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Popular Fiction Portfolio

Contents:

- Crime Novel 3-Act Structure: 1, 809 words
- Crime Novel Opening Scene: 700 words
- Fairytale Retelling: 939 words
- Reflective Essay: 2,293 words
- Bibliography

Total Wordcount: 5,741

Crime Novel planning and opening scene:

Detective: A genius child who has a fantastical way of seeing things. He is mute and was at first overlooked. The local detective took him in as a foster and calls upon him occasionally to help. Moral conundrum surrounding the exposing of a vulnerable child to the traumatic situations that arise.

x2 stories running simultaneously.

1. How the child and the detective came together: the child helped solve the murder of his headteacher who turned out to be a child rapist and was killed in an accident by the girl he was abusing. As only the child figured out the truth, the detective didn't report the truth and allowed the girl her freedom. Impressed by the child and long wanting a child of their own, the detective managed to foster the boy.
2. Current events. The child looks on at the crime scene curiously, head tilted as he watches a stream of blood trickling down towards his shoes. The mutilated corpse of a woman lies displayed in a public place- look up animal imagery to get some ideas how...

Victim: This woman was an animal welfare officer who helped ensure that a local business could no longer test their products on animals due to it being inhumane.

Murderer: Losing money and customers due to the victim's interfering, the managing director decided to get his revenge. He orchestrated an alibi and kidnapped the victim, tying her to a table and placing rats in metal containers over her. He heated one end and, to escape, the rats ate through the victim to avoid being roasted alive.

3 Act Structure:

Background:

Opening- Milo, a 10-year-old boy stands in front of a mutilated corpse hanging from a tree near the beachfront. He's more concerned by the harsh sunlight and screaming seagulls around him than the body. His foster mother, Sarah, a detective, stands at his side. Her calm demeanour is juxtaposed against Milo's internal struggle. They have the crime scene almost completely to themselves. Sarah gives Milo the victim's background and asks him what he thinks, joking that the pathologist won't get back to them for another few days due to the backlog. Milo announces that the teeth and claw marks are consistent with rats. As there are burns on the victim's skin, it's clear they were placed in heated containers on the victim and ate through her to escape being roasted alive.

- When a new officer harshly interrupts, Milo grows overwhelmed and goes into crisis.

Flashback 1- Teacher POV coming across the headmaster of the school in his office bludgeoned to death. Milo is sat next to the corpse, looking at it curiously, running his hand absently through the pool of blood beneath the headteacher's head. At the teacher's scream, Milo looks up and signs "I believe Mr Watford was bludgeoned to death. He knew his attacker. They're most likely a member of this school."

Flashback 2- Milo POV. The Police arrive, Sarah among them. As he's one of the sole witnesses, a police officer attempts to question Milo. She grows frustrated when Milo can't answer. Sarah steps in and shoos the officer away, helping Milo to calm down. She smiles at him and tells him, "Let's help each other, hmm."

Current day- Sarah and Milo sit in a cafe eating breakfast. Milo asks for a milkshake by using his PECS book – this helps establish that Milo can communicate with others if need be without signing. He is recovering after his meltdown. Milo says he's sorry, but Sarah vehemently says he's got nothing to be sorry for.

"I do. It's why I was excluded again."

Sarah says it's not his fault and that the school should be better trained. "They're there to help you, not grow cold feet every time you throw a workbook across the room. Some people just can't comprehend it when others don't fit in the carefully curated boxes they've made up in their heads. I don't play by the rules either. It's

why we make such a good team. Now, the pathologist said they'd get back to me in a day or so. Let's hear how much you got from the stiff in twenty minutes.

Milo explains.

Sarah mentions that someone must have held a grudge against the victim's animal welfare efforts.

- Attempted visit with a friend. Milo spends the whole time monologuing about the different types of paper used in a printing press and the benefits of cold pressed vs hot pressed. He then goes on to talk, in detail, about the most common types of murders. His friend grows first annoyed, then upset, and leaves him alone in the back garden. He is told not to bother visiting again.

