

Blood as femininity



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Blood is an important aspect in 'The Bloody Chamber' due to its connotations with many different elements, specifically to do with the human body. Blood is shown as impure and something that stains women and objects. This is symbolic of the thinking of the time that blood is something that corrupts people and especially women, due to their first menstruation cycle being when they transform from a girl to a woman, this blood corrupts the girl and changes her to a woman. This reinforces the beliefs of the era as the change from religious to scientific beliefs were still undergoing in the form of the Enlightenment.

Blood is an essential substance and is used to power life but the key aspect of it is that it stays in the body most of the time. This is significant as without any outside influences, the blood of males does not leave the body. This is in contrast with the blood of females which does leave the body during the act of menstruation each month and also when the hymen is ruptured. In context, the rupturing of the hymen was an important aspect in those days and to some extent, is still an important aspect when judging the purity of a female. This idea is seen in the Bloody Chamber but due to the decrease in cultural norms because of the Enlightenment, the idea of displaying a virginity for innocence is not needed. The Marquis conveys to the narrator that there is no need to drape her sheets out of the window to prove that she is a virgin, perhaps because the times have changed or because he has done that previously for his other wives.

This disruption of innocence by blood is also shown in 'The Tiger's Bridge.' When the narrator is picking a rose for her father after being betrayed by him, she accidentally pricks her finger on the rose and presents him a rose "

all smeared with blood.” This is telling of the relationship between the two and also the overall use of flowers within the novel. The rose is smeared with the blood and thus, is not a pure emblem that a rose is displayed as. This is another subversion of stereotypes as the pure white rose is corrupted, much like a pure white girl can be corrupted by her menstruation or the breaking of virginity.

The name of the book is telling as it displays a euphemism to allude to the experiences of the first short story as well as the staple aspects of femininity. Carter uses the first literal meaning of the Bloody Chamber that the narrator sees in the first story, but then also uses the aforementioned euphemism in that a bloody chamber could also be the vaginal cavity of a woman after the rupturing of a hymen or the menstruation of a woman. These are two very important aspects of femininity and foreshadow the contents of the book as it subverts gender stereotypes in a way that was becoming popular at the time of publishing. Women in Carter’s time were becoming more influential and having more rights awarded to them, Margaret Thatcher became the first female leader of the Conservative Party in the UK and then the first female Prime Minister which was certainly a subversion of gender stereotypes. The circumstances of the world at the time allowed for Carter to express herself more freely in a way that she felt comfortable to write about the role of women in stereotypical ‘ fairy tales,’ albeit with a different approach. The importance of blood with a specific outlook on women allowed her to subvert tropes in her novel.

Throughout the first story, an emphasis is placed on the “ choker of rubies... bright as arterial blood” that is gifted to the narrator from the Marquis. The

Marquis explains the background of the piece, escaping execution in the French Revolution and eventually being passed down to her which alludes to her impending execution by the Marquis. The choker is described as being “bright as arterial blood” which is significant as the carotid artery is located around where the choker is placed and is thus another element of foreshadowing being seen. This is an instance of where Carter uses blood, or a blood associated object to further the story or add elements to it. The ruby choker foreshadows the attempt at decapitation in her execution as it is described as “an extraordinary precious slit throat.”

The Marquis is shown to be obsessed with this choker as he is said to have “kissed them before he kissed my mouth” which illustrates an unhealthy obsession with this item. One theory as to why the Marquis makes the narrator wear this is to its connotations with a collar as worn by an animal. This further reinforces the notion within the novel that women are objects and owned by the husband or father, a philosophy held up till recently in modern societies and still held in some countries. This connects with the overshadowing moral of the novel, with the position of women being examined and subverted.

In the same story, prior to the discovery of the bloody chamber within the castle, the narrator drops the key inside the hidden chamber and later discovers it is stained with blood. The blood has corrupted the key and although she tries hard to be rid of it, it will not come off. This stain symbolizes the stain of the loss of virginity for a girl, no matter how she tries to regain the virginity, it cannot be done and is a symbol of impurity if

unmarried. This is evidence of a patriarchal society as men can have as many partners as they want without punishment or care.

This stain is then seen by the Marquis, who sees this as a symbol of her defiance of his will. This can be seen as a microcosm of the real world and the punishment of losing innocence without permission. In context, many a woman have been killed in honor killings and still are in the world due to losing their virginity before marriage and Carter is attempting to allude to this with this corrupting stain. The "heart shaped stain" is also seen as ironic as their relationship is devoid of real love and so this is one of the only hearts he gives her, a mark of love.

The stain also has a biblical allusion due to the context of the stain being described as the "mark of Cain" which was placed by God on Cain. This alludes to the fact that the Marquis is seen as God as well as Satan in this novel, convincing her to eat from the poison tree while also banishing her by sentencing her to death. The mark of Cain was used as a protection for Cain but did not prevent him from dying, however his attackers would be punished severely. This is presented as ironic in the novel as this mark of Cain protects the narrator in the form of a rescue by her mother while also punishing the Marquis; killing him. However, as the mark is described as being a punishment to Cain as well, the narrator is presented as the offender rather than the Marquis which ties into Bluebeard as the moral of Bluebeard is that 'curiosity costs dearly.' This trope is subverted in the novel, with the narrator surviving and thus the blood represents her growth as a woman rather than shame.

In conclusion, Carter uses blood in many of the stories to assist her in the writing of the novel as blood epitomizes femininity in particular, which is itself an allusion to a patriarchal society; although blood is the lifeline of all, it stains women.