

Deflowering of the
christmas rose:
monstrosity and
perspective in "the
tiger's br...



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What attributes qualify someone, or something, as a monster? Despite the fact that the answer to this subjective query fluctuates immensely among individual persons, for centuries we have attempted to construct a universal definition of the word ‘monster’. The Oxford English Dictionary (1884) illustrates man’s inability to produce such a designation through its inclusion of a variety of descriptions derived from those previously established and changes in cultural and societal standards. One entry, for example, defines a monster as “a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance.” Within this same entry, it continues by adapting this description in an effort to make it more general: “Any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening.”

In literature, however, we are exposed to figures of all backgrounds, appearances, and temperaments that are presented as monsters, some of which do not embody the more conventional qualities that have come to accompany this distinction. One such case is manifested in fiction author Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride”, an altered version of Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont’s “Beauty and the Beast”. The characteristics that she chooses to prioritize in shaping her monster, the tiger Milord, extend beyond the physical classifications presented in the preceding definitions and earlier versions of the fairy tale. Carter proceeds to argue that it is an abuse of power that makes a monster, and illustrates this claim through her beast’s treatment of the heroine, Rose, as well as his ability to break her strength and sense of identity. In order to adequately defend this claim and identify the additional attributes of a monster Carter presents in her tale, an

analysis of her descriptions, narrative style, and tone will be performed.

Furthermore, the relationship between “ The Tiger’s Bride” and the theories of Julia Kristeva’s abject will be explored.

It is clear that Carter wanted to incorporate specific physical qualities as a basis for generating a monster within her tale, perhaps using the initial mental images produced by many upon mention of ‘ monster’ as a launching point for the proposal of her argument. As the plot unfolds, she consistently supplies audiences with details of Milord’s intimidating form, reminding us that he is of “ great size and ferocious appearance” (Oxford English Dictionary). The “ annihilating vehemence of his eyes” (Carter, 63), his “ excoriating claws” (60), and his “ savage geometry” (63) suggest that the extent of intensity and control the tiger is capable of possessing is one to be dreaded.

What accompanies these rich descriptions of Milord’s frightful features is one of the more underlying “ stipulations” Carter considers necessary for the label of monster: deceitfulness. The beast takes every measure to disguise his true form. The speaker describes the overpowering scent of perfume radiating from Milord’s lavish purple gown, as well as the male face painted on his mask: “ Oh yes, a beautiful face; but one with too much formal symmetry of feature to be entirely human...too perfect, uncanny”(53).

Furthermore, Milord utilizes emotional deception to catalyze the deterioration of the heroine’s identity, an argument that will be evaluated more thoroughly later in this analysis. The tiger feigns weakness through tears and perceived shame following the expression of his expectation to see

Rose’s unclothed body. By doing so, he provides Rose with a false sense of
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having control of the situation, ultimately pushing her to see herself as the monster and fall to his demands. Until Rose succumbs to the Milord's barbaric desire, however, he continues to maintain the physical façade used to convince others of his humanity within his private quarters, as if attempting to overcome personal denial that he is an animal: "In his rarely disturbed privacy, the Beast wears...a dull purple gown with gold embroidery round the neck that falls from his shoulders to conceal his feet" (57).

By including these more familiar attributes of a monster in her tale, Carter essentially "warms up" her audience and prepares us to receive her proposed criterion. She offers this insight to her opinions primarily through the narrative style of "The Tiger's Bride". Establishing Rose as the speaker aids Carter in demonstrating that to her, the extent of a monster's existence is dependent upon its effects on and reactions from an individual, as well as its behavior. Rose's defiant, disturbed tone constructed as a result of her interaction with Milord clearly articulates the author's ideas of a monster, carrying it beyond the text and ensuring a connection with readers.

Consider the initial setting, mood, and events of the tale. As a chancy game of cards comes to close, Rose feels her freedom ripped away as she becomes one of the last items to be gambled. Carter uses this opening scene to present oppressiveness as a quality of a monster. She introduces Milord as a daunting figure that abuses his tyrannical stature: "Everyone who comes to this city must play a hand with the grand seigneur; few come" (51)—Milord willingly takes one's precious belongings as a means of payment for residence in his town. As the candles dwindle down and her father's

perspiration increases, Rose is guided into developing feelings of repugnance
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and impertinence for Milord as his yellow eyes routinely break from his hand to watch her as if she were his prize—or his prey. The evocation of these emotions was certainly intended—there are strong feminist undertones in this piece, as will be described in the following paragraph. However, Carter strategized for Milord to illicit these same sentiments within her audience as well: There is a sense of outrage as we witness the tiger's assessment of Rose as a mere possession to add to his collection: "...If you are so careless of your treasures, you should expect them to be taken from you" (54). His failure to acknowledge Carter's heroine as an individual with emotions and dignity immediately cultures disapproving attitudes that prevent us from associating Milord with any human-like qualities.

When exploring Carter's proposal of misuse of power as an attribute of Milord, it is possible to contend that misogynistic qualities are also included within her criterion for a monster. The tiger's animalistic request to see the body of a virgin works to stir up an array of emotions. Rose, initially, was struck by the ridiculousness and almost predictableness of his desire, later commenting how men had never taken her seriously because of her gender. For me, I reacted to his request with revulsion—to be seen merely as an object with all value stripped away is heartbreaking. Milord's lusting, almost obsessive desire to deflower a woman with his eyes is successful in evoking the type of reaction Carter insists can be also produced as an effect of a monster—one that is much different from fear.

