

A Case Study of an Anonymous Woman in Angela Carter's Short Story "The Bloody Chamber" Through the Lens of Lacanian "Psychosis"

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the character of the Marquis in the short story *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter through the theoretical framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Carter, one of the prominent feminist writers of the modern era, presents in this story an anonymous female narrator who recalls her past life and her disturbing marriage with a wealthy aristocrat known as the Marquis. Although the Marquis appears to be a sophisticated and well-established man, his behavior gradually creates suspicion in the mind of his young wife. The mystery surrounding his personality becomes clear when the narrator enters the forbidden "bloody chamber," where she discovers the corpses of his three previous wives. This shocking revelation exposes the violent and abnormal psychological dimension of the Marquis.

The paper interprets this behavior through the concept of psychosis discussed by Jacques Lacan in *The Psychoses*. According to Lacanian theory, psychosis occurs through the "foreclosure" of the Name-of-the-Father, which prevents the subject from fully entering the symbolic order of law, logic, and language. As a result, the psychotic subject often fails to abide by social norms and may act according to uncontrolled desires or impulses. By applying this theoretical framework, the paper argues that the Marquis's actions—his secrecy, his domination over his wife, and his serial killing of his previous spouses—reflect traits that resemble a psychotic structure. Through this psychoanalytic reading, the study aims to demonstrate how Carter's narrative exposes the disturbing psychological and social implications of violence, power, and abnormal desire embodied in the character of the Marquis.

Keywords: Psychosis, Lacanian analysis, The Bloody Chamber, Perversion.

INTRODUCTION

Angela Carter's short story *The Bloody Chamber* presents a disturbing exploration of power, sexuality, and violence within a patriarchal framework. The character of the Marquis, who appears as a wealthy and sophisticated aristocrat, gradually reveals a dark and horrifying psychological dimension through his treatment of women and his secret acts of murder. His abnormal desires, lack of guilt, and obsessive control over his wife suggest a deeper psychological structure that can be examined through psychoanalytic theory.

Mahitosh Mandal's Jacques Lacan: From Clinic to Culture and Bruce Fink's A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique help me a lot to comprehend the Lacanian Concept of the three clinical categories, "psychosis, neurosis, and perversion". I was also helped by Thomas Harris' novel The Silence of the Lambs. It allows me to connect the traits of "psychosis" between Buffalo Bill and Marquis. I wish to divide my paper into two parts. The paper's focus will be on defining Angela Carter's short story "The Bloody Chamber" through the light of Lacanian "Psychosis". In the first part of my paper, I would like to discuss the behavior of Marquis is resembled to the traits of "psychosis" that Jacques Lacan talks about in seminar III. I wish to emphasize Thomas Harris' novel The Silence of the Lambs" to build up my argument. In the second part of my paper, I would like to depict that the tendency of both Marquis and Buffalo Bill is alike. In order to emphasize my point, I would like to discuss the concept of Lacanian "Psychosis". "What happens if a certain lack has occurred in the formative function of the father?" (Lacan, seminar III, 230) Fink demonstrates in the context of

