

# A problem of betrayal on the example of two novels

Life



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## **Betrayal and Relationships: A juxtaposition of The Foundling by Heinrich von Kleist and Blond Eckbert by Ludwig Tieck**

Two stories worthy of comparison are *The Foundling* by Heinrich von Kleist and *Blond Eckbert* by Ludwig Tieck. Both have a theme of invasion from another person into one's life, and are rife with betrayal, drama, and tragedy. Their similarities do not end with these themes, though. They also have very similar aesops, some similar character archetypes and relationships, and similar use of surreal storytelling to move the plot. One main difference, however, is that their use of surreal and fantastical storytelling is very different between the two, a lot of their characters, while having similar roles and archetypes, are also very different.

*The Foundling* and *Blond Eckbert* both have a similarity in their themes, an important one being betrayal. This is very clear in the end of both stories, where, in each case, the main characters lives all end in tragedy, due to their actions of harming people who trusted them. Nicolo, who betrayed his adoptive father after all he had given him when he “ set about reviving [Elvira] with burning kisses on her lips and breasts”, was similar to Bertha, who similarly betrayed the old woman who had shown her kindness, possibly the first real kindness she had ever been shown (Kleist 284). The first parallel here is that both Nicolo and Bertha were “ adopted” by the older folk they had happened upon after running from the miserable fates of being an orphan in the city or living with abusive parents in a hovel. The betrayal of the one who had taken them in was the turning point in both these stories, and ended with the loss of everything they had gained in said betrayal.

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Another parallel is their relationships with their “parental” figure, particularly between Nicolo and Piachi in *The Foundling* and Bertha and the Old Woman in *Blond Eckbert*. The Old Woman and Piachi take on the role of a parent after Nicolo and Bertha no longer have parents. While Nicolo’s relationship with Piachi had been more developed than Bertha’s with The Old Woman, they both still had gotten what they wanted. Nicolo was taken into a wealthy estate, as was Bertha, in her own way, and they betrayed their elder’s trust after the elder had promised to give them so much. Bertha and Nicolo both make a choice based only on selfish desire, sexual in Nicolo’s case and material in Bertha’s, even after Bertha had been told she would get all she wanted if she did not “[stray] from the path of righteousness” as she did (Tieck 9). Despite this, she still betrayed the Old Woman and left with the bird and dog, rebelling against what the Old Woman had set up for Bertha, just as Nicolo, who Piachi had spent his whole life trying to instill virtue in, had betrayed Piachi once he was given everything. This is made even more surprising by the fact that both Bertha and Nicolo were treated well, so well that Bertha and Nicolo were both made happy by the actions of their adoptive parents by their own admission. Nicolo’s womanizing was “cured at the source” by his marriage and he had gotten his father’s wealth and estate (Kleist 273). Bertha was also happy, saying she “never wished for things to be different” after four years of living in solitude with her new family (Tieck 8).

Another feature that both stories have that makes them similar is the use of an aesop. The aesop in both stories seems to be that revenge and betrayal will always end in misery. Every example of betrayal ends up repaid in one

way or another in this story. For example, Bertha and Nicolo, again, meet unhappy ends due to their actions. Nicolo, for his promiscuous ways and his lack of respect for his wife, ends up alone, and embarrassed by his father after appearing at the funeral of his recently deceased wife while under the impression that he was going to meet Xaviera, a woman who he had been seeing before and during his relationship with his wife. He gets back at Piachi by seducing Piachi's wife and his step-mother, then removes Piachi from the house because. Nearly every decision made by Nicolo during the course of the novel is a deceitful choice made to betray someone, knowingly and maliciously in some cases. Bertha, on the other hand, was less malicious about it, but her entire life is built on a foundation of her betrayal against the Old Woman, who served as her parent in a similar capacity as Piachi did. However, her betrayal came simply from the realization that "[she] alone could decide whether [she] should take the bird and the jewels while the old woman was away and go out into the world which [she] had read about" (Tieck 9). Eckbert, also, had committed betrayal when he killed Walther for knowing more of Bertha's backstory than he let on, and Piachi, in a way, can be seen as betraying Nicolo after his wife's death by embarrassing him, and Elvira had betrayed Piachi by secretly wanting Colino and sleeping with Nicolo while Piachi was away.

