

# Can-can by arturo vivante and the blue film by graham greene

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



I have chosen to discuss 'Can-can' by Arturo Vivante and 'The Blue Film' by Graham Greene. I made this decision as I liked how both stories were about a married couple's relationship which also involved another woman and yet whilst both stories appeared to end differently the overall meanings were in fact the same. When comparing both stories they showed multiple similarities as well as differences and I was interested in how both Vivante and Greene made use of irony, imagery and language to create an atmosphere and how both stories built up tension before reaching a climax.

Arturo Vivante's short story 'Can-Can' is about a husband who is having an affair with a woman called Sarah, who is also married. The story starts at the husband's marital home, where his wife is playing with the children and does the can-can when one of them asks her to. It is at this point that the husband starts to question himself over his affair but still leaves and heads to a cafe, where he waits for Sarah. Sarah is running late and he hopes that she won't turn up but she does and they head off to a lake house where the story ends with Sarah lying in his arms, however he is thinking of his wife doing the can-can.

Whilst we initially do not know the story is about a husband having an affair, the first line in the story immediately arouses suspicion and raises the question that the husband might be up to something. "I'm going to go for a drive, he said to his wife. I'll be back in an hour or two" (Vivante 1988: 5). The husband doesn't say where he is going or what he is doing or how long exactly he will be and the following line tells us that the husband disappearing for a few hours is actually quite unusual. He didn't often leave

the house for more than the few minutes it took him to go to the post office or to a store, but spent his time hanging around, doing odd jobs” (Vivante 1988: 5). Vivante portrays the husband as being an ordinary, working class man who feels he is living a mundane life with his wife. However, his wife is described as being loving and playful, she laughs and dances and doesn’t question where he might be off to.

The husband’s mistress Sarah is the only character who Vivante gives a name to in the story, Sarah is described as being a middle-class woman who is in control of the affair and very formal with a good job and a car. “ Phoning Sarah at her office...her asking him to call again next week, finally setting a date” (Vivante 1988: 6). Vivante’s use of language in the story is very simple but he cleverly uses some French words to make things seem a bit more exotic and spicy, such as, ‘ rendezvous’, ‘ cafe’ and the ‘ can-can’ itself.

The imagery Vivante creates with the wife doing the can-can is a picture you take away with you and one that the husband clearly does. The husband doesn’t think his wife knows about his affair but we question that she might when she does this dance. “ Her eyes had mockery in them, and she laughed” (Vivante 1988: 6). Is the wife showing her husband what he is missing? The dialogue is scattered and ordinary, much reflecting the mundane mood and tone of the husband’s character yet the nervousness, guilt and uncertainty of the husband creates an atmosphere.

Vivante uses a chronological narrative structure that is simple to follow and we know that the events are taking place according to occurrence. The plot

is interesting and Vivante builds up suspense and tension whilst the husband is waiting for Sarah at the cafe with an increasing feeling of guilt. We wonder will he stay or will he leave, will Sarah turn up or won't she? It reaches a climax when Sarah turns up and the husband almost appears disappointed. The husband doesn't appear to know who or what he wants exactly.

The novelty and excitement of the affair seems to have worn off and it has now become a chore, "The appointment was at three" (Vivante 1988: 6) yet he can't seem to walk away from Sarah. This reflects in the ironic ending when Sarah is lying in his arms but he is picturing his wife doing the can-can as she had been earlier in the day. The can-can appears to have had the effect that his wife wanted after all. Graham Greene's short story 'The blue film' is about a married couple on holiday in Siam, now known as Thailand. Mrs Carter complains that the holiday is tedious, and urges her husband to take her to 'Spots'.

Mr Carter leaves the hotel in search of something. A little boy comes up to him and, after turning down his offers of a young girl and a boy, Mr Carter takes him up on the offer of a French film. Returning to the hotel, he picks up his wife and they set off together to watch the film. Mrs Carter finds the first film unattractive, but the second has 'some charm'. It is not for some time, though, that Mr Carter realises that the film is familiar to him. When he does realise, he tries to get Mrs Carter to leave, but she refuses.

