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ПАМЯТЬ ЖАНРА В РЕИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИИ СЮЖЕТА О СИНЕЙ БОРОДЕ АНЖЕЛЫ КАРТЕР

Аннотация

В статье рассматривается действие механизма памяти жанра, его способности сохранять элементы архаики благодаря постоянному воспроизведению и обновлению. Материалом для исследования послужил предназначенный для взрослой аудитории современный рассказ, который апеллирует к сказочному сюжету о Синей Бороде. Основываясь на выводах ученых об инициационном каркасе, лежащем в основе волшебных сказок, и его символической маскировке, реинтерпретация архаичного сюжета трактуется как экспликация изначально заложенных мотивов, связанных с сексуальными аспектами взросления, скрытых от детей, иной целевой аудитории.

Ключевые слова: память жанра, реинтерпретация, Синяя Борода, инициация.

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GENRE MEMORY IN ANGELA CARTER'S RE-INTERPRETATION OF THE BLUEBEARD PLOT

Abstract

The paper aims at disclosing the mechanism of genre memory, its ability to retain some persistent archaic elements due to their ongoing updating and renewal. The modern short story discussed appeals to the Bluebeard plot and is intended for grown ups. With scholars' inference about initiation rite as the underpinning of fairy tales and their symbolism hidden from children's eyes who are the common target audience now, the reinterpretation for adult readers is viewed as making symbolic truth less implicit, lifting of sexual taboos, and explication of inherent latent motifs related to initiation into adulthood.

Keywords: genre memory, re-interpretation, Bluebeard, initiation.

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Introuduction

The concept of genre memory was introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin who stated that a literary genre, by its nature, reflects the most persistent tendencies in the development of literature. It always retains the undying archaic elements; yet, these elements are retained only because of constant renewal or modernizing. A literary genre lives in the present; however, it never forgets about its past, its origins [1]. These two tendencies in the dynamics of genre provide the basis of its memory mechanism. The concept was never fully developed by the scholar; he would insist yet on the objective nature of genre memory which does not depend on the subjective will of a writer.

When investigating the problem of certain motifs in "The Poetics of Plots" (1986), A.N. Veselovsky expresses the idea of the objectivity of literary forms' memory, folktales in particular saying that their formulae were forerun by worldly relations [2]. In his powerful book «The Morphology of Folktales» (1928), V.Ja. Propp greatly influenced by his predecessor's work found out that folktales with various plots could be reduced to one narrative scheme and pointed at their potential origins in ancient myth and ritual [3]. In «The Historical Roots of the Wondertale» (1946), he writes about the meaning of folktale structure that he isolated: «If you draw a mental picture of what really happened to an initiate and tell, in order, a story about it, you get exactly that very plot on which a folktale is built» [4, P. 353]. The high degree of regularity detected in folktales where every function results from the previous one made him think about some logical pattern that predetermined it, acting on some level behind the text. The folktale formal structure, with linear development through some conflicting situations towards positive solving of predicaments, could serve as a model of solving existential problems of adult life [5].

The term "initiation" derived from anthropology denotes one of the rites of passage, ritual events which mark a person's transition from one status to another. An initiate undergoes three stages: pre-liminary stage, liminality, and

post-liminality. In primitive societies, initiation rites are observed at coming-of-age; they involve isolation, physical exertion, and initiates' communication with the supernatural by means of revelatory trances that alter their sensibilities and mark their admission to secret tribal beliefs. Often rites seem incomprehensible in advanced Western society where ancient traditions are reinterpreted to reflect modern life changes. The emphasis is laid on the initiates' identification of their social or sex roles, as well as self-knowledge. Scholars mark the economy of fairy tales which often results in the use of symbols. "Fairy tales depict in... symbolic form the essential steps in growing up and achieving an independent existence" [7, P. 73]. Yet, when traditional rituals cease to be used, it becomes possible to come out with what once used to be a great secret [6].

Method

The system of methods employed in the paper combines structuralist one as well as stylistic analysis on different language levels.

Discussion

Carter's "The Bloody Chamber", a rewriting of Charles Perrault's fairy tale "La Barbe-Bleue", is permeated with the images of the liminal. Initiation, with strong sexual overtones, is the leitmotif of her revision of the Bluebeard plot. The writer updates setting and rewrites the story from the point of view of the fourth wife of Marquis, the Bluebeard figure. It starts with a retrospective glance of the protagonist at the time when she, a naïve seventeen who believed in romance, was leaving home to marry Marquis, heading for his castle by train:

I lay awake... in a tender, delicious ecstasy of excitement, my burning cheek pressed against the impeccable linen of the pillow and the pounding of my heart mimicking that of the great pistons ceaselessly thrusting the train that bore me... away from Paris, away from girlhood, away from the white, enclosed quietude of my mother's apartment, into the unguessable country of marriage. ...My satin nightdress... teasingly caressed

me. His kiss... had hinted to me... of the wedding night, which would be voluptuously deferred until we lay in his great ancestral bed" [3, P. 7-8].

The excited state of the heroine on the wedding night eve is accentuated by the pulsating rhythm which reproduces the pushing pistons – "the syncopated roar of the train", as she, a musician, qualifies it. Rhythmization is achieved by identical structures "away from" at equal intervals. Parallelism is enhanced by gradation which leads to growing tension till it reaches its climax at the end of the sentence, its rhyme — "the unguessable country of marriage".

Syntactic repetitions are redundant since the theme can be easily defined by the key words reflecting the girl's erotic fantasies: "delicious ecstasy of excitement; my burning cheek, the impeccable linen; away from girlhood; his kiss; the wedding night voluptuously deferred; his great ancestral bed; the... country of marriage". Yet, their climactic arrangement foregrounds the feelings of one who anticipates her near initiation into adulthood.

