

## THE FEMALE GOTHIC IN ANGELA CARTER'S *THE BLOODY CHAMBER*

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In her seminal essay “Literary Women”, Ellen Moers defined the term female Gothic as “the work women writers have done since eighteenth century that we’ve called the Gothic” (1978). Primarily, the concern of this genre of the Gothic studies has been domestic. Writers like Kate Ferguson Ellis, Eugenia De Lamotte and others in their numerous studies have critiqued the patriarchal ideology that entraps women within the so called safe-precincts of the home/castle. The early writers in their respective female Gothic scripts dealt with the problematic position of the women in the society. They also tried to liberate their heroines by making them question the socio-cultural codes that were forcibly imposed on them. However, such texts usually ended in the restoration of order for the heroine, a move that often bestowed on them the gift of marriage. Therefore, in conventional Gothic plots instead of liberating their protagonists, the writers position their heroines within the socio-political walls of suppression that often resulted in subsequent exploitation. But, in the contemporary times women writers like Atwood, Carter, Munro, and Morrison have utilized the tool of female Gothic to puncture the false promises made in the name of domestic ideology. In their writing they not only subvert the traditional Gothic conventions, by puncturing the superiority of gender distinction in the process recreating unconventional, transgressive, excessive and subversive representations which destabilize the foundations of domestic bliss. Hence, in the postmodern times, the modern writers rewrite the traditional Gothic plots which stifle a woman’s existence within the castle like structures, within the institution of marriage, within their bodies and within their socio-cultural and political constructs.

Well known British author Angela Carter, academically popular for putting old wine in new bottles has often been accused for her critique of domestic ideology of separate spheres. Challenging all odds she skilfully and strategically utilizes the tool of re-writing with the intention to stand and wait for pressure to explode so as to question the elemental practices that stifle a human being’s existence. As a determined feminist, she revises the old heterosexual tales to examine a new world order that emancipates women from a silent victimization into an expressive one. In her rewriting of the fairy tales like *Beauty and The Beast*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Puss In The Boots* and *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter roars against the oppressive sexist ideology of handsome prince charming and vulnerable heroine promoted in the name of fairy tales. Carter’s version of these old fairy tales brings into light the vulnerability of female sexuality and sexual desire which otherwise are presented as suppressed and passive via the Gothic parameters in these tales. In the present study, *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter rewrites the

conventional Gothic recipe in an inversive way in order to destabilize the archaic practices and vocalize her views regarding female liberation and identity.

The plot of Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* is almost same as that of the Gothic plot of Charles Perrault's fairy tale except for its unconventional ending. A seventeen year old heroine, the nameless narrator, a talented piano-player, marries a wealthy aristocrat Marquis, much older than her. Consequently, her loyalty is put to test by her strange husband as he leaves her in his isolated castle in the name of work and hands her a bunch of keys that contains one particular but mysterious key to a forbidden chamber that he strictly forbids his wife to enter. She falls in Marquis' trap and gives into the temptation to unlock the secret world of Marquis and discovers to her horror the dead bodies of his late wives. Terrified at the sight of blood, destruction and doom; she gets frightened at what she discovers and wonders that this might be her destiny too.

In Carter's version of Perrault's fairy tale most of the traditional Gothic conventions are subverted. Carter begins her process of subversion, first by refashioning the character of her heroine into a popular piano player, and also by making use of the element of eroticism to awaken her sexuality, something that is simply denied to the heroines of old Gothic tales. In the end, Marquis fails to terrorize his heroine, and fails to gorge on her like a hungry wolf because the heroine's life is saved by her very much alive-mother in the end. Imparting such an unexpected end to the story is another proof of Carter discarding the conventions of old Gothic school that discards the role of the mother altogether. On the contrary, Carter's heroine's mother is represented as an all powerful figure that defies every odd to save her daughter and hence, restore the faith in the semiotic order in the world.

