several British authors employ the term *gaslighting* or *gas light phenomenon* to describe those situations in which one individual attempts to make others feel that a second individual is insane so that the latter will be taken to a mental hospital (Dorpat, 1996, pp.31-2).

The definition of gaslighting taps into the conventions of the 1940s noirish woman's films popularly recognised by canonical criticism as "paranoid woman's films" (Doane, 1987), "gaslight genre" (Tatar, 2004, p.94) and the "female gothic cycle" (Hanson, 2007). Short reminds us that the heroine's sanity being questioned is a trope of the Gothic melodrama (Short, 2015, p.105). In such films, space plays an important role in

establishing the experiential subjectivity of the central heroine, who is presented as confined and restricted in the marital home. In the context of the action heroine, the central figure is gaslighted within genre-crossing spaces that can be thought of as equivalent to castles, attics or bloody chambers. These include outer space (*Alien, Aliens*), a river with few escape routes (*The River Wild*), an American suburban home (*The Long Kiss Goodnight*), a deranged serial killer's mind or the closed cell that he has created (*The Cell*), a panic room (*Panic Room*), or indoor spaces, where bloody encounters result in death or lost limbs (*Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2*), the "gilded cage" of Bregna which is walled from nature (*Æon Flux*), a top floor apartment on a secluded island or a mansion of the magnitude of Thornfield (*Elektra*), or an airplane (*Flightplan*).

The action heroine's gaslighting in the films is associated to the figure of Bluebeard. In light of this theorisation, what is made to look like the action heroine's madness in several corpus films is the Bluebeard's attempt at convincing others in the heroine's and his vicinity that the heroine is mentally imbalanced, delusional and hence not in control of herself. The collective disapproval and rejection exploit the heroine's vulnerability, especially in light of the trauma that she has been through, a theme to which I return to below. Essentially, the Bluebeard and his henchmen gaslight the heroine and undermine her credibility to conceal their shady dealings. The subject of domestic abuse and the transformation of the gothic heroine into the action heroine has been explored by Diane L. Shoos (2017) in relation to the neo-gothic *Enough* (Michael Apted, 2002). Sarah in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* is locked away as Cyberdyne Systems Corporation discredit her version of events. She doesn't own any wealth that husband figures, including Dr Silberman and Dyson, might want access to. Yet a different kind of wealth is at work in attracting the attention of the Bluebeard figure. They lust to obtain it in order to become an envious global power to be reckoned with. Cyberdyne Systems which is not very dissimilar to the company in the *Alien* saga, achieve this by hushing the existence of the spare parts because of the advanced nature of the terminator technology. This power is channelled for corporate, scientific, and capitalistic greed, a theme of gothic fiction discussed by Punter and Byron (Punter and Byron, 2004, pp.20-5, pp.273-7).

The only witness of the events as they took place is Sarah, a mere waitress, who is gaslighted, cast off as a psychotic criminal, an irresponsible lone mother, and is labelled unfit to be a civilised American citizen by its founding ideologies. The secretly hidden spare parts are the only evidence that Sarah is not insane. Her victimisation as coded in the film is a masculine conspiracy noting the gender and professional imbalance not only in the psychiatric ward but also in the employees of the faceless Cyberdyne. The hierarchical structure of *The Terminator* films comes out as predominantly masculine and patriarchal. Power then is usurped, abused, controlled and expended by male characters in *The Terminator* films.

*Terminator 2: Judgment Day* is an "archetypal narrative of female disobedience" like the Bluebeard fairy tale, the tale of Pandora's Box and the Biblical story of Adam and Eve (Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p.98; Warner, 1994, p.246). Wells cites Mark Jancovich who has argued that "'rather than encouraging female passivity, obedience, and ignorance, many Gothic novels justified activity, disobedience, and the pursuit of knowledge on the part of their female characters'" (Wells, 2000, p.39). Scholars like Jeffords (1993, p.249) and Tellote (1992, p.31) have identified that through the course of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day,* Sarah becomes aligned to the terminator. That is, she hardens up in order to face-off with the abusers almost single-handedly, thereby making her disobedience apparent like the gothic heroine.

The patriarchy in crisis argument of Chapters 1 and 2 can be evidenced not merely in the representations of black devil male figures that populate these films, but also in the absence of positive male characters. This is evident in Sarah's much-quoted voice-over monologue with point-of-view shots from *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* that offers an insight into Sarah's psychology on men, heterosexuality, marriage, and fatherhood. In the film, it functions as a critique of masculinity. Sarah as a single American woman offers a critique of marriage allowing us relate her personal experiences to a significant critical debate. This is led by historian Christopher Lasch as cited by Heung (1983, p.85) and poet Robert Bly as cited by Bruzzi (2005, p.140) in the 1990s that "there is not enough father". Her monologue thus provides one possible reason for the disintegration of the American nuclear family and the transformation of the eternal feminine into an "axe-wielder" of Lubin's discussion (Lubin, 1999, p.85). Tasker argues that the male

action hero is not in control of adult sexuality, that is, his on-screen persona is marked by an absence of fulfilling heterosexual relationships (Tasker, 1993, p.138). Tasker's analysis resonates with Sarah's narrative trajectory as she does not have a partner. This is also true for most if not all action heroines in the corpus films.

Within this reading, Sarah's story is told through several generic positions, that of a victim in the female gothic narrative and as a hero in the action film. The ideas of gendered genres have been engaged with in different contexts by Tasker (1993), Fischer (1996, pp.6-8), Tasker (1998) and Grant (2007). Both these genres at first glance are gendered, but yet time and again these gender categories are easily defied. *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* is a female action picture, which I am reading partly within the tradition of the gaslight melodrama. However, this generic connection is also foregone easily as the narrative of the film develops. By reading through the gaslight tradition the action heroine is positioned in a masochistic role and within the discourse of marital/domestic abuse, lest her fetishized action body diverts our attention. But yet she is not merely a victim, as her narrative trajectory importantly involves an active transformation. She metamorphoses from victim to action heroine which leads to closure, in a cinematic narrative packed with tyrannical, absent, and ineffective masculinities. Although established within the female gothic tradition, the action heroine is simultaneously coded as both a feminist and postfeminist hero. Like Lisa Coulthard argues for Beatrix in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2*, the action heroines of the corpus films actively seek revenge for victimisation sometimes beyond the purview of law in a fantasy setting (Coulthard, 2007, p.164). Sarah thus usurps the masculine function in building up her body and learning to use weapons of death, just as the Bluebeard masculinity is feminised through his alignment with children as explored in Chapter 2. Within the framework of this study, this gender role reversal signifies that the gothic mode is in full operation in the narratives. The displacement of male and female roles has significant implications on the representation of gender in the corpus films.

Similarly, in *Aliens*, once Ripley is awoken from hypersleep, she must confront the company's representatives about the events that took place on the Nostromo. Their assessment is seemingly straightforward: Ripley's "escape-pod" did not have any signs of the alien of her description (Hermann, 1997, p.44). She is personally held accountable

for setting the Nostromo on self-destruct for reasons unknown. Their analysis is further supported by referring to colonists, who have been living in LV-426 for 20 years. Thus, Ripley in the film is gaslighted by the company and its representatives. This changes not long after the enquiry when the company loses contact with them. Later Ripley and Newt are trapped by Burke so that they can be secretly impregnated by the alien, and their bodies can be returned to earth thus evading the quarantine law. Ripley and Newt escape the death trap because the Marines rescue them in the nick of time. Burke denies having a stake in the episode and labels Ripley's version of events as "paranoid delusion." Ripley in *Aliens* is part of a military team rather than a marital home. Hence, Burke is unsuccessful at gaslighting Ripley because she receives unflinching support from her comrades, even though both Ripley and Newt are victimised. The aliens' existence and the company's vested interest despite being able to discern the creatures' lethal nature is first hushed, and then attempts are made by the company's representatives to smuggle the creatures to earth at the cost of human casualties. Cruel fate always makes Ripley the last one surviving, who stands in the way of this illegal trafficking, thereby obstructing the danger that the species poses to life on earth.

In Ripley's experiences in the quadrilogy, even when this thesis only examines the first two films, her journey is not dissimilar to that of Jane Eyre in Brontë's novel. Botting understands Ripley as a "science fiction Gothic heroine" (Botting, 1996, p.165). The analysis presented by Birch in Bragg's radio broadcast is insightful to this end. She explains that as a young woman Jane Eyre is preyed upon by the male characters in the novel. She further points out that Jane moves from place to place in the novel. In this persecution and search for happiness and stability in her life, Birch reads a reference to John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* an important novel from Brontë's childhood. The trial and tribulations that Jane encounters for Birch are resonant of Bunyan's novel (Bragg, 2015).

Birch's analysis points out the test that Jane's character goes through in the novel. We can apply this to a very different generic context. In a manner not very different to the experiences of Jane, Ripley's journey as a single woman in a futuristic, technological, conglomerate, and advanced capitalistic society on earth at first shows some inklings of being an egalitarian world. But closer examination shows that Ripley as the action

heroine is cast in a mould not very dissimilar to the Victorian governess Jane. Ripley shares with Jane her testing experiences and her struggle for her right as a woman, as she battles the dreadful archaic creature and stands in the way of man's rape of nature through science.

Similarly, this gothic narrative of gaslighting takes a special force in action thriller *Flightplan*. Recently widowed Kyle is gaslighted by Carson, the in-flight attendant Stephanie (Kate Beahan), and the mortuary director in Berlin. Despite this, Kyle continuously persists and verbalises her version of events through intelligent, assertive speech, a point of discussion that will be taken up later in this chapter. The basis of her psychological manipulation is that her husband David Pratt (John Benjamin Hickey) took their daughter Julia down with him from the roof of their residence in Berlin. It is hence concluded that she never carried her daughter on board the airplane headed to New York. Carson and others involved attempt to reveal the search for this "imaginary child" as a sign of a "disturbed" mind further linked to murder, terrorist activity, and extortion. McCormick quite simply describes Kyle as "a cog in a terrorist plot" (McCormick, 2010, p.145). Hanson explains in her analysis of *Gaslight*: "Initially, Paula seems to be under his spell as she begins to search anxiously for the knife, as she has for numerous 'lost' objects in the house which Gregory has hidden to stimulate her loss of sanity" (Hanson, 2007, p.126). By the same token, Kyle in *Flightplan* is determined to find the kidnapped child, whom she pre-empts is part of the airplane being hijacked in the post-9/11 climate. The female action hero consciously refers to the terrorist attack in dialogue. Screenwriters Peter A. Dowling and Ray also refer to the September 2001 attacks which they state was the genesis of the film (*Flightplan* DVD Special Features). The lost objects in the mansion in *Gaslight* are replaced with the child in *Flightplan*. The child made unconscious is hidden by Carson in avionics, the bloody chamber of the film, or the "attic" as Kyle calls it. Her insistence and search as a mother separated from her child seeks negative reactions from other passengers on board, who without much thought discredit her sanity and the reason for rummaging the airplane at the cost of their peace and safety. Like Sarah in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, Kyle is handcuffed like a criminal to be taken to prison in *Flightplan*. Unsurprisingly then, when the passenger and crew have de-boarded the aircraft and the door closes behind Carson and Kyle, she hits him with the fire extinguisher. In this act, there is an indirect reference to her gaslighting and

the film *Gaslight*. The action heroine while being cast within the frame of domestic abuse breaks the mould by using the extinguisher to metaphorically extinguish the abusive manipulation of the gaslight.

Foster's *The Silence of the Lambs* star image (Rich, 1991) is that of a fierce young woman in the male world of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), who tracks down a notorious serial murderer and rescues a young maiden. This image is mobilised in *Panic Room* and *Flightplan* within a backlash, postfeminist and post-September 11 contexts via the figure of the "paranoid woman" of Doane's discussion (Doane, 1987). Browning cites Linda Ruth Williams, who has recognized that *Panic Room* "is in part a woman-in-peril movie." He further cites Fincher who has claimed that the film "is just about survival" (Browning, 2010, pp.44-5). For Wood, *Panic Room* is "what Hitchcock used to call a 'run for cover' movie" (Wood, 2003, p.336). According to Kitterman, the bombing of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre has a nuanced presence in *Panic Room* as the film shows an unexpected violent threat from the outside in a privileged home which is over sealed with a safe room (Kitterman, 2003, pp.241-2). He reads the missing twin towers in the Manhattan skyline where the film's opening titles are set, also briefly considered in Chapter 1, as the real panic room of the film (Kitterman, 2003, p.242).

In the wake of the historical events that the films were made in and their conscious alluding to these events, both Foster films engage with the idea of secured spaces, a high-end security room and an airplane as unsafe. Scenarios of paranoia and a "culture of distrust" (Hanson, 2007, p.43) that the corpus films share with the gothic mode and film noir are mobilised in the films made at a time when the United States, the nation with the "biggest ego" had a terrorist attack (Clemens, 1999, p.212). The terrorist attack in the background in which *Panic Room* is set functions like the shocking home invasion, the second traumatic encounter with Bluebeard and his gang that heals the depressed Meg. Similarly, the female protagonists of *Elektra* and *Panic Room* are not gaslighted but they use domestic gas as a non-penetrating feminine weapon to evade their enemies. Whether from the kitchen cooker or cylinder, the fire that burns the stove is ultimately used to ward off threatening "male invasion" (Kitterman, 2003, p.239).

Faludi's arguments on female madness in Hollywood films are similar to those I make here. She reads Hollywood's representation of neurotic and unhappy career-driven single women as a rejoinder to the collective backlash against the developments made by Anglo-American second-wave feminism. Before this representational backlash in American media, she writes that Hollywood produced a cycle of films showcasing its "brief infatuation with the feminist cause" (Faludi, 1992, p.152). The films that Faludi uses to make her point are *Diary of a Mad Housewife* (Frank Perry, 1970), *A Woman Under the Influence* mentioned earlier in this chapter, and *The Stepford Wives* (Bryan Forbes, 1975) (Faludi, 1992, pp.153-4). In these films, the domesticated and dedicated housewife is shown to be crazy. Faludi adds that the female protagonists in these films are "housewives driven batty by subordination, repression, drudgery and neglect." She further explains:

> the wives' pill-popping habits and nervous breakdowns are presented as not-so-unreasonable responses to their crippling domestic condition – madness as a sign of their underlying sanity. What the male characters label lunacy in these films usually turns out to be a form of feminist resistance (Faludi, 1992, p.154).

Faludi's journalism thus accords female madness in film to subjugation and even boredom within patriarchal marriage.

Similarly, the husband figures in the corpus films pose the action heroine as insane upon their realisation that she possesses the strength and intelligence to threaten, penetrate and expose his system. Their intention, like in some films of the 1940s female gothic cycle, is to have the heroine committed or an equivalent imprisonment that physically and psychologically limits and restrains the action heroine. In the corpus texts, madness is a condition inflicted upon the action heroine by patriarchy, when she disobeys and tries to question its depraved nature. As a patriarchal story, where the heroines are represented and written as victims of abuse, madness is mobilised as a position from which the active heroine speaks. Resisting patriarchy is a motif of the female gothic as identified by Helen Wheatley (2006, p.92), Hanson (2007, p.131, p.180) and Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith (2009, p.8). Like the gothic heroine, the action heroine thus actively resits patriarchy.

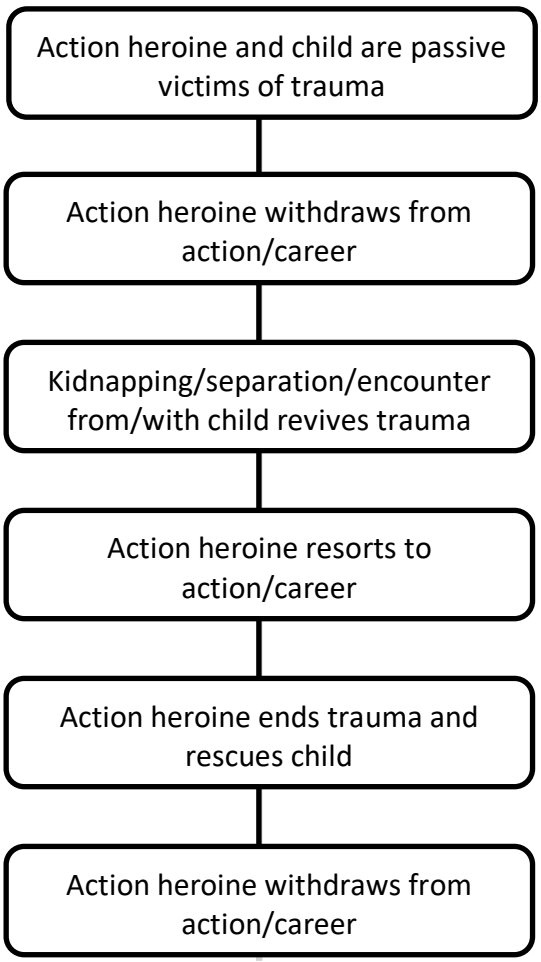


**Figure 6:** Diagram showing the typical chain of events in the action heroine corpus films that are studied in this thesis.

The discussion here will focus on the Bluebeard-husband's atrocities that take the form of action heroine's traumatic experiences. It is clear then that the action heroine is abused through gaslighting. But this gaslighting does not consist of the total of the action heroine's traumatic experiences. It is merely a small part of her post-traumatic stress disorder. The gothic obsession with a dark past (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.156; Hanson, 2007, p.35) is put to play in these films through its lurking presence in the action heroine's journey. In the corpus films, this gaslighting follows a traumatic episode in the action heroine's past. It is quite common that the action hero or action heroine onscreen is a vagrant, does not have a family, and is grieving the death of a loved one as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 (Tasker, 1993, pp.16-7). It is not unusual for the corpus films to begin with a death of a family member (*The Terminator*, *The River Wild*, *The Cell*, *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, *Volume 2*, *Æon Flux*, *Elektra*, *Flightplan*), an entire family (*Gloria, Aliens*, *The Terminator*, *The Cell, Kill Bill: Volume 1*, *Volume 2*, *Elektra*), or even the heroine herself either literally or metaphorically (*Gloria*, *Aliens*, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, *Volume 2*, *Æon Flux*, *Elektra*, *Flightplan*, *Maleficent*). The subject matter of the heroine's near-death experiences or death will come up again later in this chapter.

The action heroine has a traumatic encounter with Bluebeard, and what O'Brien has identified in another context as his "criminal band", which has an immense impact on her life and it makes her emotionally astray (O'Brien, 2013, p.156). This is an "inferred story event" in the storytime that has elapsed (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013, p.76). This is followed by a call from the action heroine's past, a resurgence of the unsuccessfully repressed trauma. The action heroine is left with no choice but to fight, which relieves the distress and involuntarily heals her in the process. The murders of a much-loved person, or people in her vicinity, if not an attempt at her own life, whether part of the first or second traumatic episode, act as a wakeup call for the action heroine to face the situation the husband figure inevitably thrusts on her. This chain of events is represented as a diagram in Figure 6 and discussed throughout the thesis. Of the three texts analysed for gaslighting above, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and *Aliens* are sequels, thereby giving the heroines a weighty backstory and associating the heroine's psychological injury with past trauma. In *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, Sarah shows signs of psychological pain suffered at the hands of the part human and part machine

terminator, the loss of Kyle who was injured and cold-bloodedly murdered in front of Sarah's eyes, and her gaslighting by the very institutions that form the pillars of American democracy and capitalism. Ripley in *Aliens* shows signs of being persecuted by an outer space gender-ambiguous monster, witnessing the shocking blood porn, and violent deaths of her crew members. She awakens to learn that she was free-floating in space for slightly more than half-a-century in a glass casket recalling Snow White's in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Hand, 1937) and Lucy in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. She is kissed back to life by a salvage team and an ever calculating company.[27] Although *Flightplan* is not a sequel, it is clear from the onset that Kyle is grieving the loss of her husband David (John Benjamin Hickey), which is later revealed as murder. David's fall which is never seen but only referred to echoes Bertha's leap from Thornfield Halls. The implication of the action heroine's backstory, subjectivity and agency will come up again later in this chapter.

The action heroine's narrative trajectory is tainted by traumatic experiences. She is forced to face the trauma of the past as it resurfaces again. This trajectory is not unique to Sarah in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. In *Gloria*, when a Puerto Rican family is murdered by the hit squad in the vicinity of Gloria's apartment, and their youngest is left in her hands, it is literally a call from Gloria's past to face Tanzini and his henchmen. It forces her out from her self-contained life and attic-like apartment, which contain bourgeois feminine belongings including a pet cat that create a sense of security and keep the past at bay. In his analysis, Carney has pointed out that "the decoration of Gloria's apartment expresses her state of emotional closure at the beginning of the film" (Carney, 2001, pp.450-1). Although Gloria's past is an "inferred story event", she barks out in a moment of anger and confusion that she can't turn the orphan to the police because she has been to gaol (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013, p.76). That minute of diegetic time when both Rowlands and the boy are on the street of New York discussing what options lie ahead of them is revealing, as Gloria's past intertwines with the boy's future. It is perhaps not an extraordinary leap of faith to conclude that her criminalisation and imprisonment were because of her alliance with the mob. In case if this came across as an inference, the remake of *Gloria* begins with the sex-symbol

[27] Hermann indeed refers to Ripley as Snow White who leads the seven men in *Aliens* (Hermann, 1997, p.42).

Hollywood star Sharon Stone looking out of her cell window in prison dungarees on her last day in. What all these heroines have in common is that they have been let down by the men in their lives either through absence, death, or unfaithfulness, which is not merely sexual.

Turning to *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, the trauma suffered at the hands of Timothy takes the form of focal retrograde amnesia. In this respect, Samantha is not very far from the amnesiac female artist Grace (Emma Thompson) of the "neo-noir/neo-gothic hybrid" *Dead Again* of Hanson's discussion (Hanson, 2007, p.136). Both *Dead Again* and *The Long Kiss Goodnight* bring together the tropes of the film noir and the female gothic because as discussed in Chapter 1, both a man and a woman are being investigated in the narratives of the films (Hanson, 2007, p.42; Read, 2000, p.221). Gilbert and Gubar point out in their feminist reading that mental illnesses like amnesia have a function in the works of female novelists and poets in eighteenth-and nineteenth-century Victorian England and North America. Because of the great significance of their analysis, I am quoting this at length:

> Finally, aphasia and amnesia – two illnesses which symbolically represent (and parody) the sort of intellectual incapacity patriarchal culture has traditionally required of women – appear and reappear in women's writings in frankly stated or disguised forms. "Foolish" women characters in Jane Austen's novels (Miss Bates in *Emma*, for instance) express Malapropish confusion about language, while Mary Shelley's monster has to learn language from scratch and Emily Dickinson herself childishly questions the meanings of the most basic English words: "Will there really be a 'Morning'?/Is there such a thing as 'Day'?" At the same time, many women writers manage to imply that the reason for such ignorance of language – as well as the reason for their deep sense of alienation and inescapable feeling of anomie – is that they have *forgotten* something. Deprived of the power that even their pens don't seem to confer, these women resemble Doris Lessing's heroines, who have to fight their internalization of patriarchal strictures for even a faint trace memory of what they might have become (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp.58-9).

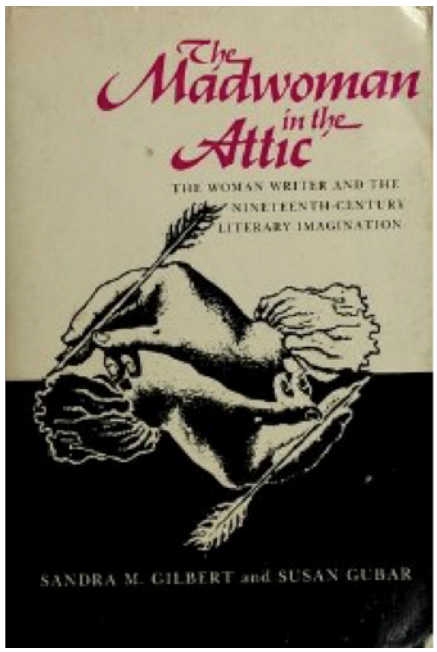


**Figure 7:** The cover image of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (2000).

**Figure 8:** Samantha Caine/Charlene Elizabeth Baltimore/Charly (Geena Davis) in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Renny Harlin, 1996). These stills emphasise the multiple identities of the protagonists, and writing as an important tool for the formation of her identity.

Gilbert and Gubar's analysis thereby point out how female illness is a symptom of patriarchal constraint.

In the view of this framework, *The Long Kiss Goodnight* taps into this tradition of novels and poetry written by women. This is further illustrated in Figures 7 and 8. One of Gilbert and Gubar's key arguments is that the women writers took the pen to counterpose the representations of women in Western literature written by men. They reveal that the work of female writers was "palimpsestic" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.73; Watson, 2007, p.121). Although none of the action heroines of the corpus are writers, Samantha is established within this writing tradition. This is established very briefly, first in the title sequence and then further on in the film. Samantha appropriates the pen for the formation of her subjective identity which is corroded by a traumatic encounter in the film. The writing practice is further evoked by the reference to "chapter" the operation that Charlene is employed for. The shots of the title sequence set the scene for the problem of dual identities in the film. Most interestingly they have a kinship with the cover drawing of the monograph and central themes of Gilbert and Gubar's feminist literary criticism. The violent murder attempt on Charlene when she was unconscious followed by a sudden fall and displacement called for the mind to defend itself from pain through post-traumatic amnesia. Charlene wakes up as Samantha, or rather as we are informed confusion causes her to buy her own cover. She emerges as a Victorian angel in the house of Gilbert and Gubar's feminist analysis who "has no story of her own" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1977, p.22). She thereby indulges like a "retreated" "domestic goddess", of Negra (2009, p.5) and Nigella Lawson's (1998) discussions respectively, in what Hanson has identified as "'pleasures' of domesticity and femininity" (Hanson, 2007, p.186).[28]

A close encounter with the titular Bluebeard-husband and memory loss renders the kick-ass CIA agent into a "divided soul" like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931) and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1941) (Wells, 2000, p.40). The film then builds on discourses both of feminism and postfeminism and throws the action heroine

[28] A clear definition of the nature and attitudes expected of Victorian women (from the period of 1837 and 1901) and how this code of conduct was channelled in early American film has been provided by Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin (2009, p.218).

in this fantasy world of two dissimilar if not exactly opposing feminine identities. The film represents how Samantha's mind has repressed this trauma and in doing so has even forgotten her identity. So painful are memories of Samantha's past that they are buried in the unreachable depths of her memory, thereby safely assuring that they are long forgotten. Following the opening title that lays the seed of Samantha's double identities, she says in her voice-over monologue juxtaposed with a montage of her new life: "The woman I was, the one I used to be, she's gone. I've kissed her goodnight". If there is any doubt that Samantha does not want to learn about her past, the amnesia that she suffers from leaves no question that she wants to leave the trauma of her past behind. Her amnesia works in favour of her enemies. While *The Long Kiss Goodnight* spells out amnesia as a mental illness that affects the action heroine's disposition, there are other texts in the corpus selection that play with the gothic metaphor of amnesia more subtly.

The spectator is allowed access to Elektra's psychology in *Elektra* as the camera makes us privy to what goes on in her mind, that is, how certain memories and thoughts motivate her actions. We see a young Elektra walk into a magnificent bedroom to discover her deceased mother lying peacefully in bed. She sees a man/creature on hind legs in the bedroom and catches a few glimpses of him/it accompanied with swooshing sounds to suggest rapid unnatural movement before the killer escapes. On the two occasions that we are made part of the nightmare, it becomes clear that Elektra is unable to recall the face of the man she saw almost twenty years ago. Instead, she imagines the man as the devil accentuated with ram horns. Reconstructing her mother's assailant as the devil signifies the extent to which this episode traumatised her as a child. For Elektra's inner child, her mother's killer is the devil literally, who deprived her of her mother's love and destroyed her childhood. Kirigi is the representation of Satanic masculinity in the film, who has not only taken Abby's life away but is also the source of Elektra's childhood trauma. This childhood trauma makes it impossible for Elektra to live happily and at her fullest as an adult. Kirigi fits Pirie's description of the "sexy, charismatic, savage yet anglophile" bogeyman (Pirie, 2013, p.130). He is also the "primal anarchic" figure of Krzywinska's discussion is another context, who is a physical and psychological threat to the vulnerable children in *Elektra* (Krzywinska, 2000, p.35).

The visual references bring to mind the engraving of the devil's face on Bill's much-fetishized Hattori Hanzo sword in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2*. Mulvey-Roberts observes: "The Bluebeard husband is sometimes represented as God the father and the devil" (Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p.100). Warner also writes of the Bluebeard-husband being represented as the devil (Warner, 1994, p.244). While Elektra knows Kirigi almost from the beginning of the film, she is never able to place him as her mother's killer. The recollection of who this devil is does not happen in a dream turned into a violent nightmare that recurs in the film, but during a midnight confrontation with Kirigi at the Natchios ancestral manor house to secure Abby's future. Kirigi's face as the killer appears to her in a waking nightmare, more precisely a recollection. Kirigi, who through his supernatural powers can read minds, even teases her during the confrontation: "Now you will remember!" This teasing links to her amnesia in the film. Her midnight excursion that reveals a secret is not unlike the experiences of her counterparts in *Alien*, *The Terminator*, *Aliens*, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, *Panic Room*, *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, *Volume 2*, *Æon Flux*, and *Flightplan*. These excursions have a long drawn history as Robert Miles explains:

> Her heroines [referring to Ann Radcliffe's novels] voluntarily expose themselves to situations, which in nature a lonely female would certainly have avoided. They are too apt to choose the midnight hour for investigating the mysteries of a deserted chamber or secret passage, and generally are only supplied with an expiring lamp, when about to read the most interesting documents. (115) (Miles, 2009, p.46).

