

# Carter's use of metamorphosis in the bloody chamber essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In *The Tiger's Bride* and *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* Carter uses transformation from human to animal and vice versa, exploring how two natures can exist in one person, and how transformation can reveal some idea of truth.

Metamorphosis is essential in these tales and the idea of blurring reality and fantasy is traditional in the gothic genre. However, these stories can also be linked to a wider feminist ideology. The metamorphoses in the stories also could be said to be criticizing society's patriarchal, stereotypical gender roles, and for the heroine's in the tales, the metamorphosis into adulthood is sexual.

Carter begins both tales by introducing the idea of innocence. In *The Tiger's Bride* Carter uses the 'white roses' to convey the idea of virginity. For example, when the heroine says "When I break off a stem, I prick my finger and so he gets his rose all smeared with blood." This illustrates the idea of the girl's transformation of virginity, and the 'blood smeared' could represent her being almost stained by her sexual awakening, which is a taboo for the gothic.

Similarly, at the beginning of *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* the heroine's complexion is described "whose skin possesses that same, inner light so you would have thought she, too, was made all of snow" this really highlights her as being pure and almost angelic. The use of words like 'light' and 'snow' portray the heroine as being innocent and virtuous. Carter's use of pure and virginal heroines is a common element of the gothic and in this way contributes to the gothic element of the tale.

However, both tales have elements which do not fall into the gothic genre. In *The Tiger's Bride* the roles of the 'virginal' heroine and the 'powerful' beast are reversed by the heroine's reaction to the beast's sexual desire to see her naked "I could scarcely believe my ears. I let out a raucous guffaw" We suddenly recognize her as not being a victim; she almost refuses to be by illustrating her fearless attitude. The use of the word 'guffaw' really conveys how she is almost mocking the beast.

Furthermore, in *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* the heroine's change in character from timid to feisty, in a similar way also does not fit into the typical gothic. For example, she is described, at the beginning "she would retreat nervously into her skin, flinching at his touch" however, at the end of the novel she is said to have "flung herself upon him" This change in character similarly does not conform to the traditional gothic, where the heroine is usually seen as being timid, nervous and frightened of the almost predatory male character. At the end of both novels we see a physical transformation.

In *The Tiger's Bride* we see the heroine transform into a tiger "And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. My earrings turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur." This introduces the idea of traditional gothic supernatural elements, which intrigues the reader with mystery. However, it could be suggested that Carter used the metamorphosis and described successive layers of female flesh being removed to reveal a true identity unconstrained by human form.

Carter could be criticizing presumed gender roles, and by transforming the feeble heroine into a tiger she almost becomes the beast's equal. Carter inverts the traditional transformation from beast to human. Moreover, in *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* the beast transforms into a man “ And then it was no longer a lion in her arms but a man” This is interesting, as it could be said that Carter is trying to illustrate how the bestial nature of a man can be humanized by the sacrifice of a woman.

The way in which the Beast is metamorphosed to physically change fits into the gothic element of the tale as the reader wonder's and almost fears for what is going to happen to both the characters of the heroine and beast. However, the idea that the heroine's perfection can calm and almost tame the savage beast could be Carter's message. In conclusion, Carter uses traditional gothic elements of transformation and the supernatural to contribute to the gothic element of the tales. However, it could be said she changes the perspective to give the reader a different view and to convey her feminist ideologies.