

Question Eleven

The heroine's transformation into a tiger combines the acts of sex and birth into one. When she takes off her clothes, she can already feel herself changing; she feels as though she is "stripping off [her] own underpelt"; but she needs The Beast's action to help her change. He rips off her skin by licking her, which can be seen as a sexual act, but this gives way to the act of birth; the heroine is reborn as a tigress with "a nascent patina of shining hairs." In this act, The Beast and the heroine reclaim sex as a collaborative act of creation, casting aside the idea of sex as an act of fetish and control wherein the man objectifies and claims the woman. The heroine here, in fact, is claiming herself. Carter makes it clear that coming into one's selfhood is a painful and arduous act that calls for more than the wave of a wand. It requires the heroine to endure the excruciating pain of giving birth (to herself) in order to attain the relief and freshness of being reborn.

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