Miles' analysis of the midnight excursions of the investigative gothic heroine allows a contextualisation of the adventures of the action heroine. The midnight excursion in Elektra's case brings back her memory of her mother's killer. It is the second encounter with the Bluebeard villain presented as a midnight adventure that heals Elektra from the psychological pain caused by traumatic childhood events that led to memory loss.

Coded in a similar territory of generic tropes as her recollections of the past is the action heroine's ability to know the future or to be able to look into it. It is most often overlooked that memories, recollections and visions are at the heart of these films. This has much to do with how Hollywood films mobilise the gothic mode in action thriller narratives. It is not merely Sarah who knows the time that is to be. Other corpus

**Figure 9:** The imagery of fire in the poster image of the stage adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) at the National Theatre London in collaboration with Bristol Old Vic in 2015.

**Figure 10:** The midnight fire reflects on Gail Hartman (Meryl Streep) in *The River Wild* (Curtis Hanson, 1994) after she is misinformed about her husband's murder.

heroines also have access to what Mulvey-Roberts has recognised concerning Bluebeard's wives as "forbidden knowledge" (Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p.102). In *Aliens*, Ripley's familiarity with the alien beasts gives her an edge over the soldiers. It allows her to guide their vision in the living and breathing gothic space. In *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, Samantha's re-emergence is a threat to her former nemeses because she has known about Operation Honeymoon. This involves a terrorist attack on American soil with a pre-empted body count of 4000 American civilians so that the CIA can extort money from Congress. Samantha has known of the operation before the amnesia set in and during the eight years. It is the fact that she is alive and not dead and could easily compromise the operation that makes the terrorists come after her.

*Panic Room* does not employ the supernatural as it looks inside a separated wealthy family's human condition. When the mother-and-daughter attend the slightly rushed viewing of the five million dollars property, the viewing agent is impressed that Meg alone has been able to spot the "secret chamber", thereby giving proof of her intelligence and superior ability to see (Kitterman, 2003, p.239). The upper-class family's recently purchased high-end asset is protected by Closed Circuit Televisions (CCTV). This allows both the captive wife Meg and Sarah in the panic room to see what the three thieves are scheming, thereby giving them advanced vision yet again. In the second half of the film, the two remaining thugs who manage to enter the panic room are denied this special view. Meg "blinds" them "by breaking the cameras", thereby claiming the vision only for herself (Browning, 2010, p.46). Æon, because of her superior cognitive skills, and Elektra, through her training in martial art Kimagure can look into the near future. These skills are not a gift to them but rather like athletic abilities, which they train with discipline to develop. Because of her advanced knowledge of aircraft design, Kyle in *Flightplan* is the only passenger, who can pre-figure that her daughter is hidden in avionics. She also pursues the possibility of the airplane being hijacked and her daughter being held as a hostage with assistance from the crew. Finally, putting her plan into action, she is intelligently able to manoeuvre her way around the aircraft in search of her daughter. As revenge against Carson for gaslighting her, she manipulates the aircraft's power, thereby causing panic among the passengers and drawing attention away from herself. Clearly, the action heroines, whether or not the supernatural

element is deployed in the films, have a vision of the future that allows them to overcome to a certain extent their "scheming husband's" atrocities (Pirie, 2013, p.126).

The psychological illness of aphasia part of Gilbert and Gubar's analysis has a smaller and less pronounced place in the corpus. In the opening monologue of *Æon Flux*, the rebel action heroine Æon explains how the citizens of Bregna are provided for by the government only if they "stay quiet" and turn a blind eye to the actual state of affairs in the man-made paradise. This associates Æon's character with the illness of aphasia under discussion. Bregna specifically is a male-made paradise as misogynistic scientist practices and ethics are deployed forcefully to control and regulate the female womb. In *The River Wild,* Gail communicates with Roarke in American Sign Language as though she has aphasia and is unable to speak. She does this so that the intruders are unable to fathom the communication between her and her son. She is proficient in sign language because she teaches history at a school for the deaf and that is how the family communicates with her deaf father. She is a teacher like Jane Eyre and Samantha in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*.

Figure 9 shows the poster image of the stage adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) at the National Theatre London in collaboration with Bristol Old Vic in 2015. True to Jane Eyre's character as written in the novel, the fire image on the stage actress' chest through to her midriff is symbolic of the disposition of the character. It has been commented upon by O'Brien that Jane has "a burning sense of justice and injustice" (Bragg, 2015). Gail in *The River Wild* is a rower, history teacher, wife, and mother are represented in the tradition of the novel *Jane Eyre*. Figure 10 is a screenshot from her midnight confrontation with Wade at the riverside, who after having supposedly shot her husband insinuates rape and the murder of her son. The campfire reflects on Gail's face and chest, thereby assigning her Jane's inner fiery determination. Her outer calmness that conceals her anger is propped with the campfire as part of the mise-en-scène. Similarly, Elektra in *Elektra* has been brought back to life again and is noticeably socially withdrawn. She is not talkative but her supressed anger and hurt make her unwilling to speak. It even takes her a while to give out her name to the Millers, who are befriending her. It seems as though her reluctance to speak does not allow her to release

her pain through speech. She holds this pain inside as if she is unable to speak, as though she has aphasia.

This section will next investigate the idea of Bluebeard-husband's atrocities taking the form of the action heroine's mental instability. Other than their gaslighting, the action heroine shares with the unsuspecting heroines of the 1940s female gothic cycle the terrain of mental instability. Gloria in *Gloria* is not mentally ill, but the anger that she holds inside manifests after being forcefully pushed out from her somewhat self-imposed incarceration is most likely depression-related. Perhaps not surprisingly then, she is fearless when shooting her ex-lover's posse in broad daylight on the streets of New York, when they try to hold a boy who is bereft of his family against his will. Gloria's anger does have a psychological charge rooted in her past but it is also a liberating cathartic experience. Williams argues that: "The quintessentially feminine emotion of pathos was viewed as key agent of women's oppression by feminists in the early and mid-eighties. Anger was viewed by feminism as a liberating emotion, pathos as enslaving" (Williams, 1998, p.46). Thus the anger that guides Gloria and the cause it is put use to hail her as what Charity has aptly called a "post-menopausal feminist icon, symbolically castrating the men who come after her" (Charity, 2001, p.176).

The case of Ripley in *Aliens* is more complicated. Doherty has read *Aliens* as a "tale of posttraumatic stress" because of its stylistic and generic lineage "to the Vietnam and combat film, the troubled descendent of the World War II prototypes" (Doherty, 1996, p.192). Greenberg M.D., a clinical professor of psychiatry explains that post-traumatic stress rehearses in Ripley's "waking and sleeping life" (Greenberg, 1988, p.167, p.170). The Ripley that we see in *Aliens* is somewhat unlike the Ripley that we have known from *Alien,* who is assertive, confident and even ball-breaking. This Ripley is "burned-out" as Doherty describes her, has lost all her colleagues, her version of events dismissed as unimportant, her testimony is given no legal bearing, and she is seen doing a blue-collar job (Doherty, 1996, p.185). Freeland has even read Ripley's character as "emotionally vulnerable" (Freeland, 2000, p.678). Her gaslighting is closely associated with post-traumatic stress. The feminist Hollywood action heroine is here at her lowest. To make things worse, Ripley has recurring violent nightmares that keep her awake at night, affect her well-being, and make her depressed, unengaged, and deeply angry.

Greenberg points out that Ripley's dream begins with a "panic attack", which when interpreted psychoanalytically is the "day's residue" of the traumatic experience (Greenberg, 1988, p.171). She has also taken up smoking to cope with the stresses of life.

Ripley agrees to join the platoon as an expert advisor only because the post-traumatic stress disorder consumes her. She calls Burke in the middle of the night after another dream of the alien chest-burster and hangs up the video call straight after, thereby refusing to communicate with him on any matter other than dispatching the extra-terrestrials. She has birthing nightmares like Alice (Lisa Wilcox) in *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child* (Stephen Hopkins, 1989). When she is summoned to brief the marines about her experience, the assertive speech and direct eye contact suddenly give way to a minor crisis. In her solitary narration of events, she comes across as a doomsayer but not as 'hysterical' as Sarah in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Her confidence seems to crumble in front of a troop that is geared with combat skills and weaponry, which at first sight, make them invincible. To make this worse, her version of events is cut by the marine's everyday banter and teasing, echoing the themes of gaslighting narratives explored here. The inexperienced Lieutenant Gorman (William Hope) further undercuts the narration of her story and reminds the marines that Ripley's report is also available on disc.

Ripley, like the Victorian angel in the house, is denied a story of her own or when she does try to tell it, it is dismissed or undermined, thereby relegating it to the margins of human memory (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.22). It seems apparent that Ripley agrees to join the marines not only in the hope of healing from the pain of the past but to defend herself against gaslighting, let others witness her story and give it some credence as an experience. By paving a way for her story, Ripley "resists" the "male order" of Creed's discussion in another context (Creed, 2007, p.487). Ripley's trauma then is not easily cured as unsympathetic displays from people offer no condolence. One person who does genuinely console Ripley is her love interest Hicks. He checks on her before they enter the underground facility, where they assume that the parasites could be stationed. She becomes angry with Bishop (Lance Henriksen) for no apparent reason because of her distrust of androids based upon her bad experience with Ash. The second

chance to retell her story supported by eyewitnesses allows for the reformation of her identity, credibility and subjectivity.

Another example of Ripley's alien trauma concerns how she goes out of her way to find, protect, and rescue Newt, whereas others on the scene dismiss her as a little person and consider their involvement with her a waste of time. This leads to the unlikely coupling in these films of the "reluctant Madonna" and the "foisted" child, of Charity's discussion on *Gloria*, which will be examined by argument in Chapter 4 (Charity, 2001, p.176). There is another connection between Ripley and Newt than the often read surrogate mother-child bond. They have both survived these ghastly creatures in their own way, as has been observed in several writings on the films. From this reading, they are both survivors of, Bruzzi's discussion in another context, the "hegemonic father figure's" atrocities (Bruzzi, 2005, p.125). Brown compares Ripley's *Aliens* persona to Rambo. He compares the two films and their central characters in relation to authorship, iconography and their promotion. He further explains:

> Interestingly, where Rambo's stock promotional photo occasionally showed him carrying a bedraggled prisoner of war, Ripley's photo often showed her carrying the frightened little girl, Newt, who is central to the narrative of *Aliens* (Brown, 2011, p.27).

Both Ripley and Newt are victims of trauma, and like Rambo, Ripley is seen in publicity material carrying Newt. A similar comparison between Ripley and Rambo is also made by Doherty (1996, p.195). The action heroines are written as having prone and impressionable human minds unlike the fantasy of their impossible bodies, thereby giving these characters, largely influenced by mythical storytelling credible psychology.

Greenberg's employment of psychoanalysis as an approach for analysing the character of Ripley also allows him to draw parallels between trauma and amnesia. Thus he writes that: "Ripley's clinical condition is hallmarked not by her inability to remember but her powerlessness to forget" (Greenberg, 1988, p.167). Greenberg raises the point of an "amnesiac" quality to the script while *Alien* solely places blame on the scheming company, in Cameron's *Aliens* the "fear and loathing is… displaced upon the Alien itself" (Greenberg, 1988, pp.167-8). According to him this amnesiac quality in Ripley's trauma is further hinted at when she decides to trust Burke, a "corporate rat", where Ripley

should have known all along that the real culprit is the company (Greenberg, 1988, pp.167-8). Greenberg's astute analysis deciphers a sort of amnesia in Ripley's trauma, thereby aligning her to other corpus film heroines like Samantha in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* and Elektra in *Elektra*.

Sarah in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* is gaslighted as she bereaves the loss of Kyle and other family members like her mother, Ginger Ventura (Bess Motta) and Matt Buchanan (Rick Rossovich). In the wake of these traumatic events, the unwanted correction that she is subject to and the rejection she faces from society, especially her son evokes pathos. This is especially true as the "unrestricted narrative" allows audiences more knowledge about Sarah's plight than some of the characters in the film (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013, pp.87-90). Sarah is preoccupied with the future and because of this rejection she becomes at war with herself. Far from the mother of the future, she is immured by the "opaque husband", of Fischer's discussion of *Rosemary's Baby*, like Silberman, who as part of her rehabilitation deems it fit to separate a mother-and-son (Fischer, 1996, p.417). In an act of love and guilt, her son bravely comes to her rescue, thereby coincidentally enabling her escape. She however coldly and unsympathetically tells him off for risking his life.

As raised earlier in the chapter, there is a critical consensus on Sarah's mental instability in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. In discussing Sarah's transformation, it is also argued that she is aligned to the terminator both via her physique and in her emotional disposition by Telotte (1992, p.31) and Jeffords (1993, p.249). In her chapter Jeffords understands this transformation in the context of a role reversal, as Sarah's character is "repeated and inverted" (Jeffords, 1993, p.249). The role reversal that Jeffords reads is within the purview of the gothic mode, as engaged with earlier. It takes place not only in Sarah's physicality, her aggressive, and traditionally unfeminine pursuits but also in her emotions, as she withholds not only pain but also love, which allows Cameron to dub her as a terminator on an emotional level (*Terminator 2: Judgment Day* DVD Digitally Remastered Special Edition Director's Cut; *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* Broadcast Recording: Documentary on the Making of the Film). Such views are also expressed by Penley (1990, p.118), Telotte (1992, p.31), Jeffords (1993, p.249), French (1996, p.67), Naughton (1998, p.21), Sears (2003, p.107) and Brown (2011, pp.29-30).

Not only is Sarah unable to love her son which has been commented upon widely, but she is also unable to love herself.

Transformed into the terminator in her inability to love, the hard exterior suggests that the characteristics that distinguish her as a human being have quite literally been terminated. Sarah then unknowingly makes the mistake of over-focusing on her end goal, which is specifically constructed within the rubric of 'the personal is political,' discussed in Chapter 1, thereby physically and emotionally burning out in the process. She forgets that while meeting the goal is her duty, the journey is as important and holds several life lessons. John comments on her terminator-like goal-oriented behaviour, when he criticises her by saying that she has "no sense of humour."

The title sequence of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, where among other exterior spaces a children's playground is set on fire because of nuclear explosion, sets the scene for the recurring nightmare that disturbs Sarah in her sleep. The extended title sequence juxtaposes the blaze from the nuclear explosion and the remains of a traditional children's playground. The night filter sequence with the remains of rocking horses, a swing set, roundabout, and bicycle in a medium shot is played in slow motion, superimposed with the orange and yellow blaze of fire. As each frame dissolves into another accompanied with an emotionally intense soundtrack, it works to signify the extent to which the "malevolent aristocrat's", of Botting's discussion in another context, wickedness is a threat to all children in the film and not just include John (Botting, 1996, p.114). This juxtaposition staged carefully in each frame of the extended title sequence, allows the story to establish how the metal-armoured Bluebeard-husband figure will destroy the continuity of human race by posing a threat to children.

The secret motive behind what Botting characterises as the Bluebeard-husband's "unchristian" deeds, in another context, is to evade death and achieve immortality by transforming into a persecutory indestructible machine (Botting, 1996, p.178). This can be read as the desire to curb nature and her awesome cycle of life and death. In his desire to reign supreme, he seems to want to reproduce himself, ensure his continual perpetuation, and surpass death. His illicit and amoral enquiries resemble what the feminist writer Evelyn Fox Keller has called "from secrets of life to secrets of death" in

the context of feminist cynicism of technological developments that are rhetorically juxtaposed with the female capacity to reproduce (Keller, 1990). The terminator husband thereby can be understood as a Promethean figure. Sarah's nightmare thus represents a conflict between nature and technology. This conflict is at the heart of these films and gothic writing.

There are other signs of Sarah's depression than violent nightmares, such as her compulsive smoking. The way Sarah holds her cigarette is different to how the femme fatale, the gothic heroine's "inverse" (Hanson, 2007, pp.41-4) counterpart and "sinister twin" (Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p.106), who also has her roots in gothic literature, holds her cigarette. Whereas the cigarette empowers the "spider woman" of Janey Place's discussion with "unnatural phallic power" (Place, 1998, pp.53-4), Sarah's "chainsmoking" (Jeffords, 1993, p.252) makes her look like a neurotic using a substance to calm her nerves. It does not bestow her with any actual or symbolic power like the femme fatale of Place's discussion, but reaffirms a certain level of emotional instability. Fischer reminds us that within "Victorian mores" smoking in women was classified as "dangerously loose and 'masculine'" (Fischer, 1996, p.43). In finding a place for these Victorian mores within a contemporary science fiction action text, Sarah's smoking links to masculinity and gender non-conformity to gender ideology. Sarah's cigarette habit also parallels Gloria's in *Gloria*, Ripley's in *Aliens,* also discussed earlier in the chapter, Samantha's in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* and Catherine's in *The Cell*.

In *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, there are several other psychological implications than temporary memory loss as the impact of an unknown past becomes apparent in the course of the film. The signs of this impact are somewhat camouflaged in both representational style and by gender ideology but are none the less unmissable on scrutiny. As the personal drama unfolds amidst spectacular events, the suburban American school teacher emerges as the action heroine in disguise.

After the Hitchcockian title sequence of the film, which lays the seeds for the tension between two conflicting identities followed by the voice-over monologue discussed earlier, we are made part of an intact, picture-perfect domestic scene during the holiday season. There is not much dysfunctionality and repression in this somewhat

non-traditional bourgeois American nuclear family, which is one of its defining qualities. Samantha jokes about her amnesia with her daughter's friends and laughs about personal questions on the frequency of sexual intercourse between Hal (Tom Amandes) and herself. But if the overall atmosphere of Samantha's life is sexually liberated and unrepressed, the family photographs in the title sequence suggest an alternative identity. I would like to argue that these photographs are contemporary versions of gothic portraits. They are also reminiscent of the photographs in the title sequence of *In My Daughter's Name* (Jud Taylor, 1992), a film that Read uses to investigate the postfeminist figure of the "maternal avenger" (Read, 2000). According to Hanson (2007), whenever there are gothic portraits or contemporary equivalents, even if their presence seems to be out of lack of clear thinking or merely coincidental, there is something that is repressed. By the same logic, what is repressed will return (Wood, 1979; Wood, 1984).

The Christmas party turns unexpectedly sour as it tail ends with a car accident. It is suggested that the accident injures Samantha on the head, thereby allowing Charlene's memories to seep through. The accident takes place at midnight through collision with an animal, a stag. When the animal forces its way into Samantha's car by crashing through the windshield, something not human makes way into her life psychologically. Particularly significant is the representation of the dark figure and Samantha's flashbacks after injury while in a state of semi-consciousness, which blur between the car hit and the resurfacing of the "Other." The definition of the "Other" that is implied here is given by Wood (1984, pp.168-70), Tasker (1998, p.71), Creed (2005, p.202), de Beauvoir (2011) in other contexts. The Other in these definitions is someone or something that is an outsider in the hegemonic order. The visitor is represented as an Other which is conclusive from the film techniques that are deployed to represent her. The strobe lighting effect accompanied by eerie soundtrack consists of shots of the car hitting the stag, Samantha's eye, the stag again, lips parted with bloody teeth which are suggested as Charlene's, the car crash, and the ghost-like pale Charlene. The extreme close-ups signify intensity, claustrophobia, and forceful audience engagement.

Charlene's re-emergence in Samantha's life is marked by violent forceful entry and death. Samantha's alter-ego is constructed as animalistic evoking the "monstrous-

feminine" of Creed's discussion (Creed, 1993b). Gilbert and Gubar refer to the animal references that are evoked in the novel in relation to Bertha and the reference to her as an "it" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.570). Their discussion also focuses on how Jane and Bertha are connected to each other via these zoological metaphors, which earlier in the novel are used for Jane (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp.361-2). They argue, that Bertha is the secret repressed self of Jane (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.339, p.348, p.360). Indeed, Gilbert and Gubar (2000, p.360) and Punter and Byron (2004, p.280) have argued that Jane and Bertha function as doubles. Like the figure of Bertha, Samantha's footprint in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is portrayed within the realm of the gothic "woman from the past" (Hanson, 2007, p.108). She is painted as a "'the ghost of some old sin'" like Hyde (Botting, 1996, p.139), at least at first. In accounting for the developments in debates about second-wave feminist theory, Hollows cites Mary Daly. For Daly, true femininity is represented by "witches, nags and hags" (Hollows, 2000, p.14). Daly thus asks women "to free 'the Hag within'" (Hollows, 2000, p.15). Similarly, the hag of Daly's discussion is released by Samantha is the form of her alter-ego. Then she is reincarnated as Charlene, a spy like Modesty Blaise (Monica Vitti) in *Modesty Blaise* (Joseph Losey, 1966), in the upbeat transformational sequence. The extreme-close up of lips apart showing bloody teeth link Charlene to the figure of the vampire even though there are no fangs. The split-second shot of bloody teeth is deeply laden with twisted menace, rage, monstrosity, and insanity.

As this dark figure resurfaces into Samantha's world, violence, injury, death, and the "fragmentation", of Kehr's (1986, p.46) discussion in another context, of the white middle-class family ensues. In embodying the status of the Other, something that the docile mother is not, the two split personalities take on the status of "hypocritical" dualism, none too different from Wells' discussion of Jekyll and Hyde mentioned before (Wells, 2000, p.48). Samantha's personality and the struggle that is played out embodies the inconsistencies of the split-personalities of Jekyll and Hyde, two impossible opposites as one person, both in opposition of each other, encompasses the different aspects of femininity. Wells writes that the figure of Jekyll/Hyde: "plays out the tension between social identity, civilised codes of conduct, and the more primal and inchoate instincts of humanity" (Wells, 2000, p.41). A similar tension of personalities and its impact on Samantha is played out in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*. In the Other's resurfacing,

the two are one in Samantha, a fatal combination that conveniently preys on the domestic scene and unsuspecting family members. The domesticity of the suburban home becomes fraught with tension and unexpected emotion as this Other, previously merely content of hallucinations and nightmares threatens to take over the mother and the beautiful home. Violent and ungenteel displays make the guest's presence felt. Its symptomatic displays are like that of domestic violence and abuse.

The Other takes several turns to conjure the simple teacher. Amusingly enough the homemaker while chopping carrots gives way to someone, who can chop them with greater intensity. Having pricked her finger when chopping, she says to Hal: "I am gonna cut this carrot and you are gonna eat the blood soaked pieces and like it!" The chef's knife takes on the connotation of a lethal weapon, true to the gothic tradition that dwells on what lurks behind the white picket fence. When teaching Caitlin how to ice skate, Samantha transforms from a caring mother to a taskmaster, an over-achiever, and fearless assassin, who instructs her little princess to be as tough. In the process, she forgets to listen to her daughter's plea pointing to her fractured wrist. Injury, death, bloody cuts, and a broken wrist do not suggest much. An infuriated One-Eyed Jack (Joseph McKenna) escapes from the correction facility and breaks into Samantha's home to seek revenge. The gothic theme of home invasion is as explicit as in *Panic Room*, or has an implicit presence in the rest of the corpus films (Wheatley, 2006, p.160). He loses another eye when the Other, that is, the 'madwoman' in Samantha seriously mishandles a lemon meringue pie, thereby transforming her former and current assailant into blind Jack. Dancey argues that in this particular sequence Samantha's home transforms from a "domestic setting into a battle ground" (Dancey, 2009, p.83). This unexpected chain of events brings to mind the question that Jane asks of Rochester in the film *Jane Eyre*: "Mr Rochester who did all that violence?"

In his critique of the American nuclear family, Wood decrypts the failure of marriage as an institution, the promulgation of "neurosis" via the traditional family, the power and roles of men and women in the traditional division of labour, and addresses its psychopathological displays in the cinema. He ascertains that the nuclear family is a monstrous institution (Wood, 1979, p.7). Some of Wood's intellectual standpoints also ring true for the "family in action" heroine films, as the family in these films is a

dysfunctional family (Tasker, 2004). His idea of Victorian "tension, constraint and repression within the family" in *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944) are also true for *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Wood, 1979, p.10). He discusses little Tootie Smith's (Margaret O'Brien) obsession with morbid diseases and death, and her hacking down of snow people with adult clothing as her unspoken desire to kill her parents (Wood, 1979, pp.9-10). For him *Meet Me in St. Louis* is a "comedy film with intermittent Horror film overtones" (Wood, 1979, p.7). In the same manner, *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is a female action film with, what Birch has called the "thrills" of the Gothic (Bragg, 2015).

The central protagonist of *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is as ill as Tootie's dolls that are buried in the Smith's backyard (Wood, 1979, p.9). These seemingly postfeminist displays of domesticity in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* are akin to the reading of feminist critics Gilbert and Gubar and Wood's of *Meet Me in St. Louis* a sign of "home as prison" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp.83-4; Wood, 1979, p.9). Read argues that postfeminist femininity is defined by "consumerism", which is not true for Samantha and other heroines of the corpus (Read, 2000, p.196). What does make room for a postfeminist reading of *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is Samantha's occupation of the domestic space and her motherhood, which are unintentional and unplanned respectively. *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is thus a postfeminist text with feminist leanings. Feminism is the repressed in the corpus films that returns via the figure of the gothic action heroine. The "retrogressive" tendencies of the popular gothic mode which have been widely acknowledged, when channelled into women's action films, does not produce radically different representational politics (Hanson, 2007, p.35).

Samantha is contained in the house, the attic of this discussion, where the action heroine seeks refuge after an episode of her brute husband's atrocities until she is relocated by him and his henchmen. In terms of Wood's theories, Samantha has accepted her "enslavement" by establishing an amicable rhythm with domesticity and monogamy as is expected of women in traditional American patriarchy (Wood, 1979, p.8). On the contrary, her double, through her reappearance pushes these psychosocial boundaries and shows both desire and strength to reverse these norms through gender transgression, which is represented as a perversion in the film. The doppelgänger is portrayed as a deranged part of an ill and lost woman's improper impulses. Yet she

breaks free from the house and renounces her sacred duty as a mother, a much punishable transgression in Hollywood history. After all, only an ill and mad American woman in the underlying "ideological charge", of Hanson's discussion in another context, of the film will want to leave home, disown her daughter, and show courage and skill to defeat a terrorist husband in his own game (Hanson, 2007, p.175).

Much like *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, injury caused by violence sends Beatrix in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* into a coma for four years. Warner explains of the inspirations that lay behind the Bluebeard fairy tale:

> Perrault, a realist who clothed his witness in fancy dress, spun a tale [Bluebeard] of reassurance, in which his heroine is spared one of the most present fears of young women in the past: that marriage will be the death of her (Warner, 1994, p.264).

Thus, like the Bluebeard fairy tale even the desire to get married almost brings death upon Beatrix. That only male characters, Budd and Bill come close to capturing and threatening shows that the films are about male on female violence. But this marital abuse does not cause a mere mortal wound. It is, after all, her head that Bill shoots almost causing brain death. He complains to his current fling Elle that even though he shot Beatrix in the head, her heart kept beating and instead put her to sleep. The "Sleeping Beauty" action heroine of Short's discussion wakes from her sleep only to find that she is being violated by men (Short, 2015, p.44, p.111). This gives the film a certain edge as a critique of patriarchy in the culture of abuse that is prevalent in the films. She has flashbacks, recollections of the bullet being shot in her head. She checks the temple she was shot at and hears a metal clank. It is a physical injury that has recuperations for the character's psychic and emotional well-being.

The violent heroine of *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* is complex. Beatrix combines the surety of Jane and the violence and demonic rage of Bertha. Despite a psychic split, the division is embodied by one strong female lead who does not show unease because of expressing this contradiction. The disposition of the heroine exhibits cognitive dissonance, a theoretical avenue that will be unpacked further in Chapter 4. Throughout her journey, Beatrix does not show hesitation when set to seek murder as retribution for those who have done her wrong. Much like Jane she has a burning sense

of justice and injustice. Her odyssey, an instance of "travelling heroism" of Radcliffe's heroines (Wallace and Smith, 2009, p.2; Miles, 2009, p.47, p.50), takes her on the world map from the West to the East and then back to the West, which also has influences on the much-noted generic drawing of the film as noted by Rich (2004, pp.25-6).

As a result, we have very limited access to her inner workings and her past, although there are some instances in the film and in dialogue where her past is revealed. As discussed earlier, Coulthard has pointed out that her actions are beyond the purview of law which can be overlooked in a fictional film (Coulthard, 2007, p.164). There a paradox in that bloodthirsty revenge is a character trait of an anti-hero, but it is represented as a divine act. Coulthard explains: "As is the case in most revenge films, the avenger in *Kill Bill* is the ethical centre of the universe created" (Coulthard, 2007, p.164). She executes revenge as though it was an act of divine intervention and she is none other than the Messiah's messenger. The film privileges her subjectivity despite foregrounding her morally questionable actions, while also framing them as divine. This insensitivity to self-questioning recedes post the death of the patriarch, the finale, and the smooth drive of the end titles of *Kill Bill: Volume 2*.

Particularly conclusive are the "superimposed" flashbacks of Bordwell and Thompson's observation before Beatrix embarks on seeking brutal revenge, which are accompanied by an overwhelming soundtrack (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013, p.176). They consist of how she was battered at the wedding dress rehearsal by Bill's squad. Because Beatrix is such an intact figure on account of her confidence, there are hardly any moments of contemplation in the films. Her few moments of introspection are made way for when the truth serum is forcefully administered to her and she breaks down emotionally, revealing another dimension of her personality perceptively supported by Bill's analysis.