Setback 1:

- Milo's social worker visits. It doesn't go well. There's lots of talk of the school not meeting needs and Milo having to start medication. Sarah is beyond furious and Milo just sad. When the social worker talks to him it's in a condescending manner, as if he can't understand her.
- Sarah and Milo research the victim, but she has a lot of potential enemies.

Conflict and rising action:

- With the excuse of 'bring your child to work day', Sarah and Milo interview potential suspects. They narrow it down to three potential managing directors of big companies that use animals in the testing of their products. The victim campaigned against them and, on all three accounts, won.
- Red Herring here. One suspect talks about his recent divorce. Another talks about bankruptcy. The third about employee strikes
- Sarah receives a typed anonymous letter, threatening her involvement in the case. Milo grows excited, despite the threat, recognising the rarity of paper used and where it comes from and how he spotted a whole stack at one of the directing managers office. Sarah smiles, saying she needs to get a warrant to search the office immediately.
- Sarah is in the attic, looking through a box of memories. She pulls out a child's bonnet and onesie, too small and pink to belong to Milo. She holds it to her chest, a tear running down her face. When she hears Milo on the stairs she shoves the clothes back in the box.
- Not wanting to wait for a warrant, Milo sneaks out of the house that evening. He breaks into the workplace of the director, finding stacks of the same paper and another clue. He proudly brings it to Sarah.
- Argument about Milo sneaking out. Milo grows frustrated as he struggles to defend himself.

Sarah interrogates the PA and Director again. They have iron tight alibis. When she brings up the paper the Director seems confused. "It was a money-making ploy I invested in years ago. Nothing came from it. We ordered hundreds of thousands too many boxes, and the stuff's not even good enough for professional use. We've been selling it to the local pet shop for years to try and get some of our money back. I think they use it for bedding- it holds up better than sawdust and newspaper, so I've been told."

Setback 2:

- True to the director's word, the pet shop uses the paper for bedding and even sells the stuff, able to keep a percentage. It's predominantly used as rat bedding, which rings alarm bells for Sarah. She asks to look at the receipts for people who brought rat bedding in the last three weeks. She recognises a few of the surnames, but none belonging to any of the suspects.
- Milo tries to convince Sarah to get him a pet. She refuses. The owner says they have more in the back that are due to go out and let them have a look around. Milo spots a chinchilla that he likes, and Sarah says she'll get him one if he can do a whole term at school without being excluded. Milo pouts.

- Milo has a meeting with Sarah, the social worker, the headteacher, his LSA and the ALNCO before being allowed back to school. The social worker grows frustrated with the lack of provisions in place for Milo, spouting that they're almost as useless as her ex-wife. Overwhelmed by the meeting, Milo has a breakthrough at the social workers words. He knows who the killer is. Stressed from the meeting, he's overwhelmed and unable to advocate for himself, even to Sarah. He flees from the school, only to get kidnapped as he's barely out of the gate.

Climax:

Flashback- Milo realises that the headteacher is a rapist who has been killed by one of his students and victims- someone who happens to be Milo's only friend. Milo tells Sarah and together they work out how to make the headmasters death look like an accident. Something fell on him, it wasn't orchestrated... very sad... etc.

Current day- Bound and blindfolded, Milo hears animals in cages around him and realises he's in the back of the pet shop. He immediately knows where he is and who he's been taken by. Slyly, he manages to activate the tracking tag Sarah insisted he have hidden in his shoe and sets out to distract the murderer until Sarah gets there. The murderer is one of the Managing Director's ex-wives who blames the victim for the loss of money from the company and her subsequent divorce. She keeps rats

and sells the babies to the pet shop, using her own paper for bedding. Murderer tells Milo he won't be harmed if he keeps quiet, she wants Sarah to give up hunting her and he'll be released.

- Sarah is notified of Milo's kidnapping and gathers backup. She gets a notification on her phone of Milo's whereabouts. "Clever boy."

Setback 2:

- Milo infodumps to the murderer, using his PECS and saying that they already know who she is and Sarah's not going to give up. Incensed, and believing herself caught, the murderer sets up the rats over Milo.

