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THE BLOODY CHAMBER COLLECTION | **THEMES**

SEXUALITY

- ❖ The collection as a whole offer an impression of sexuality as an equally frightening and exciting aspect of adult behaviour. **Carter** portrays the extremes of desire in detailing human behaviour at its most perverse.
- ❖ In *The Bloody Chamber* the risks involved in allowing another person to define one's sexuality (in being submissive and passive) are given an urgent nature. **Carter** flirts with sadomasochistic psychology in the tale, but ultimately rejects masochistic submission as empty and unfulfilling.
- ❖ **Carter** emphasises the appeal of the risk in marrying an older, more experienced man in *The Bloody Chamber*. The attention and prestige the young girl acquires through her association with the Marquis are flattering to her. She, who knows 'nothing of the world' finds herself caught in conflicting emotional responses that give 'a kind of fear' at the 'strange, impersonal arousal' and 'repugnance' she feels when her husband delays consummation.

SEXUALITY

- ❖ Human sexuality is conceived by **Carter** as something that is dangerous and animalistic – as shown by the violent images in *The Bloody Chamber*; the voyeurism and exhibitionism in *The Tiger's Bride*; the comical contrast of the cats and the exuberant coupling of the lovers in *Puss-in-Boots*; the imprisonment of women in *The Erl-King*; the intimate moments of transformation in *The Tiger's Bride*, *The Company of Wolves* and *Wolf-Alice* – but desire is always contained within the boundaries of heterosexual behaviour.
- ❖ Sexuality is presented exclusively through a female view in these tales, a challenge to the prevailing attitudes of the 1970's. Male sexuality is shown to be aggressive and selfish.

BEAUTY AND WEALTH

❖ The Beast in *The Tiger's Bride* wears a mask of a painted 'beautiful face' that is 'too perfect' to be 'entirely human'. **Carter** is playing with the reader's expectations and understanding of the character, deliberately keeping the real identity of The Beast hidden. Subtle suggestions are made that wealth (the source of the disguise) distances humans from each other.

❖ **Carter** is influenced by Marxist analysis of capitalism and its effects. Marx described how obsession with things they make, buy, sell and use; he described this effect as alienation. This is represented in the Marquis and his private collections of art and literature. His personal degradation symbolises the degenerate nature of the idle rich and inherited wealth.