psychoanalysis and argues that in “psychosis”, the children foreclosed the name of the father (NOF) (78). They don’t abide by the rules of “law, logic, and language” of the symbolic world. They only enjoy “Jouissance” (unbridled enjoyment). According to Lacan, “the element that is foreclosed in psychosis intimately concerns the father” (Fink 79). The father did not feel the need to justify their orders; they only felt themselves as masters in the household (Fink 80). Mahitosh Mandal researched Lacanian psychoanalysis and articulates in his work, “Lacan does not reduce these categories to a collection of symptoms but defines them as structures, which implies that a neurotic, for instance, might manifest symptoms of psychosis without having a psychotic structure” (Mandal 110). In this story, Marquis always behaves as if he is the supreme of the family, and he shows himself as being superior to his wife. Whatever he orders is correct for him. It is strikingly noticed that he is three times married before his marriage to the anonymous wife, and he acted as a serial killer by murdering his earlier wives in his secretive, bloody chamber. “Married three times within my own brief lifetime to three different graces, now, as if to demonstrate the eclecticism of his taste, he had invited me to join this gallery of beautiful women” (Carter 10). There is a lot of lust in the husband’s mind, so he always looks at his wife lustfully. Here, Marquis’s behaviour is not like a natural human being, just as the psychotic does not justify his actions. They think that whatever he is doing is right. Further, Lacan states, “The psychotic, on the other hand, is subjugated by the phenomenon of discourse as a whole” (Seminar III, 235). “The psychotic has the sense of being possessed by a language that speaks as if it were coming from inside but from outside” (Fink 87). The psychotic does not bother about society. In this story, Marquis does not have the sense when he wants his wife lustfully, and he engages in sexual intercourse with his wife. He doesn’t feel how he hurts his wife by doing this. As his wife explains with gory detail, “he stripped me, gourmand, that he was, as if he were stripping the leaves of an artichoke...” (Carter 15). He doesn’t care for his wife. He is a somewhat sexual insomniac who wants lust, and there is no mental relationship between him and his wife. As she utters “he twined my hair into a rope and lifted it off my shoulders so that he could better kiss the downy furrors below my ears...” (Carter 18). Jon Mills points out “contemporary Lacanians are not in debate over what constitutes psychosis, including defining the ordinary form psychological variants that have historically defined the phenomenon as a mental illness” (Mills 2). Here in this context, Marquis suffers from mental illness; possibly, he thinks that his wives are not compatible as he actually desires to be. “All knowledge is imbued with paranoia for Lacan” (Mills 4). “Knowledge is paranoiac because it is acquired through our imaginary relation to the other as a primordial misidentification or illusory self- recognition of autonomy, control, and mastery, thus leading to persecutory anxiety and self-alienation” (Mills 4). Marquis controls his wife and compels her to keep the “ruby chokher” on her finger that he gave to his wife. Though Marquis is a rich person, she feels that his palace is like a prison to her because of Marquis's autonomy. Sometimes, Marquis behaved like a “monster” and oppressed his wife. As she states, “I was afraid not so much of him, of his monstrous presence, heavy as if he had been gifted at birth more...” (Carter 22). Many times, he acts like a pervert. “Throughout his career, Lacan consistently maintained that perversion is most likely a structure diagnosis reserved for masculine subjects” (qtd. in Swales 145). Here, Marquis sometimes forces her to do “mimic surprise” to entertain him. “Lacan’s contribution to psychoanalysis is bringing in language analysis as the major objective tool available to uncover the truth behind the symptom, it is clear that symptom resolves itself entirely in an analysis of language because the symptom is itself structured like a language, because it is from language description and the arrangement of the bloody chamber evoke the mental and psychological state of his life. His arrangements give a clue that he has some mental illness. At the four corners of the room were funerary urns of great antiquity, Etruscan, perhaps, and, on three-legged ebony stands, the speech must be delivered” (Ecrits 59). Marquis forbids his wife from entering the bloody chamber. His wife does not know the reason behind his forbidding. Marquis hides his privacy. He always keeps himself away from his wife. It is strikingly notable that the scenario of Marquis’s *The Bloody Chamber* is structured in a somewhat bizarre manner. The bowls of Innocence he had left burning, which filled the room with a sacral reek. Wheel, rack, and Iron Maiden were, I saw, displayed as grandly as if they were items of statute, and I was almost consoled, then, almost persuaded myself that I might have stumbled only upon a little museum of his perversity, that he had installed these monstrous s items here only for contemplation (Carter 22). “It was as if the symptom that had taken place of the letter in the earlier formulation, as if allowed Lacan to bridge the gap between the loop of the latter and the function of psychotic discourse” (Biswas 64, qtd. in Jean Michael Rabate). Here, Marquis' wife enters the forbidden room and is startled by seeing the coffins of his earlier wives. She realizes that her husband masked himself as a good person, but he has a mental illness because it’s not possible to keep corpses in the apartment. Mandal further argues, “In the case of psychosis, the mother- child dyad is not successfully broken since the name of the father does not shape the psychical universe. There is no symbolic identification of a

psychotic. This is precisely why there is no question of sacrifice of Jouissance for the psychotic” (Mandal, chapter III).

The comparison between Marquis and James Gumb (Buffalo Bill):

This is a remembrance of Thomas Harris' novel *The Silence of the Lambs*, in which there is a character called Buffalo Bill (pseudonym), who might be a transsexual, murdering women and making dresses by peeling off the skin of dead bodies. This is quite a nasty characteristic of him. This novel foregrounds an agent called Clarice Starling who meets with a serial killer called Hannibal Lecter to get some information about the motive of the serial killing that Bill is doing. The intentions between Buffalo Bill and Marquis may be different, but the act of serial killing is the same. Buffalo Bill wants to be a woman. In order to fulfill his quest, he meets with women, takes off their skins to make a dress for himself. Later, he murders a woman called Klaus by entering “ a death's head moth” into Klaus' throat. This instance is closely related to what Marquis did with his earlier wives. In Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, “ ... Marquis once used to hunt young girls on the mainland; he hunted them with dogs, as though they were foxes” (38). These two instances suggest that both Marquis and Buffalo Bill had traumatic childhoods, and they both had similar mental illnesses. Fink articulates, “ In certain cases of psychosis, we see a tendency toward transsexualism, repeatedly requesting for sex change operation, and homosexual activity (97). “ Freud analyzed Schreiber's psychosis as indicative of an inadequate defense against homosexuality, but Lacan suggests that Schreiber's feminization occurs due to the very nature of psychosis” (qtd. in Fink 98). Marquis and Buffalo Bill both have an atrocious kind of attitude towards women. Marquis always forbids his wife from entering the bloody chamber, and he always restricts her. In Harris' novel, Buffalo Bill captivated a woman called Catherine Martin in a wail, continuously terrorizing her to take off her skin. Both these two men are suffering from psychosis due to some kind of abuse. As Lecter utters ; Childhood disturbances associated with violence. Our Billy was not born a criminal, Clarice. He was made one Through years of systematic abuse (Harris 47). These two men both have the same paranoid personality.