Falling Action:

- Sarah and her backup burst in just as the murderer begins to heat up the rat cages.
- Murderer is apprehended and Milo released.
- Milo is taken to hospital with Sarah accompanying him. He's fine but they want to keep him in overnight for observation. Milo hugs Sarah and tells her how glad he is she came for him. She replies that she'll always be there for him.

Resolution:

- Another meeting with the social worker and school. This time it's agreed that specialists will be employed in the school to meet Milo's unique needs.

Questions are raised regarding whether Sarah is the right guardian for Milo.

- As a celebration present for solving the case, Sarah hands Milo the chinchilla he was looking at. Milo realises that there are people from social services following him and Sarah and puts together the fact that he may be taken away from her. The book ends with him panicking and vowing not to be taken from her.

Opening Scene to a Crime Novel:

It was the worst sort of day for examining a corpse. The pool of congealed blood beneath the victim reflected the rising sun and sent fractured beams of light drilling directly into Milo's skull.

'What do you think, hun?' said Aunt Sarah, an ever-present bodyguard at his side. She wasn't really his aunt, not by blood, but every time he failed to use the moniker something in her face changed. He didn't like that expression. It made his chest ache and reminded him too much of the time before.

'Too bright,' Milo signed, his movements small to keep from jostling his head too much. His sunglasses sat high on his nose; in the same position he'd placed them earlier that morning. Still, they did little to appease the sharp stabbing in his brain, and he had to resist the urge to bob up and down on the balls of his feet. People didn't like it when he moved too much. 'I want to go home.'

The light burned, the cry of the seagulls over the bay made his ears vibrate and the old scent of blood made nausea churn in his gut. Even the tree the victim hung from did little to block the glare. 'I know,' said Aunt Sarah, 'just a little longer then we can go.'

She always said that. "A little longer Milo;" "Five more minutes, Milo;" "We'll be done soon, Milo." In all the one-hundred-and-twenty-two times previously she'd said

such a thing, they'd never left in the time frame she'd given. Milo curled his hands into fists, his nails digging into his palms. The pain grounded him and helped chase back that nagging feeling deep inside that the world was wrong. He took a deep breath and a step closer to the corpse.

A little over twenty-four hours ago the corpse had been a woman. She was older than Aunt Sarah, with strands of silver streaked through her dark, blood-caked hair. Rigor-mortis had been and gone, and discolouration of the skin had already settled in. Milo poked at a particularly dark purple spot on the woman's naked thigh. As suspected, it did not blanch.

Half of the woman's torso was missing. He could see the trunk of the tree she hung from through her stomach. He peered closer, noting the jagged edges to the wounds, the scratch marks on the skin still intact. Rats, he decided with a nod to himself.

'What the hell are you doing, bringing that kid 'round here again?'

Aunt Sarah jolted sharply, twisting to see where the voice had come from. Milo didn't care; besides it was rare for people to talk to him directly. They took one look at him and believed that, just because he couldn't speak, he was dumb too. He continued to stare at the corpse. How long had it taken for the rats to gnaw through all that soft tissue? One hour? Two?

‘Schools closed, Glenn- frozen pipes- and there’s no way I’m paying for a babysitter,’ said Aunt Sarah.

Milo glanced up, raising his hands to tell her that was decidedly not the case. As a garbled ‘N-o-o-o,’ escaped his lips, she gently batted his hands aside and levelled him with the firm look he often received from his teachers. It made no sense. She’d received the call informing her of his exclusion only hours earlier. Surely, she couldn’t have forgotten already?

‘Later,’ she signed quickly, before turning back to Detective Glenn.

‘I don’t care if hell’s frozen over. Get the kid away from my crime scene.’

‘*Your* crime scene?’ Sarah’s face contorted, as though a wasp had flown into her open mouth and dug its stinger into her tongue. Milo was just wondering if he should get help when Detective Glenn stepped around her and into his line of sight. Milo’s first feeling was one of overwhelming relief. If Detective Glenn wasn’t concerned, then Aunt Sarah couldn’t be stung too badly. Then he registered the scowl on the man’s looming red face, and his meaty hand curled vice-tight around his upper arm. Static burst into life behind Milo’s eyes, fizzing down his leaden arms and setting his entire body alight. He began to scream.