Like the nameless narrator of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, Carter's unnamed narrator gives a firsthand account of her journey on a train, with her wealthy husband, to her new marital home away from the parental protection. Although the talented young heroine gets disturbed on the realisation of this new change, she admits "I felt a pang of loss as if, when he put the gold band on [her] finger...in some way she had ceased to be her child in becoming the wife." On accepting the proposal of marriage, however, the bride to be felt love, security, and passion gradually slipping away: "I felt a pang of loss as if, when he put the gold band on my finger, I had, in some way, ceased to be her child in becoming his wife". The dark clouds of fear and sadness warn her of her impending future destiny in passive acceptance of the tyranny of her husband to be, the Marquis.

Often the marriage ceremony issues a certificate to the young heroine to enter into the world of symbolic order from that of the semiotic. Like a true obedient wife the heroine humbly submits herself in the service of her master and dutifully, performs the roles assigned to her with utmost perfection. She even fulfils all the social expectations at the cost of her own career and gives up her dreams and desires to embrace flashy couture and jewellery that her affluent husband provides her with.

Significantly, the heroine's mother is not the conventional suffering passive victim like the typical Gothic mother. She defines her Gothic mother as: "My eagle-featured, indomitable mother; what other student at the Conservatoire could boast that her mother had outfaced a junkful of Chinese pirates, nursed a village through a visitation of the plague, shot a man-eating tiger with her own hand and all before she was as old as I?" The heroines' mother in her life "beggared for love," she is portrayed as a strong willed woman whose worldly experience makes her daughter question her daughter's decision to marry Marquis: "Are you sure you love him? 'I am sure I want to marry him', I said". Perhaps, the heroine's affirmation to her mother's query

has its roots in their own financial problems. Thus, Marquis “the richest man in France” indeed, promises a wealthy hence comfortable living for the needy daughter mother duo. Indeed, this mother-daughter dialogue indicates how women easily pawn themselves as slaves in the institution of marriage. In her work, Carter sheds more light on this issue in *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*:

...relationships between the sexes are determined by history and by the historical fact of the economic dependence of women upon men. This fact is now very largely a fact of the past and, even in the past, was only true for certain social groups and then only at certain periods. Today, most women work before, during and after marriage. Nevertheless, the economic dependence of women remains a believed fiction and is assumed to imply an emotional dependence that is taken for granted...(6)

So, the gifts that Marquis, the husband showers on his young bride, especially, the “choker of rubies” is a testimony of male suppression as with his rich tokens, he utilizes the instrument of economic dependence to repress his wife’s existence in his large but mysterious mansion. The red colour of the choker, symbolically represents the red colour of blood, a symbol of death and destruction. Also heroines’ imprisonment and her impending assassination together represent her dark future in the bloody castle, a price she might pay of her sheer ignorance.

That Marquis is much older than his wife is a fact that speaks volume about his being an expert in the art of seduction and subsequent deceit. So expert is he in his field that for him women are nothing but mere objects of desire. Bestowed with animal like features, Carter’s Marquis is an abject figure who transgresses the boundaries between the subject and the object. Also Marquis’ deep longing for his mother is another proof of abjection. The secret of it being the ring that every bride in Marquis’ home wore; a symbol of family tradition that was worn by his grandmother and was passed onto his three beautiful but now dead wives. Interestingly, this ring now decorating the heroine’s finger is like a wreath via which Marquis tries his level best to fulfil his lust for his own mother. But every time as he tries to fulfil his forbidden desire, he fails. His first wife who died in a boating like incident like Maurier’s Rebecca was a Romanian countess, the second wife was a model and third an opera diva who too dies an untimely death. All the marriage ceremonies, Marquis performed in his life including his fourth marriage signify his unsuccessful attempts to separate his self from his mother and enter the symbolic order.

Again Marquis tries his luck at abjection from his mother in order to be the subject in the symbolic order. For this he takes the young innocent pianist to his secluded mansion. Blinded by his materialistic wealth, the naive heroine easily gives in to his malicious intentions. However, the funeral like imagery that heroine uses to describe her wealthy husband hints at the fact that he is a master in his art of deception and trickstery. She describes his personality as strange but in “possession of ominous calm of sentient vegetable, like one of those cobra headed, funeral lilies,” and this imagery symbolizes that the male sexual desire is at once threatening and destructive.