All of these betrayals are repaid in kind. Nicolo first loses his family and then his life, Piachi and Elvira die by execution and illness, respectively. Eckbert is deceived by the Old Woman for what he had done, and Bertha dies of illness after Eckbert had killed Walther. Nearly every person in the two stories meets a tragic fate because of their acts of betrayal earlier in the stories.

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The Old Woman's stating "no one who strays from the life of righteousness will ever prosper, and punishment will follow, no matter how late" rings true in every situation, and outlines the aesop being told in both stories (Tieck 9).

Both stories also have surreal, almost fantastic features. In Blond Eckbert, the Old Woman serves as a source of otherworldly powers, having a bird that lays gems and the ability to shapeshift into Walther and Hugo and act convincingly enough to deceive Eckbert and Bertha for years, as well as having abilities that are similar to a seer, knowing that Bertha is the daughter of a knight and the sister of Eckbert. She seems to be almost omniscient in the scope of this story. The Foundling also has one noteworthy surreal feature, it being that Nicolo and Colino have an uncanny similarity in how they look, made clear when Xaviera's daughter said "[w]hy, god bless us Signor Nicolo! That's a picture of you!" in reference to the portrait of Colino in Elvira's room. This similarity is made even more clear by the fact that they both have very similar names that are anagrams of each other.

While these stories have a great many similarities, they also have a few key differences. For example, Blond Eckbert has far more fantastical, almost fairytale like references. The story starts from when a child runs from her abusive, impoverished household, and then she finds a witch, only to leave, and is brought to a happy life with her knight in shining armor. This a very basic, romantic fairy tale kind of story. The Foundling, on the other hand, uses its surreal element between Nicolo and Colino only, and mostly as a plot device, as opposed to something indicative of magical or fantastical forces.

Further developing this idea, the two stories also have different archetypes of characters, which is expected since they are differently written. Blond Eckbert, being closer to a fairytale, has a maiden in the form of Bertha, due to her kindness and relationship with Eckbert. The Old Woman also fits the old man archetype in Carl Jung's view of archetypal characters, but in the context of making this story a fairy tale she is closer to a witch archetype due to her scheming and fantastic powers, and a knight in the form of Eckbert, who saved the maiden from her lonely life. The Foundling, in comparison has a maiden in Elvira for similar reasons as Bertha, and an old man in Piachi, as he is kind and offers wisdom and guidance in his child. Colino is the knight for Elvira, who saved the maiden and died years after. Other than this, however, there are no more character parallels, only contrasts. Xaviera, for example, plays the younger, seductive temptress, in comparison to the witch/old man that was the Old Woman. Where the Old Woman wanted to lead Bertha to a life of virtue and righteousness, Xaviera was constantly manipulating and tempting Nicolo in the background to be less virtuous. Piachi also acts as a counterpart for Bertha's father, being kind, wealthy, and always has Nicolo's best interest in mind, offering everything he has to his child, whereas Bertha's father is impoverished, abusive, and offers nothing while asking for everything. Something that makes these two characters similar, however, is the fact that neither of them are their child's biological father. The main cause for this difference is probably the structure and type of story. Blond Eckbert, being similar to a fairy tale, has a few critical characters that behave similarly to common, simple archetypes. The Foundling, on the other hand, is much closer to a

drama, using character interaction and relationships to cause conflict, with a greater number of more developed characters in comparison to Blond Eckbert.

Ultimately, both of these stories have to do with betrayal brought about in bringing a foreign person into your life. Both these stories are similar in the way they use similar characters and betrayal to tell a story, but they go different directions with these similarities, making them very different stories to read, even though they are similar in the basic story that is being told.