

'the bloody chamber',
the characters and
elements of gothic



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The genre of gothic literature contains both elements of horror and romance, with an innocent female, a powerful male (usually the quintessential villain), as well as themes to do with the supernatural as key features included in the novel. In this chapter, elements of the gothic begin in the very title of the book: the 'bloody' in 'The Bloody Chamber' associates the idea of death and gore, a more horrific element of the gothic genre; the 'Chamber' itself now sounds more claustrophobic and similar to a torture chamber, due to the link to blood.

However, blood can be interpreted in different ways throughout the extract, even in a romantic way in this example: 'the wedding dress...wrapped up in...red ribbon'. Juxtaposing the red of the ribbon with the white of the dress (which symbolises innocence) could represent the staining of virgin blood on a pure dress, or scarring of one's purity with blood, to represent taking somebody's identity with them - the person who took her virginity is the one she'll belong to for the rest of her life.

Not only is there a presence of a pure and desirable female ('the wedding dress he'd bought me' - hinting at the fact he wants her and he shall buy her this wedding dress and her mother a dress so as to encourage her to marry him), who is dominated by a male (he bought her the dress, instead of letting her choose the design...a controlling character), but the fact there is a transition from everyday life to something bigger is also a major element of the gothic genre.

Transition at the very beginning of the novel is also illustrated in another gothic novel - Dracula (when Harker is travelling to Transsylvania to Count

Dracula's castle). The female character is travelling from her home, 'the narrow bedroom (she) had left behind forever' into 'the unguessable country of marriage'. This brings forward a sense of excitement and uncertainty as to whether marriage will live up to her expectations or worsen her intentions of getting away from poverty - whether it will make her happier.

The narrator of the chapter, clearly a female, seems to have a mixture of characteristics, making it difficult to read her true personality. From the beginning of the chapter, she seems a rather passionate but at the same time innocent figure: 'my burning cheeks pressed against the impeccable linen of the pillow...'. The burning of her cheeks suggests a fast flow of blood, blood now being represented in a different way - for passion and excitement.

The impeccable pillow brings forward an image of a white crispy pillow, untouched beforehand, just like a virgin. The two opposites placed together, one on top of the other, juxtaposes passion and innocence which could be interpreted in several ways: both the groom and bride juxtaposed together to form opposites, or the narrator's character, confusing the audience on purpose. This point makes the narrator unreliable, as we do not particularly understand her real character at this point in the book. 'And I remember' - the fact she is using her memory as a point of narration, instead of the present day actions makes her even more unreliable as we cannot trust what she may and may not remember. A journal or another character could have made her story more reliable otherwise. An unreliable narrator is a huge element of gothic literature, and the fact that the female character is the unreliable narrator so far, breaks the boundaries of gothic literature (as only male villains were described as such before).

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However the male character in the chapter remains unreliable to the reader. He seems mysterious, and not described in major detail - the only details collated by the reader are the fact he is fairly rich (bought her the wedding dress, as well as a luxurious dress for her mother), rather controlling over his future bride (the girl abandoned her items in her room - perhaps because he wouldn't let her bring her possessions with her).

The lack of description set by the narrator only leaves the reader to guess to his personality, but it also shows that the girl isn't particularly excited by her groom, perhaps preferring not to mention or think about him as it may discomfort her. Her mother seems like a matured character, one who developed from the girl who sacrificed her rich background and family for love, but after losing him, fought her way for her and her daughters' survival. Having seen this change in her, her daughter must have looked up to her - which is where her sensible side comes from (' I know I want to marry him' - having to marry the man).

This woman doesn't seem to fit in any context in gothic, apart from when the groom gives her identity in the gothic genre; by gifting her a black dress, which to me symbolises decay and the overlooked, he is showing the girl the person she will one day turn into, therefore degrading the females in that family into white and black, differentiating their characters but also showing the link between them - what the black once was, and what the white shall one day turn into.

The male characters described in the chapter - the father and the groom - both seem honourable, either due to civil service or the amount of money

they are worth, and are most certainly recognised for it. This is shown by the fathers' medals of honour and the groom's availability in having a 'treasure wife' or a woman of his choice, who marries him for his money's worth.

Without his money, he wouldn't particularly have his bride.

However, although the women in the chapter do seem honourable in their own way, such as the mother surviving the hardships of poor life without a husband and the daughter making a courageous decision in marrying someone she isn't in love with for economic purpose (and both trying to overcome a loved man's death in hard times) - they are not entirely recognised for it. Instead, the young lady could be passed off as rather naive, due to the ecstasy (or exaggeration) of her descriptions, and the woman as having no purpose other than mourn her husband's death and her daughter's departure.

There is already a difference in the male-female importance and stereotype ratio, making the author already (either purposefully or accidentally) sexist in their work...this being another key element of gothic literature. However this could also be counter argued by stating that neither of the characters on the page are named, therefore are still all equals. In conclusion, the opening chapter introduces the characters to a good level of understanding for the audience and throws essential elements of gothic literature (exaggeration, juxtaposing, and sexism, symbolism) to set the mood.