Marquis begins to examine her virgin flesh, part by part and bit by bit she feels he begins to devour her body: “I saw him watching me in the gilded mirrors with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even of a housewife in the market....when I saw him look at me with lust...”. Hence, for Marquis his new bride is nothing but a perfect piece of meat (dead flesh) for him to devour upon in order to satiate his animal like hunger. In simple words, in

Marquis' eyes the heroine's body is reduced to a mere plaything, an object arrested in the male gaze. To use Kristevan terminology, the heroine in her husband's eyes has reached an abject stage, a stage where the lines between the subject and the object begin to melt and blur to ultimately result in collapse.

Brought up on the diet of typical patriarchal dictates the young wife accepts her present plight and rather finds solace in being the object of the husband's gaze. Thus, the girl being aware of the male-active, female-passive binary submits her entire being in the hands of a man, who according to her wit is more experienced, and so can enjoy his passive prey to his utmost satisfaction. So, when Marquis is about to gratify his lust just before that he enjoys the young brides spectacle in his bedroom with thousand mirrors displaying his victory over his object d' pleasure, "a dozen husbands approaching in a dozen mirrors...impaling a dozen brides." For the naive bride who is yet to be devoured these mirror reflections make her change her point of view. She narrates her sorry plight: "The young bride, who had become multitude of girls I saw in the mirrors, identical in her chic navy blue tailor-made, for travelling, madame or walking. A maid had dealt with the furs. Henceforth, a maid would deal with everything". Sadly, Marquis uses the language of pornography to satiate his lust and admires the whole naked spectacle and says, "I have acquired a whole harem for myself". Befittingly, Carter says: "The marriage bed is a particularly delusive refuge from the world because all wives of necessity fuck by contract" (6). Movingly, the heroine armed with her virgin innocence describes the gory spectacle of her wedding night:

off comes the skirt; and, next, the blouse of apricot linen that cost more than the dress I had for the first communion ... his movements seemed to me deliberately coarse, vulgar... . And yet, you see, I guessed it might be so – that we should have a formal disrobing of the bride, how could I have failed...

All this and more and the rough sexual encounters make the heroine suspicious of her husband's character. She gets uneasy and strangely the familiar becomes unfamiliar for her, even her act of consummation is not what every bride dreams about. In utter state of chaos and confusion she mutters:

And I began to shudder like a racehorse before a race, yet also with a kind of fear, for I felt both a strange, impersonal arousal at the thought of love, and at the same time repugnance. I could not stifle for his white, heavy flesh that had too much in common with the armfuls of arum lilies ... I always associate with him; that are white. And stain you.

The heroine's loss of virginity along with Marquis' violent treatment of his young bride forces her to deliberate on her marriage decision. Rather she makes use of death like imagery and narrates her unnatural act of consummation: "In the course of one sided struggle ... I had heard him shriek and blaspheme at the orgasm; I had bled. And perhaps I had seen his face without its mask; and perhaps I had not. Yet I had been infinitely dishevelled by the loss of my virginity".

However, heroine's naivety overpowers her questioning conscience. For some time she silences her doubts and continues to be his prey. On the surface she begins to enjoy these sexual encounters with her husband and also looks forward to more opportunities to be on one bed with him. In other words, her growing sexual appetite is an indicator of the awakening of her sexuality. As a result, she begins to contemplate: "I lay in bed alone. And I longed for him. And he disgusted me." In this present state of ambiguity she strolls through Marquis' castle and

ventures into his library to perhaps pick a clue or so about her suspicion regarding her husband's masked identity. Lo! there in his bookshelf she discovers her husband's secretive collection on pornography.

In the Gothic world, the innocent young heroine gets entrapped in multifarious ways. The patriarchal ideal strips them of their autonomy for instance the institution of marriage chains them and shuts them in dungeons, an imprisonment that often pushes them *to be locked in the attics* to struggle through the labyrinthine passages of gloomy castles (my emphasis). Hence, the world of Gothic is too dangerous for women, as is quiet apparent in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*.