Bill aptly describes her as a "natural born killer" thereby framing Beatrix as a madwoman with a taste for shedding blood. In Beatrix, Bill presents us with the image of the female monster. Like the monster in the house and the queen in the Snow White story of Gilbert and Gubar's discussion, Beatrix lives a life of "significant action" by definition an "unfeminine" life of stories and story-telling" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000,

p.39). But these few moments of analysis do not make her rethink her revenge. On the contrary, as the side-effects of the truth serum wear-off she "turns tables", as described by Warner and Tatar in context of the Bluebeard fairy tale, on her jealous lover, who confesses under the influence of alcohol that he "overreacted" by shooting the wedding party (Warner, 1994, p.248; Tatar, 2004, p.112). Mental instability adds to the complex nature of the seemingly impenetrable action heroine's character. Beatrix then is a much richer counterpart of her century-and-a-half-old literary ancestors Jane and Bertha. Female heroism as represented in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* is then closely associated to violence and mental instability.

Perhaps true to the nature of mental instability of these heroines triggered by traumatic encounters in troubled relationships is the multiple identities that they take on. Sometimes this is done to avoid detection from husband figures, due to illness, or from transition from one life to another, as the heroines in the films often go through a literal or metaphoric resurrection. These multiple identities of the past cast a shadow on the heroine's present. Beatrix's name is not revealed until close to the climax of the film, thereby abstaining full access to her subjectivity. Gail is also known as Whitewater in *The River Wild*, Æon in *Æon Flux* was called Catherine in her previous life, and Charlene indulged in the fantasy figure of Samantha in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*. Beatrix is also called Black Mamba, Mommy, The Bride, Arlene Machiavelli, and Mrs. Tommy Plympton although the latter two names are not credited in the end titles of *Kill Bill: Volume 2*. Aliases can be seen merely as a narrative technique yet they typically have a larger significance. They signal different clues to the action heroine's personality. Hanson briefly observes this gothic device of multiple names in relation to neo-gothic films (Hanson, 2007, p.186, p.175). Likewise, Gilbert and Gubar's analysis points out the source of these pseudonyms:

> But the three Brontë sisters [Anne, Emily and Charlotte], too, concealed their troublesome femaleness behind the masks of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, names which Charlotte Brontë disingenuously insisted they had chosen for their androgynous neutrality but which most of their earliest readers assumed were male (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.65).

Gilbert and Gubar's analysis, when seen from the point-of-view of contemporary film criticism, is much a reminder of Clover's argument on the slasher film, which gained

prominence post-1960s. Despite the slasher's generic alignment to pornography, it did not fail to have an impact on prestigious Hollywood genre films (Clover, 1992, pp.21-2).

Clover's characterisation of the final girl of the slasher film is relevant to the films and characters explored in this thesis and is worth quoting at some length:

> The Final Girl is boyish, in a word. Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine – not, in any case, feminine the ways of her friends. Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself. Lest we miss the point, it is spelled out in her name: Stevie, Marti, Terry, Laurie, Stretch, Will, Joey, Max. Not only the conception of the hero in *Alien* and *Aliens* but also the surname by which she is called, Ripley, owe a clear debt to slasher tradition (Clover, 1992, p.40).

The seriality of Clover's analysis, gender-neutral names, and theory of male identification with the final girl in slasher films have their origins in gothic writing. Academics engaged in the study of contemporary gothic do link the final girl to the gothic heroine but only briefly, for instance Wheatley (2006, pp.159-60).[29] Tasker has taken the final girl forward in scholarship by linking her to the action heroine (Tasker, 1998, p.81). Beatrix has been identified by Rich as a final girl (Rich, 2004, p.26). These names whether gender-neutral or not whether taken on voluntarily or not, certainly signify the fragmented nature of the action heroine's personality as written by storywriters. Most importantly they point out the action heroine's different positions in a given narrative and chart her shift in generic positions from victim to avenger to survivor, hero to villain, madwoman to intelligent, married to single/unmarried, working to non-working, mother to non-mother, and the repression to exhibition of feminine/masculine qualities.

On similar lines, Kyle in *Flightplan* takes anxiety pills to deal with the sudden death of her spouse. What makes her appear even more anxious is that she knows aircraft design that allows her to pre-figure every possibility that may lie ahead in the narrative,

[29] The many papers presented at 'Gothic Feminism: Women-in-Peril or Final Girls? Representing Women in Gothic and Horror Cinema' was a conscious academic attempt to link the final girl to her gothic lineage. However, there was no significant mention of Gilbert and Gubar's monograph in the papers presented.

thereby infiltrating the Bluebeard's system. This is the reason why she was victimised for this criminal activity in the first place. Her professional expertise makes her appear as a credible hijacker and terrorist. On the other hand, it allows her to plan the course of action for searching her daughter with foresight that most crew members do not possess, and is at par of the Captain. What appears as anxiety is actually mastery of her profession combined with anxiety. Gilbert and Gubar's explanation for the Victorian female writer resonates with Kyle's situation: "the contradictions between her attitude toward her gender and her sense of her own vocation seem really to have made her in some sense 'mad'" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.63). Based on Gilbert and Gubar's analysis, Kyle does not have ambivalence about her gender, but her vocation does call for her gaslighting. Her advanced knowledge of the aircraft makes her appear mad in the eyes of others.

The airplane is a contemporary equivalent of the "awesome mansion" of Fischer's discussion of *Rosemary's Baby*, where, dressed entirely in black, Kyle the young widow is trapped (Fischer, 1996, p.417). This resonates with the earlier discussion on the absence of heterosexual relationships in Sarah's life in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Kyle thus also moves to a different relationship status like other corpus heroines, which seemingly makes her vulnerable in the eyes of villainous characters. As discussed in Chapter 2, a passenger airplane is of phallic shape, with its erect structure and its pointy protruding head. Hanson has argued that the "autocrat" confines the innocent heroine in four walls, and also exercises unnatural control over the gendered domestic space, which is an extension of his power over her (Hanson, 2007, p.72; Clemens, 1999, p.107). As a variation, the active heroine is trapped with the "mysterious husband" and his sinful deeds in an exclusively masculine space (Hanson, 2007, p.42). Punter and Byron explain that:

> The castle has even been seen as the primary protagonist of Otranto; all the events take place either within or near it, and its physical presence dominates the text, creating a sense of oppression that emphasizes the powerlessness of the characters to control their own lives (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.179).

Like in Punter and Byron's analysis of the castle in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole, the "founding text of Gothic fiction", the aircraft in *Flightplan* is also the

primary protagonist in the film (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.177). All the narrative events unfold inside it, as the characters are indeed trapped without an escape route. Once the aircraft makes a forced landing, events continue to unfold inside and around it. Its physical presence dominates the film, creating a sense of oppression that leads to the gaslighting and abuse of the action heroine. However, Kyle penetrates this masculine space through her assertiveness, persistence, and familiarity, as she has confrontations with the air marshal, who is policing and even renders the Captain impotent. Oblivious to the fact that Kyle is being gaslighted, even a therapist (Greta Scacchi), who happens to be on board, is sent to make conversation with Kyle in the hope of healing her from her pain. This further confirms the preconceived ideas of her mental state that are held and circulated via the significant and minor characters in the film.

The specific use of camera movement to capture Kyle's anxiety and her state of mind warrants investigation. This anxiety is activated by the rupturing of the innocent bourgeois American family. This is after the first traumatic encounter of the discussion, that is, the sudden death of her husband. This sudden death of her spouse and the anxiety it generates is used to set the scene for Kyle's state of mind. For instance, before Kyle and her daughter board the transatlantic flight headed to her maternal home in New York, her daughter wanders off to a kiosk at the airport. Unable to find her daughter, Kyle's internal psychological stress and disbelief is captured via a 360-dolly shot. This brings her inward emotion outward and allows viewers to be a part of those distressing emotions, which includes Kyle's disbelief and confusion. This recurs again when, as part of her gaslighting, the Captain is misinformed that Kyle's husband took their daughter down with him. When this information is conveyed to Kyle, she defends herself and has a recollection.

In a Hitchcockian foray into her psychological makeup, we are let into her mind via an extreme close-up of her eye. The Captain still appears in her vision and the camera zooms into her eye. As part of her recollection, we are tailed into her husband's last minutes in the exterior of their apartment building as he walks, to what can be assumed, to the roof. This dissolves into an overhead shot of the 360-tracking sequence at the airport and further cuts into a rapid 360-tracking shot of the present sequence on the airplane. In a sound bridge, subtle sounds of crows cawing from the previous outdoor

shot resonate in the sequence on the airplane. This gives her memory a gothic undertone and links her possible loss of mind to an implicit form of monstrosity. Birds as a threat and presence onscreen can be read as a homage to the gothic suspense *The Birds*. An account of gothic patriarchy in *The Birds* is given by Kyle Williams Bishop (2011). “You are all crazy!” she says as she defends herself, and establishes a case for her daughter’s abduction, despite resistance. The rapid dolly movements thoroughly communicate her shock and panic.

Kyle’s identification as the “crazy lady” is established through her misfortune, anxiety, the abduction of her daughter, visual techniques, through insinuating remarks of her sickness, gaslighting, and finally, her rummaging of the airplane, thereby overriding the Captain’s authority in the search of her daughter. The attic does not exist as a space on the airplane but the heroine refers to it in dialogue. The heroine is not mad but other characters either judgmentally mouth off or are frustrated of the tireless persuasion to find the hostage of a possible hijacking. This brief justification of female madness within the narrative calls for deeper theorisation. Both frameworks discussed earlier in the chapter that of activity in women being chastised in the form of madness by Clinch (1995, p.5), and Faludi’s model that of female madness on screen as a form of feminist resistance provide useful leads (Faludi, 1992, p.154). But it is feminist literary criticism on female gothic writing that provides a fertile framework to approach this somewhat uncharted territory. Gilbert and Gubar explain in their feminist reading of the madwoman in fiction and poetry written by women. They argue that because of gender norms and patriarchal constraints these authors acted on their fantasies and desires to live an emancipated and indeed a rebellious life via alter-egos that featured in the landscape of their fictional prose. They conclude that this literature was an extension of the writers’ reality, a central subject matter of their monograph. Because of the significance of Gilbert and Gubar’s analysis, I cite it at length here:

> As we explore nineteenth-century literature, we will find that this madwoman emerges over and over again from the mirrors women writers hold up both to their own natures and to their own visions of nature. Even the most apparently conservative and decorous women writers obsessively create fiercely independent characters who seek to destroy all the patriarchal structures which both their authors and their authors’ submissive

> heroines seem to accept as inevitable. Of course, by projecting their rebellious impulses not into their heroines but into mad or monstrous women (who are suitably punished in the course of the novel or poem), female authors dramatize their own self-division, their desire both to accept the strictures of patriarchal society and to reject them. What this means, however, is that the madwoman in literature by women is not merely, as she might be in male literature, an antagonist or foil to the heroine. Rather, she is usually in some sense the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage. Indeed, much of the poetry and fiction written by women conjures up this mad creature so that female authors can come to terms with their own uniquely female feelings of fragmentation, their own keen sense of the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, pp.77-8).

This madwoman of Gilbert and Gubar's discussion is embodied by the action heroine in the corpus films. She actively engages with the abuse and hierarchy that has the likelihood of subordinating and subjugating her identity in the narratives. Gilbert and Gubar's analysis parallels Place's observation about the technique deployed to showcase the Hollywood femme fatale: "It is not their [femme fatale] inevitable demise we remember but rather their strong, dangerous, and above all exciting sexuality" (Place, 1998, p.48). Along the same line of thought, Purse has argued that the active female character onscreen surpasses the "containing frames" of mainstream cinema (Purse, 2011, p.91).

In this respect, in *Flightplan*, Kyle's high mental capacity and dynamic activity channelled as a hysterical response to an extremely stressful situation has a certain and steady place in her onscreen personality that allows her to overcome the crisis that is presented in the narrative of the films. What is portrayed as a possible loss of mind in the film is actually Kyle's inner strength, through which scholarly debate has identified her as the action heroine. In the closure of the film, we are left with female courage and skills only mustered to protect the family, albeit a non-traditional one in the backdrop of the absence of a white heroic male. Thus is formed the alternative family of Heung (1983), Sobchack (1996) and Tasker's (2004) discussions. In this cautionary tale, female disobedience is reigned in and subsumed with the ideologically satisfying portrayal of a

helpless child protected by the only responsible, capable, and emotionally available primary caregiver. After the climax, Kyle emerges as the non-threatening female/mother shot in soft lighting who does not interfere with the masculine order.

McCormick observes that while Kyle rightfully questions what is happening around her given her situation, the film's reason to set a scene for questioning her sanity and then re-establishing our confidence in her is a crass technique employed to undermine the Hollywood female action hero (McCormick, 2010, p.145). Different "containment" devices, of Purse's discussion, are often deployed to undermine the action heroine's strength and channel her into stereotypical gender norms of mainstream cinema (Purse, 2011, p.92). In the case of action heroines like the pinup star Pamela Anderson's Barb Wire in *Barb Wire* (David Hogan, 1996) the dominatrix of Brown's discussion, or Lara Croft (Angelina Jolie) in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (Simon West, 2001), or even Ripley in the much commented upon the climax of *Alien*, their over-sexualisation, fetishization, and objectification for male pleasure arguably downplays the heroine's validity as a character for feminist analysis and identification (Brown, 2011, p.45). Concerning Ripley's character in the first three *Alien* films, it has been argued that her character surpasses the reign of traditional patriarchal marriage (Doherty, 1996, p.198). The reinstatement of gender binaries via marriage like in *Revenge of the Creature* (Jack Arnold, 1955) as Freeland has observed, undermined female scientists in classical Hollywood cinema (Freeland, 2000, p.73). In the films being analysed, possible insanity is the ideological technique exploited to question the action heroine's subject. Hollywood storytelling and contemporary filmmakers are very far from ease at representing a bourgeois career woman and mother like Kyle in *Flightplan* in control of her story. They have to employ the trope of questionable female judgement.

Most of *Panic Room* is set in a villa on a late evening. On this dark evening, the sky is shown to pour indiscreetly on New York City. The massive house that the pair have locked themselves into with all their belongings can be read as a stand-in for their current relationship with life. It appears as though they have locked themselves in to deal with the pain that life has inflicted upon them. Other than the expansive space that eventually entraps them, the mise-en-scène outside the manor, the dark and rainy night is representative of the emotional state of the broken family. Wood's analysis points out

that the sombre atmosphere of *Panic Room* is resonant with Fincher's directorial style. In the "gothic thriller", of Mercer and Shingler's discussion in another context, *Panic Room* the movement from depression to adrenaline aggression is fairly swift because of a home invasion (Mercer and Shingler, 2000, p.4). However, this sudden change of mood does not mean that the bleak tone of the film slips away. It has an unbridled and uncanny presence in the family and the house.

However, Meg the ex-wife's depression has been noted (Kitterman, 2003, p.239; Browning, 2010, p.52). Further, Browning points out that in the script Meg has to pop a pill to calm her nerves down and make a deal on the house with refences to her divorce (Browning, 2010, p.48). Browning's analysis points out Meg's state of mind in the film. The heroine's depression stems from the personal crisis she has experienced. Meg with her cropped hair and nerdy eyeglasses fulfils the stereotype of the gothic heroine as the librarian, whose only idea for the decor of the grandiose house as the nest keeper is a stencilled bookcase.

She has a pubescent daughter and is recently divorced from her wealthy and powerful husband. In light of this existential crisis, she is seemingly calm and self-composed during the viewing of the house that resembles the townhouse in *Sleep, My Love* (Douglas Sirk*,* 1948). This is in contrast to how this scene was written in the script quoted above. This is so despite the "discipline issues" her daughter exhibits (*Panic Room* DVD 3 Disc Special Edition). But not much later her inner anxiety materialises, when she locates the hidden room and steps inside it. Koepp has aptly called it the "horror movie" scene of the film (*Panic Room* DVD 3 Disc Special Edition). Like Meg's depression, the panic room is both there and not there, and is only visible to those who look deeply. In the extra safe insides of the panic room, she finds what is lurking inside her: her post-divorce angst and the worry of not being able to recuperate her life, while raising her daughter. Her, and only her, location of the room vocalises her fear as if she found what is deeply repressed inside her. It is as though her repressed anxiety metamorphoses as the robbery and makes them unsafe in an otherwise safe house.

In viewing the five million dollars worth property the mother-daughter duo appears privileged. But once they move in and eat takeout pizza for dinner, it is clear

that they are isolated. The gloomy silence is their companion when they eat, and the daughter already knows her mother is brooding about her father and his new lover. After putting her daughter to bed, Meg has a moment of reflection, crying in the bathtub. She sips red wine to suppress the symptoms of depression. The former Mrs. Altman is thus almost dead when we meet her and is in the process of starting a life again. Just as Meg thought she was on the first step to building a new life, a sign of her independence and control, as out of nowhere three ruffians break into the house. Despite her desperate attempts to leave behind the damage caused by the breakdown of a relationship, it threatens to taint her new start. The thugs break in for the inheritance of the panic room and also take advantage of the situation by trying to creep into the insecurities of a divorced mother, which is apparent in their taunting. Meg is tainted by the patriarchal mythos and ideologies, and the house invasion is an attack on feminine independence, will for survival, subjectivity, agency, and most importantly the desire to break free.

Kitterman explains that via this home invasion a "contest between the sexes" ensues (Kitterman, 2003, p.239). As argued in Chapter 1, Raoul functions as Stephen's metaphoric stand-in and within this logic it is the husband who sends his wife and daughter to the attic. Within the same reading, it is the husband who sent his henchmen to seek revenge on his wife and lay their hands on the hidden inheritance. Within this reading, this is the wife Meg's inheritance as it is hidden in her house. In the climax, when Meg takes charge of dealing with the thieves, she transforms from the passive housewife to a rebellious "axe-wielder" of Lubin's discussion (1999, p.85). In this particular instance, Kyle takes Raoul's sledgehammer/chainsaw and becomes the unlikely head of the family unit, the madwoman of this discussion. Like Tatar's analysis of *Gaslight*, Meg's "critical faculties" are not "disabled" when forced to contain herself for her safety (Tatar, 2004, p.95). Rather her confusion signifies her transformation from victim to avenger. She escapes a second attempt at her life when Burnham blows the uncontrollable Raoul's brains out. After this narrow escape, she learns to value and embrace her less-than-perfect-life than she did after the divorce, when she moved into her house, and before the burglars set their foot in. This act is read by Kitterman as a "reinscription of traditional values" as a man rescues the women (Kitterman, 2003, p.239). *Panic Room,* like several other corpus films, is an anti-romance of Hanson (2007)

and Gilbert and Gubar's (2000, p.31) discussion of the gothic. Hence, an external crisis of an extreme nature rejuvenates but does not reunite the disintegrated nuclear family. The family situation in *Panic Room* resonates with Heung (1983) and Sobchack's (1996) analysis of the alternative nuclear family that emerged in New Hollywood films.

Like the Bluebeard fairy tale, Fincher's film is also "a cautionary warning about the abuse of male power and privilege in marriage" and post-divorce (Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p.100). The action heroine as the madwoman in the attic is a subtle critique of the institution of marriage in these pictures. The enclosed spaces that the action heroine inevitably finds herself captured in, the hysterical and passionate behaviour that she indulges in when imprisoned, the unintended psychological consequences of the imprisonment, and the emotional and physical struggle that the heroine goes through to free herself are extended efforts not just to rescue orphans (*Gloria*, *Aliens*), save the world from a technological apocalypse (*Terminator 2: Judgment Day*), save America from the CIA's terrorist activities (*The Long Kiss Goodnight*), rescue her family (*The River Wild*), rescue a serial murderer's victim (*The Cell*), defeat three burglars at their game (*Panic Room*), seek revenge for the murder of her unborn child (*Kill Bill: Volume 1 and Volume 2*), to seek revenge for the death of a sibling (*Æon Flux*), rescue a motherless daughter (*Elektra*), and learn to love a child (*Maleficent*). On the face of it, these are narrative drivers, but they are also and most importantly the action heroine's extended efforts to overcome her oppressive lover's atrocities.

In most corpus films, the trauma suffered at the hands of the decadent aristocrat in a not very distant past has psychological manifestations for the action heroine. These include emotional breakdown, tears, anger, anxiety, sadness, feelings of helplessness, loss, regret, isolation, guilt, trauma, nightmares, insomnia, amnesia, and other signs of depression. In several films, the trauma penetrates the action body and is visible as scars, wounds, and physical ailments, whether literal or symbolic. Keller has observed: "In reminding us of the somatic substratum of our mental products, one of Freud's greatest contributions was to restore for us the connection between body and mind that Descartes had severed" (Keller, 1990, p.177). A similar connection has been made by Jeffords for representation in Hollywood pictures. She explains that in *Rambo: First Blood II* (George P. Cosmatos, 1985) and *Rambo III* (Peter MacDonald, 1988), Rambo's

"internal workings" take the form of the "wounds he incurs", and she reads this as part of Rambo's "externalization" (Jeffords, 1993, p.246).

Similarly, running themes can also be found in the action heroine corpus films. In *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, Samantha stands in front of the mirror and wonders why she has so many scars. The trauma she has suffered has not only taken the form of memory loss but has also injured her body. As engaged with earlier in the chapter, in *Aliens*, Ripley's traumatic experience in *Alien* takes the form of recurring nightmares. Most interestingly, these nightmares have a certain physical quality attached to them. The nightmare consists of Ripley having convulsions resembling labour pain, and the chest-burster alien trying to make its way through Ripley's chest. Ripley's nightmare quite obviously refers to *Alien*, where the alien bursts through Kane's (John Hurt) chest and kills him, a scene that has been acknowledged as one of the scariest in film history (Doherty, 1996, pp.184-5; Hermann, 1997, p.37). Every time Ripley wakes up from her nightmare, she feels her chest by placing her hand on it, as if the nightmare has scarred her chest or split her open.

In *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, Bill shoots Beatrix in the head for secretly escaping from him. When Beatrix wakes up from coma after four years, she feels the left temple with her hands, where she was shot. The act of feeling the temple is juxtaposed with flashbacks of the shooting. An extreme close-up of the barrel of the gun is pointed towards the audience. This is followed by a point-of-view shot of Bill and we see him pull the trigger, although Bill is not really visible because of the shallow depth-of-field. The bullet travels the barrel and heads towards the target, we hear the gunshot, and then Beatrix feels her temple in the present moment. The sequence is accompanied by Bill's voiceover: "This is me". Beatrix surveys the damage done to her temple with her hands, and we hear the sound of the metal clang, suggesting that metal has been inserted in her head. She is given "mental subjectivity", of Bordwell and Thompson's discussion when we see the bullet enter her head and when she clangs it (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013, p.91). Beatrix then feels her belly hoping to find the baby, since she was pregnant when she was shot, or any bruises signifying the presence or absence of the embryo. Although there are no visible scars on her belly, she holds it and weeps. The violent encounter leaves actual and metaphoric marks on her body.

In *Maleficent*, Stefan shows disloyalty towards Maleficent by drugging her to sleep, clipping, and stealing her wings. This backstabbing has been read as rape in Chapter 2. The children's fairy tale made for family entertainment unfolds as a rape-revenge narrative starring a Hollywood A-list actress (Read, 2000). The young Maleficent is not only heartbroken but is also physically weighed down by the absence of her wings. She finds herself unable to stand up and walk, and appears weak and disempowered. The malady affects not only her mental but also her physical well-being. To assist free movement, she uses magic and transforms a stick into a staff that enables her to move around. The staff signifies the extent of pain, the deceitful lover has caused her. In *Æon Flux*, the illnesses caused by the husband figure's atrocities move beyond the mind as they attack the body and have an impact on female fertility, a physical incapacity. Mad science in the form of human cloning becomes the necessary evil that comes to the rescue of mankind. The cloning of the citizens of Bregna for seven generations has caused mental illnesses, like memories of a past life and sleeplessness, as unintended consequences. The spouse's inescapable tyranny in these films thus also physically scars the action heroines' bodies.

**Conclusion**

The arguments presented in this chapter show that the action heroine is also a significant figure in the familial figurations that are found in the corpus films. It is brought to light that the representation of the action heroine is juxtaposed to the idea of madness in the corpus films. The analysis presented shows that possible insanity is more than a mere narrative device to explain the problem figure of the action heroine. The analysis of abuse, psychological trauma and mental instability that is presented here gives the action heroine in the corpus films a psychological profile and subjectivity, that is imperfect and hence complex. It is also argued that the action heroine is a complex figure that embodies the assertiveness and passion of Jane Eyre, yet is also like the incarcerated and subjugated Bertha. The latter position is one of diminished subjectivity and subjugation that the action heroine actively resists. While the subject position of the action heroine is undermined by this abuse, her overcoming of these narrative events has a significant impact on her narrative trajectory and agency. The implications of an unstable mind are thus read as moments of feminist resistance in the corpus films.

Accordingly bringing the action heroine's gothic heritage to the fore and acknowledging her abuse and retaliation against the person and system that has nurtured her, allows for understanding of action in Hollywood films as a tool to resolve women's domestic, personal and familial issues. It is found that the films mobilise an anti-male abuse discourse, and reinstate the need of feminism in an era where mainstream cinematic images directly align themselves with the postfeminist message of the emancipated woman, domestic pleasure, and celebrated femininity. Again, via close examination, it is shown that although the action heroine's relationship with the Bluebeard-husband occupies the backdrop in the corpus films, the representations of masculinity, femininity and the family are intertwined. This further shows that a study of these films is incomplete without investigating the representations of masculinity in the first instance.

## Chapter 4

## The Action Heroine as the Inconsistent Mother: Good Mothers, Bad Mothers and Final Mothers

### Introduction

Critical accounts of the Bluebeard explain that this unsettling fairy tale is given a happy ending by reintegrating the curious wife into the community via remarriage to a younger and eligible bridegroom. As the Bluebeard fairy tale is used as a framework to read the action heroine films that this thesis investigates, it is argued that the films climax with the transformation of the action heroine into a mother figure. Chapter 3 discussed the lack of emphasis on the father in the corpus films, suggesting that instead familial figurations centre on a righteous mother figure, who protects the child. Thus, the Christian mythical religious and sacred relationship of the mother-and-child is evoked to set the narrative events to a harmonious closure. This has clear ideological implications regarding the place of women as mothers within wider cultural discourses. This chapter looks at the representations of motherhood, maternal figurations and reproductive discourses in the corpus films, analysing how the action heroine's role as a mother salvages the disintegration of the nuclear family. In turn, reunion of the action heroine and the child is shown to be uninterrupted by the Bluebeard-husband's violence.

Scholarship on motherhood in the corpus films has emphasised the role of the action heroine as a supermother (Dancey, 2009; Goren 2009; McCormick 2010). However the arguments here show that the action heroine as a mother is more complex. The chapter argues that fragmented fatherhood and confused paternal representations lead to inconsistent representations of motherhood and maternity. Lucy Hamilton's analyses Samantha's character and her motherhood in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, arguing that there is a split in Samantha's personality, one side that acts as a mother and another that refuses to mother (Hamilton, 1999). Rather, in this chapter, I understand this expression of the action heroine's contradictory desires within the frame of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is further understood as a gothic device, thereby making the action heroine both a mother and a mother who refuses to mother. It is

suggested that discourses of madness, as discussed in Chapter 3 are mobilised to chastise the active nature of the action heroine's character. It is concluded that the action heroine's refusal to mother is representative of a feminist-inspired subjectivity and the image of the supermother is influenced by postfeminist developments. This conflict in the action heroine's representation as a mother is understood as representative of the underlying themes of familial dysfunctionality and child neglect/abuse in the corpus films.

**The Inconsistent Motherhood of the Action Heroine: The Cognitive Dissonance of Gloria in *Gloria***

Almost at the crack of dawn on a summer's day in New York City, Gloria and Phil are shown to walk with laden tension. The gangsters traced them to the second apartment and Gloria is shown to be worried about what lies ahead. It can be deduced that she is not wrong in feeling so. While keeping an eye out on the gangsters, she hails for a taxi but none stop. They are on the pavement with no one around. There are no cars on the road either to bother the personal nature of their interaction that follows. The film presents this as Gloria's moment of thinking aloud and speaking to herself. She was shown doing this once at her flat after Phil was forcefully thrust upon her instead of the coffee she ran out of. Now she is shown to do it again, and in desperation this time. This is a pivotal sequence of the film. It marks the transitional phase for the character of leaving behind her comforted secluded life to facing action with her former love-hate relationship with the mob. There is no damage done until this point as not much is done to disrupt harmony with her clique. There is a possibility that she can safely return to her attic, which contains feminine possessions of comfort: cat, shoes, pictures, perfume, clothes, her friends and money locked away in a safety deposit box. This is the attic post-imprisonment and post-breakup with boss Tanzini, which, as discussed in Chapter 3, signifies her emotional closure at the beginning of the film. Her former lover's abominations sent her there, just like he had a hand in her time at the prison. Until this narrative development she believed her apartment was the safest place for her, but it represents another extension of Tanzini's deeds. This allows a reading of Tanzini as the person responsible to bring Gloria to the streets, to gutsily face the gangsters that he leads.