Fairytale Retelling of the Grimm Brother's Godfather Death:

It was not without forethought that the girl's parents chose a vampire to be her godfather. After the death of many children, the couple had abandoned God and the Devil both. In their eyes, neither cared for the wellbeing of the mortals they sought to rule.

The vampire was different. Only an immortal knowledgeable in the unfairness of human life would strive to give those that sustained him better.

'She shall grow without fear,' said the Vampire, contorting his ancient bones until he loomed over the child in her crib. 'No illness shall wrack her body; no sadness shall cloud her mind. She shall be mine and I will care for her as a father ought. When she is of age, I shall take her to my college and there she shall learn the art of the physician.' The girl's parents nodded and were pleased, for they were dying, and their daughter's wellbeing was their prime concern. Outside, the mists licked at the windows, only to spiral away when they could find no point of entry. All was well.

When the girl was five years old, her parents succumbed to their illness in one another's arms. The Vampire barely allowed the soil to rest atop their pallid corpses before he swept the girl off to his domain. The college had been a castle once, when

the Vampire was but a fledgling, apparent in its flying buttresses and weathered gargoyles. Now it was the most prestigious physician school in the land.

‘Am I to learn your arts so soon, godfather?’ asked the girl, her stern little face upturned towards the Vampire.

‘Not yet, little one,’ said he, ‘When your humours stir, your body ripens, and your blood proves not to be such a temptation, then it shall be time.’ And it was so.

A mere five years after the girl came of age, she became the most renowned physician in the land. The Vampire had taught her the healing arts, and only when he was certain she had mastered them did he take her into the caves below his beloved college and offer up a secret. A jar of medicine mixed with the Vampire’s blood, could heal all human ailments. ‘But only,’ said the Vampire, ‘if I allow it. You must not go against me, my dear, for I know best which fate suits each mortal. Promise me this.’

‘I promise,’ said the girl.

Now, it came to be that the prince of the land became gravely ill. Under cloaks of shadow the Vampire and the girl came to him. ‘His blood runs thick with poison. It is not to be,’ said the Vampire, but the girl was unconvinced. As soon as her eyes had fallen on the prince, her heart had stirred, and she had fallen deeply in love.

That morning, whilst the Vampire was slumbering in his coffin, the girl took a vial of his blood and mixed it with medicine as she had been shown all those moons ago. As the potion settled it became a deep, dark crimson, frothing and hissing when exposed to the light of the sun.

The girl took the potion and knelt at the head of the prince. Carefully, she bade him drink and waited for him to awaken. The prince's cheeks flushed with life, and his eyes fluttered. When he opened them and beheld the girl, he was so overcome with gratitude that he kissed her. They made love right there on his sickbed.

Day turned to night, and the Vampire rose from his slumber. He searched high and low for the girl but could not find her. Eventually, he returned to the castle the prince called home, and there found his ward curled into a tight little ball, crying.

'What is wrong?' asked the Vampire.

The girl lifted her tearstained face from her arms. 'I did what I promised I would not. I ignored your orders and healed the prince. He took me there on the bed, and I thought all my dreams had come true. But when I asked him when we would marry, he laughed in my face. He said he could never marry someone as lowborn as I.'

The Vampire's face darkened, and his blue-toned lips peeled back from his sharp teeth. In the depths of his black eyes there swirled an immortal jealousy. 'I shall pardon you, as you are my goddaughter, but the prince I shall not spare.'

The Vampire then went to the prince, sat tall on his golden throne, and drained him dry. Then, he took the girl once more into the caves beneath his college, into a room she had never seen before. A stone shelf was built into the wall, the contents of which made her tremble. Hundreds of jars, filled to the brim with preservative, and containing beating human hearts.

'What is all this?' whispered the girl.

'Evidence of my previous mistakes,' said the Vampire. With one cold finger, he caressed the girl's face and leaned in close. His iron-sweet breath hissed across her lips. 'All I wanted was your happiness. I swore an oath to your parents and now, there is only one way I can honour it. Never again shall you be disappointed by love, for mine is eternal. Never again shall you be afraid of the cold fingers of death, for they shall be yours to command.'