It turns out that thirty years ago Mr Carter had been attracted to the young woman in the film. She had needed money, and he had helped her out by

acting as her partner in the film. On the way back to the hotel, Mrs Carter professes herself shocked, but when they get back to their room she is in fact aroused, and makes love to her husband with a passion she has not known for years. Greene tells us straight away in the first line of the story that something is wrong with this couple and that they are not happy. "Other people enjoy themselves, Mrs Carter said" (Greene 1982: 74).

The couple would be from a middle-class background to be in Thailand and later in the story we are told that Mr Carter is a businessman. Greene portrays Mrs Carter as almost being desperate in wanting to please her husband Mr Carter, by wanting to be exciting and experiment but we learn that although Mr Carter quite likes experimenting himself, he simply doesn't want to with his wife as he isn't physically attracted to her and almost appears to want to get away from her. "When he looked at her neck he was reminded of how difficult it was to unstring a turkey" (Greene 1982: 74).

Greene uses a lot of dialogue throughout the story which plays an important role as Greene uses it to create building tension when Mr Carter realises it is him in the film and doesn't want his wife to find out. Greene also uses the dialogue to create a picture of Mr and Mrs Carter, not only as individuals but what their relationship is like. "I'm sure we could find a better place than this." "No". (Greene 1982: 77). Greene also uses a lot of description especially in regards to Mrs Carter, who he even unflatteringly compares to birds on occasion. "Her thin bare legs reminded him of a heron waiting for fish." (Greene 1982: 78).

The story is narrated with the impressions that a woman's worth is determined through her attractiveness and economic terms. For example Mr Carter compares his wife's jewellery to slave's bangles. Mr Carter wants to shock his wife in order to put her off, so that she doesn't want to experiment but ironically it has the complete opposite effect. Another irony is that Mr Carter has gone to see something exotic and has ended up seeing himself. The ending has us realising that he has only ever loved the girl in the film and he has simply married his wife for business reasons, such as taking her to dinner parties.

We know this as there are only two women in the story, the girl in the film and Mrs Carter, after Mr and Mrs Carter have made love, Mr Carter almost appears to feel abused and he feels lonely and guilty, so we can conclude it is not her that he loves. " It seemed to him that he had betrayed that night the only woman he loved. " (Green 1982: 79) When comparing the two stories against each other we can see some noticeable differences. Can-Can appears to be set around the 1960's-80's in America, " going out to a call box" (Vivante 1988: 6) and is about a young working class couple.

The Blue Film however is set around the 1950's, in Thailand and is about a middle-class middle-aged couple. It can be seen that whilst Vivante only names the mistress and not the husband and wife in Can-Can, Greene names the husband and wife but not the other woman in The Blue Film. Whilst in Can-Can Vivante uses minimal dialogue which doesn't play much of a role, Greene's use of dialogue in The Blue Film plays a very important part in establishing Mr and Mrs Carter's relationship and their individual characters.

The husband in Can-Can is seen as finding his wife attractive, “ a smile that suddenly made her look very pretty” (Vivante 1988: 5) and it is her he is thinking of at the end of the story however in The Blue Film, Mr Carter finds his wife extremely unattractive, “ one so often mistook the signs of frigidity for a kind of distinction” (Greene 1982: 74) and it is the girl in the film that he is thinking of at the end of the film.

Greene creates a lot more imagery in terms of the setting, his wife, himself and the girl in the film whereas Vivante’s main use of imagery is his wife doing the can-can. In comparison whilst there are several differences there are also similarities. Vivante and Greene have written both Can-Can and The Blue Film in the third person and tell you what the husbands are thinking and feeling, guilt, tension, nervousness and uncertainty, both depicting the husbands as being in conflict with themselves and their decisions. Carter lay in the dark silent, with a feeling of loneliness and guilt” (Greene 1982: 79). Both stories have lots of irony, “ For a moment I was afraid you where thinking of your wife” (Vivante 1988: 6) and the same theme of a husband having feelings for another woman outside of his marriage and the events that take place in both stories are that the husband makes love with this other woman.

The openings of each story are similar and we know straight away that something isn’t right and whilst initially we believe that the endings are different, with Vivante ending Can-Can with the husband thinking of his wife and Greene ending The Blue Film with the husband thinking of the other woman, the prostitute, they are actually ending very similarly. Both

husbands are thinking of the women they actually love and the ironic ending in both stories is that both are experiencing that the grass isn't always greener on the other side.