This situation can be read as a challenge to the feminist impulses inside her which have been dormant since her return from prison. By feminist impulses, the reference here is to the supressed desire to retaliate against the untouchable and corrupt system of the mob that subjugates a working-class family, their orphaned boy and a single woman. This is represented by the courageous act of protecting the vulnerable boy wanted by the mob. Most notably, it is also presented as Gloria's first moment of hesitation in the film. The question that emerges in this sequence is whether this female character actually "needs" a child.

Gloria is shown to turn inward in fear and pulls Phil away. Her communication with Phil and her response to the situation becomes physical. The boy himself is dumbfounded and instead of speaking his heart, he tugs harder on his mother's friend. As the pattern of their relationship is not fully developed in the film yet, this becomes the default and effective way of communicating the fear that both of these characters are shown to represent given the stressful situation they are under. This is an unusual emotion for Gloria. What follows is a moment of cowardice for an empowered figure like Gloria. She first runs the boy ahead, abandons him and runs away from him. She attempts to disown the boy and forgo the responsibility given to her. When doing so, she is shown to resist her shame in order to protect her self-interest. The boy easily catches up with her, holding her back. This is the moment of contemplation before the physical threat is shown to take over. She voices her concern to Phil about him being a burden on her. She declares this in a sympathetic context: "I can't even turn you to the cops. I have been to jail… the people that killed your parents are my friends. I can't get involved with you." This statement can be read as showing what is going on in Gloria's mind.

It is too late as the gangsters pull in on their wheels. The boy pulls on her arm off-screen. After a meagre conversation which is somewhat close to a plea of understanding, she begins to communicate in the dialect the gangsters speak and thoroughly understand. She pulls out the gun and shoots them before they do. Her hesitation is shown to be over. Several other shots are fired without guilt or regret. The non-diegetic soundtrack swells, thereby highlighting the change of emotional trajectory. Gloria both refuses and attempts to renounce the boy. At the same time, she is aware

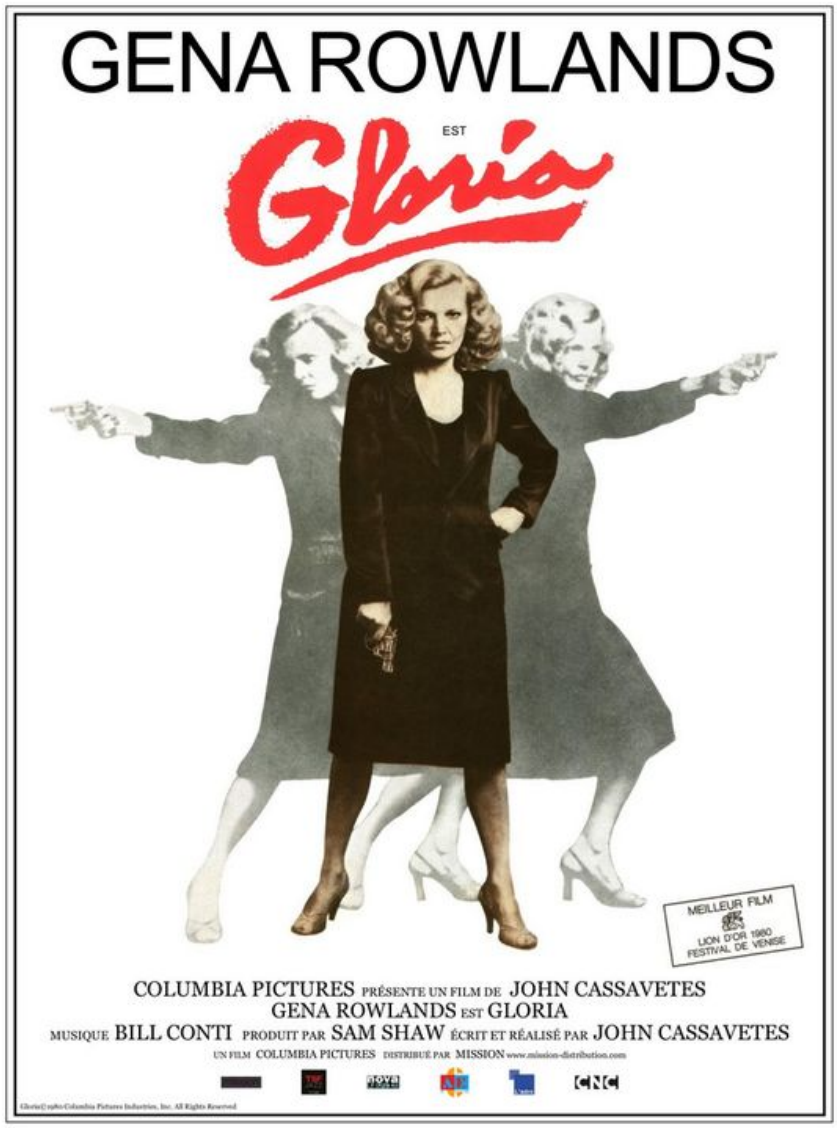


**Figure 11:** The poster of the film *Gloria* (John Cassavetes, 1980) shows how cognitive dissonance is inherent to Gloria's character.

that the orphan needs mothering and she is the only one around to do it. Esposito points out in relation to *Gloria*: "Their [the critics] conceptualization of 'tired fortyish dame' made it impossible for them to see her as a mother (*Variety* 30)" (Esposito, 2003, p.104). Despite, the odds Gloria chooses the child over herself and her former friends. As I will argue in this chapter, the action heroine's role as a carer to the child in the corpus films is part of her active opposition of the Bluebeard lover. Because he takes the role of the evil father, she acts as a sublime force by being placed in the role of a good mother.

This sequence and several others in the film are revealing of the cognitive dissonance of Gloria's character. Cognitive dissonance here means: "psychological conflict arising from inconsistencies between one's ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and practices" (Chandler and Munday, 2020). In her monograph, Georgieva uses *The Others* as an example and refers to this cognitive dissonance via the character of Grace (Nicole Kidman), who is also a mother. This "conflicting behaviour" Georgieva argues is typical of the gothic genre: "She [Grace] entertains a love-hate relationship with them [her two children] and does everything that is in her power to preserve them from harm, including executing them with her own hands" (Georgieva, 2013, p.184). Georgieva's analysis shows how some mother figures in gothic-infused genres represent conflicting desires towards the child. How this cognitive dissonance is inherent to Gloria's character is also reflected in the poster art of the film as Figure 11.[30] In the poster, Gloria's image is tripled, thereby suggesting that it takes the determination of more than one person to overcome the gangsters and to choose to mother someone in Phil's situation. The idea of cognitive dissonance will be pursued at length further along in this chapter.

**The Action Heroine as the "Final" Mother**

Mulvey-Roberts has observed that "in [Angela] Carter's feminist rewriting, fairy tales are narrated from the woman's point-of-view" (Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p.103). Much like Mulvey-Robert's observation, as the story of Bluebeard and his wives, a fairy

[30] This idea of cognitive dissonance also comes through in Tasker's discussion of the female investigator in Hollywood films. She argues that the female investigator is positioned as the investigator, investigated and also the victim (Tasker, 1998, p.100). However, Tasker does not approach the characters' identity crisis via the framework of cognitive dissonance. A similar viewpoint is also expressed by Punter and Byron via the investigator's over-identification with the killer and the subsequent blurring of boundaries between good and evil (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.266). Again, Punter and Byron do not approach this via the idea of cognitive dissonance.

tale of patriarchal distaste and female oppression is used as a framework to read twentieth and twenty-first centuries action heroine, a figure of feminist consideration. The story is told from what Tatar (2004, p.9) and Short (2015, p.100) have termed as the "wife's perspective". The story of the husband unfolds in the background in these films. Deploying the trope of reintegrating Bluebeard's wife into the community gives the retellings of the otherwise obscene story a "happy ending" (Warner, 1994, p.264; Punter and Byron, 2004, p.279). This theme of reintegration was a feature of the many variations of the Bluebeard folktale. A motif of ideological closure and conservatism, it is also adopted by some of the films of the 1940s female gothic cycle. Such is not the case with the corpus films. This observation is also made by McCormick concerning *Flightplan,* although without the framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale: "Their (the female characters) sexual lives are also in flux, as they move from the heterosexual institution of marriage as a result of death, divorce, and alien intervention" (McCormick, 2010, p.149). In the absence of the happily united heterosexual couple, these films exhibit what Tasker has identified in female friendship films, "the insistent presentation of heterosexuality *as a problem*" (Tasker, 1998, p.152).

In its variant of this harmonious conclusion, the action heroine films differ significantly from their ancestral counterparts. In the films that this thesis investigates, a heterosexual union is replaced with motherhood, as the conclusion of the films does not lead to a positive romantic relationship. As discussed in Chapter 3, the action heroine is not shown to be in control of adult sexuality. Although motherhood is a fairly new ending of the Bluebeard tale, Hollywood treatments of the myth have evoked the relationship between mother-and-child. Films that present this relationship include *The Night of the Hunter*, *The Stepfather*, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Volker Schlöndorff, 1990), *Deceived* (Damian Harris, 1991), *The Piano, New Nightmare* (Wes Craven, 1994), *Matilda* (Danny DeVito, 1996), *Striptease* (Andrew Bergman, 1996), *Enough* and *What Lies Beneath*. The emphasis on motherhood rather than a new union between the action heroine and a prospective lover is a firm continuation of the "anti-marital" discourse of the Bluebeard fairy tale (Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p.105) and the gothic mode (Hanson, 2007, p.131). This anti-marital discourse then is not only central to the plot of the films under discussion but is also predominant in the climax of the films. The problematic nature of the female characters' sexuality in the corpus films ultimately represents what

Kaplan has categorised as American cinema's ambivalence towards the combination of sex, work and motherhood (Kaplan, 1992; 1994). The anti-marital myth in these films when read via the lenses of the Bluebeard fairy tale leans towards postfeminist ideologies, thus emphasising the Jungian archetype of the great mother.

These feminist strands, although few and far between, in the otherwise ideologically conservative action heroine corpus are owed to the historical feminist revisions of the misogynistic and patriarchal Bluebeard fairy tale. As discussed in the Introduction, Warner's engagement with several retellings of the Bluebeard tale allows her to point out retellings with potential for feminist readings. Female emancipation is a key aspect in the retellings of the Bluebeard fairy tale. For example, Bartók wrote of his belief in equality between men and women, which is reflected in his opera (Warner, 1994, p.269). Warner observes that a version of the Bluebeard tale written by Victorian children's writer Juliana Horatia Ewing has "female independence" as central to the tale (Warner, 1994, p.266). The feminist ideas that emerge in the analysis of the films further along in the chapter hark back to these feminist revisions of the fairy tale as a possible source.

The action heroine's motherhood is a relatively stable familial relationship in the corpus films. This is especially true as the mythic father and the family itself is at crisis in these films. When the narrative developments are as dire as in the corpus films, it is one of the most sacred relationships that of the mother-and-child, that comes to rescue the action heroine family in some possible form. Sarah Arnold cites French philosopher Élisabeth Badinter, who notes that "Christianity contributed towards the development of the concept of the self-sacrificing mother" (Arnold, 2013, p.173). This Christian mythological dyad of the holy Madonna and child is also perpetuated by the maternal melodrama. However, Williams has argued that although within film studies melodrama is considered to be a genre, it is indeed the "fundamental mode of American 'moving pictures'" (Williams, 2001, p.13). This also rings true for the action heroine corpus films, whether it focuses on the mother-and-child relationship or the establishment of good and evil identities.

*Alien* and *Aliens* are two corpus films that are written about extensively by scholars. The films have specifically gained attention from feminist scholars because Ripley is modelled after gothic heroines like Jane Eyre, as discussed in Chapter 3, and her appearance throughout all four *Alien* films is framed as one of the strongest female characters in mainstream Hollywood cinema. *Alien* deals with the subject of motherhood at several different levels. Hermann draws on Robert Wood's analysis and points out that the name of the spacecraft Nostromo loosely means "our man" (Hermann, 1997, p.38). The spacecraft via its name is thereby established as a masculine space like the aircraft in *Flightplan* (Hermann, 1997, p.38). The crew include five men (one of whom is revealed to be a milk-oozing android), two women and a pet cat. It is via these characters among other aspects, that the drama of gender, sexuality and the family is played out in the film.

The first mother who is presented in the masculine space of the aircraft is the spacecraft's all-knowing invisible supercomputer called MU/TH/UR. In his analysis of the film, Hermann argues that crew members of the Nostromo are the supercomputer MU/TH/UR's children (Hermann, 1997, p.40). This is also made obvious in what Kavanaugh (1990, p.93) and Creed (1993b, p.18) have identified as the first birthing scene in *Alien*. It has been pointed out that MU/TH/UR's rousing of the crew from hypersleep is similar to a birth scene. These theorists draw attention to the womb-shaped pods that the astronauts sleep in. The astronauts come out of the pods in white underwear as if they have been birthed by MU/TH/UR. Her revered status as the mother in the film is also made apparent by the mise-en-scène. Viewers first see MU/TH/UR when Dallas is prompted by Ash to talk to MU/TH/UR, as she interrupts the course of Nostromo's journey. The room where the interface, and by that logic MU/TH/UR, is located has brightly coloured lights on the walls, emblematic of science fiction's futurism. The enclosed room surrounded by thousands of small lights makes MU/TH/UR's room appear to be a holy shrine, thereby giving her a science fiction version of divine status of the mother. But as the narrative events unfold, this godlike status is exposed to be merely a façade, which has even conned the crew members.

MU/TH/UR as the artificial intelligence cannot be seen but her voice can be heard in her enclosed shrine and via the Nostromo's intercom system. While investigating the significance of sound in the gothic, Hanson explains:

> To assert that the body is the source of the voice seems like a redundant statement, until we consider how often films in the gothic and horror genres separate the voice and the body, and the uncanny effect that this separation has on the audience (Hanson, 2007, p.104).

The MU/TH/UR in *Alien* is a voice without a body. This makes her a source of uncanny like the alien, who as Chien discusses metamorphoses in *Alien* and indeed throughout the quadrilogy (Chien, 1994, p.7). Not surprisingly then, the plot twist reveals that MU/TH/UR is a source of horror in the film. It comes out that she is responsible for taking the crew to their deaths by redirecting the course of the Nostromo's journey. She even knowingly invites the alien onboard the spaceship. More specifically, she does not warn Dallas about the unlikely possibility of overcoming the alien single-handedly.

As the narrative progresses, it is revealed that the MU/TH/UR is programmed, controlled and dominated by the invisible bad father, the company. It is MU/TH/UR controlled by father that interferes with the course of Nostromo's journey for procuring the alien species. This co-dependent MU/TH/UR has no voice of her own and is pre-programmed with the father's interests and his voice. The MU/TH/UR is represented as treacherous and nothing more than a computing machine that transmits and advances the company's agenda. It has been commented upon by Greenberg (1988, p.165) and Hermann (1997, p.39) that both *Alien* and *Aliens* criticise corporate greed and capitalism via the representation of the company and its exploitation of its workforce.

The revelation that the MU/TH/UR is secretly controlled by the company discloses only another level of the company's deception. The MU/TH/UR knowing fully well that the alien is very powerful takes Dallas to his death, thereby depriving the crew of a benevolent father figure in the film. This MU/TH/UR is a smothering MU/TH/UR who takes her children to their deaths. The MU/TH/UR in *Alien* both mothers the child and takes them to their death thus representing different psychological dispositions towards her role as a mother. The hierarchal family order that is created by the company as father is that which subordinates and subjugates MU/TH/UR. The company's

representative onboard the ship is the Bluebeard-like Ash, who watches over the company's interests. A dysfunctional family is represented consisting of the company, MU/TH/UR and Ash. All three characters are technological horrors either vested in science or a product of science. It is their perverse interest in science that allows them to invite monsters to their home. Ash's role as a child of science (he does not know nature) and a representative of it, means he is both controlled and controlling. He occupies the dual roles of an abused child because his programming is a coercive form of control and an abusing parent because he is programmed to further maintain control.

As Dallas enters the vicinity of MU/TH/UR's cabin for the first time, we see that the access to MU/TH/UR is regulated by a futuristic lock and key. This futuristic key links the MU/TH/UR's room to the chamber in the Bluebeard fairy tale, where the last wife finds the dead bodies of the previous wives. Once Dallas passes away, Ripley gets access to MU/TH/UR. She, via her understanding of computer jargon can reveal the company's special order. This order instructs that the alien has to be procured for the company's bio-weapons division at any cost. The MU/TH/UR's chamber is also the space where the truth about Ash is revealed. It is discovered that Ash as the science officer is a synthetic person pre-programmed with the company's agenda. It emerges that MU/TH/UR is the bearer of secrets and her cabin is like the Bluebeard's bloody chamber. By this logic, it is the chamber where the hidden truth is revealed. The revelation via Ripley trigger's Ash's attack on her.

In a scenario that evokes violence against women, the otherwise rational Ash has a fit of anger. He pushes Ripley down and knocks her unconscious. Revealing his true character, he impulsively tries to smother Ripley with a rolled-up copy of *Playboy* magazine. Kavanaugh (1980, p.97) and Cobbs (1990, p.201) have read this aggressive act as a stand-in for Ash raping Ripley. Ash attempts to impale Ripley almost like Bluebeard's beheaded wives. Newt's beheaded doll Casey in *Aliens* is also a visual reminder of the beheaded wives. Gallardo-C and Smith write that it evokes the "fellatio" of Kane's oral rape earlier in the film (Gallardo-C and Smith, 2004, p.37). The wall in the sequence is covered with nude photos and pictures of twin fried eggs – signifying a woman's breasts – thereby implying that Ash's anger and urges are violently sexual. It also places Ripley as a 'tough' female character, who has an authoritarian position

among the crew members and assertiveness in speech, in the context of this derogatory objectification and violence against women.

Ripley is technically at her workplace onboard the spacecraft. However, the politics of her workplace has semblances to the politics of domestic isolation and domestic violence. Indeed, Hermann has pointed out that *Alien* is a variation of a haunted house film (Hermann, 1997, p.49). Ripley's abuse and then the implied rape via the hands of a husband-like Ash is more akin to domestic and marital abuse as touched upon in Chapter 3. Ripley's implicit rape by a company man is a scenario that is reiterated in *Aliens*. Burke secretly leaves the alien specimens in the laboratory loose on Newt and Ripley so that they are impregnated by the crab-like parasite. Gallardo-C and Smith have explained: "In Burke's mind at least, the two females [Ripley and Newt] constitute 'natural' wombs and are thereby open to the Alien, himself, and the Company" (Gallardo-C and Smith, 2004, p.102). In both perceiving and victimising Ripley and Newt as vessels, it is the mother's body that is violated by the company. The company man Burke, like the Bluebeard-husband in the fairy tale, oppresses the wife-like Ripley and his child like Newt.

This sexual threat, either literal or metaphorical, has a place in the corpus films other than *Alien* and *Aliens*. The rape or the sexual threat to the gothic heroine is recurrently reiterated via the figure of the action heroine across different generic spaces. This includes Gloria in *Gloria*, Sarah in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, Gail in *The River Wild*, Samantha in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, Catherine in *The Cell*, Beatrix in *Kill Bill Volume 1* and *Volume 2* and as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 Maleficent in *Maleficent*. This sexual threat is transferred to the figure of the child in some corpus films. It was noted earlier that the films this thesis investigates are marked by an absence of heterosexual relationships. Hence the only form of sexual activity that is represented onscreen are these rapes or instances of implied paedophilia.

Sexual activity coded as rape is a corrupt act of violation, masculine aggression and misogyny that does not lead to reproduction in the films. Perhaps not unsurprisingly then, motherhood in several corpus films is surrogate, for instance in *Gloria*, *Aliens*, *The Cell*, *Æon Flux*, *Elektra* and *Maleficent*. Gibbard notes in relation to Ripley: "Ripley has

found her maternal role as the protector of Newt, but she has done so by bypassing sexuality" (Gibbard, 1988, p.38). Similarly Gloria in *Gloria*, Catherine in *The Cell*, Æon in *Æon Flux*, Elektra in *Elektra* and Maleficent in *Maleficent* like Ripley have bypassed sexuality by nurturing and supporting helpless children that they come across in the narratives of the films. The male antagonists of the films constantly smother the institution, experience and ideology of motherhood. The single status of the action heroine may seem to threaten the existence of the nuclear family in the films. But conclusively, it is the surrogate mothering by the action heroine that comes to rescue motherhood and the family in the films.

In the relative, if not complete, absence of motherhood linked to female sexuality, male characters usurp a woman's power to give birth and even their roles as mothers. The male characters' appropriation of the female capacity to reproduce takes either physical manifestations or is represented metaphorically via the concept of a brainchild. For instance, in *Alien*, astronaut Kane's rib cage is broken and his body is violently torn apart as he gives birth to an alien. The male characters whose masculinity is at crisis have brainchildren in the films, which as discussed in Chapter 2 are MacGuffins around which the drama is played. Wade's brainchild in *The River Wild* is robbing the cattle auction money and disappearing with it as though he is a magician. Timothy's foolhardy idea of killing 4000 American civilians in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is representative of the failure of the American establishment and hence by that logic American patriarchy. In her analysis on the Bluebeard myth, Tatar looks at the Bluebeard figure as an "artist and aesthete" (Tatar, 2004, p.152). In a similar manner in *The Cell*, Carl's "Bluebeard as artist and aesthete's" genius is to immortalise beautiful young female victims in a pornographic display in the museum of dismembered dolls that is also a private collection of natural history (Tatar, 2004, p.152). In *Panic Room*, the thieves who break into the Altman residence use inside knowledge to get to the inheritance in the secret room. Bill's masterplan in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* is to execute brutal revenge on his former lover who is carrying his child, and then secretly whisk away their child. In *Elektra*, the ruthless Kirigi's idea is to kidnap a gifted 13-year-old girl for financial and personal gain. Carson's brainchild in *Flightplan* is extortion via victimising a family by holding their six-year-old hostage with the intention of murdering her. In *Maleficent*, Stephan's well-executed plan is to steal Maleficent's wings and use this theft as a tool

for climbing an economic and social ladder. He only falls short of stabbing Maleficent to death. Female sexuality and motherhood are in peril in the corpus films and the three rapes in *Alien* and *Aliens* are signifiers of this threat.

Kane, who is impregnated by the face-hugger alien, acts as the second mother figure in *Alien*. Gallardo-C and Smith have cited Thomson's reaction to watching *Alien* in the cinema: "And the nausea, the gulping and retching, came in the sudden upheaval of understanding, of what had been done down Kane's throat. For the man had been made pregnant" (Gallardo-C and Smith, 2004, p.16). Hermann has written: "Ridley Scott's film is indeed about gestation and birth: *male* gestation and birth" (Hermann, 1997, p.38). The expulsion of the caterpillar alien from Kane's chest is a sequence of graphic horror (Doherty, 1996, pp.184-5; Hermann, 1997, p.37). Other than the gore and shock that is associated with the sequence, what has also been commented upon is the gendered implications of this 'birth'. For Hermann, Kane's oral rape and death in childbirth signify male anxieties over the shift in roles of men from the sphere of production to the sphere of reproduction (Hermann, 1997, p.39). Hermann further argues that Kane's death represents a male anxiety of birthing and paternity (Hermann, 1997, p.38). Chien has written: "The Aliens as a species represent the abjected female; their rampant fecundity dramatizes the male fear of the female procreative ability and the power they derive from it" (Chien, 1994, p.14).

Kane's forced birthing of the alien creature is also representative of the womb envy of gothic-inspired masculinities that abound in the corpus films. What cannot be overlooked in this pinning down of a discourse of male desire to reproduce or incorporate the womb is the homosexual tendency of the text and the characters represented onscreen. Although the homosexual subtext is outside the scope of this thesis, theorists have unfailingly observed and engaged with this strain of thought when looking at ideas of male reproduction. Hermann reads the alien in *Alien* as a monstrous masculine power thereby counterarguing Creed's monstrous-feminine thesis (Hermann, 1997, p.37). In this respect, Kane's rape by the alien, another man, allows for a queer reading. Gallardo-C and Smith have cited co-writer Dan O'Bannon, who has labelled Kane's oral rape as a form of "castration" (Gallardo-C and Smith, 2004, p.37). This idea

of castration is consistent with the masculinity-in-crisis argument presented throughout the thesis.

The birthing of the alien via Kane's chest also shows that is the subject of gender that is at stake in the films via the nuclear family or an alternative family unit of Heung (1983), Sobchack (1996) and Tasker (2004). The thematic terrain of the corpus films is masculine and feminine identities mediated via the roles of fatherhood and motherhood in culture and its construction in popular culture. The films bring to the fore the problems, anxieties and dysfunction that surround these assumed roles that have kept culture in a state of constancy and inconstancy. However, with Kane's violent rape and death, the message that the texts contain is that when male characters give birth onscreen it will be to technological horrors like the terminator machines or creatures like the aliens. It is hinted that the extreme gender ambiguity via parenthood in the films conclusively sustains conservative gender ideology, the absolute need to separate the public and private sphere, and confine traditional gender roles within this segregation.

It is thereby not only representative of womb envy but is also a critique of masculine endeavour in the films. Masculine energy in the corpus films is resolutely redirected towards the thriving of the hearth and the family. Although Kane is hardly a company man any more than Ripley, this birth of the alien is representative of the bad father's desire (which in this instance is the company) to give birth. Reproduction and motherhood are not characteristic of the female sex in the world of *Alien*, a world which is revealed to be sexist, misogynist, racist, governed by capitalistic greed, and classist. The problem surrounding the gendered premise of men giving birth is both introduced in the text and contained by the climax of the film via the representation of the warrior-like Ripley, who protects the cat and is thereby the third mother figure in the film.

In *Alien*, Ripley the professional conducts herself and her crew out of a manual, a twist on the theme of the gothic heroine as a writer or librarian or the seeker of answers. She does not show any empathy for her distressed colleague Kane, and by the same logic, it seems unlikely that she would be portrayed in a caring role. Scholars have somewhat reductively read the convoluted struggle to find Jones the cat in the climax of the film as a marker of an otherwise androgynous Ripley's maternal instinct. Wood

explains: “Having destroyed the alien, Ripley can become completely ‘feminine’ – soft and passive, her domesticated pussy safely asleep” (Wood, 1984, p.199). Kavanaugh argues that Ripley’s fetching of Jones leading up to the convoluted climax of the film shows that “humanism” survives in the film. He states: “Gary Cooper goes home to his little boy, and Sigourney Weaver goes to bed with her kitty-cat” (Kavanaugh, 1990, p.98). Creed approaches this preoccupation with the cat via the “phallocentric concept of female fetishism” (Creed, 1993b, p.23). She argues that Jones is a “reassuring, fetish-object for the ‘normal woman’”, and that Ripley strokes Jones as “it were her ‘baby’, her ‘little one’” (Creed, 1993b, p.24). What comes across from these theorisations of Ripley’s protection of the cat is how invariably this act evokes in critical analysis the essentialist framework of gender stereotypes, associating nurturing and protection with the female sex, and as innately feminine.

Ripley’s journey continues in *Aliens*. As discussed in Chapter 3, she is represented at a loss as she has lost everyone and everything, including her job. Despite the desperate situation that she is confronted with, she accepts the offer of yet another expedition in outer space. She seeks this adventure to heal from the trauma of the past as she clearly states to Burke. It is also an attempt to give a narrative and perhaps even to seek closure to what looks like an otherwise broken life. The colonists of LV-426 have been devoured or impregnated by the alien creatures. What the rescue team come across is a young child Newt in the science laboratory with the hamsters, which is the equivalent of the Bluebeard’s bloody chamber in outer space. In this film, the chamber of secrets intersects with the man of science’s laboratory of foray into illicit activities. This version of Bluebeard’s bloody chamber violates and indecisively penetrates the sacred terrain of God and the unknown as it studies perverse life forms. The company’s secret space is outside the American justice system’s jurisdiction and hence the company’s unlawful deeds go unchecked and unhindered. The gothic child of the film, the orphan Newt, has witnessed the death of three of her family members. By this implication, she is a product of the company’s failed experiment of colonising uncharted outer space and developing it for commercial purposes by settling human life.

Instead of rescuing injured civilians who could tell the supercharged marines their story and go on to tell their tales about how the soldiers rescued them, the marines find

disappointment in an almost mute Newt. Feminist writers, philosophers and film scholars have understood the male desire for immortality in the context of their inability to reproduce. They argue that this subconscious lack is manifested in the cultural activity that men engage in. As already discussed in Chapter 1, among feminist writers and philosophers who propagate this viewpoint are Kittay (1983), al-Hibri (1983), Arditti, Klein and Minden (1984), Keller (1986, 1990), Stanworth (1987), Corea (1988) and Götz (1999). Among feminist film scholars who engage with this idea include Modleski (1988), Creed (1990, 1993a, 1993b, 2005), Kaplan (1992), Robbins (1993), Fischer (1996, p.419) and Nelmes (2007). That she is a girl child unlike the boy child Phil in *Gloria* from the discussion in Chapter 2, again has sexist, misogynist and inherently patriarchal implications. Newt's inability to speak and tell her story aligns her to Ripley and the illness of aphasia discussed in Chapter 3. They are Othered when compare to the marines, who cannot cease to banter even when the situation requires discipline. The opposition between banter and muteness, between power and vulnerability, between inexperience and experience with the alien species, sets Ripley and Newt apart from the marines.