The Vampire turned her, then, into that same deathless thing as he. Her still-beating heart he added to a new jar and slid it pride of place amongst his collection. In her new, moonlit world, the girl had become death.

Reflective Essay:

This portfolio contains three pieces reflecting upon what constitutes popular fiction.

The first two pieces are an extension of one another and comprises of an outline of a grounder crime novel and the novel's opening scene. The third piece is a short retelling of a Grimm's fairytale, replacing the archetypical Death with the ever-popular vampire, and the male protagonist with a female one. My aim with this work was to improve my writing craft by exploring the requirements of varying genres of popular fiction. Throughout this essay I reflect upon the process of writing the pieces, including critical reflections on my research practice and the outcomes of the workshopping sessions.

For the outline of my grounder crime novel, I followed the basic three-act structure. In a grounder novel, the central character is generally interesting and significant to the story. It made sense then, to ensure that characterisation and plot was my priority. As stated by Earnshaw, "In crime fiction with few exceptions plot is more important than in literary fiction."¹ Taking this into account, I expanded most heavily upon scenes that hinted at character background and story.

¹ Steven Earnshaw, *The Handbook of Creative Wiring* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2007) p. 126

The story I wished to tell takes place on two levels. The surface level is the story of Milo, a brilliant young boy solving crimes. The underlying concern is of the everyday struggles of a pre-verbal autistic child, and the uncertainty of a life dictated by others. Earnshaw expresses, "The constant dilemma for the crime writer is how to make the genre new, to take the old conventions and formulae and inject them with energy and innovation."² In Act One, I was able to show this by creating an intriguing protagonist struggling to navigate a world that is overwhelming to him. To juxtapose this, I also planned out how surrounding characters, such as his foster mother, Sarah, would react in the same situation and either hinder or help Milo.

In our workshop sessions, a member of the class suggested, "There are a lot of ethical and moral, social issues to wrestle with here to do with the boy's welfare. Social services are going to have a huge part to play in this story!" In early drafts, I did not include the role of social services overly in the plan. After taking the comment into consideration, I decided more of the story should surround this subject as it is a pertinent one to the lives of those on the spectrum. Candy suggests that, "If reflection becomes a necessary part of professional thinking, this can bring benefit by accelerating the learning process."³ By reflecting, I was able to realise that I should change the ending of the piece so it would be less stereotypically happy and

² Steven Earnshaw, *The Handbook of Creative Wiring* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2007) p.126

³ Linda Candy, *The Creative Reflective Practitioner* (Routledge: Oxon, 2020), p.35

highlight the issues surrounding the care system (including staff shortages, miscommunication and failure to meet needs).

With the rewrite of my initial plan, Social Services and Milo's exclusion from school now play a prominent role in the story. It was imperative to hint at how a world built for neurotypical people can be hard to navigate for someone with a neurodivergence. This impact is heightened by the duo storylines, one past, one present, threaded throughout acts one and two. Milo's past highlights what motivates him and informs thought processes, that readers otherwise might not be familiar with.

Another student suggested they were unsure of Sarah's role in the story, questioning, "Why does she want a child in the first place?" Though the focus of the story is on Milo, I decided to take this view into account and expand upon Sarah's backstory. I included a new scene with Sarah perusing a box of her infant daughter's clothes, hinting that she had once been a mother, and something happened to both the child and her previous relationship. This expansion gives Sarah more depth and the motivation to want to be a good parent to Milo.

For Act three, I initially drafted a happier ending, with Milo being adopted and the case closing smoothly. After a comment on the work sharing forum - "You might consider different kinds of resolution to the two story lines – though all round happy

works.” - I decided that, whilst Milo’s first case ended well, the message of the story would be better emphasised by posing some unanswered questions.