In the Marquis' perilous castle, the heroine in utter state of shock discovers a picture that has a peculiar caption "Reproof of Curiosity". She illustrates, "yet I had not bargained for this, the girl with tears hanging on her cheeks like stuck pearls, her cunt a split fig below the great globes of her buttocks on which the knotted tails of cat were about to second, while a man in black mask fingered with his free hand his prick, that curved upwards like the scimitar he held." To unravel the mystery she penetrates and digs deeper, and discovers a book which is "a rare collector's piece" *The Adventures of Eulalie at the Harem of the Grand Turk* with a steel engraving, "Immolation of the wives of the Sultan." Marquis' exclusive collection on pornography, symptomatically, reveals his sadistic nature. Before commencing on the journey, according to his plan Marquis drags his wife to bed and strategically answers all her queries especially the ones regarding sex in broad day light and says: "All the better to see you." This clearly indicates how much pleasure he derives from voyeurism. During the sexual act, he deliberately makes his wife wear red ruby necklace, the "choker", his ancestral piece of jewellery, the one that was of his grandmother. Following this ritual, he plants a kiss, first on the choker and then begins to kiss his wife; this further symbolizes Marquis carnal desire for his own mother. Indeed, the red colour of the rubies is same as the colour of blood and all this in unison serves as a premonition of the sad fate of the heroine, at the end of the story—a metonym for murder as the husband would punish his wife for transgressing her boundaries—the limits set by him according to his gory game plan. Also, this particular scene emblemizes Marquis' continuous but failed attempt to reunite with his mother to satiate his repressed hidden forbidden sexual desire for her via the means of his various wives.

In the old version of the "Bluebeard" story, the bride(s) are punished for displaying their unbridled curiosity. In this light, the inquisitiveness of the bride(s) in the bloody chamber and their subsequent silencing in view of the patriarchal ideals is an important theme of the narrative. To keep a check on his wives' loyalty, Bluebeard puts them through a self-designed test of character. He hands them keys of the entire castle and particularly points to not to use the key to the forbidden room. When his respective wives do what is expected and enter the room much against the wishes of the husband they are punished with death. Carter in her revised version of "the Bluebeard's" tale, remodels the heroines character with exceptional dose of curiosity but goes a step further and rescues her heroine from untimely death and much desired liberation from the stifling Gothic boundaries of Marquis' castle.

In the traditional Gothic plots, the good mother dutifully conforms to the society's mores and manners. The evil mother, the defiant figure violates these social codes and typically, should either be killed or discarded altogether from the plot. Such a mother figure is taken to be absent either literally or metaphorically in the script of Gothic fiction. Precisely, this accounts for the absence of the mother figure from the Gothic scripts. The mother is conveniently discarded away



both from the theories on identity and from the world of Gothic. In the essay “Powers of Horror” Kristeva discusses in detail the process of identity formation and suggests that the first thing to be abjected is the mother’s body and this accounts for the intended expulsion of the mother both from theories on identity and the Gothic world. In this sense, Kristeva is in favour of the subject-in-process that accords her subject a fluid identity. Therefore, the traditional Gothic plot, which banishes the mother, is subverted in the contemporary female Gothic plots of writers like Atwood, Carter, Oates, and Spark respectively. Carter’s Bluebeard’s tale *The Bloody Chamber* on female Gothic is one such plot in which the mother figure is deliberately presented as a powerful character by the writer and the aim of which is to destroy the symbolic order; a subject in process who dilutes the binaries by conforming all the power to destroy the mother.

Setting is a vital ingredient in any Gothic novel, the castle, the stage of master Marquis’ craft is the most important metaphor in the present study. In *The Bloody Chamber* the castle in which the heroine arrives after her marriage represents that ambiguous place which is “neither on the land nor on the water, a mysterious amphibious place, contravening the materiality both of the earth and the waves.” Metaphorically, this mysterious maternal space – embodies a cavity which is the ultimate entry and the exit point of one and all. It can also be said then the castle of Marquis where he was born and where all the horror drama of the assassination of his former wives took place symbolizes the dark womb. In this sinister setting, Marquis’ serial attempts to kill his wives signify his measured steps to break free from his mother’s spell especially for the process of individuation.