Too consumed with themselves and the propensity of the situation they are faced with, the marines are unable to connect with Newt. This is shown quite explicitly by Newt's muteness. Much to the marines' disappointment, it is a relatively feminine yet androgynous female outsider Ripley, whose skills in being in touch with her "'softer' side" of Greenberg's analysis are employed to rescue the only survivor (Greenberg, 1988, p.170). Ripley, via her tenderness and mutual respect for a fellow survivor of the alien attack, can communicate effectively because of her special insight into Newt's experience. Thus Ripley, like Jane, also becomes responsible for a neglected child. Given Ripley's secondary non-military position compared to the marines, Ripley has the option to protect Newt. She does this in the climax, which involves a confrontation between the queen alien and Ripley over Newt. The number of different ways in which Ripley puts herself at risk for Newt leading up to the climax validates a bond between them, particularly when Newt calls out to her as "mommy". Ripley and Newt are thus bound by a surrogate mother-and-child relationship in *Aliens* because of the adverse situations from which Ripley protects Newt. By killing the killer who in this instance is the queen alien and exposing the company and its treachery, Ripley protects Newt and thereby

emerges as the "final" mother. Like the term killer father in Chapter 2, the term final mother draws on Clover's work and her analysis of the final girl in the slasher film. Ripley in *Alien* has been read as a final girl by Clover. Thus Ripley in *Aliens* is the final mother who dispatches the killer father (here the reference is to the company and its malicious intent as discussed in Chapter 2). The Director's Cut of the film further associates Ripley with familial ties. In a scene not included in the cinema release, Ripley contemplates the photograph of her now-deceased daughter, Amanda. The picture establishes Ripley as a mother, who was unable to make it to her eleventh birthday celebration. This disruption and damage of a familial bond on account of being a working mother have allowed scholars to unflinchingly read Ripley as a bad Reaganite mother. According to this reading by Gallardo-C and Smith, Ripley abandoned the family seduced by the feminist pursuit of gains in the public sphere, and the absence of a family in the text is the retribution for her sins (Gallardo-C and Smith, 2004, p.112).

Motherhood is a central theme of science fiction films *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Cameron has explained in an interview about *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. He explains that the challenge he faced when writing Sarah's character was to write of a female character, who was not just a woman in man's clothes. Cameron explains that giving Sarah's character a maternal dimension added more complexity to her action persona (Jones, 1991, p.17). However, Cameron's idea of writing a strong woman who is not masculine by associating her with the role of a mother, although understandable, is not fully agreeable to feminist film theorists. Sarah's motherhood has received critical attention as she is the central protagonist of the films. Goscilio undertakes an in-depth feminist analysis of *The Terminator* (Goscilio, 1987). The plot of *The Terminator* involves Sarah, a naïve white woman, who learns to transform her life in face of an apocalyptic message. She eventually overcomes a horrendous cyborg as the evidence of this possible future. The meek waitress transforms into the mother of the future because she has to give birth and raise the protector of the human race. Goscilio concludes that the narrative focuses on Sarah's role as a mother and her role is favoured in service of a male child. This, according to Goscilio, means that Sarah's identity is "mediated through a male subjectivity" (Goscilio, 1987, p.47). Sarah is a cog in the patriarchal oppression that the terminator husband figure represents. She transforms into the Hollywood action heroine on

account of her role as a mother, which is deemed by the patriarchal unconscious as the primal role of a woman in the sacrosanct American nuclear family (Goscilio, 1987, p.46).

While the discourse of maternity is ideologically conservative, there is another dimension worth highlighting. As discussed in Chapter 2, John is the child born out of Sarah's infidelity. Within the scope of the Bluebeard fairy tale, Sarah's infidelity signifies of rebellion against her violent husband. It is also within a political context an act of defiance of the patriarchal nuclear family. Whittaker cites Danny Peary:

> It can be argued that *The Terminator* is another Reagan-era anti-abortion film in which a single woman wisely decides to have her baby than terminate her pregnancy. …But I believe Cameron and Hurd think of Sarah as an independent, leftist woman of the sixties and seventies, an era when unmarried women, who gave birth to and raised their children, stood in defiance of the pro-nuclear family political right (Whittaker, 2000, p.76).

Peary reads feminist defiance of the traditional patriarchal nuclear family in the discourse of the maternal that is consciously propagated both by the filmmaker and the text. Sarah's act of feminist-inspired defiance leads to the formation of the extended family unit of this thesis' discussion.

Exploring religious allegory in both films, French reads Sarah as a stand-in for the Virgin Mary, who is impregnated by an "annunciatory angel" like Reese (French, 1996, p.50). The film's religious references have also been mentioned by Finlan (1999, p.49) and Whittaker (2000, p.80). This religious subtext in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* resonates with the Christian mythological dyad discussed earlier in the chapter. This in turn recalls and underlines the significance of the mother-child bond within the Bluebeard fairy tale. In his analysis of Sarah's motherhood, French further explains:

> Far from being a representative of any recognisable form of feminism, Sarah is the embodiment of something stranger and more primitive, the woman defending her child, the tigress fighting to defend her cub, which is also the future of mankind (French, 1996, p.51).

French's analysis of the primitive in Sarah's motherhood rings even truer when understood within the frame of the Bluebeard fairy tale. As French has clearly stated,

Sarah's act of protecting John may or may not have feminist potential. Mann has also engaged with the idea of motherhood in *The Terminator* and its controversial status in feminist criticism (Mann, 1989-90, p.24).

Sarah, like Rosemary in *Rosemary's Baby,* has a "hysterical pregnancy" where she is being persecuted by a demonic force that wants to possess the child and obliterate her in the process (Fischer, 1996, p.419). This further makes the gothic link in *The Terminator* apparent. Sarah's primitive maternal instinct is on a par with the barbarity of the Bluebeard-husband. It is the savagery of the husband that calls for the action heroine to defend the child with such ferociousness, which equals French's analogy of a tigress defending her cub. Goscilio points out that Sarah's "maternity differentiates and secures the feminine, however strong a woman may become" (Goscilio, 1987, p.49). In her account on postfeminism in the film *Enchanted* (Kevin Lima, 2007), Tasker argues that femininity is constructed as a source of empowerment (Tasker, 2011, p.73). Similarly, Sarah is empowered via an exaggerated maternal instinct as a marker of her femininity. This makes both *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* postfeminist texts that focus on the protagonist's motherhood.

Most critical accounts on motherhood in the films discuss Sarah's motherhood in relation to John highlighting either Sarah's protection of John or her absence from his life. Chapter 3 explores at some length critical accounts that have identified Sarah as emotionally unavailable to John. This changes when they bond at the Dyson residence via their honesty. In both films and especially *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, Sarah takes on the role of the symbolic mother. In *The Terminator,* Goscilio has argued that even before Kyle comes calling, Sarah is typecast as a virgin and a mother especially one that opposes the whore typecast of her flatmate Ginger (Goscilo, 1987-88, pp.41-2). Similar views are also expressed about Ginger by Telotte (1992, p.29), Finlan (1999, p.49) and Whittaker (2000, pp.49-51). Goscilio argues that this is understood in how Sarah perceives of their pet lizard compared to her flatmate. While the simple-minded Sarah treats Pugsley like a child, the "unmaternal" Ginger threatens to make a belt out of the lizard (Goscilio, 1987, pp.45-6).

That Sarah is given the role of mother is not surprising since the film's version of Los Angeles is represented as waste and lewd. Towards the climax of the film, the heavily pregnant Sarah who has a gun to the side of her belly is further juxtaposed with the Mexican street kid. By purchasing the polaroid, Sarah saves the boy from what is said in the translation: "a beating from his father." In her act of paying for the photograph, Sarah saved the unknown boy from abuse that is specifically linked to the father. This framing within the discourse of the maternal has an impact on an active character's agency, subjectivity and narrative trajectory. But when this stereotyping is approached from the point of view of the Bluebeard fairy tale, it becomes apparent that the role of the symbolic mother brings the action heroine into a zone from where she can confront the evil Bluebeard-father.

Sarah's incarceration in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* makes her an absent mother. The Bluebeard-husband figure Silberman incarcerates Sarah, gaslights her, and his people abuse her verbally and physically. As an ultimate act of control, Silberman does not allow any visits from Sarah's son and she is not even allowed to make a phone call. The Bluebeard-like Silberman thus maintains an aura of his power by separating mother-and-child. Sarah's abuse and isolation are the reasons for her deteriorating mental health and rebellion against the system. Silberman's ultimate goal is not to rehabilitate Sarah but to sadistically punish her and shut her away from the world. She is thereby systematically being driven out of her mind by the symbolic husband. It is American society's professionals, capitalistic greed and single-mindedness that have thus undermined motherhood in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* rather than a single mother who had a child outside of wedlock undermining the system. Sarah's absence makes John delinquent and leaves him with an uncaring and verbally abusive foster family. His disbelief in Sarah's stories of the Last Judgement has most obviously distanced them from each other.

But while Sarah is both physically and emotionally absent to John in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, she continues to hold the pedestal of the symbolic mother in the film. Chapter 3 briefly analyses the title sequence of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Later in the film, the title sequence is revealed to be part of Sarah's nightmare. The nightmare that Sarah has whilst she falls asleep outdoors is revelatory. Sarah's point-of-view shots

before falling asleep include John, a few children playing with dogs, and more specifically a toddler. As reality seeps into dream state, some children become the preoccupation of Sarah's dream. In this dream sequence, Sarah dressed as the action heroine in black combat fatigues is held captive via a wire fence overlooking a children's playground. The naïve young Sarah as we see her in *The Terminator* is seen in the playground with John who is still a toddler. The feminine and angelic Sarah is seen in her waitress uniform at the playground. The action heroine Sarah pulls on the metal fence aggressively trying to catch the younger Sarah's attention. We soon realise that that the action heroine Sarah is speaking but neither the younger Sarah nor we can hear a voice. Despite not having a voice, her mouth syncs several times "wake up", warning her younger self. The younger Sarah can hear a distant sound as she lifts her head, but is unsure of the source of this sound and if it contains a message. This scenario is unmistakably evocative of Bertha's warnings to Jane about Rochester's true identity. Sarah, like Jane, does get the sense that something unusual is happening around her but is not fully able to decipher the source and message of the warning. Sarah also doubles like Bertha and Jane as discussed in Chapter 3, here as the woman of the future (and past as discussed in Chapters 1 and 3) who forewarns the younger, inexperienced and naïve heroine. This warning is not about marital status, but involves the immortal Count's malice, which will destroy mankind and most importantly kill the children who are a symbol of love, hope and survival in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

As the dream sequence continues, a blaze of fire falls on the playground and moves towards its vicinity. This fire however is not started by the incarcerated woman whose voice is silenced and existence is shut and denied by patriarchy like in the novel *Jane Eyre*. This fire is started by none other than the "destructive parent", of Fischer's discussion in another context, and his devious deeds (Fischer, 1996, p.16). As the nuclear fire increases in intensity, everyone, and here mostly mothers and their children, are seen slowly burning and disintegrating. The madwoman burns to ashes as well, as she cries hysterically in anger and pain. It seems as though as she is not crying in the pain of the fire, but in the pain of being unable to stop what she knew all along. The cry of the burning madwoman in the dream sequence is the pain of the mother, who could not protect her children, despite knowing that the blaze was inevitable. The dream represents Sarah's inability to control the future of the children despite being foretold

its course. It is the regret of being unable to change the course of the future that burns Sarah on the inside and is visible as emotional instability on the outside.

From the analysis of the title sequence presented in and the extended nightmare above, the nightmare is not just of a nuclear apocalypse; it is also a mother's nightmare. In this nightmare, Sarah is not just John's mother, she is the mother of the children of the world. As discussed in Chapter 3, Sarah in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* is unable to function and is emotionally unavailable to mother John (Telotte, 1992, p.31; Jeffords, 1993, p.249). Instead, Jeffords argues, it is the protector terminator that is motherly towards John (Jeffords, 1993, pp.250-1). However, in Sarah's positioning as a *symbolic* mother, her duty of care extends beyond John. In the title sequence, we are introduced to John via Sarah's voiceover. This is followed by a close-up of the adult John (Michael Edwards). The title sequence allows us to peek into this future of Sarah's subconscious. As the nightmare is played shot by shot, we see the burning playground thereby making it apparent that Sarah's maternal duty extends to these other children.

Furthermore, in the film, Sarah's point-of-view shots include children. But they hardly ever include John who is craving love, attention, affection and understanding as suggested by the physical and emotional distance between them. The underlying message of *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* is that the human race will be saved from doom by protecting its children and safeguarding their future. Sarah is never seen showing any affection or interacting with the child characters in the film. But it is the life of these children that is part of her dilemma. In Sarah's dilemma that surround primarily children and the family unit, the text consciously promulgates an appreciation of traditional feminine traits. Drawing on Jancovich, Freeland has made some useful observations concerning the representation of femininity in Shelley's *Frankenstein* and 1950s horror films, which are also pertinent here:

> Like women in Mary Shelley's novel, women in the 1950s horror films often bring humanity to situations that have gotten out of hand due to the impersonal aims of a (male) scientific-military technocracy. …Mark Jancovich points out that in these movies, 'feminine' qualities such as feeling, intuition, interaction, and imagination are often valued. Further, he notes that

> 'women's involvement is often central to the defeat of the menace' (Freeland, 2000, pp.75-6).

Jancovich's (1996) work here brings to the fore the importance of stereotypical feminine traits in the ideologically conservative gothic-infused narratives. Similarly, Sarah's feminine concern for the family and children is the cause that comes against the inevitability of the nuclear war. Feminine traits keep in check excessive masculine passions which hinge on violence in the corpus films. As discussed in Chapter 2, when the police officials question Sarah for the terminator's whereabouts, they point out that the officers that were killed were men with family and children. The plea for information from Sarah is thus also an appeal for the preservation of the American nuclear family.

Among Sarah's point-of-view shots includes the sequence of two children fighting at the gas station. They hold pistols and defensively argue over their intellectual and hierarchal superiority. The young children fighting among each other are evocative of the war between humans and machines that we briefly catch a glimpse of in both *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. The message is also that this war between humans and machines is as childish as the fight between the children and hence illogical. Within the patriarchal realm of the film, which extends to both the representation of men and women, it is boys who are seen waging this fight. They are further coded as exhibiting masculine values via their aggressive nature and by having guns to play with. In its representation of masculinity's foundational ideology as destructive, the lineage that *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* refers to is specifically that of the literary and cinematic gothic. It is the boys' mother who interferes and breaks the fight. Again, taking this sequence with minor characters as the signifier of gender ideology in the film, it is the female character as mother who is represented as the redeemer. This sequence signifies Sarah's role as the mother and redeemer and also demonstrates why this role is necessary. It is implied that the female characters have to take on this role or else childlike male characters will wage a war and lead to the collapse of the natural order. This normalises gender ideology in the film, a cycle that is presented to be temporarily disrupted.

The other child character in the film is Danny Dyson (De Vaughn Nixon) whose childish prank saves his computer scientist father's life. Earlier in the film, we see Dyson

as overinvested in his work. He is busy working away on his brainchild on a Sunday instead of spending time with what his wife Trisha Dyson (S. Epatha Merkerson) calls "his other babies", thereby referring to their two biological children. While Dyson's brainchild almost brings death upon him, his son saves his life. The father who will change the course of his actions is rescued by none other than the child, the real humaniser and redeemer in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and in the corpus films. Tarissa's role as a wife and mother allows her to regulate Dyson's Promethean ventures and redirect his energies towards the children and the family. The ultimate goal of the text is to reconstitute the biological family around the child and restore traditional gender roles. It becomes clear that the "transvestism" that Brown accuses Sarah and the protector terminator of is only temporary and its objective is the strengthening of the biological nuclear family (Brown, 2011, p.30).

The presence of children in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* is similar to the portraits of children in gothic and horror films such as *Shock* (Alfred Werker, 1946)*, The Curse of the Cat People* (Gunther V. Fritsch and Robert Wise, 1944), *Sorry, Wrong Number* and *Jagged Edge* (Richard Marquand, 1985). Although these films do not engage with the subjects of motherhood and reproduction, children maintain a pervasive presence via their gothic portraits. There are portraits of children in *Æon Flux,* even though children are not established as a missing object until much later in the narrative. As noted in Chapter 1, Trevor's pop art portraits appear all over Bregna. As discussed earlier, Trevor as the dictator is also a child because of his last name Goodchild. Within the logic of this reading, the portraits of Trevor are those of a child. Gothic-infused films such as *Demon Seed*, *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* (Rachel Talalay, 1991), *Children of Men*, and *Silent Hill* (Christophe Gans, 2006) also deal with a similar subject. This presence of the child figure in the corpus films points out their significance and how the narrative unfolds around them.

However, in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* children are close to becoming the lost object in the narratives. It is to ensure the safety of these children that Sarah decides to assassinate Dyson. Perhaps then not surprisingly, her confrontation with Dyson moves fairly quickly from an attempt to assassinate him to giving him a feminist-inspired speech. French argues that of the many ideological

positions that *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* represent, the feminist stance comes across inarguably. It is especially unavoidable in Sarah's confrontation with Dyson. French has engaged with this idea in some detail:

> the script itself anxiously makes the feminist point… as Sarah Connor attacks a male scientist, and all males [*sic*] scientists for creating the bomb and all those other technological horrors, when they are unable to perform the true creative act of making a baby. The feminist point is made, but also undercut as we are shown that she is ranting, and as her son calls on her to be more constructive (French, 1996, pp.52-3).

French's analysis reveals the feminist message in Sarah's confrontation with Dyson in his family's presence. Sarah's passionate speech is undercut by her son John's appeal to constructive problem-solving. However, Sarah's speech is revelatory to the central preoccupations of her character. Sarah criticises and addresses what is analysed in Chapters 1 and 2 as the Bluebeard-husband figure's appropriation of the female capacity to reproduce by producing terminator monsters. Her confrontation with Dyson thus involves a critique of masculine endeavour. French's analysis further reaffirms Sarah's status as the symbolic mother in the film. It also demonstrates that the action heroine has to take on the role of the mother because as discussed in Chapter 2, the Bluebeard-husband is a child murderer. In her transformation into a killing machine like the terminator – the action heroine – Sarah becomes both emotionally disconnected from John and capable of proactive action. Her purveyance in the area of violence and aggressiveness gives her the physical and indeed the mental capacity to ensure that the children have a future. Ironically, Sarah transforms into the symbolic mother not by softening but by *hardening* into a killer, whose warrior skills can assure that the children are not murdered.

Chapter 2 argues that the ultimate aim of masculine endeavour in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* is to conquer the womb. But there is another agenda as well, and that is to obliterate, replace, and even become the mother. In *The Terminator*, the bad terminator dispatches Sarah's mother. He speaks in Sarah's mother's voice and seeks information about her whereabouts. The terminator as Sarah's mother is not a mother who mothers, but a mother who *smothers*. This subconscious desire to overpower the mother is given more attention in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

Assuming that the bad terminator has killed John's foster mother Janelle Voight (Jenette Goldstein) in the story, he speaks to John over the telephone as his foster mother. In this particular incarnation, the bad terminator becomes the mother full-fledged. He is seen preparing food in the kitchen. His occupation of the house and the kitchen brings the politics of the public sphere that the bad terminator represents into the familial and private sphere. The bad terminator is thereby further feminised via being positioned in a domestic space. In this way, he brings to mind Bill in *Kill Bill: Volume 2* who is seen cutting sandwiches on the bar to feed dinner to his daughter, who is otherwise motherless, like John. John detects that something is not quite right from the excessive politeness that the terminator communicates. And as the mother, the bad terminator logically murders the verbally abusive foster father Todd Voight (Xander Berkeley). He is also portrayed in the Bluebeardian tradition signified by the blue sleeves of his t-shirt.

Towards the climax of the film, the bad terminator again takes on the role of John's mother to lure him. He injures Sarah and copies her. In this particular instance, he appears to John as Sarah and calls out for him. Again, the giveaway is the verbal weakness that the bad terminator exhibits when impersonating the otherwise strong Sarah. Seeking John for assistance is out of character for Sarah, who clearly states early on in the film that she can look after herself. The bad terminators then repeatedly take on the guise of the mother as if playing out their subconscious desires of killing the mother, becoming the mother and seeking the child.

In a much-cited monologue, Sarah positions the protector terminator as John's replacement father figure. But he is, as Jeffords points out, motherly towards John (Jeffords, 1993, pp.250-1). Even the protector terminator is learning to care, protect, love and feel. He is thereby softening his excessively macho image set by *The Terminator* and the bar sequence upon his arrival to the present. The ultimate goal of masculinities in this film is to feminise and concomitantly become the mother either from a negative or positive frame of reference. Such cognitive dissonance is not merely restricted to the characters within the text, but is also symptomatic of the texts and the multiple readings that they allow for. From the account on motherhood in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, it is apparent that the texts allow for simultaneous pre-feminist, feminist and postfeminist readings. Sarah is both the epitome of a good and a bad

mother. The terminators play the role of the father and mother as the texts itself play with the meaning of culturally accepted concepts.

In *The River Wild*, Gail is a mother of two children, and in the film, director Hanson employs some themes of his maternal thriller *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1992). In 'The New Male Melodrama', Dave Kehr writes of the resurgence of the family melodrama and thematic changes from the late 1970s onwards arguing that there is an anti-feminist inspired reversal of gender roles that disrupts the harmony and functioning of the family unit based upon a traditional sexual division of labour. He writes on a string of films which represent female characters who seek gratification outside the family and its constraints, including Streep's portrayal of Joanna in *Kramer vs. Kramer*. Kehr explains: "Now it may be the women who are macho, but the theme is the same as ever – the protection of the nuclear family" (Kehr, 1983, p.47). Similarly, in *The River Wild*, Streep's Gail displays muscular strength and agility that makes her macho in a different way. Gail's macho character does not give her the aggressiveness to separate herself emotionally from the family and the child that needs mothering as it did to Joanna in *Kramer vs. Kramer*.

In *The River Wild*, Streep plays against type and is represented as a caring mother, who does everything in her capacity to protect her son and salvage her family. And the aspect of Joanna's character, which is machismo, is subverted and deployed to service the family in *The River Wild*, a postfeminist text, rather than to tear it apart. Gail's machismo allows her to protect her family from the drifter Wade, who is unmarried and portrayed as a womaniser, the anti-thesis of the nuclear family, as both a literal and figurative threat to it. When Gail does approach the shameless Wade, the warlord, in a moment of great thought and simultaneous hesitation, she pleads to him as a mother. In the film, motherhood and family are important aspects of Gail's identity.

Likewise, before even being introduced as a spy and at a time when there is a dilemma surrounding her former identity, we know that Samantha in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is a mother. On the other hand, her alter-ego Charlene robustly declares that she has nothing to do with the child. This brings into play the subject of cognitive dissonance in relation to action heroine and mother personas of Samantha's character.

Motherhood causes struggle and tension in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, yet is central to the protagonist and her quest of self-discovery and personal plenitude in the film.

The representation of motherhood in *The Cell* is very similar to Ripley in *Aliens*. Catherine in *The Cell* is a woman with a cat. This signifies her single-out-of-choice relationship status and her dedication to her career. She even takes her work home with her, which gives her nightmares. Work-related stress is represented to cause insomnia and affects her mental and physical wellbeing. She is completely unattached, and when assessing her circumstances and choices, motherhood seems like a distant possibility. The narrative does not give her any romantic leads either, much like contemporary renderings of the gothic heroine, for instance Ripley in *Alien* and Starling in *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal* (Ridley Scott, 2001). Akin to her gothic heroine counterparts in science fiction and the investigative woman of Tasker's analysis, Catherine is independent and self-sufficient (Tasker, 1998). This counts her out of heteronormativity, even if temporarily. It further weakens the possibility of her having a family or to become a single mother. However, because of her professional choices she spends every waking minute understanding problem child psychology and by logic rescuing children. Hollinger has noticed developments in the roles played by female characters in Hollywood films comparing 1970s female representations to their counterparts in the 1980s and 1990s. For Hollinger, the independence of the female characters in the 1970s in films died out. In her post-1980s films include this sense of female independence with motherhood, thereby defining the character in terms of her femininity (Hollinger, 2012, p.44). In line with Hollinger's argument, Catherine and other corpus heroine's independence is contained by the role of a mother figure, thereby framing them within conservatism and the stereotype of woman as breeder.

Catherine's main patient is *The Cell* is the unlucky Edward who is tied to his bed in a death sleep. When a comatose psychopath is brought for her assessment, she explores the uncharted territories of his mind as guided by his inner child, boy-Carl of the discussion. This is done so that one of his victims can be rescued from a Baptist drowning. The psychologically damaged monster has subsumed his identity with his abusive father. The verbal and physical abuse and neglect he suffered as a child are too extreme to be healed. Despite the bleak state of affairs, Catherine ends up connecting,

protecting and, in the end, rescuing the child, who has an enduring presence in the mentally ill monster's subconscious. The theory of healing the inner child is deployed to cure the killer father's catharsis. Freeland has argued that the senator's daughter in *The Silence of the Lambs* takes on the status of a damsel in distress (Freeland, 2000, p.210). By the same logic, boy-Carl and indeed other children in the films take the status of damsels in distress, who are protected by the action heroine. As cited earlier, Nelson has argued that: "The task of the heroine in a gothic romance novel is to transforms the *homme fatale'*s darkness into light" (Nelson, 2013, p.138). Similarly, films that have Bluebeard in the narrative (unlike a gothic husband who holds the possibility of being reformed), the action heroine instead transforms the child's inner and outer darkness into lightness via love and protection. This rings true for boy-Carl in *The Cell* as well as Phil in *Gloria*, Newt in *Aliens* and Abby in *Elektra*. Once Carl passes away, Catherine also adopts Carl's homeless dog Valentine. Catherine is thereby closely linked with the protection of children and shown to be a symbolic mother. She, like Rachel Cooper (Lillian Gish), is a "Mother Goose-like protector" in the Southern gothic film *The Night of the Hunter* (Del Toro, 2013, p.108). She is accorded the status of the primal mother because she brings an end to the serial killer's blood lust for attractive young white women. In his death, the fear that he generated as the bogeyman of the unconscious that led to the debilitated condition of the children in the film ceases to exist as well.

In the same way, motherhood is reinstated in relation to divorce and a broken family in *Panic Room*. Judith Kegan Gardiner argues that: "Women's disillusionment with men leads not to lesbianism but to motherhood" (Gardiner, 1978, p.74). As Meg's marriage to a wealthy billionaire has ended at the beginning of the film, her other significant relationship is that of a mother to a teenage daughter. This bonding in the face of marital disharmony is representative of Gardiner's statement. Tasker has argued regarding to female friendship films: "Female friendship is redemptive in a narrative that constructs marriage as an obsessive fantasy" (Tasker, 1998, p.153). Although Meg and the rebellious Sarah are not exactly friends, their coupling amidst familial crisis has striking similarities to Tasker's observation. This leads to strong female bonding in absence of stable masculine figures.

When the house is under invasion in the hunt for a hidden inheritance unknown to the new owners, the formulaic generic trope of the mother protecting her child is evoked. That this trope may have several origins including the maternal melodrama is not inaccurate. But what is also given is that these tropes both of home invasion and an older woman protecting a younger more vulnerable character is rooted in the gothic tradition (Wheatley, 2006, p.160). Hanson has argued that "female fear" is significant in the gothic mode (Hanson, 2007, p.183). In her discussion on neo-gothic films, Hanson argues that the gothic mode is utilised to rearticulate female fears in the contemporary period (Hanson, 2007, p.198). The mother-and-daughter are and further re-emerge as the only version of a thriving family in an otherwise bleak and hopeless film. In the neo-gothic *Panic Room*, this female fear is displaced as Meg's concern for Sarah's safety. Fincher claims that he chose Stewart for her androgynous quality and her similarity to Foster, by saying that she reminds him of a "young Jodie Foster" (*Panic Room* DVD 3 Disc Special Edition). Both Wheatley's analysis of generic conventions and Fincher's casting choices not only make explicit the mother-daughter relationship, but also the bond between this duo as sisters, thereby suggesting the term 'sisterhood'. The discussion on Elektra and Maleficent's motherhood engages with this term in detail and points out its significance in the corpus films.

In *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2*, Beatrix meets her supposed end as an expectant mother. In a fantastical turn of events, Beatrix wakes from her sleep-like death and embarks on a journey of revenge in the memory of her daughter. As her journey unfolds, she finds that her daughter is alive and hidden in secret in what Mercer and Shingler have identified in another context as *deus ex machina* ending to the films (Mercer and Shingler, 2000, pp.59-60). Beatrix as a character is unaware that the end of her journey will lead her to her daughter. In her analysis of the narrative twist at the climax of *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2*, Coulthard writes:

> Even though the logic is one that escapes the Bride until her confrontation with Bill, the ideological power of the ending (and the audience's knowledge of her daughter's existence) transforms the vengeful murders into required acts necessary for the rescue of a child (Coulthard, 2007, p.167).

Coulthard's analysis thus points out that Beatrix's brutal murder of her former colleagues as revenge transforms into a morally coded righteous journey to rescue the

child from the clutches of the evil father.

However, I would argue that the climax is about recovering her daughter, when analysed within the frame of generic conventions. This allows Beatrix to transform into a mother again. Tasker discusses elements of cross-dressing, when looking at the representation of women in the contemporary Western. She writes of the TV series *Buffalo Girls* (1995):

> If the first time [Calamity] Jane (Anjelica Huston) self-consciously dresses in female clothing is as a prospective lover, the second is in her role as a mother, during an ill-fated trip to London to reclaim her daughter (Tasker, 1998, p.62).

