

# Role of environment in 'the bloody chamber'



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter espouses setting as a tool which contributes towards the reader's emotional reaction when delving into the corrupt themes of her stories. We can therefore become more engaged with her stories as the settings allow ideas such as superstition and male desire to surround the characters. Within the stories, these features function as external displays of characters' faults.

The bedroom in *The Bloody Chamber* is symbolic and exemplifies the themes of male dominance and of a pernicious sort of female subjection in the story. This bedroom contains multiple mirrors, in which the narrator recalls watching "...a dozen husbands approach me in a dozen mirrors and slowly, methodically, teasingly, unfasten the buttons of my jacket..." an action which she seems to be reluctant to allow. Through the employment of multiple mirrors in the setting, the Marquis' reflection is seen "a dozen" times, shedding light on his predatory approach. The imagery of multiple men asserts the idea that there is no escape for the narrator and that she must subject herself to the Marquis. She is in his house, in a room he has given to her; he is even ingrained in the walls "methodically" approaching her. Setting therefore has a significant role in the reader's ability to empathize with the narrator, as we see through the setting a strong reminder that the Marquis is the predator and she is the prey.

The narrator again is alerted to her helplessness through the setting of the bloody chamber when she states, "Absolute darkness. And, about me, the instruments of mutilation." Carter employs short, sharp sentences to describe the chamber here, allowing the horror of the scene to shine through. It is as though she cannot quite believe what she is seeing; this

disbelief is further exemplified by the description of the torture devices as “ instruments,” since the euphemism indicates that she cannot give an honest account of the setting in which she is standing. Once more, Carter reminds us of the helplessness of women unwillingly subjected and frightened, left in “ absolute darkness” while the dominant males have full power over sexuality and freedom. The setting of the bloody chamber is a reminder of the horrible consequences women will find themselves in if they are subjected to fraught relationships of this sort.

Furthermore, “ The Snow Child”’s setting contributes to the stories’ effect through the description of the girl who is created and melts back into the snowy woods which surround the count, a reminder of destructive male desire and its fruitless and potentially harmful physical manifestations. After the Count rapes the dead girl, she seems to melt away and “ Soon there was nothing left of her but a [...] bloodstain” which suggests that the Count’s fantasy was as only as real and as human as the setting around him. The image of blood contrasts with the appearance of “ fresh snow,” creating a stain in the setting so that it is no longer “ immaculate.” This sequence shows that while males may have unrealistic fantasies, it is foolish and harmful to wish these fantasies to exhibit themselves in the real world. Such desires are damaging to society’s ideals as a whole because they demand that women fulfill unrealistic expectations. This point is furthered by the phrase “ soon there was nothing left,” as the reader can infer that there was never anything real there to begin with. The setting is simply something that the Count thinks he can use as a device to accommodate his desires, whereas we understand it to be a visual consequence of male appetite.

Carter also uses setting in "The Werewolf" to convey the themes of superstition and corrupted community that prevail later on in the story. The villagers' houses are described as containing a "crude icon of the virgin," "crude" implying that the villagers endorse a distortion of religion which encompasses them all. They mistake superstition for religious practice, prompting the alienation of outsiders in the village. It is ironic that they should possess a "virgin" which evokes connotations of saintliness and kindness. We understand that while the setting in which the villagers live in might contain signs of virtue, the people themselves are in fact delusional and corrupt. The virgin mocks their behavior as merciless killers; the graves of the town are described as having "no flowers put in front of them," an allusion to the villagers' own hearts - hearts lacking life. In this instance, the setting achieves the opposite, contributing towards the villagers' cold behavior as manifested later by the murder of the grandma, rather than mocking it. Through the description of the setting, Carter characterizes the brutality and cold-heartedness of the community.

Setting is used as a device by Carter to enhance the themes portrayed in each of her stories, such as heinous male dominance and community mob mentality. Throughout, her descriptions make her criticisms of our own society more explicit and severe.