When Marquis informs his present wife that he has to leave for an urgent work for a period of six weeks, the heroine feels sad at the husband’s untimely unplanned departure. But for the experienced Marquis’, it’s a part of his well planned conspiracy, and so he leaves his castle keys in the hands of his new bride. The heavy bunch of the keys suddenly rings the alarm and she realises the intensity and responsibility of the new relationship that she chose to be a part of:

I eyed the heavy bunch with circumspection. Until that moment, I had given a single thought to the practical aspects of marriage with a great house, great wealth, great man whose ring was as crowded as that of a prison warden. Here, were the clumsy and archaic keys for the dungeons ... the keys to the kitchens ... the key to the picture gallery,.... Keys, keys, keys. He would trust me with the keys to his office ... the keys to his safes, where he kept the jewels I should wear.

Keys and keys to various rooms in the castle further confuse the innocent heroine for she is particularly asked to not to make use of one key—the key to the forbidden room in the castle. Marquis’ warning further baffles the heroine as she suspects her husband’s real identity—the real Marquis—hidden behind the mask(s). In this context, she says: “that face...seemed to me like a mask, as if his real face, the face that truly reflected all the life he had led in the world before he met me, before, even, I was born, as though that face lay underneath his mask. Or else, elsewhere”. For his words ignite her curiosity to unlock the secret of one particular room. Thus, Marquis’ warning is indeed a patriarchal ploy to entrap and imprison and punish the heroine as she fails to act according to the advise given to her by the master:

Every man must keep one secret...from his wife.... All is yours everywhere is open to you – except the lock that this single key fits. Yet all it is the key to a little room at the foot of the west tower, behind the still-room, at the end of a dark little corridor... But you must promise

me, if you love me, to leave it well alone. It is only a private study, a hideaway, a 'den', as the English say, where I can go, sometimes, on those infrequent yet inevitable occasions when the yoke of marriage seems to weigh too heavily on my shoulders.

Like mother Eve was forewarned to not to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, the young heroine too is warned by Marquis to not to enter the deathly chamber. It may be added then that Marquis quite successfully kills two birds with one stone; he not only acts like a true wealthy patriarch whose orders must be obeyed but also like the serpent tempts his wife sexually and ignites her passion to acquire the forbidden (sexual) knowledge.

Lone in the Gothic like castle of Marquis', the heroine contemplates on her present life. She tries hard to cut her loneliness by thinking about her husband, yet his mysterious and distanced nature persuades the girl out of the heroine to hide and make space for an inquisitive wife who deliberates to go on a quest for knowledge. Petrified by the husband's attitude and his pornographic collection she no longer feels safe in her huge haven. Before she begins the inquiry, she makes a poignant call to her mother. Perhaps, she wants to feel her maternal bond that will give her the necessary courage to carry on the crusade against the patriarchal oppressive world.

She surveys around and looks for cracks and fissures all over the mansion. First, she scans his office documents and fails to find anything except for official documents. This raises her suspicion all the more. She says: "And this absence of the evidence for his real life began to impress me strangely; there must, I thought, be a great deal to conceal if he takes such pains to hide it". Perchance, her efforts bear fruit and she finds a secret file marked "*Personal*". This document titled personnel is a record of Marquis' dead wives, and thus, gradually, before the heroine unfolds the horror of Marquis' concealed identity. The words of Romanian Countess (Marquis' former wife) strike the gong: "On the occasion of this marriage to the descendant of Dracula – always remember, 'the supreme and unique pleasure of love is the certainty that one is doing evil'". Certainly, this is her first clue that initiates her entry into the deadly world of Marquis. So the "den" of the master is her next destination. Surprisingly, the heroine feels no dread, no fear when she is about to enter the forbidden room. Using Claire Kahane's words from her essay "The Gothic Mirror" it can be said that there is a close link between the Gothic castle in which the heroine is entrapped and the eternal womb of "the maternal body" – the point of the origin and exit of the ego. In this uncanny journey to Marquis' hidden secrets the heroine draws energy from her mother, and unlocks the room of absolute darkness and discovers to her shock the dead corpses of his ex-wives. Immediately, numbed in her senses the heroine is transported to the state of abjection as she witness the whole drama of the dance of death and destruction in Marquis' *bloody chamber* (my emphasis). According to Kristeva, in the state of abjection the borders between death and life begin to blur and diffuse. So the dead corpses indeed threaten heroines' existence as she witnesses abject in its ultimate form. The dead corpses once alive and brimming with life but now in their dead-state threaten heroines' survival as they stand as a symbol that reminds the subject that one day even she shall cease to exist. *The Bloody Chamber*, the ultimate Gothic setting of Marquis castle threatens heroine's perception of (non)existence. Unlike the conventional Gothic plots that imprisoned the heroines in such deadly chambers, Carter subverts this trend and rescues her heroine from deathly claustrophobic imprisonment. By doing so Carter's Gothic heroine becomes a subject in process whose ideas about life and death become fluid. She even begins to look for refuge and is much in need of her mother's