Tasker's analysis points out the significance of costume for the masculinised heroine. She explains how the instances where she reclaims her femininity through heterosexual romance or motherhood are signified by the appropriation of feminine clothing. In *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2.* Similarly, the only time Beatrix dresses in a woman's clothes – a full skirt and a vest – is when she goes to kill Bill, and to reclaim her daughter. Her feminisation through costume is suggestive of the reclamation of her daughter, stolen and seduced by patriarchy and her role as a mother.

Unlike the mothers in *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937) and *Kramer vs. Kramer*, who pass over their children to patriarchy, Beatrix returns from her grave to reclaim her child. The father's home is not the daughter's right home in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2*. Beatrix then emerges as the final mother, who not only dispatches the killer father but also reclaims the child. In this respect, Gloria in *Gloria*, Sarah in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, Ripley in *Aliens*, Gail in *The River Wild*, Samantha in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, Catherine in *The Cell*, Meg in *Panic Room*, Æon in *Æon Flux*, Elektra in *Elektra*, Kyle in *Flightplan* and Maleficent in *Maleficent* are final mothers. Coulthard further goes on to explain the significance of motherhood via the collapse of patriarchy in the films:

> The familial structure of the death squad (with the 'Snake Charmer,' Bill, as the patriarchal head) is replaced with more benign and normalized maternal bonding (Coulthard, 2007, p.166).

Coulthard thus explains how monstrous patriarchy is replaced by benign maternity and

matriarchy in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2*. Motherhood is both the start, end and the reason for Beatrix's journey, as she is first victimised and then overcomes her Bluebeard-husband and his henchmen. The union of the mother-and-child in the absence of the patriarchal threat is the harmonious climax of the two volumes.

Other than fighting the atrocities of a figure whom Warner has identified as the "false suitor", protecting children (whether as a biological mother or not) gives the action heroine a certain velocity and purpose in the films (Warner, 1994, p.248). In addition to motherhood, *Æon Flux* like *The Terminator*, *Aliens* and *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2,* engages with what Kaplan has identified as "reproductive discourses" in science fiction films (Kaplan, 1992). Kaplan argues that the increasing focus on the foetus and the development in reproductive technologies signify patriarchal desire to rob subjectivity from onscreen mothers and displace it to the foetus and the child (Kaplan, 1992, p.209). In *Æon Flux*, Æon is childless. In her monograph, Creed refers to the menstrual cycle as "flux" (Creed, 1993b, p.81). Hence, Æon's last name, Flux, can be read as a reference to women's menstrual flow. Within this logic, Æon as a character brings natural feminine balance among the female citizens of Bregna. This restores their normal capacity to reproduce that was shut down by the industrial disease. The mystery she risks her life for allows the first new children to be born to the human race in 400 years. The birth of these children allows them to end to the veiled process of human cloning applied by male scientists. As a secret, it both thrives and punishes the citizens of Bregna.

Political integrity is maintained by the dictators of Bregna by becoming both mother and father to the citizens of Bregna, including parenting themselves. In their deeds, they replace what Adrienne Rich has called "of woman born" (Rich, 1977). By curbing the female capacity to reproduce, they ensure their own uncensored self-generation thereby transforming scientific fantasy into reality. The proponents of radical feminism believed that "men, in part because of their fear of women, and particularly their fear of women's capacity to bear children, deliberately ensure that women's interests are subordinated to their own" (Evans, 1992, p.99). The villain in this film is Oren who wants to become a father that can control mother, and in the process, obliterate women, their capacity to reproduce and even motherhood. Viewed from this

perspective, Æon's rebel activity is actually "radical feminist" activity in disguise as noted in Chapter 2. The man-made paradise of *Æon Flux* is not a step far from a feminist nightmare. The coincidental feminist dialectic is that of women's ability to mother and/or reproduce without facing violent retribution by masculine jealous action or endeavour that silences them to death in the process.

In her 'Reproductive Technologies: The Final Solution to the Woman Question?' Robyn Rowland has argued:

> For the history of 'mankind' women have been seen in terms of their value as child-bearers. We have to ask, if that last power is taken and controlled by men, what role is envisaged for women in the new world? Will women become obsolete? Will we be fighting to retain or reclaim the right to bear children – has patriarchy conned us once again? (Rowland, 1984, p.368).

Rowland expresses feminist cynicism on the development of reproductive technologies. Rowland's enquiry calls into question the sexual politics in *Æon Flux*. It is motherhood in crisis here as the male dictator maintains power by aiming to be both mother and father and in effect being God, thereby reaching to the themes elaborated in Chapters 1 and 2. Æon's extended efforts ensure the survival of humans and restore family as a primary unit. This also allows us to read the establishment of democracy in a state where a monarchy of scientists has been in power for four centuries. The concluding result is the exchange of power from the father of Bregna, Trevor a scientist, to Æon, the rebel, as the mother of Bregna. In this restoration of biological roles, it is assumed that the perversity of reproducing fathers and active mothers as represented by the leading protagonists Trevor and Æon has ceased. It is implied that the upset caused to traditional gender roles have been reset, thereby assuming that men will protect and women will reproduce and mother, a point also discussed in Chapter 3. Biological essentialism is the underlying conservative message of the film, with reproduction/motherhood an important theme.

In the same way, Elektra in *Elektra* is represented not as a mother but as a lost child in relation to the death of her mother. This daughter who lost her mother at a young age comes across another like her, the exceptional Abby. When Abby first makes an appearance, we see her break-in and steal Elektra's most personal belonging, her

deceased mother's locket. But like Elektra's mother's locket that is on the verge of being stolen and lost, Elektra's relationship with her past and the childhood trauma that her subconscious holds onto is about to resurface and heal, both by seeing herself in another and by mothering another. In search of the absent mother, a trope of the gothic mode discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 and earlier in the chapter or rather in search of the mother's killer in this particular instance, Elektra herself becomes a maternal figure. The dynamic of the mother-daughter relationship is brought into play significantly. Verbal references like "soccer mom" are present and draw attention to Elektra as a caregiver. What Elektra imagines as she observes Abby's life from both the outside and the inside is a life drama not dissimilar to her own. Foreseeing the directions and possible endings, she is adamant to change the course of it for good. Elektra is thus able to empathise with Abby at a completely different level.

Like Snow White and the Queen of Gilbert and Gubar's discussion, Abby and Elektra are represented as doubles in the film consistently via the employment of gothic doubling. Elektra uncannily sees her younger self in Abby as she has flashbacks of her past self, especially after Abby changes her appearance. They are like doppelgängers. Abby mentions her desire to become like Elektra, only to meet Elektra's disapproval. Most fantastical is their psychological alignment either in an emotional sense or in superior telepathy-like cognition. Like doubling and death, telepathy is also a signifier of the uncanny (Punter and Byron, 2004, p.283). This further associates *Elektra* with the gothic lineage. They both have obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) which they recognise in each other, yet deny to each other and themselves. In this way they are shown to be psychologically attuned to each other. Both Elektra and Abby are gothic heroines.

Miles defines female gothic as: "featuring narratives of 'a heroine caught between a pastoral haven and a threatening castle, sometimes in flight from a sinister patriarchal figure, sometimes in search of an absent mother, and often both together' (1994:1) (cited in Wheatley, 2006, p.92). Miles' analysis of a typical gothic heroine's narrative trajectory can be used to read *Elektra*. Abby, like the gothic heroine, is in flight from Kirigi and unknowingly in search of the absent mother, who turns out to be Elektra. Further into the film Elektra makes a trade-off for Abby's life recalling the maternal

melodrama's rhetoric of the self-sacrificing mother figure. Abby's biological mother lost her life when the Hand was chasing the family to possess Abby. Elektra by that logic is Abby's mother reborn, as the undead assassin. Abby and Elektra then telepathically connect to each other – a relationship suggested via sequential close-ups – as Abby joins Elektra in the confrontation with Kirigi. Rescuing Abby and her father from the gang of assassins Hand's masterplan leads to the transformation of Elektra's karma from a trained killer to a protector of an American family in danger. The action heroine is rehabilitated in a truly Freudian sense, when the narrative introduces her to a surrogate family thereby relieving past traumas.

While recounting the significant theoretical and practical developments surrounding second-wave feminism, Hollows defines the term "sisterhood" as women's "assertion of their identification with one another" and the acknowledgement of women's "common experience of oppression" within patriarchy (Hollows, 2000, p.3). For Hollows: "The emphasis on a 'familial' bond between women acting collectively to support each other is one feature of the ways in which feminist concerns have entered into 'mainstream' popular forms" (Hollows, 2000, p.8). As a surrogate mother-daughter duo, Elektra and Abby rescue each other and are representative of this kind of sisterhood and its transference in popular culture as Hollows describes it. They both ultimately take a stance against an enemy, who is the source of maternal deprivation in their lives as discussed throughout. The Bluebeard-husband figure is not only a threat to two generations of children in *Elektra* but also responsible for the absence of the mother in the film.

There is more to this chance encounter with a family for Elektra's fate. Elektra due to the violent deaths of both her parents and her rebirth carries immense psychological baggage from her previous life. Her self-loathing, inability to socialise, and her role as an assassin typify her as a misguided soul on the brink of transforming into a heartless monster. This comes through especially when she takes her bow and arrow and targets Mark and Abby getting on with their everyday life in order to assassinate them, while looking through the window of their abode. The sequence is played over an upbeat soundtrack which it is suggested stands for Elektra's inner drive as an assassin. Her view of the targets is crosscut with different parts of her job sheet and shots of her personal

memories with the two characters to build tension. These point-of-view shots, especially when the job sheet is inserted, resemble those of the terminator in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, where the terminator's vision is of one calculative precision.[31] From within the text, it is suggested that Elektra the assassin is much like the cybernetic organism than a flesh and blood human being.

In his chapter on the 1980s horror film Williams has explained that "the monster represents the alternative 'No' to the family" (Williams, 1996b, p.169). Elektra shares this aspect of her personality with the Bluebeard as killer father as discussed in Chapter 2. Doherty (1996, p.182), Creed (1993b, p.42) and Cobbs (1990, p.201) all identify a trend in horror cinema within which the threat is internal rather than external. It is thus the dysfunctional family in the corpus films and the maltreatment of the figure of the child that is the true source of trauma to the family and the characters in the films. As evident in Elektra's personality and much to the dismay of America's socio-political ideologies, it is not an Other that ruptures Elektra's psychological makeup and transforms her into a monster but severe childhood trauma, as discussed in Chapter 2 and 3. As these images play in Elektra's mind and she takes a second to pause and reconsider, the compulsive soundtrack stops. When Elektra gets back onto her target, the soundtrack resumes. Her pauses and her final stopping of herself signals that she is overcoming her inner drive that ruthlessly slays (in most other cases) and finally silencing it. In resisting this madness, Elektra shows compassion and empathy. This surge of positive emotions is indicative that she is capable of being reintegrated into the family, from which she was violently pulled away from without any fault of her own.

This psychological revelation aligns Elektra to her counterparts, Sarah in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and Samantha in *The Long Kiss Goodnight,* who are also framed in similar sequences. The discussion in Chapter 3 explores at some length critical accounts that have identified Sarah's transformation into a terminator, which begins in *The Terminator* and fully develops in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. This change of character in my understanding is also closely aligned to Sarah's psychological disintegration as identified in Chapter 3. Similarly, Ripley in *Aliens* wears the cyborg suit

[31] The way in which this sequence is edited is also evocative of the credit sequence of *The Long Kiss Goodnight* which was briefly discussed in Chapter 3.

to confront the queen alien. Penley (1990, p.125), Moore and Miles (1992, p.60), and Brown (2011, p.26) argue that this momentarily gives Ripley machine-like strength, not machine-like lack of empathy.

Much in the same way, Hamilton (1999, p.20), Tasker (2004, p.262) and Dancey (2009, p.86) have pointed out the hardening of Samantha's character in *The Long Kiss Goodnight,* as she pushes Caitlin when ice-skating and later ransacks her room in the attic for the key to the safety deposit box. The key is on a charm bracelet around Caitlin's teddy bear, in the child as treasure motif of the film discussed at length in Chapter 2. The key is, as Tasker analyses, the key of Samantha's past and also of a possible future (Tasker, 2004, p.262). It is that, but it is also the key that the husband hands over to the new bride to test her loyalty in the Bluebeard fairy tale, a premise that is revisited in some of the corpus films including *Panic Room* and *Elektra*. Tasker writes in relation to the sequence in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*. Because of the significance of Tasker's analysis, I will cite it at length:

> From her daughter's bedroom, Charly looks down through her rifle's sights at Caitlin, dressed as an angel for a Christmas event (a nativity perhaps?), Hal crouched beside her in supportive paternal pose. One of the film's key thematic axes is represented here in the extreme juxtaposition of an intimate Christmas festivity, slow-motion and soft-focus, with Charly's image, hard and sharply drawn. If the image of Charly looking at her family through the gun suggests that she is divided between killing and caring, the soft music signals the return of maternal feelings. Moreover the camera first closes in on Charly's face and then pulls back into an image of loss and yearning familiar from the woman's picture – a woman framed in a medium shot looking out through the bars created by the window. Action – signalled by the sound of Mitch honking the horn to alert her to danger – disrupts the moment, but the scene paves the way for Charly to return to her daughter (Tasker, 2004, p.262).

Tasker's analysis above points out that Samantha in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is divided between her roles as a mother and a spy. This is especially symbolic in the sequence analysed above. From Tasker's analysis above, the striking similarity between the sequence in *Elektra* and *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is clear. Elektra like *The Long Kiss*

*Goodnight* is set during Christmas. Elektra much like Samantha's alter-ego Charlene does not embrace this season of hope and is an outcast because of her lack of good cheer. Most importantly though in the sequence Elektra is not inside the Miller's home when she targets them, but outside it. Her view of the family resembles that of Sarah's in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* as she targets Dyson from outside his home and ruptures domestic harmony. This sequence according to Jeffords sets Sarah up as a killing machine (Jeffords, 1993, p.249). Telotte also discusses this sequence concerning the transformational impact it has on Sarah's goal-oriented mindset (Tellote, 1992, p.31). Elektra like Sarah is an outcast from the bourgeois nuclear family and this peeping into a familial, feminine and domestic space brings out a repressed desire in Elektra to become a part of it. Her view of the family does not signify a "return of maternal feelings" but surely "paves the way" for Elektra's emotional and physical integration into the family in some form (Tasker, 2004, p.262).

As discussed in Chapter 1 several Bluebeard figures in the corpus films like Dyson in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and Trevor in *Æon Flux* seek redemption for their Promethean ventures by embracing death as a way of life. In the same way, Elektra the assassin is redeemed by being reintegrated into a family and becoming its protector. The bourgeois nuclear family both reigns in and redeems the action heroine from her perversions via its traditional family values, even if these perversions consist of a mere threat that she may pose to the conservative gender binary. It is her assimilation into the family via motherhood which saves her and gives her a new chance at life. This saves her from the ill-fate of another bold heroine of Hollywood films, the femme fatale. The femme fatale is dispatched at the end of the films because as Place points out her existence threatens the symbolic order in the film (Place, 1998). By threatening patriarchal power, she also weakens the principles of the nuclear family, which Sylvia Harvey points out in her 'Woman's Place: The Absent Family of Film Noir' is the ultimate threat that she poses via her symbolic possession of the phallus (Harvey, 1998). The femme fatale is not integrated into the family and thereby within conservative ideology not redeemed like the action heroine.

Similarly, in *Flightplan*, Kyle is on a hiatus from both her roles as a wife and in her career. She leaves her marital home behind and is en route to see her maternal family.

**Figure 12:** Gloria (Gena Rowlands) and Phil Dawn (John Adames) in *Gloria* walking down the stairs of Gloria's sister's apartment.

**Figure 13:** Kyle Pratt (Jodie Foster) and Julia Pratt (Marlene Lawston) in *Flightplan* (Robert Schwentke, 2005) walking down the stairs of their house.

Her temporary dislocation is in line with the gothic heroine, who it is observed by Ann B. Tracy, does not have a home, much like Jane Eyre (Tracy, 1998, p.105). This also rings true for Gloria in *Gloria*, Ripley in *Aliens*, Sarah in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, Samantha in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, Meg in *Panic Room*, Beatrix in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* and Elektra in *Elektra*. Despite Kyle's desperate situation, almost from the beginning of the film Kyle is established as a mother. Figures 12 and 13 show Gloria and the reluctant boy in *Gloria* and Kyle's daughter Julia refusing to walk down the stairs of their home. The staircase in both the films symbolise the forced movement from the apparently secure space of the domestic to the unsecure space of the public. Traditionally, the domestic space is occupied by women and children and the public by men and represents paid workforce. This forced transition of the female and child characters from a threatened domestic space into an equally threatening and uncanny space of the public signifies the tensions that the characters face. The incline of the staircase as an uneven surface further underlines this uneasy movement, tension and uncertainty that they face. Motherhood is distinguished by class, race and choice in *Gloria* and *Flightplan*. In Figure 14, Gloria in *Gloria* is walking down the stairs of her sister's house. In Figure 15, Kyle in *Flightplan* is walking down the stairs of her house. The child in both the films moans the loss of the good father and is unable to face the cruelty of the bad father. However, the narrative involves questioning Kyle's identity as a mother and her motherhood. McCormick writes of Kyle in *Flightplan* and some other films that she analyses for the representation of supermothers. She explains:

> The difficulty of finding a job for a black woman or a white divorcee in the 1930s through the 1950s [referring to *Imitation of Life* (John M. Stahl, 1934) and its remake *Imitation of Life* (Douglas Sirk, 1959)] has been replaced with the difficulty of protecting one's children against alien abduction or supernatural murder at the turn of the millennium, and doing it without help (McCormick, 2010, p.145).

McCormick's analysis points out the shifts in challenges faced by the figure of the mother in Hollywood's maternal melodramas. Once Kyle boards the airplane, she not only has to rescue her child without any assistance but has to convince others that her child has been kidnapped. Kyle struggles to establish herself as a good mother as other characters judge her as being neglectful. In her feminist historical account of motherhood Mary Evans explains "it is not motherhood *per se* which oppresses women

but the oppressive conditions of motherhood under patriarchy" (Evans, 1992, p.100). The struggle that Kyle goes through as a mother in order to secure her child's safety is reflective of Evan's historcisation.

As those around the action heroine ruthlessly question her sanity rather than the corrupt power of authority that is representative of patriarchy in the films, momentarily the audiences and the heroine are forced to rethink what they have seen until that point. This takes place in the sequence when the therapist tries to calm Kyle down. She looks outside the window of her seat and sees the heart shape doodle made by her daughter on the condensed window earlier in the film. This moment when Kyle reaffirms herself amidst the stress is also a moment for audiences' interrogation of what they have seen and also what they have understood. This narrative technique is employed in the gothic thriller *The Sixth Sense* (1999). In *The Sixth Sense*, the deceased child psychologist Malcolm Crowe's (Bruce Willis) viewpoint is questioned along with that of the audiences and what they have understood till a given point in the diegesis. But while the hapless doctor's position in *The Sixth Sense* is undermined, Kyle and the audiences' point-of-views are reaffirmed. Hanson points out that the gothic heroine's perceptions are rarely proven incorrect and such is also the case with the action heroine (Hanson, 2007, pp.42-3).

The action heroine's representation as mentally instable has been pursued at length in Chapter 3. However, in *Flightplan* this idea of the action heroine as not in control of her senses is represented in conjunction with motherhood, moreso than any other corpus film. This brings to mind the rhetorical question posed by Oakley also cited in Chapter 3: "Do mothers have minds?" (Oakley, 1987, pp.38-40). Oakley further writes:

> The specific reproductive definition of women as mindless mothers appears to have emerged simultaneously with the move towards a centralized technological control of pregnancy which has taken place over the last thirty years (Oakley, 1987, p.39).

Oakley's analysis points out the demonisation of female subjectivity and identity in the face of developments in reproductive technologies. *Flightplan* engages with the subject of reproduction implicitly rather than overtly. The argument presented in Chapters 2 and 3 read the airplane as a masculine space. Kyle's daughter is kidnapped by a male air

marshal during moments of minutest inattentiveness. She is drugged into an unconscious state and secretly hidden in the avionics of the airplane. The child is not kidnapped but rather stolen from the mother's supervision. She is secretly locked in the airplane which can be read as the bad Bluebeard-father's womb as discussed in Chapter 2. The father's womb is the perverse technological womb in the film. This scenario is reflective of Oakley's observation of the technological control of pregnancy, and in this instance the child. It is also an example of masculine intervention in motherhood and the usurping of the role of the mother via technology. According to al-Hibri, technology is a patriarchal tool created by male fear of death and male envy of the female capacity to reproduce (al-Hibri, 1983). The airplane as the technological incubator allows the villain to hold the child and simulate the role of the mother, thereby chiming with al-Hibri's argument.

Julia in *Flightplan* takes on the status of what Gena Corea has called in her 'Egg Snatchers' the "eggs of man", when providing a feminist account of her visit to a pioneer in reproductive technologies (Corea, 1984). Like Oakley, for Corea, the male doctor and modern science's investment in women's generative power is an equivalent of "dismembering motherhood into its components" (Corea, 1984, p.37). Within the frame of Corea's penetrative sceptical feminist analysis, the misogynistic and envious masculinities as represented by Carson "dismembers" the role of the mother in the film (Corea, 1984, p.37). What follows once the child is snatched is the rejection of Kyle's psychological disposition. She is conveniently labelled as a "mindless mother" who is in search of a child secretly claimed by the representative of patriarchy in the film. What Kyle then fights is the colonisation of the womb and the status of motherhood in limbo.

In her discussion of the Hollywood rape-revenge film, Read argues that the female protagonist's trajectory is that from victim to avenger. However, in the maternal avenger films of Read's discussion, the heroine moves from the roles of "mother to aggressor" (Read, 2000, p.226). The action heroine is first victimised and then empowered via the aggressive stance of Read's argument. It may seem that motherhood silences the action heroine, but it does not. Such is also resonant with Kyle's shifting subjectivity as by the kidnapping of her child and her gaslighting, she is forced to stand up against the system that abuses her. The climax of the film involves

the action heroine overcoming her inner demons and those demons that surround her. She emerges triumphant having rescued her child and established herself as a good mother among those who judged, undermined, shamed, discredited and gaslighted her.

The theme of motherhood is consistent in *Maleficent.* First orphaned and then deceived by her lover, Maleficent does not experience unconditional love in her life. With her fate turned sour, motherhood does not seem like much of a possibility. Especially because she interprets her lover's false character as the absence of love in the world. After surviving her ordeal, she learns from Diaval (Sam Riley) her pet raven that Stephan has taken the throne as the king of the human kingdom. Diaval soon arrives with the news that the king and queen have had a child. The news visibly saddens Maleficent at first, but yet she swears to her malicious activity.

Maleficent arrives at the christening and decides to use the newborn princess as the object of revenge against Stephan. While the three fairies Flittle (Lesley Manville), Knotgrass (Imelda Staunton), Thistletwit (Juno Temple) use magic to bestow gifts upon the child, Maleficent curses the child. With her devious plans which aim at shaming and punishing Stephan, she curses the child to lay in a sleep-like death from the sunset of her sixteenth birthday. Aurora's plight is much like Snow White in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* who lay in a sleep-like death because of the poisoned apple administered by her stepmother, the wicked queen disguised as an old hag. By this accord too, both the wicked queen and Maleficent are witches and mothers. In contextualising the changing image of the witch within Hollywood storytelling and mythology, Creed explains:

> Witches were feared because it was thought they could cast terrible spells and bring death to those they cursed. Historically, the curse of a woman, particularly if she were pregnant or menstruating, was considered far more potent than a man's curse. A 'mother's curse', as it was known, meant certain death. The curse of a woman who also practised as a witch was even more deadly than that of an ordinary woman (Creed, 1993b, p.74).

Creed's historical account points out that a witch's and a mother's curse were considered to bring death upon the bestowed. Given Creed's theorisation of the many faces of the monstrous-feminine in the phallocentric Hollywood industry, Maleficent is

both witch and mother, the witch who curses Aurora and also becomes Aurora's surrogate mother. Maleficent is both childless and a mother, one who wishes the child was dead and then does everything in her capacity to reverse the curse. The action heroine's disposition is thereby representative of the idea of cognitive dissonance discussed earlier.

After the ceremony, Stephan casts Aurora away with the three fairies so that she is brought up in anonymity away from Maleficent's vengeful gaze. Botting and Sobchack's idea in another context that the "sins of the father are revisited upon" the daughter is representative in *Maleficent* not only via Maleficent's curse, but also because Aurora is uprooted from her family on account of this unfortunate disharmony (Botting, 1996, pp.131-2; Sobchack, 1996, p.153). Patriarchy in the film restores conservative traditional patriarchal imbalance, where female characters including the action heroine have no choice but to choose motherhood. All the female characters in *Maleficent* are mothers because the father is the devil himself. Maleficent, however, is a step ahead of Stephan and is fully aware of Aurora's relocation. Wanting to monitor the misery that her curse has brought first-hand, she secretly relocates herself to baby Aurora's vicinity to see the drama unfold in front of her eyes. It is shown that Maleficent's life is empty and possible boredom is also the reason for spending time around Aurora and the three fairies. But this monitoring for all the wrong reasons eventually transforms into positive intervention in Aurora's childhood.

We bear witness to scenarios of child neglect, as we see how the fairies are unable to carry out the duties of a primary caregiver. Most poignant is the sequence, where the baby is hungry and cries from dawn into the night. The sequence evokes amusement, especially in a film where human tragedy and revenge are central themes, as the fairies try to feed the baby a bunch of carrots. The inability of the fairies to cope with their new-found responsibility, which they took on from Stefan is a reminder of the feminist discourse on the role of women as mothers. Through its principles, second-wave feminism rejected traditional notions of femininity. This disowning was because of the common foundational thought that femininity is a source of women's oppression and exploitation (Hollows, 2000, pp.9-12). This opposition between feminism and femininity

was specifically understood in feminist discourses concerning maternity. Regarding this, Hollows writes:

> it was argued, while biological differences between men and women did mean that women were biologically destined to give birth to children, it did not necessarily follow that women naturally had feminine, 'maternal' instincts which made them essentially more supportive, nurturing and caring than men (Hollows, 2000, p.10).

Hollows' feminist theorisation of the maternal instinct implies that it is a patriarchal construct that is neither instinctive to women or men. The inability of the fairies to cope with their roles as Aurora's surrogate mothers is a reference to Hollows' argument that maternal instincts are not natural to female characters. Nor are the fairies more naturally attuned to Aurora's physical and emotional needs. Maternity is exposed as patriarchal ideology in the film. In their inability to cope with the baby, they also closely resemble the three bachelors in the *Three Men and a Baby* discussed in Chapter 2. The philandering men learn to look after the baby and make it a part of their lives, an act read by Modleski as suggestive of the inherent misogyny in the film (Modleski, 1988). Compare to their male counterparts, the three fairies are unable to achieve any such superficial balance and seem aloof from their role as mothers.

In her monograph on motherhood, Kaplan asks the question why comedy is the preferred mode for representing the subject of changing American families and nurturing fathers on American films and television from the mid-1970s onwards (Kaplan, 1992, pp.187-8). While her line of argument is certainly valid for the feminist perspective, this question when reiterated in this scenario yields a significantly different answer. The three fairies' motherhood is played for laughs because it is a critique of the institution of motherhood and the gender stereotype that women are natural-born mothers, a subject discussed by Badinter (1981). It is also a reminder of Judith Butler's argument as cited by Brown: "According to Butler's deconstruction of the traditional theory of mind/body and nature/culture dualism, there is no real and biologically determined self at the core of our being, only the mannerisms and gestures we have learned" (Brown, 2011, p.23). The trio of fairies are not better at mothering, if not worse, than the philandering bachelors. The idea of the supermother is commonly used in relation to the corpus films (Goren, 2009; McCormick, 2010). Yet the films in themselves

have moments of resistance to suffice as case studies of critiques of women's roles as mothers.

In her discussion on motherhood in literature on the American screen, Kaplan argues that the self-sacrificing mother, like the phallic mother, is a creation of male fantasy. She argues that these images are created by the patriarchal unconscious in order to fulfil inadequacies of the male unconscious and compensate for castration anxieties. These representations are read in an historical frame as allowing men to overcome the feelings of powerlessness felt after their return from the Second World War (Kaplan, 1992, p.110). Similarly, the figure of the supermother via the empowered action heroine is attuned to a culture of backlash against feminism and the postfeminist culture that Faludi writes of extensively in her monograph (Faludi, 1992). Faludi argues that the gains made by women in both private and public sphere on account of second-wave feminism caused feelings of fear, inadequacy, deep-felt anxiety and insecurity in American society. The progressive nature of second-wave feminism and its promotion of choices for women were seen as a threat to the sacrosanct institution of the nuclear family. Faludi argues that this subconscious threat was also transferred to the representation of women in films and television that Faludi analysis in some detail. Fauldi has observed: "In any case, only for domestic reasons – for the sake of family and motherhood – can a woman shout and still come out a heroine in the late-'80s cinema" (Faludi, 1992, p.144). Although the corpus films start in the 1980s until recently, they are representative of this backlash ideology that Faludi writes about. The action heroine's strength and alertness are deployed in the corpus films, but like Faludi argues they are channelled in the service of motherhood.

