

The French Folktale Bluebeard Reinvented

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The original French folk tale by Charles Perrault, about an ugly noble man who had anywhere between five to seven wives who died in quick succession and who was always looking to remarry. His castle is a place of uncountable wealth and one of the rooms also is a chamber of torture and death. This old folk tale is given an alternative ending by the British writer Angela Carter in her story "The Bloody Chamber".

The original story had the female character from a noble family whereas the modern rendering was based on the fact that the story is a first-hand narrative recollection of the time when she had met the Marquis as a seventeen year old. The massive wealth of the Marquis is the attraction for the young poor pianist, who lived with her widowed mother in a small apartment. The girl and her mother had spent their entire lives without any material comfort. So when there came a much older man who just wanted to marry the girl for the sake of getting married, though he was recently widowed the girl wants to marry him. When she travels by train to go to him in his castle she covers her journey which is more of a transformative journey from her being a girl to becoming a woman who was shortly to be married. In the original the female lead character is first averse to the idea of marrying the "Bluebearded" man. Though the girl herself was of noble upbringing and very young and beautiful yet becomes prey to the Bluebearded man's massive wealth. So if in the new story the poor girl is impressed and besotted with the much

older Marquis' wealth it comes as no surprise.

The original French folk tale where the blue beard chooses to marry the youngest daughter of his neighbour against her will, yet upon persisting she was attracted to bluebeard's immense wealth and grandeur of each room of his castle exceeding the other. We do not know the exact age of the girl though we know that she was young. But in the story by Carter we know the narrator was seventeen, and poor at the time of the incident.

Carter's character was attracted to the wealth in order to secure her future as she had lived all her life in poverty with her poor mother, as her father had died in the world was leaving her young mother penniless. Though the mother had doubts about the Marquis being an appropriate match for her daughter she remains silent because she too felt that money would definitely make her daughter happy and provide her daughter the security that was lacking all her life. The suitor was never doubted, neither his appearance nor his age, nothing deterred either of the female characters in both the old or the new tale. In both the cases neither the family nor the girls doubt or grow suspicious about the strange disappearance of the wives, with no bodies ever being found, multiple times. He called himself a widower and everyone accepted that as a decent excuse to be remarried. Though all the wives were women of great beauty, wealth and personal accomplishments. Yet their disappearance goes unreported and unnoticed. Even more strange is the new

wives eagerness and willingness to marry a man who has neither age nor appearance. It was only his wealth that the girls and their families were attracted to be it a noble woman or a seventeen year old poor pianist, and that is what is used to lure the women into the trap.

Nothing about his behaviour raises doubts either as he unabashedly displays his immense riches, to his wives friends and family. The hasty marriages, the girls travelling alone to their husband. The journey is of transformative nature, a journey from girl hood to womanhood , a journey from obscurity to security.

the pounding of my heart
mimicking that of the great pistons
ceaselessly thrusting the train that
bore me through the night, away
from Paris, away from girlhood,
away from the white, enclosed
quietude of my mother's apartment,
into the unguessable country of
marriage.

The only doubt the modern character, the seventeen year old has is the total lack of emotions in the Marquis, she consoles herself with the logic that he was recently widowed and so was in mourning. Yet she was observant in her recollections that she likened him to both an animal and a plant. He was plant like because he resembled a lily, and animal like because he appeared as ferocious as a lion.

On hindsight her bridal chamber bore the resemblance of a funeral, an embalming chamber with white lilies surrounding the room. There are various signs that signal at her impending fate. The gift the husband presents is a very telling symbol of his plans, his grandmother's thick double stranded ruby choker, which she had purchased to celebrate her own escape from the guillotine. The portrait of the martyred Saint Cecelia who was decapitated, is another very telling symbol, of her inevitable fate. Though we know that Carter's character is recollecting past events and so she has survived the tragedy.

The concept of curiosity is another key feature as to how Bluebeard makes the excuse to travel away on business, to give his wife control over the castle and handing her the bundle of keys and then arousing curiosity by asking her to enter all the rooms but one, but giving her the key to the forbidden room as well. This is a reflection upon the curious nature of all women be it Pandora, Eve or Psyche, where they would alone be entirely responsible for the following consequences.

Both the girls enter the forbidden room to find its floor covered with clotted blood, both the girls in their panic drop the key , retain it and try to wash the blood which mysteriously does not wash off leading to their entry to the room being discovered by the husband. The original story deals with how the young girl begs for time to pray giving time for her brothers to arrive and to rescue her from her being beheaded. In Carter's modern twist which is more feminist, the girl's mother arrives in time to shoot the Marquis in a single shot. Both the female characters were unable to help themselves and relied upon outside help.

The French original story by Charles Perrault was translated into English by Angela Carter. Angela Carter's story too has a "happily ever after ending" but it is an alternative one. The fact that the original character retains the inherited wealth and uses it to make sure that her siblings were well taken care of and finally making sure that she marries another wealthy and loving man. The nameless character chooses to give away all her wealth to charity, the bodies of the wives are given a decent burial and the bloody chamber is sealed. The castle is turned into a school for the blind, the nameless female prefers to earn her living as a piano teacher and live on her meagre means with her blind husband and mother. She had learnt a lot from her experience and we know that her change is dramatic. The main male character Bluebeard is called Marquis in

Carter's story which continues to be set in France, as in the old story instead of a sister Ann Carter's female lead has a blind admirer called Jean. The female character is nameless, Carter chooses to keep the

character nameless for two reasons as the story is first person narrative, by keeping the character nameless she universalised the story for all women.

WORKS CITED

"The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories" Carter, Angela, Victor Gollancz (1979).