The girl, young as she was, identifies Marquis as Other at once: "the dark, leonine shape of his head; his dark mane; he would... softly creep up behind me; his strange, heavy, almost waxen face; that face... with heavy eyelids over eyes that always disturbed me by their absolute absence of light, seemed to me like a mask, as if his real face... lay beneath this mask; his lips... so strangely red and naked between the black fringes of his beard". Yet she prefers to close her eyes on these scary features. Moreover, her description of what she felt when she became the *fiancée* of the affluent Marquis and thus an object for scrutiny, goes beyond a teenager's understanding of things. The protagonist declares lack of experience in her, a homegrown girl; at the same time she shows grown-up awareness of her own taste for corruption:

His wedding gift, clasped round my throat. A choker of rubies, ...like an extraordinary precious slit throat. ...That night at the opera comes back to me even now. ...the white dress; the frail child within it; and the flashing crimson jewels round her throat, bright as arterial blood.

I saw him watching me... with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even of a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts of slab. I'd never seen... that regard of his before, the sheer carnal avarice of it. When I saw him look at me with lust, I dropped my eyes but, in glancing away from him, I caught sight of myself in the mirror. I saw how much that cruel necklace became me. And, for the first time in my innocent and confined life, I sensed myself a potentiality for corruption that took my breath away [3, P. 11].

A closer glance at the description of "that night [which] comes back to [her] *even now*" reveals two different perspectives. On the one hand, verbs of sense perception (to sense, to see, to catch sight) suggest the position of the protagonist as a witness or participant. On the other hand, sustained metaphors – "a *choker* of rubies... like an extraordinary precious *slit throat*"; "the flashing *crimson jewels round her throat, bright as arterial blood*"; [the Marquis] "with the assessing eye... of a *housewife in the market, inspecting cuts of slab, ...[with] the sheer carnal avarice*"; "that *cruel necklace*" – which require effort to realize the similarity of two objects, suggest passage of time. These markers of cognitive process, in their phraseology, indicate the perspective of a person who has already gained liminal experience and worldly knowledge. She tells a story about her almost fatal experience *post factum*: with wisdom of hindsight, she understands the real state of things then.

Keen vision results from her profound analysis of those events and is introduced into their description some time after her married life with Marquis came to an end. Everything in the protagonist's memories – Marquis who bought her as a piece of meat at the butchers, and the precious, yet cruel, guillotine-like necklace with which he did it, and she herself admitting her potential for collusion — become an object for irony of a mature person in the stage of post-liminality.

Scholars identify the central motif of the Bluebeard tale differently. In his essay "On Fairy-Stories", J.R.R. Tolkien writes about the great mythical significance of prohibition, with its origins in taboo. "The Locked Door stands as an eternal Temptation" [10, P. 32]. Carter foregrounds temptation and draws a parallel with the biblical Eve, which is made explicit in the conversation of the protagonist with the blind piano tuner. It becomes clear to both that, with intent to punish her, Marquis has plotted his wife's breaching his prohibition to enter his office:

'I only did what he knew I would.'

'Like Eve,' he said [3, P. 38]

Marquis encourages her curiosity, punishable as Eve's, by leaving her alone with his collection of Felicien Rops's paintings notorious for their pornographic images. When she is examining one with a telling name "The Reproof of Curiosity", he catches her unawares:

'My little nun has found her prayerbooks, has she?' he demanded...; then, seeing my painful, furious bewilderment, he laughed at me aloud...

'Have nasty pictures scared Baby? Baby mustn't play with grownups' toys until she's learned how to handle them, must she?' [3, P. 17].

As Ch. Renfroe states, "since the heroine's exploration of the chamber is overtly desired by both the husband and the girl for *different* reasons and with the hope of *different* outcome, the tale becomes at once a depiction of the oppressive sexual initiation of a young girl at the hands of a powerful older man as well as a tale of self-initiation and survival undertaken willingly by a member of a community of women" [9, P. 101].

Results

Thus comparing the original story with its modern re-interpretation we see that in "La Barbe-Bleue" the girl can't resist curiosity and enters the forbidden chamber. Perrault blames her in *moralité* which equates curiosity to trouble:

Ladies, you should never pry, —

You'll repent it by and by!

Though the protagonist confronts death, the tale does not suggest any liminal experience she has gained. B. Bettelheim argues that at the end both Bluebeard and his wife are the same persons as they were before. "Earth-shaking events took place", and none of them is better: "no development toward higher humanity is being projected" [7, P. 302].

At the end of Carter's story, the girl who prefers partnership with the blind piano tuner to matrimonial relations violates society conventions. Fairy-tale conventions with marriage as climax are ruined too. The major character, though nameless and thus a stereotype, gives her own perspective of the events, awakening of her sexuality and making her own, rather than anyone else's choice, and getting a better insight into the complexity of the grown-up world. So in Carter's retelling initiation of a young Marquise becomes an impetus to her self-realization. The new understanding is gained by the protagonist as a result of the crucial experience that helps her to attain greater maturity.

Conclusion

Each re-interpretation permits the articulation of deeper possibilities because they were not explicitly expressed in the original story. Embedded and reduced, the latent archaic elements of the pretext that re-emerge later make it possible to treat fairy tale rewritings through the prism of Bakhtin's

ideas on genre memory. So, readdressing their retellings of fairy tales to grown-up audience and bringing to light what used to be implicit or latent in stories for children, exposing anxieties and horror inherent in them, as well lifting sexual taboos, give modern writers an opportunity to reinvent and clarify potential meanings of fairy tales.

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