Finding the baby's constant crying unbearable and afraid that the baby will starve to death, Maleficent intervenes. She sends Diaval with a flower which presumably contains the nourishment needed, which the baby suckles on. The flower becomes the breast that feeds baby Aurora. The baby is further pacified as Diaval gently rocks the cradle. The flower that signifies a dismembered or external breast is a reminder of Melanie Klein's discussion of the good breast that is available to feed the child. Klein argues how the child externalises this relationship with the mother, thereby rationalising her as the good mother (Klein, 1975, p.183; Segal, 2004, pp.20-2). Kaplan

(1992, p.108) and Hamilton (1999, p.19) have used this idea for their discussions on representation of motherhood and the latter has challenged it in relation to *The Long Kiss Goodnight*. Later Maleficent prevents the girl from falling off a cliff by magically procuring a branch, when the three fairies are preoccupied with their picnic. Monitoring the child closely eventually leads to Maleficent's changed feelings. This indeed is also a fairy tale of inconsistent mothers via the representation of the three fairies, who are unable to mother the child and Maleficent who has cursed the child to death.

Like most children from dysfunctional families are represented to, Aurora grows up and mistakenly thinks that Maleficent is her fairy godmother. She believes that in her role as a godmother Maleficent's shadow followed her around since her childhood. From the Freudian scenarios and child neglect that are abundant in *Maleficent*, the foundations of Aurora's upbringing are closely set to make her into an adult monster like her father. However, it is Maleficent's intervention that rescues Aurora's psychological disposition from going awry. Even though Aurora was not raised in the castle, Stephan's behaviour towards his daughter after she runs off to see him on the day of her sixteenth birthday suggests that had she been brought up in Stephan's vicinity, he would have inevitably transferred his deceit and darkness into the child's vulnerable mind. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2 it is indicated in Bluebeard narratives like *Crimson Peak* that Bluebeard is the son of an overpowering mother and such is also suggested in serial killer films like *Psycho* and *Red Dragon*, which are offspring of the Bluebeard fairy tale. This suggests an association of adult monsters in corpus films with dysfunctional families and a bad childhood, a link very often explored in the horror genre. This is the fate Aurora is marginally rescued from.

*Maleficent* differs from the Disney animated classic in several ways. But two of the ways that it differs in are very significant for the feminist argument and its relationship to the representation of motherhood in the film. First, the story of the film is not about Sleeping Beauty the princess, but about the ugly witch who curses her. Gilbert and Gubar's exposition about the plots of novels written by female authors further support the enigma of cognitive dissonance:

> At the same time, more subtly perhaps for that reason even more significantly, such authors devised elaborate anti-romances to show that the

> female 'angel' was really a female 'fiend,' the ladylike paragon really an unladylike monster (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.31).

Gilbert and Gubar point out that the characters they analyse have personalities from both ends of the spectrum, that is, they are both heroic and villainous. The action heroine corpus films are largely "anti-romances" of Gilbert and Gubar's discussion, although a film like *The River Wild* does unite the warring couple as discussed in Chapter 1. This tradition that Gilbert and Gubar refer to is drawn upon in *Maleficent* as well. Mulvey-Roberts also argues that Bluebeard's wife is both hero and villain (Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p.106). Giving her character complexity and as the text explicitly states, Maleficent is both hero and villain. Maleficent is not split like Jekyll and Hyde or like Gilbert and Gubar's discussion of an opposition between "a sweet heroine inside the house" and "a vicious bitch outside", hence progressive in this sense (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.29). The text clearly points out the cognitive dissonance in Maleficent's character and makes these blurring boundaries between the otherwise rigid polarisation of good and evil a central aspect of her character. Both the conflicting personalities and varying psychological dispositions are embodied as one character, which adds to the complexity of Maleficent's multi-dimensional and thus rich character.

Maleficent's role both as a villain and hero is eventually bound to her role as a mother. Faludi (1992) and Negra (2009) have argued the emphasis on motherhood in popular culture is symptomatic of the postfeminist culture. This resonates with *Maleficent* and the other corpus films. It is the climax of the film when she transforms back into a hero and a mother that is pertinent for the feminist discussion. Aurora falls into a sleep-like death by pricking her finger on the spinning wheel as the prophecy of the curse unfolds in real-time. Maleficent is pessimistic of the prospect that a prince charming's love could awaken Aurora from the spell. This viewpoint is akin to her own experiences with her childhood sweetheart Stephan. Coaxed by Diaval, Maleficent agrees that the attraction between Prince Phillip (Brenton Thwaites) and Aurora might break the curse. Diaval plays the role of the gentler patriarch in the film, a trope of the gothic discussed briefly in Chapter 2 in relation to Hicks in *Aliens*. Further a twist to audience expectations set by the animated version, Phillip is unable to wake Aurora from the curse much to the dismay of the characters. The possible inkling of hope set by the chance encounter between the two love birds on the day of Aurora's sixteenth

birthday does not come to fruition. In her heartfelt monologue with the sleeping Aurora an act of apology, Maleficent kisses Aurora on her forehead. Without realising the impact of her honesty and love on the spell, to everyone's surprise we witness Aurora wake up from slumber.

Since Phillip is unable to wake up Aurora, it is for the second instance that the film does not condemn but neither does it promote the fairy tale ending rooted in patriarchal heterosexual hegemony, where the white male hero rescues the damsel in distress. This somewhat outdated ideology favoured by traditional Hollywood genre entertainment is left ambiguous in the film. It is the love between a surrogate mother and a teenage daughter rather than romantic love that awakens Aurora and its status as true love in the film makes the climax interesting for feminist readers. Maleficent finds love in the film not via a lover but by a child and forming an extended family with the child, the extended family that is central to the corpus films. The gothic child is an unloved figure. The narrative is about restoring the parent/family to ensure his or her well-being. In her brief purview of the Hollywood action film, Tasker explains that the alternative family structure consistently draws on the "image of the patriarchal family as a moral anchor" (Tasker, 2004, p.263). This rings true for the action heroine corpus as well, as this thesis has referred throughout. Albeit this extended family is inspired by feminism. This true love comes to life when Maleficent gives up her desire for revenge, moves away from the past and allows the hatred for her old flame to transform into love for a child. The entry of the child marks a new phase in Maleficent's narrative trajectory. The child is represented as the only good left of her bad relationship with the Bluebeard lover. The child marks the beginning of her new life and gives the hope that the trauma of the past will be healed. In saving the child, Maleficent rescues a part of her relationship with her former lover, which in narrative terms is constructed as unrecoverable. Like Meg and Sarah and Elektra and Abby, Maleficent and Aurora as a pair are representatives of sisterhood discussed earlier.

There is another theoretical route that can be brought into reading Aurora as Maleficent's daughter. In *Maleficent*, Aurora is born from the relationship between Stephan and Leila. Despite so, the text presents the possibility of reading Aurora as Maleficent's biological daughter. Maleficent is Stephan's actual wife. The child is born

soon after Maleficent's implied rape briefly discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Aurora is the child born after the rape and hence Maleficent and Stephan's child. Chapter 2 pointed out that the clipping of Maleficent's wings has been read as a metaphor for Jolie's much-publicised double mastectomy surgery before the release of the film. The wing clipping within the scope of this reading is a connotation of womb-ripping, thereby sustaining the argument of the womb envy of gothic-inspired masculinities in corpus films. The child conceived during rape is born at Stephan's castle as read in Chapter 2. When Aurora is relocated incognito, Maleficent steps in where the fairies fall short as mothers. She becomes the carer in scenarios of neglect discussed earlier. It is Maleficent's womb that was ripped and her breast that feeds the child. To make this point further, it is the adolescent Aurora who locates the glass showcase and releases the wings, as the child as treasure and as the child who locates the treasure, which consists of the stolen womb and the child. Aurora is yet another child stolen from her mother's womb just like B.B. in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* and *Volume 2* or the mother's lair like Julia in *Flightplan*.

There is a dimension from the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's theorisation that needs to be considered when looking at the relationship between Maleficent and Aurora. This is elaborated upon by Erens in relation to *The Stepfather,* a film also discussed in Chapter 1. Erens' suggestion that Hollywood cinema tends not to "valorize" the maternal, constructing the mother-daughter bond as one that potentially excludes men. Using *Stella Dallas* as an example, she explains that even when this bond is central, "the narrative works towards the removal of this female threat to patriarchal power by the reassertion of the heterosexual couple" (Erens, 1996, p.354). This she argues is not the case with *The Stepfather*. Erens' analysis uses Lacan's theoretical account on the Oedipus complex and explains that the formation of patriarchy relies on the psychic separation of the mother-and-child. Erens' discussion above allows us to appraise the narrative developments in *Maleficent*. Via the unlikely pairing between Maleficent the witch and Aurora the princess, a close bond is formed between them. This bond is further reaffirmed as Maleficent involuntarily breaks Aurora's curse. Their relationship is similar to the relationship between mother-and-daughter in *The Stepfather*. Erens identifies this close female bonding as "pre-Oedipal" in its nature (Erens, 1996, p.358) and thus "outside the Law of the father" (Erens, 1996, p.355). Like *The Stepfather*, *Maleficent* "foregrounds patriarchal power but posit[s] the

maternal order in opposition to the destructive elements of patriarchy" (Erens, 1996, p.354).

Creed argues that the mother in the horror film is constructed as "abject" as she does not "relinquish" her grip on the child and allow him/her to take his proper place in the "symbolic" order. Such Creed argues is true for films like *Psycho*, *The Birds* and *Carrie* in which she points out that the father is absent (Creed, 1993b, p.12). Similarly, in her analysis of *The Stepfather*, Erens refers to *Psycho,* stating that the desire for the mother leads to Norman's psychological disintegration. Such Erens argues is not the case with *The Stepfather* (Erens, 1996, p.362). Likewise, the love between mother-and-daughter in Maleficent does not lead to psychosis in the characters and is not represented as perverse. Although Maleficent's character is constructed within Western culture's stereotype of the witch as the monstrous-feminine, unlike similar representations discussed by Creed, Maleficent does not dominate Aurora and allows her to form other healthy attachments. However, *Maleficent* does climax with the heterosexual couple of Phillip and Aurora. This heterosexual bonding does not, like in *Stella Dallas* or even its more recent remake *Stella* (John Erman, 1990), work at excluding Maleficent as Aurora's protector, carer and friend. *Maleficent* does shift attention to the newly formed couple but this is achieved without compromising the strong bond that is formed between Maleficent and Aurora. As pointed out in Chapter 1, that a cinematic discourse pioneered by a B-movie such as *The Stepfather* has circulated into mainstream films is representative of Clover's argument on the gender politics of the slasher film and its eventual dissemination into mainstream films such as *Alien* (Clover, 1992, p.20).

A brief overview of the action heroine's mothering role in the corpus films shows that motherhood is a unique familial relationship, one illuminated by using the Bluebeard fairy tale as a touchstone to read the figure of the female action heroine. The "narrative progress" of Tasker's discussion on the female friendship films is reflected in the corpus films not via a move towards heterosexuality but a move towards motherhood (Tasker, 1998, p.153). The action heroine's motherhood in the films that this thesis investigates is especially emphasised because patriarchy in these films is destructive and malignant.

**Conclusion**

This chapter gives an account of motherhood and reproductive discourses in the corpus films. The action heroine's role as a symbolic mother is understood through her single relationship status and her position as an outsider in the patriarchal nuclear family. It is argued that by taking on the role of the mother the action heroine reclaims the position of female sexuality and the institution of motherhood in the films, which are under threat. Masculine and feminine identities in the films are mediated via the representations of fatherhood and motherhood respectively. While the corpus, films via the use of the gothic mode, blur the boundaries of gender identities, gothic devices also further re-establish and reinstate conservative gender ideology, thereby suggesting a strict separation of the public and the private sphere. This retrogressive ideological stance on gender is associated with the backlash against feminism and the postfeminist influence on popular culture and the corpus films. The frame of cognitive dissonance allows a reading of the action heroine within and yet outside of the binary opposition of the good and the bad mother. The action heroine's move away from the stereotype of the good and self-sacrificing mother is read as an influence of feminism.

In her analysis of the sexual politics of *The Terminator*, Mann cites Teresa de Lauretis: "the story of a woman's fulfillment [*sic*] (as subject) of her destiny as a mother is really only a disguised enactment of the fulfillment [*sic*] of her role as object of man's desire" (Mann, 1989-90, p.24). de Lauretis' argument establishes that the female role of motherhood services patriarchy. This resonates with the gender ideology of the corpus films. The action heroine's agency is subsumed in the corpus films by the climax as it is deployed to service the family. That motherhood is a patriarchal scapegoat is also visible in how madness is frequently associated in the corpus films to the action heroine's motherhood. Despite so, it is argued that the role of the symbolic mother also allows the action heroine to overcome the Bluebeard-husband's atrocities, protect the child in danger and save the nuclear family albeit the alternative family unit of Heung (1983), Sobchack (1996) and Tasker's (2004) discussion. The action heroine thus emerges as the final mother who protects herself, the figure of the child and the family against the killer father, and intergenerational trauma and abuse. Compared to the tradition of the maternal melodrama, it is argued that the action heroine does not allow patriarchy to

unfairly claim the child at the cost of excluding the figure of the mother and the relegation of the institution of motherhood to the margins.

## Conclusion

This thesis examines the representation of the action heroine and familial figurations in the corpus films. The key framework used to examine the representations in these films is the Bluebeard fairy tale. Throughout the thesis the archetypal Bluebeard fairy tale structure was identified as informing the characters and most importantly the gender politics and familial ideologies present in the films. Other frameworks used to read the texts include genre theory on various Hollywood genres, the novel *Jane Eyre* and Gilbert and Gubar's work of literary criticism. The project has an inter-disciplinary approach as the literary gothic, gothic fiction and feminist literary criticism are also used as frameworks. As discussed in the Introduction, this research project began with the idea of examining the action heroine's motherhood. Genre theory on the action heroine, the woman's film and specifically the maternal melodrama are used to examine the corpus films. However, via using specific frameworks and addressing themes such as the action heroine's symbolic marriage, the role of fatherhood, domestic abuse and female madness, the representations that surround the action heroine's motherhood are brought to the fore for analysis. Addressing these themes allows to draw attention to the gender and sexual politics of the films, the underlying message on heterosexual relationships, the significance of parenting, and the role of the nuclear family and reproduction in the survival of patriarchy. The thesis shows that the action heroine's motherhood does not exist in a vacuum but is a part of a whole of the familial figurations that are found in these films. Via systematic deconstruction of familial dimensions in the films, the thesis especially focuses on narrative developments and the ideological undercurrent that frame the action heroine to take on the role of the symbolic mother.

It is argued in Chapter 1 that the action heroine is in a symbolic marriage with the antagonist figure in the corpus films. It is shown that this figure is inspired by historical accounts of Count Bluebeard. The different faces of the Bluebeard-husband are analysed in-depth. It is brought to light via closely examining the various faces of the Bluebeard-husband in the corpus films that he is emblematic of a patriarchy in crisis. The discussions presented show the significance of the Bluebeard fairy tale and the gothic mode to study the representations in the corpus films.

The analysis presented in Chapter 2 shows that like the historical accounts of the Bluebeard fairy tale, the villainous male characters in the corpus films also function as evil father figures. The figure of the child although not fully studied in the thesis is representative of a power struggle for the Bluebeard antagonist. The various forms that his bad fatherhood takes is explored in-depth. The figure of the bad Bluebeard-father is further briefly theorised with Clover's model of the killer. He is read as the killer father, who not only poses a threat to women but also children.

Chapter 3 focuses on the action heroine, who is the protagonist of the corpus films. This chapter explores the critical territory of female madness in relation to the action heroine. It is argued that the action heroine's gaslighting, post-traumatic stress syndrome and mental instability are a consequence of the Bluebeard-husband's abuse. The analysis shows that the rhetoric of questionable mental judgment is a technique employed by Hollywood to reign in the assertiveness of the empowered figure of the action heroine. The central premise of the female gothic that of the gothic heroine resisting patriarchy is revisited via the figure of the action heroine, who stands up to the patriarchal hegemony represented by the symbolic husband.

In Chapter 4, it is argued that in contemporary retellings of the Bluebeard fairy tale the last wife takes on the role of the mother. The arguments presented here address the action heroine's motherhood, reproductive discourses and other maternal figurations that appear in these films. The frame of cognitive dissonance and the gothic is used to show that the action heroine acts as a mother and simultaneously also refuses this role. It is argued that the action heroine has to take on the role of the symbolic mother to defeat the Bluebeard-husband figure, who is a threat to the child and familial figurations in the corpus films.

This thesis gives an account of the familial figurations in the corpus films via studying in-depth each of the characters that constitute the family. This includes the Bluebeard antagonist, his bad fatherhood, the action heroine's predicament and her role as the symbolic mother. By producing these readings, this thesis shows the significance of the Bluebeard fairy tale and the gothic mode to study the action heroine. The absence of the gothic in the discipline to study the much debated-figure of the

action heroine is surprising given that the action heroine's ancestral connection to the gothic heroine is well-established. The central source of dysfunctionality in the films is the Bluebeard-husband's masculinity and his perverse relationship to children. By bringing out the significance of masculinity and fatherhood in the corpus films the arguments presented point towards the marginalisation of masculinity in the study of these films. The addressing of masculinity and its state of crisis provides a narrative motivation for the action heroine's acquisition of agency and power in the narratives. Through this, the familial dimension of the corpus films can be brought forward.

In the essentialist framework of binary opposition that informs these representations, and the gothic and melodrama's tradition of Manichean struggle of good over evil, masculinity is established as a source of evil in the films. The child is the site of mythical innocence in the ideological force of the films over whom the battle between good and evil is waged and thereby justified (although the gothic and horror have also at times featured the child as site of corrupted innocence). The Bluebeard fairy tale's message of the consequences of marrying a stranger and the gothic mode's anti-marital discourse are read into the films via a symbolic marriage. It questions the nature of heterosexual relationships and the patriarchal nuclear family in relation to the figure of the action heroine.

The familial figurations are further undermined when the empowered action heroine is read within the frame of abuse and trauma, which is evocative of the domestic abuse represented in the 1940s female gothic cycle. The analysis of these scenarios brings to fore the blurring of domestic/private and the professional/public spaces as the action heroine is gaslighted at her work place in some instances. The politics of the workplace is shown to have semblances to that of the domestic space. Unlike the Bluebeard fairy tale and the female gothic narratives, the films do not directly critique the institution of marriage but rather exposes how the politics of the workplace can be a source of abuse. It also shows the abuse in the public sphere can impact private lives and vice versa. The reading of abuse then questions the very nature of the empowered action heroine. At the same time, it is understood that like the figure of the mythical hero, this abuse is the cause for the action heroine's agency. The action heroine's potency as a character, when compared to the action hero, is further undermined by

what in most instances is circumstantial motherhood. Her circumstantial motherhood refers to the involuntary narrative developments that force her into the role of the symbolic mother. The analysis of motherhood thus brings out another significant familial dimension in the films.

Through the familial figurations that are read via the Bluebeard fairy tale and the gothic mode, the subject of gender is also at stake in the films. The villainous male characters are shown to usurp the female role by a perverse interest in children and the threat that they pose to the institution of motherhood. On the other hand, the action heroine takes on the traditional masculine role of the protector, via her inner strength and fearless aggression. It is also analysed that there are narrative obstacles that do not allow the action heroine to mother. This includes the action heroine's own ambivalence towards motherhood. These fluid gender boundaries in the films are shown to be a source of familial dysfunction and overall tension between the genders in the films.

It is via the representation of these somewhat progressive gender roles that the ideological force of the films moves to a forced conservatism. It is shown that this traditionalism, which includes the strict need to separate the private and the public domains, the masculine and feminine, extends beyond familial dysfunction. This is implied via the themes of a global crisis that the Bluebeard-husband has the potential to stir, especially the threat to the figure of the child and the children in the narrative of the films. His usurping of the female capacity to reproduce and the threat that he poses to children makes the Bluebeard-husband and his deeds a threat to humanity and the continuation of human race in the corpus films. His phallic paternity is shown to disrupt God's sacred cycle of life. This essentialism also reinstates the necessity for both genders to accept parenthood. Indeed, this conservatism is reinstated via parenthood. In this respect, these representations are not politically subversive.

This triggers the action heroine to take a stance by transforming into the symbolic mother. She is shown to represent the good moral force in the films. The analysis points out that there are feminist and postfeminist implications in the representation of the action heroine. As pointed out throughout, the figure of the action heroine in general has been read as inspired by popular discourses of feminism. However, the action

heroine in the corpus films, who is a mother figure has been read as inspired by backlash and postfeminism. It is this tension between repressed feminism and postfeminism that does not allow for a simplistic reading of the action heroine as a self-sacrificing mother of the maternal melodrama. It is the framework of the gothic that allows us to address this tension and the moments of resistance that make way for the action heroine's feminism to resurface. This gives the action heroine the agency of her ancestral counterpart, the gothic heroine. It is this reading of the interplay of feminist and postfeminist ideologies that makes the action heroine a crucial figure in the corpus films. By the climax of the films the action heroine emerges as a conservative figure. However, the heroine's gender essentialism is a critique of science, technology and masculinity in the films. Ending the child abuse and familial dysfunction, the action heroine dispatches the negative patriarchal figure and the family formed on the grounds of misogyny. This alternative family, the death of agreed-upon evil in the films and reigning-in of the action heroine as the mother provides the ideological closure needed for these mainstream films.

Future research can explore the potential of the framework of the Bluebeard fairy tale and the gothic mode to study a wide variety of gothic thrillers that I came across when researching this project. The figure of the gothic child in these films can be studied at length. The antagonistic relationship between the Bluebeard-father figure and the child can be examined by using some other mythical frameworks. An audience study of the audiences of the corpus films and the appeal of the action heroine as a mother would also be an interesting subject. The American horror film masculinities can be investigated within the gothic traditions rather than the framework of the horror. An investigation of television Bluebeard narratives would also be insightful. As noted in the Introduction, examining films such as *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* (Joachim Rønning, 2019) would give the framework a wider purchase. This thesis has hopefully acted as a starting point for examining the presence of the Bluebeard fairy tale in Hollywood films. It has also made a significant contribution by analysing the ways in which the Bluebeard fairy tale's character types and its patriarchal, gender, familial ideologies are an important part of our shared cultural imagination.

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**Filmography**

**Corpus**

*Alien*, 1979. [film] Directed by Ridley Scott. UK/US: 20th Century Fox.

*Gloria*, 1980. [film] Directed by John Cassavetes. US: Columbia Pictures.

*Terminator, The*, 1984. [film] Directed by James Cameron. US: Orion Pictures.

*Aliens*, 1986. [film] Directed by James Cameron. US/UK: 20th Century Fox.

*Alien3*, 1992. [film] Directed by David Fincher. US: 20th Century Fox.

*Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, 1991. [film] Directed by James Cameron. US: TriStar Pictures.

*River Wild, The*, 1994. [film] Directed by Curtis Hanson. US: Universal Pictures.

*Long Kiss Goodnight, The*, 1996. [film] Directed by Renny Harlin. US: New Line Cinema.

*Cell, The*, 2000. [film] Directed by Tarsem Singh. US/Germany: New Line Cinema.

*Panic Room*, 2002. [film] Directed by David Fincher. US: Sony Pictures Releasing.

*Daredevil*, 2003. [film] Directed by Mark Steven Johnson. US: 20th Century Fox.

*Kill Bill: Volume 1*, 2003. [film] Directed by Quentin Tarantino. US: Miramax Films.

*Kill Bill: Volume 2*, 2004. [film] Directed by Quentin Tarantino. US: Miramax Films.

*Æon Flux,* 2005. [film] Directed by Karyn Kusama. US: Paramount Pictures.

*Elektra*, 2005. [film] Directed by Rob Bowman. Canada/US: 20th Century Fox.

*Flightplan*, 2005. [film] Directed by Robert Schwentke. Germany/US: Buena Vista Pictures.

*Maleficent*, 2014. [film] Directed by Robert Stromberg. US: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.

*Mad Max: Fury Road*, 2015. [film] Directed by George Miller. Australia: Roadshow Films.

**Note:** For reasons of brevity, I have chosen to provide limited details for the secondary titles. The secondary titles are categorised thematically.

**Fairy Tale, Gothic, Science Fiction, Thriller, Gothic Horror, Horror Films and Television Series**

*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 1931. [film] Directed by Rouben Mamoulian.

*Frankenstein*, 1931. [film] Directed by James Whale.

*M*, 1931. [film] Directed by Fritz Lang.

*Bride of Frankenstein, The*, 1935. [film] Directed by James Whale.

*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937. [film] Directed by David Hand, William Cottrell, Wilfred Jackson, Larry Morey, Perce Pearce, and Ben Sharpsteen.

*Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*, 1938. [film] Directed by Ernst Lubitsch.

*Wizard of Oz, The*, 1939. [film] Directed by Victor Fleming.

*Wuthering Heights*, 1939. [film] Directed by William Wyler.

*Gaslight*, 1940. [film] Directed by Thorold Dickinson.

*Man I Married, The*, 1940. [film] Directed by Irving Pichel.

*Rebecca*, 1940. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 1941. [film] Directed by Victor Fleming.

*Suspicion*, 1941. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*Cat People*, 1942. [film] Directed by Jacques Tourneur.

*I Walked with a Zombie*, 1943. [film] Directed by Jacques Tourneur.

*Jane Eyre*, 1943. [film] Directed by Robert Stevenson.

*Shadow of a Doubt*, 1943. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*Curse of the Cat People, The*, 1944. [film] Directed by Gunther V. Fritsch and Robert Wise.

*Laura*, 1944. [film] Directed by Otto Preminger.

*Dark Waters*, 1944. [film] Directed by Andre de Toth.

*Experiment Perilous*, 1944. [film] Directed by Jacques Tourneur.

*Gaslight*, 1944. [film] Directed by George Cukor.

*Uninvited, The*, 1944. [film] Directed by Lewis Allen.

*When Strangers Marry*, 1944. [film] Directed by William Castle.

*My Name is Julia Ross*, 1945. [film] Directed by Joseph H. Lewis.

*Spellbound*, 1945. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*Spiral Staircase, The*, 1945. [film] Directed by Robert Siodmak.

*Deception*, 1946. [film] Directed by Irving Rapper.

*Dragonwyck*, 1946. [film] Directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz.

*It's a Wonderful Life*, 1946. [film] Directed by Frank Capra.

*La Belle et la Bête*, 1946. [film] Directed by Jean Cocteau.

*Notorious*, 1946. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*Shock*, 1946. [film] Directed by Alfred Werker.

*Stranger, The*, 1946. [film] Directed by Orson Welles.

*Undercurrent*, 1946. [film] Directed by Vincente Minnelli.

*Bury Me Dead*, 1947. [film] Directed by Bernard Vorhaus.

*Possessed*, 1947. [film] Directed by Curtis Bernhardt.

*Secret Beyond the Door*, 1947. [film] Directed by Fritz Lang.

*Two Mrs. Carrolls, The*, 1947. [film] Directed by Peter Godfrey.

*Sleep, My Love*, 1948. [film] Directed by Douglas Sirk.

*Sorry, Wrong Number*, 1948. [film] Directed by Anatole Litvak.

*Caught*, 1949. [film] Directed by Max Opuls.

*Under Capricorn*, 1949. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*Whirlpool*, 1949. [film] Directed by Otto Preminger.

*Hans Christian Andersen*, 1952. [film] Directed by Charles Vidor.

*Dial M for Murder*, 1954. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*Them*, 1954. [film] Directed by Gordon Douglas.

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* 1957*.* [film] Directed by Don Siegel.

*Voodoo Woman*, 1957. [film] Directed by Edward L. Cahn.

*Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*, 1958. [film] Directed by Nathan Juran.

*Dracula*, 1958. [film] Directed by Terence Fisher.

*Fly, The*, 1958. [film] Directed by Kurt Neumann.

*Vertigo*, 1958. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*Sleeping Beauty*, 1959. [film] Directed by Clyde Geronimi.

*Wasp Woman, The*, 1959. [film] Directed by Roger Corman.

*Black Sunday*, 1960. [film] Directed by Mario Bava.

*Peeping Tom*, 1960. [film] Directed by Michael Powell.

*Innocents, The*, 1961. [film] Directed by Jack Clayton.

*Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?, 1962*. [film] Directed by Robert Aldrich.

*Birds, The*, 1963. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*Haunting*, *The*, 1963. [film] Directed by Robert Wise.

*Marnie*, 1964. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*Masque of the Red Death, The*, 1964. [film] Directed by Roger Corman.

*Night of the Living Dead*, 1968. [film] Directed by George A. Romero.

*Dr Jekyll & Sister Hyde*, 1971. [film] Directed by Roy Ward Baker.

*Play Misty for Me*, 1971. [film] Directed by Clint Eastwood.

*Frenzy*, 1972. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*Solaris*, 1972. [film] Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky.

*Don't Look Now,* 1973. [film] Directed by Nicolas Roeg.

*Exorcist, The*, 1973. [film] Directed by William Friedkin.

*Sisters*, 1973. [film] Directed by Brian De Palma.

*It's Alive*, 1974. [film] Directed by Larry Cohen.

*Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The*, 1974. [film] Directed by Tobe Hooper.

*Stepford Wives, The*, 1975. [film] Directed by Bryan Forbes.

*Tenant, The*, 1976. [film] Directed by Roman Polanski.

*Demon Seed*, 1977. [film] Directed by Donald Cammell.