In the context of psychosis, Lacan experiments on a child called Aimee and provides some traits of a psychosis patient. “ Lacan investigates Aimee's childhood, her adulthood, her love affairs, and her marriage and discards the possibility” (Mandal, chapter III). In Carter's story, after discovering the corpse, the wife realizes that Marquis is a serial killer. After revealing his true nature, Marquis declares that his wife should bathe herself. He orders her to get ready herself so that he can kill by using his great-grandfather's sword (Carter 43). This instance suggests the ill psychological state of the Marquis. It is worthily notified that Marquis gives his wife a ring that was provided earlier to his wife's generation. After killing his wife, Marquis orders her to take off the ring from her finger and gives it back to him so that he can give it to 'a dozen more fiancées.’ This instance reveals his serial killing attitude. Further, Fink describes the traits of psychotic person, “it has been often noted that psychotics show a predilection for neologisms unable to create new meaning using the same old words via metaphor, the psychotic is led to forge new terms, and attributes to them a significance that he or she often describes as ineffable or incommunicable”(95). As Shoshana Felman also points out on Lacanian Psychoanalysis , “Lacanian psychoanalysis is praxis (the practical treatment of a patient), a method (the technique used in the praxis), not a theory (qtd in. Nayar 75). Here, Marquis twisted his wife's hair into a rope and drew it “ away from her neck” (Carter 47). His wife utters before this situation, Marquis “kissed his wife's lips... the sharp blade ripped my dress in two, and it fell from me “ (Carter 47).

The ending situation of Buffalo Bill and Marquis is intricately interconnected with each other. Both Marquis and Buffalo were killed by a penetrating bullet to their bodies. Marquis ' wife is saved by her sister when she enters the bloody chamber and kills Marquis (Carter 48). Lacan depicts, “The psychotic is convinced not necessarily of the reality of what he or she sees or hears, but of the fact that it seems something, and this involves him or her. While the psychotic may agree that what he or she heard or saw was not audibly or visible to others” (Lacan, Seminar III,87). Lacan talks about psychosis as “ a freedom that convinces the law not as an external prohibition but as the subject's internal obstacle, as a nonsensical signifier that provides the basis for the subject's symbolic universe. The investigation of psychosis not only reveals the psychotic dimension of the normal but also points toward an alternative” (Mills 5). In both the text, Marquis and Buffalo Bill are alienated from society. Their deeds of killing women are strikingly revealing their mental illness. They are actually suffering from psychosis. According to Lacan, “ the unconscious is present but not functioning contrary to what has been thought, the fact that it's present does not imply a solution but, on the contrary, a very special inertia (qtd.in

Mandal, Chapter III). “ A psychotic can learn to speak the way other people speak, but the essential structure of language is not integrated in the same way” (Fink 91). “ The metaphorical use of language is not available to the psychotics, according to Lacan, due to the failure of the essential: the paternal metaphor. Lacan refers to the paternal function as having the structure of a metaphor, where the term NOF replaces the DOM” (Fink 91). The psychotic does not abide by the structure of language. “ In psychosis, just as the imaginary is not overwritten by the symbolic, so the drives are hierarchized in the body except by imitation (Fink 96). The psychotics can not suppress any secrets from anyone. They don’t have a sense of societal norms. They feel that whatever they are doing is correct. Most of all, they don’t have any sense of guilt in their psyche. Despite doing bad things, they don’t have the feeling of guilt. Just as Marquis and Buffalo Bill, though they kill many women, they don’t have any sense of guilt. They do not feel repentant for their deeds. Lacan suggests that “ the psychotic may also describe himself as in a feminine or passive relation to language itself, passively submitting to it, invaded by it or possessed by it” (Fink 99). This type of characteristic is depicted in the case of Buffalo Bill, who desires to be a woman. Marquis ' behavior in Angela Carter’s short story “ The Bloody Chamber” closely resembles the traits of psychosis that Jacques Lacan described in Seminar III. There are lots of psychological similarities between Marquis and Buffalo Bill in terms of their deeds, thinking, and murder. They both don’t have any sense of guilt for the nasty deeds that they have done. Marquis doesn’t abide by the rules of the symbolic world, “ law, logic, and language.” He doesn’t have the sense to justify his action.

CONCLUSION

The character of the Marquis in *The Bloody Chamber* can be effectively interpreted through the framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis, particularly the concept of psychosis discussed in Seminar III. Lacan’s theory of the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father helps explain the Marquis’s abnormal psychological structure, which is characterized by his inability to abide by the symbolic order of law, logic, and language. His excessive desire, lack of moral restraint, and absence of guilt reveal a subject who is driven by unregulated jouissance rather than by socially structured norms. The Marquis’s behavior—his domination over his wife, his secretive acts of violence, and his compulsive desire to control and possess women—suggests a psychological condition that resonates with Lacanian descriptions of psychosis. Furthermore, the comparison between the Marquis and Buffalo Bill from *The Silence of the Lambs* strengthens this interpretation.

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