Although these particular instances illustrate some of Rose's emotional and physical responses that were not rooted in terror, others that do address the ability of a monster to produce such a reaction are included in the tale. When <https://assignbuster.com/deflowering-of-the-christmas-rose-monstrosity-and-perspective-in-the-tigers-bride/>

Milord sends his valet to collect his winnings, Rose describes the carriage being “ as black as a hearse” (54). This comment provides significant insight regarding Rose’s composure as the time comes for her to be taken to Milord. A sense of dread, an awareness of an impending doom, is embodied in this description, and we begin to get an idea of how intimidating Milord is to a woman of such confidence. As the valet leads Rose to the tiger’s dark, stifling chamber, the heroine’s reflection offers a similar connotation: “ I held my head high and followed him; but, for all my pride, my heart was heavy” (57).

Julia Kristeva’s “ Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection” can be used to understand the main and final attribute of Milord that classifies him as a monster within this text: his ruthless attempts to erode Rose’s resilience and self-worth, and his eventual success in doing so. In her essay, Kristeva considers Sigmund Freud’s theories of the uncanny and writes to redefine the word ‘ abject’ by describing it as a sort of “ limbo”—the middle ground between something that is a part of someone as an individual, and something that is embodied within a separate entity. The abject pushes someone to react with uncertainty and uneasiness by essentially relating the individual to something they do not wish to have a connection with, either because it instills fear within them, or because they have developed a set of negative feelings towards it.

Carter works to produce the abject through Milord’s manipulative behavior, and it becomes more evident once his victim Rose’s tone, thoughts, and actions are considered. Initially, the heroine is admirably self-respecting and firm, refusing to allow her captor the satisfaction of having complete

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dominance over her. Upon entering the tiger's chamber for the first time, Rose conveys that she will not easily be made submissive: "I remained standing. During this interview, my eyes were level with those inside the mask..." (57). It is while the tiger's yellow eyes bore into Rose's, however, that connections between herself and the monster first began to make themselves known. Being separated from mankind and thrown into a world of beasts forces the heroine to become more aware of her animalistic qualities, disassembling every trace of humanity.

The more time Rose spends at the palace, the more obvious it becomes that she is losing her sense of identity. She acknowledges the apparent power struggle between herself and Milord, and neither are willing to stand down. On the winter day that she, Milord, and the valet go riding, we see Rose come to a climactic realization: "A profound sense of strangeness slowly began to possess me...then the six of us—mount and riders, both—could boast amongst us not one soul, either, since all the best religions in the world state categorically that not beasts or women were equipped with [them]..." (62). At this moment, Rose inadvertently recognizes that a part of Milord is referenced within herself, and vice versa. In their society, neither of them are considered to have an opinion, a soul—any remote sense of worth. It is here that the abject is officially established, and it is here that the heroine loses herself to Carter's monster. Shortly before revealing her breasts to the tiger, Rose grants insight into the newfound fear instilled in her by Milord: "My composure deserted me; all at once I was on the brink of panic" (62). The tiger exploits this abjection and strips his prize of more than her clothing. He maintained a sort of patience, waiting for Rose to recognize

her inner beastliness and disassemble herself one piece at a time.

Ultimately, his actions push her to deterioration, and Rose wilts in the tiger's chamber as Milord's rough, licking tongue "ripped off skin after successive skin" (66).

I have analyzed Carter's argument and identified the attributes she considers to be essential for the existence of a monster through her use of Milord: deceitfulness, abusive with power, capable of generating the abject, and willingness to inflict harm on another to satisfy selfish desires. After doing so, it becomes possible to refute the notion that the creature described previously in the Oxford English Dictionary is a monster based on solely the definition.

This exploration can now be applied to Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" to examine an additional case in which the definition of a monster presented in the introduction lacks relevance and accuracy as a result of the evolution of time. Beaumont's tale, published in 1756, addresses a popular notion of the era that a hideous physical appearance is a domineering characteristic of a monster. The narrator and characters even refer to the Beast (initially) with this distinction: "...and the monster having asked her if she came willingly; 'ye—e—es,' said she, trembling". Clearly, Beaumont's Beauty is afraid; however, this reaction does not stem from Beast's behavior or attitude toward her—it is rooted in his appearance alone. In "The Tiger's Bride", published over 200 years later, Carter argues that a monster's existence is more reliant upon the creature's conduct. When taking the attributes proposed by Carter under consideration, then, it becomes clear that

Beaumont's 'monster' actually proves to be the exact opposite. Take for <https://assignbuster.com/deflowering-of-the-christmas-rose-monstrosity-and-perspective-in-the-tigers-bride/>

example the manner in which Beast treats his female counterpart. He sacrifices his happiness and well-being for that of the woman he loves and treats with value, which nearly results in his death. This selflessness evokes a set of reactions from Beauty that greatly contrasts with that of Carter's heroine. Beast's temperament, behavior, actions, and words suggest more human-like qualities than animal, and these features eventually result in Beauty developing a love for him. As audiences culture feelings of favor towards Beast and even a sense of relatability, they discover that " any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening" no longer accurately defines what constitutes a monster.

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