Deliberately leaving the story open-ended leaves the reader unsettled. This mirrors Milo’s feelings on the situation – his questions never fully answered, and his life ruled by a feeling of unease. This sentiment echoes Storr’s studies, who argues that “the fundamental human value is the struggle towards a meaningful goal.”⁴ Just as in reality, Milo’s life and his struggles are not yet over.

For the opening scene, I decided to write from a limited third person perspective, including focalisation. This helps convey Milo’s thought process, whilst still allowing the reader distance. Rimmon- Kenan defines focalization in the following manner. “The story is presented in the text through the mediation of some ‘prism’, ‘perspective’, ‘angle of vision’, verbalized by the narrator though not necessarily his.”⁵ By allowing the reader distance, they are unlikely to become overwhelmed by a psyche that is unfamiliar, whilst still allowing them to empathise with the protagonist by having the occasional focalised sentence. Third person can also help explore the character in a more detached way, mirroring Milo’s detachment to himself as he becomes overwhelmed. This is apparent in the following sentence.

⁴ Will Storr, *The Science of Storytelling* (London: Harper Collins, 2019) p.188

⁵ Shlomith Rimmon – Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, (Routledge: Oxon) p. 72

“Static burst into life behind Milo’s eyes, fizzing down his leaden arms and setting his entire body alight. He began to scream.”

The genre of the piece fits the category of a grounded crime novel. In this form, the emphasis is on character, which is something I wished to explore. The way Milo experiences the world is just as important as the crime itself. Even though the protagonist is a child, my ideal reader would be an adult audience due to the darker nature of the piece and the concerns regarding the education system and social services. However, if the gorier scenes were rewritten, and the focus was applied more heavily to Milo and his navigation of the world, the piece could easily constitute a young adult novel. In this case, the themes explored would be very different, navigating adolescence and trying to fit into an unsympathetic world. The crimes would take secondary precedence.

Although I did a thorough job of exploring character, I could improve by expanding upon the setting. As evidenced, I glossed over setting in broad strokes, rather than give it more space. “The light burned, the cry of the seagulls over the bay made his ears vibrate and the old scent of blood made nausea churn in his gut. Even the tree the victim hung from did little to block the glare.” This could be remedied in later scenes, when Milo is feeling less dissociated.

In our online forum, one person stated that the scene was good. “Only thing I would say is careful with the formatting? Like “babysitter,’ said Aunt Sarah.” instead

of "babysitter.' Said Aunt Sarah." I made sure that I changed this. In a similar manner it was also suggested that "The opening descriptive sentence is perhaps still a little bit overdone - though it is clear that it is a way of signalling how Milo experiences the world as establishing the murder. Maybe this: The pool of congealed blood beneath the victim reflected the rising sun and sent fractured beams of light drilling directly into Milo's skull." After some thinking, I decided that the wording suggested was more succinct and fit the tone of the piece better.

For my rewriting of a fairytale, I decided I wanted to explore one of the Grimm Brother's stories. I looked through a collection and came across '*Godfather Death*'. This story is centred around the personification of Death and is very archetypal in nature. The dark themes and Jungian archetypes immediately caught my attention. As Jung himself expresses, "The greatest and best thoughts of man shape themselves upon these primordial images as upon a blueprint."⁶ I decided to attempt a subversion of the tale, essentially rewriting the 'blueprint'. The original has themes centred on the inevitability of death but frames it in a way that seems negative. I wished to flip it and have death (or undeath) represent freedom and relief, with the protagonist becoming the same dark being as her godfather.

Most fairytales are written in third person with a lack of focalisation. I found emulating this a challenge but did my best to mirror the original form and adhere to

⁶ Carl Jung, *The Essential Jung: Selected Writings Introduced by Anthony Storr* (London: Fontana Press, 1998) p. 70

an omniscient third person narrator. Mary Oliver suggests, “Imitation is a very good way of investigating the real thing.”⁷ By imitating the way in which the fairytale is written, I now have a better understanding of its content and structure. In the case of fairytales such as this, story is more important than characterisation and setting, with both being flat aspects.