*Hills have Eyes, The*, 1977. [film] Directed by Wes Craven.

*Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, 1977. [film] Directed by Richard Brooks.

*Rabid*, 1977. [film] Directed by David Cronenberg.

*Boys from Brazil, The*, 1978. [film] Directed by Franklin J. Schaffner.

*Dawn of the Dead*, 1978. [film] Directed by George A. Romero.

*Fury, The*, 1978. [film] Directed by Brian DePalma.

*Halloween*, 1978. [film] Directed by John Carpenter.

*I Spit on Your Grave*, 1978. [film] Directed by Meir Zarchi.

*Manitou*, *The*, 1978. [film] Directed by William Girdler.

*Amityville Horror*, *The*, 1979. [film] Directed by Stuart Rosenberg.

*Altered States*, 1980. [film] Directed by Ken Russell.

*Dressed to Kill*, 1980. [film] Directed by Brian De Palma.

*Final Countdown, The,* 1980. [film] Directed by Don Taylor.

*American Werewolf in London, An*, 1981. [film] Directed by John Landis.

*Blow Out*, 1981. [film] Directed by Brian De Palma.

*Das Boot*, 1981. [film] Directed by Wolfgang Petersen.

*Hell Night*, 1981. [film] Directed by Tom DeSimone.

*Scanners*, 1981. [film] Directed by David Cronenberg.

*Blade Runner*, 1982. [film] Directed by Ridley Scott.

*Cat People*, 1982. [film] Directed by Paul Schrader.

*Entity, The*, 1982. [film] Directed by Sidney J. Furie.

*Incubus*, *The*, 1982. [film] Directed by John Hough.

*Hunger, The*, 1983. [film] Directed by Tony Scott.

*Videodrome*, 1983. [film] Directed by David Cronenberg.

*Company of Wolves, The*, 1984. [film] Directed by Neil Jordan.

*Nightmare on Elm Street, A,* 1984. [film] Directed by Wes Craven.

*Back to the Future*, 1985. [film] Directed by Robert Zemeckis.

*Brazil*, 1985. [film] Directed by Terry Gilliam.

*Enemy Mine*, 1985. [film] Directed by Wolfgang Petersen.

*Jagged Edge*, 1985. [film] Directed by Richard Marquand.

*Small Wonder*, 1985-9. [TV series] Created by Howard Leeds.

*Fly, The*, 1986. [film] Directed by David Cronenberg.

*Gothic*, 1986. [film] Directed by Ken Russell.

*Manhunter*, 1986. [film] Directed by Michael Mann.

*Fatal Attraction*, 1987. [film] Directed by Adrian Lyne.

*Alien Nation*, 1988. [film] Directed by Graham Baker.

*Beetlejuice*, 1988. [film] Directed by Tim Burton.

*Dead Ringers*, 1988. [film] Directed by David Cronenberg.

*Back to the Future II*, 1989. [film] Directed by Robert Zemeckis.

*Batman*, 1989. [film] Directed by Tim Burton.

*Dead Calm*, 1989. [film] Directed by Phillip Noyce.

*Arachnophobia*, 1990. [film] Directed by Frank Marshall.

*Back to the Future Part III,* 1990. [film] Directed by Robert Zemeckis.

*Handmaid's Tale, The*, 1990. [film] Directed by Volker Schlöndorff.

*Jacob's Ladder*, 1990. [film] Directed by Adrian Lyne.

*Misery*, 1990. [film] Directed by Rob Reiner.

*Pacific Heights*, 1990. [film] Directed by John Schlesinger.

*Pretty Woman*, 1990. [film] Directed by Garry Marshall.

*Total Recall*, 1990. [film] Directed by Paul Verhoeven.

*AEon Flux*, 1991-.[TV series] Created by Peter Chung.

*Addams Family, The,* 1991. [film] Directed by Barry Sonnenfeld.

*Beauty and the Beast*, 1991. [film] Directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise.

*Dead Again*, 1991. [film] Directed by Kenneth Branagh.

*Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare*, 1991. [film] Directed by Rachel Talalay.

*People Under the Stairs*, *The*, 1991. [film] Directed by Wes Craven.

*Sleeping with the Enemy*, 1991. [film] Directed by Joseph Ruben.

*Batman Returns*, 1992. [film] Directed by Tim Burton.

*Bram Stoker's Dracula*, 1992. [film] Directed by Francis Ford Coppola.

*Bram Stoker's Dracula:* Special Features, 1992. [DVD] Directed by Francis Ford Coppola.

*In My Daughter's Name*, 1992. [TV film] Directed by Jud Taylor.

*Lawnmower Man, The*, 1992. [film] Directed by Brett Leonard.

*Single White Female*, 1992. [film] Directed by Barbet Schroeder.

*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, 1992. [film] Directed by David Lynch.

*Addams Family Values*, 1993. [film] Directed by Barry Sonnenfeld.

*Dennis the Menace*, 1993. [film] Directed by Nick Castle.

*Jurassic Park*, 1993. [film] Directed by Steven Spielberg.

*U.F.O.*, 1993. [film] Directed by Tony Dow.

*Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, 1994. [film] Directed by Kenneth Branagh.

*New Nightmare*, 1994. [film] Directed by Wes Craven.

*Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh*, 1995. [film] Directed by Bill Condon.

*Casper*, 1995. [film] Directed by Brad Silberling.

*City of Lost Children, The*, 1995. [film] Directed by Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet.

*Se7en*, 1995. [film] Directed by David Fincher.

*Village of the Damned*, 1995. [film] Directed by John Carpenter.

*Fargo*, 1996. [film] Directed by Joel Coen and Ethan Coen.

*Matilda*, 1996. [film] Directed by Danny DeVito.

*Nutty Professor, The*, 1996. [film] Directed by Tom Shadyac.

*Scream*, 1996. [film] Directed by Wes Craven.

*Event Horizon*, 1997. [film] Directed by Paul Anderson.

*Gattaca*, 1997. [film] Directed by Andrew Niccol.

*I know what You did Last Summer*, 1997. [film] Directed by Jim Gillespie.

*Lost Highway*, 1997. [film] Directed by David Lynch.

*Lost World, The: Jurassic Park*, 1997. [film] Directed by Steven Spielberg.

*Fallen*, 1998. [film] Directed by Gregory Hoblit.

*Perfect Murder*, *A*, 1998. [film] Directed by Andrew Davis.

*Species II*, 1998. [film] Directed by Peter Medak.

*Lost in Space*, 1998. [film] Directed by Stephen Hopkins.

*Bone Collector, The,* 1999. [film] Directed by Phillip Noyce.

*Gloria*, 1999. [film] Directed by Sidney Lumet.

*Sixth Sense*, *The*, 1999. [film] Directed by M. Night Shyamalan.

*Sleepy Hollow*, 1999. [film] Directed by Tim Burton.

*Talented Mr. Ripley, The*, 1999. [film] Directed by Anthony Minghella.

*American Psycho*, 2000. [film] Directed by Mary Harron.

*Memento*, 2000. [film] Directed by Christopher Nolan.

*What Lies Beneath*, 2000. [film] Directed by Robert Zemeckis.

*What Women Want*, 2000. [film] Directed by Nancy Meyers.

*A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, 2001. [film] Directed by Steven Spielberg.

*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, 2001. [film] Directed by Chris Columbus.

*Hannibal*, 2001. [film] Directed by Ridley Scott.

*Mulholland Dr.*, 2001. [film] Directed by David Lynch.

*Dark Water*, 2002. [film] Directed by Hideo Nakata.

*Red Dragon*, 2002. [film] Directed by Brett Ratner.

*Resident Evil*, 2002. [film] Directed by Paul W.S. Anderson.

*Ring*, *The*, 2002. [film] Directed by Gore Verbinski.

*Solaris*, 2002. [film] Directed by Steven Soderbergh.

*In the Cut*, 2003. [film] Directed by Jane Campion.

*Underworld*, 2003. [film] Directed by Len Wiseman.

*Catwoman*, 2004. [film] Directed by Pitof.

*I, Robot*, 2004. [film] Directed by Alex Proyas.

*Phantom of the Opera, The,* 2004. [film] Directed by Joel Schumacher.

*Stepford Wives, The*, 2004. [film] Directed by Frank Oz.

*Amityville Horror*, *The*, 2005. [film] Directed by Andrew Douglas.

*Batman Begins*, 2005. [film] Directed by Christopher Nolan.

*Brothers Grimm, The*, 2005. [film] Directed by Terry Gilliam.

*Single White Female 2: The Psycho*, 2005. [film] Directed by Keith Samples.

*Children of Men*, 2006. [film] Directed by Alfonso Cuarón.

*Pan's Labyrinth*, 2006. [film] Directed by Guillermo del Toro.

*Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, 2006. [film] Directed by Tom Tykwer.

*Prestige, The*, 2006. [film] Directed by Christopher Nolan.

*Underworld: Evolution*, 2006. [film] Directed by Len Wiseman.

*Becoming Jane*, 2007. [film] Directed by Julian Jarrold.

*Funny Games*, 2007. [film] Directed by Michael Haneke.

*Hannibal Rising*, 2007. [film] Directed by Peter Webber.

*I am Legend*, 2007. [film] Directed by Francis Lawrence.

*Mimic*, 2007. [film] Directed by Guillermo del Toro.

*Sydney White*, 2007. [film] Directed by Joe Nussbaum.

*Zodiac*, 2007. [film] Directed by David Fincher.

*Dark Knight, The*, 2008. [film] Directed by Christopher Nolan.

*Terribly Happy*, 2008. [film] Directed by Henrik Ruben Genz.

*Drag Me to Hell*, 2009. [film] Directed by Sam Raimi.

*Princess and the Frog*, *The*, 2009. [film] Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker.

*Terminator Salvation*, 2009. [film] Directed by McG.

*Thirst*, 2009. [film] Directed by Chan-wook Park.

*Alice in Wonderland*, 2010. [film] Directed by Tim Burton.

*Black Swan, The*, 2010. [film] Directed by Darren Aronofsky.

*Inception*, 2010. [film] Directed by Christopher Nolan.

*Jane Eyre*, 2011. [film] Directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga.

*Monk, The*, 2011. [film] Directed by Dominik Moll.

*Dark Knight Rises, The*, 2012. [film] Directed by Christopher Nolan.

*Mirror Mirror*, 2012. [film] Directed by Tarsem Singh.

*Prometheus*, 2012. [film] Directed by Ridley Scott.

*Woman in Black, The*, 2012. [film] Directed by James Watkins.

*Crimson Peak*, 2015. [film] Directed by Guillermo del Toro.

*Terminator Genisys*, 2015. [film] Directed by Alan Taylor.

*Beauty and the Beast*, 2017. [film] Directed by Bill Condon.

**Fatherhood Films and Television Series**

*3 Godfathers*, 1948. [film] Directed by John Ford.

*Father of the Bride*, 1950. [film] Directed by Vincente Minnelli.

*Slightly Pregnant Man, A*, 1973. [film] Directed by Jacques Demy.

*Rabbit Test*, 1978. [film] Directed by Joan Rivers.

*Shining, The*, 1980. [film] Directed by Stanley Kubrick.

*Author! Author!*, 1982. [film] Directed by Arthur Hiller.

*Mr. Mom*, 1983. [film] Directed by Stan Dragoti.

*Commando*, 1985. [film] Directed by Mark L. Lester.

*Mosquito Coast, The*, 1986. [film] Directed by Peter Weir.

*Raising Arizona*, 1987. [film] Directed by Joel Coen.

*Stepfather, The*, 1987. [film] Directed by Joseph Ruben.

*Three Men and a Baby*, 1987. [film] Directed by Leonard Nimoy.

*Dad*, 1989. [film] Directed by Gary David Goldberg.

*Parenthood*, 1989. [film] Directed by Ron Howard.

*Stepfather II, The*, 1989. [film] Directed by Jeff Burr.

*Uncle Buck*, 1989. [film] Directed by John Hughes.

*Kindergarten Cop*, 1990. [film] Directed by Ivan Reitman.

*Three Men and a Little Lady*, 1990. [film] Directed by Emile Ardolino.

*Twin Peaks:* season 1 and season 2*,* 1990-91. [TV series] Created by Mark Frost and David Lynch.

*Boyz n the Hood*, 1991. [film] Directed by John Singleton.

*Father of the Bride*, 1991. [film] Directed by Charles Shyer.

*Candyman*, 1992. [film] Directed by Bernard Rose.

*Falling Down*, 1993. [film] Directed by Joel Schumacher.

*Mrs. Doubtfire*, 1993. [film] Directed by Chris Columbus.

*Junior*, 1994. [film] Directed by Ivan Reitman.

*Father of the Bride Part II*, 1995. [film] Directed by Charles Shyer.

*Nine Months*, 1995. [film] Directed by Chris Columbus.

*Father's Day*, 1997. [film] Directed by Ivan Reitman.

*Object of My Affection, The*, 1998. [film] Directed by Nicholas Hytner.

*I am Sam*, 2001. [film] Directed by Jessie Nelson.

*Transamerica*, 2005. [film] Directed by Duncan Tucker.

*Pacifier, The*, 2005. [film] Directed by Adam Shankman.

*Stepfather*, *The*, 2009. [film] Directed by Nelson McCormick.

**Motherhood Films and Television Series**

*Applause*, 1929. [film] Directed by Rouben Mamoulian.

*Champ, The*, 1931. [film] Directed by King Vidor.

*Blonde Venus*, 1932. [film] Directed by Josef von Sternberg.

*Christopher Strong*, 1933. [film] Directed by Dorothy Arzner.

*Evergreen*, 1934. [film] Directed by Victor Saville.

*Imitation of Life*, 1934. [film] Directed by John M. Stahl.

*Penny Serenade*, 1934. [film] Directed by George Stevens.

*Craig's Wife*, 1936. [film] Directed by Dorothy Arzner.

*Stella Dallas*, 1937. [film] Directed by King Vidor.

*Mrs. Miniver*, 1942. [film] Directed by William Wyler.

*Now, Voyager*, 1942. [film] Directed by Irving Rapper.

*Mildred Pierce*, 1945. [film] Directed by Michael Curtiz.

*Letter from an Unknown Woman*, 1948. [film] Directed by Max Ophüls.

*All that Heaven Allows*, 1955. [film] Directed by Douglas Sirk.

*Night of the Hunter*, *The*, 1955. [film] Directed by Charles Laughton.

*Peyton Place*, 1957. [film] Directed by Mark Robson.

*Imitation of Life*, 1959. [film] Directed by Douglas Sirk.

*Psycho*, 1960. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*Thrill of it All, The*, 1963. [film] Directed by Norman Jewison.

*Nanny, The*, 1965. [film] Directed by Seth Holt.

*Sandpiper, The*, 1965. [film] Directed by Vincente Minnelli.

*Rosemary's Baby*, 1968. [film] Directed by Roman Polanski.

*Up the Sandbox*, 1972. [film] Directed by Irvin Kershner.

*Alice doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 1974. [film] Directed by Martin Scorsese.

*Big Bad Mama*, 1974. [film] Directed by Steve Carver.

*Woman Under the Influence*, *A*, 1974. [film] Directed by John Cassavetes.

*Carrie*, 1976. [film] Directed by Brian De Palma.

*Turning Point, The*, 1977. [film] Directed by Herbert Ross.

*Autumn Sonata*, 1978. [film] Directed by Ingmar Bergman.

*Interiors*, 1978. [film] Directed by Woody Allen.

*Unmarried Woman*, *An*, 1978. [film] Directed by Paul Mazursky.

*Brood, The*, 1979. [film] Directed by David Cronenberg.

*Champ, The*, 1979. [film] Directed by Franco Zeffirelli.

*Kramer vs. Kramer*, 1979. [film] Directed by Robert Benton.

*La Luna*, 1979. [film] Directed by Bernardo Bertolucci.

*Norma Rae*, 1979. [film] Directed by Martin Ritt.

*Friday the 13th*, 1980. [film] Directed by Sean S. Cunningham.

*Ordinary People*, 1980. [film] Directed by Robert Redford.

*Mommie Dearest*, 1981. [film] Directed by Frank Perry.

*Shoot the Moon*, 1982. [film] Directed by Alan Parker.

*Terms of Endearment*, 1983. [film] Directed by James L. Brooks.

*Heartburn*, 1986. [film] Directed by Mike Nichols.

*Baby Boom*, 1987. [film] Directed by Charles Shyer.

*Fatal Beauty*, 1987. [film] Directed by Tom Holland.

*Hightide*, 1987. [film] Directed by Gillian Armstrong.

*Overboard*, 1987. [film] Directed by Garry Marshall.

*Throw Momma from the Train*, 1987. [film] Directed by Danny DeVito.

*Another Woman*, 1988. [film] Directed by Woody Allen.

*Good Mother, The*, 1988. [film] Directed by Leonard Nimoy.

*She's having a Baby*, 1988. [film] Directed by John Hughes.

*Look who's Talking*, 1989. [film] Directed by Amy Heckerling.

*Nightmare on Elm Street 5, A: The Dream Child,* 1989. [film] Directed by Stephen Hopkins.

*Parents*, 1989. [film] Directed by Bob Balaban.

*Look who's Talking Too*, 1990. [film] Directed by Amy Heckerling.

*Postcards from the Edge*, 1990. [film] Directed by Mike Nichols.

*Stella*, 1990. [film] Directed by John Erman.

*Deceived*, 1991. [film] Directed by Damian Harris.

*Gas, Food Lodging*, 1992. [film] Directed by Allison Anders.

*Hand that Rocks the Cradle, The*, 1992. [film] Directed by Curtis Hanson.

*Look who's Talking Now*, 1993. [film] Directed by Tom Ropelewski.

*Piano*, *The*, 1993. [film] Directed by Jane Campion.

*Antonia's Line*, 1995. [film] Directed by Marleen Gorris.

*Striptease*, 1996. [film] Directed by Andrew Bergman.

*Alien Resurrection*, 1997. [film] Directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet.

*Eye for an Eye*, 1997. [film] Directed by John Schlesinger.

*Stepmom*, 1998. [film] Directed by Chris Columbus.

*Anywhere but Here*, 1999. [film] Directed by Wayne Wang.

*Erin Brockovich*, 2000. [film] Directed by Steven Soderbergh.

*Gift, The*, 2000. [film] Directed by Sam Raimi.

*Others, The*, 2001. [film] Directed by Alejandro Amenábar.

*Enough*, 2002. [film] Directed by Michael Apted.

*Blade: Trinity*, 2004. [film] Directed by David S. Goyer.

*Forgotten, The,* 2004. [film] Directed by Joseph Ruben.

*Raising Helen*, 2004. [film] Directed by Garry Marshall.

*Dark, The,* 2005. [film] Directed by John Fawcett.

*Dark Water*, 2005. [film] Directed by Walter Salles.

*Heroes:* season 1, episodes 1, 2*,* 3, 4, 2006-10. [TV series] Created by Tim Kring.

*Silent Hill*, 2006. [film] Directed by Christophe Gans.

*Sherrybaby*, 2006. [film] Directed by Laurie Collyer.

*Applause*, 2009. [film] Directed by Martin Zandvliet.

*Motherhood*, 2009. [film] Directed by Katherine Dieckmann.

*I don't know how She does It*, 2011. [film] Directed by Douglas McGrath.

*Twilight Saga, The: Breaking Dawn – Part 2*, 2012. [film] Directed by Bill Condon.

*Gravity*, 2013. [film] Directed by Alfonso Cuarón.

*Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*, 2019. [film] Directed by Joachim Rønning, 2019

**Action Heroine Films and Action Films**

*Calamity Jane*, 1953. [film] Directed by David Butler.

*Modesty Blaise*, 1966. [film] Directed by Joseph Losey.

*Dirty Harry*, 1971. [film] Directed by Don Siegel.

*Cleopatra Jones*, 1973. [film] Directed by Jack Starrett.

*Coffy*, 1973. [film] Directed by Jack Hill.

*Foxy Brown*, 1974. [film] Directed by Jack Hill.

*Rocky*, 1976. [film] Directed by John G. Avildsen.

*Mad Max*, 1979. [film] Directed by George Miller.

*Mad Max: The Road Warrior*, 1981. [film] Directed by George Miller.

*First Blood*, 1982. [film] Directed by Ted Kotcheff.

*Rambo: First Blood Part II*, 1985. [film] Directed by George P. Cosmatos.

*Red Sonja*, 1985. [film] Directed by Richard Fleischer.

*Lethal Weapon*, 1987. [film] Directed by Richard Donner.

*Predator*, 1987. [film] Directed by John McTiernan.

*RoboCop*, 1987. [film] Directed by Paul Verhoeven.

*Die Hard*, 1988. [film] Directed by John McTiernan.

*Blue Steel*, 1989. [film] Directed by Kathryn Bigelow.

*Lethal Weapon 2*, 1989. [film] Directed by Richard Donner.

*China O'Brien*, 1990. [film] Directed by Robert Clouse.

*Die Hard 2*, 1990. [film] Directed by Renny Harlin.

*Nikita*, 1990. [film] Directed by Luc Besson.

*Mortal Thoughts*, 1991. [film] Directed by Alan Rudolph.

*Point Break*, 1991. [film] Directed by Kathryn Bigelow.

*Silence of the Lambs, The*, 1991. [film] Directed by Jonathan Demme.

*Thelma and Louise*, 1991. [film] Directed by Ridley Scott.

*Passenger 57*, 1992. [film] Directed by Kevin Hooks.

*Last Action Hero*, 1993. [film] Directed by John McTiernan.

*Point of No Return*, 1993. [film] Directed by John Badham.

*Speed*, 1994. [film] Directed by Jan de Bont.

*True Lies*, 1994. [film] Directed by James Cameron.

*Cutthroat Island*, 1995. [film] Directed by Renny Harlin.

*GoldenEye*, 1995. [film] Directed by Martin Campbell.

*Strange Days*, 1995. [film] Directed by Kathryn Bigelow.

*Barb Wire*, 1996. [film] Directed by David Hogan.

*Courage Under Fire*, 1996. [film] Directed by Edward Zwick.

*Eraser*, 1996. [film] Directed by Chuck Russell.

*Mission Impossible*, 1996. [film] Directed by Brian De Palma.

*G.I. Jane*, 1997. [film] Directed by Ridley Scott.

*Jackie Brown*, 1997. [film] Directed by Quentin Tarantino.

*Matrix, The*, 1999. [film] Directed by The Wachowski Brothers.

*Charlie's Angels*, 2000. [film] Directed by McG.

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, 2000. [film] Directed by Ang Lee.

*Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, 2001. [film] Directed by Simon West.

*Bourne Identity, The*, 2002. [film] Directed by Doug Liman.

*Femme Fatale*, 2002. [film] Directed by Brian De Palma.

*Bourne Supremacy, The*, 2004. [film] Directed by Paul Greengrass.

*Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, 2005. [film] Directed by Doug Liman.

*Bourne Ultimatum, The*, 2007. [film] Directed by Paul Greengrass.

*Wanted*, 2008. [film] Directed by Timur Bekmambetov.

*Watchmen*, 2009. [film] Directed by Zack Snyder.

*Salt*, 2010. [film] Directed by Phillip Noyce.

*Brave*, 2012. [film] Directed by Mark Andrews and Brenda Chapman.

*After Earth*, 2013. [film] Directed by M. Night Shyamalan.

*Lucy*, 2014. [film] Directed by Luc Besson.

*Wonder Woman*, 2017. [film] Directed by Patty Jenkins.

**Other Important Films**

*Old Maid*, *The,* 1939. [film] Directed by Edmund Goulding.

*Woman of the Year*, 1942. [film] Directed by George Stevens.

*Meet Me in St. Louis*, 1944. [film] Directed by Vincente Minnelli.

*Duel in the Sun*, 1946. [film] Directed by King Vidor.

*Gilda*, 1946. [film] Directed by Charles Vidor.

*To Each His Own*, 1946. [film] Directed by Mitchell Leisen.

*Out of the Past*, 1947. [film] Directed by Jacques Tourneur.

*Reckless Moment, The*, 1949. [film] Directed by Max Opuls.

*Johnny Guitar*, 1954. [film] Directed by Nicholas Ray.

*Magnificent Obsession*, 1954. [film] Directed by Douglas Sirk.

*Rear Window*, 1954. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*Cobweb, The*, 1955. [film] Directed by Vincente Minnelli.

*Desperate Hours, The*, 1955. [film] Directed by William Wyler.

*East of Eden*, 1955. [film] Directed by Elia Kazan.

*Picnic*, 1955. [film] Directed by Joshua Logan.

*Giant*, 1956. [film] Directed by George Stevens.

*Written on the Wind*, 1956. [film] Directed by Douglas Sirk.

*Interlude*, 1957. [film] Directed by Douglas Sirk.

*Sound of Music*, *The,* 1965. [film] Directed by Robert Wise.

*Persona*, 1966. [film] Directed by Ingmar Bergman.

*Diary of a Mad Housewife*, 1970. [film] Directed by Frank Perry.

*Klute*, 1971. [film] Directed by Alan J. Pakula.

*Boxcar Bertha*, 1972. [film] Directed by Martin Scorsese.

*Godfather*, *The*, 1972. [film] Directed by Francis Ford Coppola.

*Super Fly*, 1972. [film] Directed by Gordon Parks Jr.

*Way We Were, The*, 1973. [film] Directed by Sydney Pollack.

*Chinatown*, 1974. [film] Directed by Roman Polanski.

*Godfather: Part II*, *The,* 1974. [film] Directed by Francis Ford Coppola.

*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 1975. [film] Directed by Milos Forman.

*Marriage of Maria Braun, The*, 1979. [film] Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

*My Brilliant Career*, 1979. [film] Directed by Gillian Armstrong.

*Nine to Five*, 1980. [film] Directed by Colin Higgins.

*Private Benjamin*, 1980. [film] Directed by Howard Zieff.

*Tootsie*, 1982. [film] Directed by Sydney Pollack.

*Victor Victoria*, 1982. [film] Directed by Blake Edwards.

*Man, Woman and Child*, 1983. [film] Directed by Dick Richards.

*Yentl*, 1983. [film] Directed by Barbara Streisand.

*Making Mr. Right*, 1987. [film] Directed by Susan Seidelman.

*Twins*, 1988. [film] Directed by Ivan Reitman.

*Accused, The*, 1988. [film] Directed by Jonathan Kaplan.

*Working Girl*, 1988. [film] Directed by Mike Nichols.

*Steel Magnolias*, 1989. [film] Directed by Herbert Ross.

*Godfather: Part III*, *The,* 1990. [film] Directed by Francis Ford Coppola.

*Fried Green Tomatoes*, 1991. [film] Directed by Jon Avnet.

*Regarding Henry*, 1991. [film] Directed by Mike Nichols.

*Basic Instinct*, 1992. [film] Directed by Paul Verhoeven.

*Reservoir Dogs*, 1992. [film] Directed by Quentin Tarantino.

*Natural Born Killers*, 1994. [film] Directed by Oliver Stone.

*Last Seduction, The*, 1994. [film] Directed by John Dahl.

*Pulp Fiction*, 1994. [film] Directed by Quentin Tarantino.

*Copycat*, 1995. [film] Directed by Jon Amiel.

*Waiting to Exhale*, 1995. [film] Directed by Forest Whitaker.

*First Wives Club, The*, 1996. [film] Directed by Hugh Wilson.

*L.A. Confidential*, 1997. [film] Directed by Curtis Hanson.

*Romy and Michele's High School Reunion*, 1997. [film] Directed by David Mirkin.

*Titanic*, 1997. [film] Directed by James Cameron.

*Babe: Pig in the City*, 1998. [film] Directed by George Miller.

*Hope Floats*, 1998. [film] Directed by Forest Whitaker.

*Pleasantville*, 1998. [film] Directed by Gary Ross.

*Simon Birch*, 1998. [film] Directed by Mark Steven Johnson.

*Fight Club*, 1999. [film] Directed by David Fincher.

*Gladiator*, 2000. [film] Directed by Ridley Scott.

*Legally Blonde*, 2001. [film] Directed by Robert Luketic.

*Far from Heaven*, 2002. [film] Directed by Todd Haynes.

*Maid in Manhattan*, 2002. [film] Directed by Wayne Wang.

*Sweet Home Alabama*, 2002. [film] Directed by Andy Tennant.

*Down with Love*, 2003. [film] Directed by Peyton Reed.

*Mona Lisa Smile*, 2003. [film] Directed by Mike Newell.

*View from the Top*, 2003. [film] Directed by Bruno Barreto.

*13 going on 30*, 2004. [film] Directed by Gary Winick.

*Howl's Moving Castle*, 2004. [film] Directed by Hayao Miyazaki.

*Basic Instinct 2,* 2006. [film] Directed by Michael Caton-Jones.

*Fall, The*, 2006. [film] Directed by Tarsem Singh.

*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 2006. [TV film] Directed by Brendan Maher.

*Enchanted*, 2007. [film] Directed by Kevin Lima.

*Zodiac*, 2007. [film] Directed by David Fincher.

*Curious Case of Benjamin Button, The*, 2008. [film] Directed by David Fincher.

*Avatar*, 2009. [film] Directed by James Cameron.

*Education, An*, 2009. [film] Directed by Lone Scherfig.

*Inglourious Basterds*, 2009. [film] Directed by Quentin Tarantino.

*Made in Dagenham*, 2010. [film] Directed by Nigel Cole.

*Social Network, The*, 2010. [film] Directed by David Fincher.

*Dangerous Method, A,* 2011. [film] Directed by David Cronenberg.