indomitable strength. Using pornographic jargon she begins to narrate her observations. Based on her observation of the gory spectacle, she comments on the sinister smile of the opera singer whose now dead body becomes an emblem of her husband's gory museum: "The opera singer lay, quite naked, under a thin sheet of very rare and precious linen...I touched her, very gently, on the white breast; she was cool, he had embalmed her. ...the worst thing was, the dead lips smiled." Then she moves on to describe corpse of Marquis' second wife, a barmaid, and in lyrical manner she likens her face "to the evening star walking on the rim light". Quite disturbing is then the heroine's description of his third wife, the countess as "She was pierced, not by one but by a hundred spikes". This firsthand account of the corpses reveal that after putting his wives to eternal sleep Marquis had embalmed, remoulded and transformed their dead bodies into art objects representing the penultimate control, suppression and passivity of the female body. Hence, the corpses and their preservation in Marquis' chamber represent his numerous but failed attempts to separate from his mother. The red ruby choker, the ancestral bed, the opal ring all serve as fit indicators of his umpteen attempts to reconstruct his snapped bond with his mother. However, according to the psychoanalytic theories he has a fear, fear of the father and the related castration in the form of punishment in context of the sexual desire for the mother. In this sense, Marquis' castration related anxiety is dealt by him in a strange manner, his perverse butcherous act of murder of his former wives is a clear reflection of his various attempts to abject his mother so as to step into the symbolic in order to become subject.

Again as mother eve was punished for crossing her boundaries, similarly, the heroine, with her newly acquired subjectivity would also be punished for her unrestrained curiosity and defiance. To escape from the impending disaster she tries to call her mother for rescue and finds out that the "line of course was dead". Hope against hope she prays for her husband's delay in return and takes momentary refuge in music. The heroine says: "I set myself the therapeutic task of playing all Bach's equations, every one, and I told myself, if I played them all through without a single mistake—then the morning would find me once more a virgin". At this juncture the heroine understands the stifling aspect of marriage and longs to re-establish her maternal bond and return to her mother, who courageously had sold her own wedding ring to support her daughter's career in music, and is her ultimate source of support. Hence, in the abject state she finds necessary comfort in her mother's lap, and willingly wants to return to her semiotic stage.

Much in need of human company and emotionally disturbed over her findings, the heroine now meets a blind piano tuner, Jean Yves, who enters the room on hearing her music. His kindness gives heroine the strength to share the newly acquired knowledge about her husband with him. She exchanges every little detail about Marquis with him and he in turn shares all the strange stories he has heard about him. He even labels Marquis' castle as "Castle of Murder". Just then they both realise that Marquis has returned sooner than expected and both try to put the key of the horror chamber back into the key ring. In between the heroine had accidentally dropped that key on blood smeared floor of the bloody chamber and now she tries hard to wash it off but the stain gradually with series of attempts becomes more and more bright. Then she sends Yves away and runs to her bedroom to welcome her husband. When he explains the reason of his return, the heroine now in command of her sexual awakening knows that sooner or later she will have to pay the price of her new knowledge:

I did not believe one word of it. I knew I had behaved exactly according to his desires...I must pay the price of my new knowledge. The secret of Pandora's Box...I had played a game in which every move was



governed by a destiny as oppressive and omnipotent as himself, since that destiny was himself; and, I had lost. Lost at the charade of innocence and vice in which he had engaged me.