The ‘Dark Father’ is an archetype present in many folk tales. Booker informs us that “Firstly there is the older man who stands in some position of power over the hero or heroine, usually in the place of a lost father.”⁸ Although the figure of my vampire seems, at first, very much the archetype of ‘Dark Father’, I wished to make him an eventual saviour figure, rather than an antagonist. Though he carries many features of the original, my godfather is a less impartial figure, motivated by lust and his own desires. I found this interesting to explore, again subverting the expectations that Death is an impartial witness simply doing his job and implanting a more modernistic view.

In *‘The Seven Basic Plots’*, Booker specifies that “The central key to the story thus lies, in each case, in the struggle between the young hero and a fully-grown man, who as a Dark Father- figure or Tyrant, is a negative version of the father

⁷ Mary Oliver, *A Poetry Handbook: A Prose Guide to Understanding and Writing Poetry* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994) p.13

⁸ Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (Bloomsbury: London, 2024) p. 241

absent at the beginning.”⁹ I found it an intriguing idea to flip this, transforming the vampire into the rescuer and saving the girl through her undeath, whilst the prince is the cause of her misfortune. Having the antagonist of the piece be the prince, taking the protagonists virginity, ‘ruining her’ and leaving her to her fate, goes against most traditional fairytales in which the prince is a saviour figure.

Another subversion I chose to enact was to make the protagonist female instead of male. In the original tale the protagonist is male and has a very neutral relationship with his godfather. LeGuin suggests that “Folktales often repeat themselves exuberantly, both in the language and in the structure.”¹⁰ By subverting this I hinted at the underlying lust and uncomfortable sexual attraction that can come with having an older man (vampire) as the godfather to a much younger woman. Though this aspect was always a subtle point in the text, I did add a few sentences to make it clearer after a workshopping session. These include, “In the depths of his black eyes there swirled an immortal jealousy,” and “His iron-sweet breath hissed across her lips. ‘All I wanted was your happiness. I swore an oath to your parents and now, there is only one way I can honour it. Never again shall you be disappointed by love, for mine is eternal. Never again shall you be afraid of the cold fingers of death, for they shall be yours to command. “

⁹ Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (Bloomsbury: London, 2024) p. 277

¹⁰ Ursula. K. LeGuin, *Steering the Craft* (Silver Press: Glasgow, 2024) p. 33

Vampires are known as being archetypes of their own, representing lust, sex and its relative taboo within society. The attraction I hinted at is also taboo but has the underlying metaphor of the attraction of death and the release one can find in it. This echoes the latest feminist movement of 'I would rather choose the bear (death) than the man (rape and humiliation).' It is, in a sense, the power to choose and have agency over one's body.

In the workshopping sessions, one person said that when the vampire mentions his 'previous mistakes' it wasn't clear what had happened to them. I thought about expanding on this but believe it is truer to the genre to leave it vague. It is still there as a subtle background detail for readers to pick up on, but not necessarily expanded upon. If I were to expand this piece into a novel, then it would take more precedence.

On the forum, it was suggested that I simplify some of my word choices, changing 'allotted' to 'chose' and 'multiple' to 'many'. Candy asserts that "By placing the work in a different context, the practitioner's perspective can be altered by seeing or experiencing it in a different kind of space."¹¹. After printing out my work and looking at it from a different perspective, I decided to make the changes and believe it helps the story flow better.

¹¹ Linda Candy, *The Creative Reflective Practitioner* (Routledge: Oxon, 2020), p 63

In conclusion, the portfolio explores a variety of aspects of popular fiction. I successfully outlined a three-act structure for a crime novel, taking genre and story into consideration. For the first scene in the crime novel, I explored characterisation by making my character autistic and focalising in how it could feel to be in sensory overload; with an emphasis on showing not telling. In the future I will expand upon the description of the setting. Likewise, in my rewriting of a fairytale, I adhered to the form of the piece, writing from a third person omniscient perspective and using literary canon as a guide. My focus was predominantly on story, though I did include subtle pieces of character development and hints at setting. Singleton suggests that through workshopping sessions one can ‘...develop an ability to offer constructive criticism.’¹² I experienced this through feedback from my peers in such sessions, I improved upon all pieces, tightening diction and removing irrelevant paragraphs and descriptions.

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