Entrapped completely in the net-tap of Marquis, the heroine knows that she is the next victim in the hands of an all powerful male in this male-Gothic-plot. So, the cruel husband demands his wife to bring the keys and she tries her best to delay her moment of execution, and even distracts his attention by seducing him in their bed chamber. Sadly, this time she sees all together a different reflection of herself in the mirror: “I saw myself pale; pliant as a plant that begs to be trampled underfoot...I saw how he almost failed to resist me. If he had come to me in bed, I would have strangled him.”

But Marquis orders his victim in hand to act as desired; this scene depicts that much against her wish he finds out that even his fourth wife too has followed the same course as the previous ones had. Now it is inevitable that she will have to be eliminated, especially in accordance to the conventional Gothic plot she should be done away with as she too has tried to trigger his castration anxiety. She too has acquired the secret knowledge now—the failure to overcome the desire for his mother. Thus, he commands her to kneel down in order to receive the punishment for crossing the boundary. She says: “I knelt before him and he pressed the key lightly on my forehead, held it there for a moment. I felt faint tingling of the skin and, when I involuntarily glance at myself in the mirror, I saw the heart shaped stain had transferred itself to my forehead.” Thus, was the proof of her adulteration of not being able to keep his words? Though the heroine has fear of death, yet her abject state which is positive in comparison to Marquis’ which is negative provides her inner strength. Unlike passive Gothic heroines she faces death bravely and removes her ring and feels light as it marks the dissolution of her marriage strings. Although she is ready to kiss death yet she no longer belongs to Marquis. Obeying her master for one last time she slips into a white dress and decorates her neck with red ruby choker. She sends the blind piano tuner away and invokes the company of her mother: “When I thought of courage, I thought of my mother”. At once she draws strength from her maternal source to act bravely. Unlike the traditional version of the Bluebeard story in which the heroines brother rescue her, Carter subverts this traditional ending and provides the reigns of life, this time in the hands of her female hero, the heroines mother who comes to save her daughter from the clutches of death. Thus, Carter rewrites the end to the bluebeard tale and in doing so she transgresses the traditional binaries of men/active and women/passive, and also dissolves the sexual lines of differences thereby blurring the boundaries between self and other constructed by the conventional psychoanalytic theories. The heroine declares:

You never saw such a thing as my mother, her hat seized by the winds and blown out to sea so that her hair was her white mane, her black lisle legs exposed to the thigh, her skirts tucked round her waist, one hand on the reigns if the rearing horse while the other clasped my father’s service revolver ... And my husband stood stock-still, as if she had been Medusa, the sword still raised over his head as in those clockwork tableaux of Bluebeard that you see in glass cases at fairs.

In Carter’s contemporary female Gothic plot of *The Bloody Chamber* the mother is the saviour who destroys the patriarchal power of the symbolic order and restores the faith in the maternal. The good mother resolves to destroy the evil with great courage and spirit as the heroine affirms the end of Marquis “Now, without a hesitation, she raised my father’s gun, took

aim and put a single, irreproachable bullet through my husband's head". Indeed, the semiotic wins over the symbolic as the mother had purely acted on the basis of intuition sensing the danger to her daughter's life. This unconventional end to Perrault's tale is a clear manifestation of the object over the subject-object dichotomy. The heroine, thus, with the reward of life hugs her mother for liberating her from the oppressive patriarchal world of the Marquis. Unlike Eve, the curiosity of Carter's narrator wins in the end. The liberated heroine with her mother and blind piano-tuner all now convert the deathly castle into a school for the blind and pray for safe education and survival of the children. This contemporary female Gothic saga of the young narrator rewards the heroine, a subject in process and her mother with the promise to live happily ever after.

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