

COMMENTARY

❖ The women in *The Bloody Chamber* collection are in general given domestic roles without economic definition, whether they be aristocrats, petits bourgeois or peasants. The men are mostly figures of authority whose power of wealth has been inherited in one way or another. To consider **Carter's** characterisation is to consider those who take the role of narrator and protagonist; the villainous patriarchs and the male characters who are predators; the male characters who are less threatening; the positive and negative models of motherhood; the few female characters who can be seen as victims of their circumstances; the female characters that represent the vivacity of life; and the clearest example **Carter** gives of the attractions of the human animal.

THE NARRATOR PROTAGONIST

- ❖ The girl in *The Tiger's Bride* is immediately presented with a tougher personality, a survivor who chooses her experiences carefully, but is equally powerless in many respects. She resents the way she cannot prevent her circumstances growing worse under her father's neglect. She describes his 'special madness', his 'debauchery', as the 'sickness' of gambling.
- ❖ Her disappointment in her father is clear as she lists the items of the 'king's ransom' that prompted him to gamble her away. Her 'heartless mirth' in response to Beast's request to see her 'Desnuda' is the response of a person hardened by experience. She initially feels she is part of a 'humiliating bargain', but she changes her view when the Beast changes his demand.

THE MATRIARCH

- ❖ The mother is romantic, having 'gladly, scandalously, defiantly beggared herself for love'. As a widow, she is 'magnificently eccentric' in black silk. **Carter** is presenting an all-action female who does not abandon her femininity to compete with men. **Carter** initially suggests that this is part of her wild youth, an 'adventurous girlhood' she has grown out of by becoming a mother.
- ❖ Her reappearance at the end of the tale, however, crashing through waves on horseback with her 'black skirts tucked up around her waist' is even more romantic and glamorous. The wild image of the mother, 'black lisle legs exposed to the thigh' astride a 'rearing horse', identifies her with the power of nature. She is the Marquis's nemesis, the embodiment of 'furious justice'.

THE VICTIM

- ❖ **Carter** was particularly interested in the portrayal of women as victims of male aggression as a limiting factor in the feminist perspective of the time. Her argument was that women did not need to accept that role, and she uses these stories to explore how that can be achieved.
- ❖ Aside from the narrator role, the bride in *The Bloody Chamber* is passive and compliant in the Marquis's planned abuse. The character is a submissive woman who enables **Carter** to explore the attractions of dominance as part of the sexual dynamics of human relationships. The extent to which she might be seen as a willing victim is delineated by **Carter**; the young wife does not understand what she is dealing with, despite her claim that she is 'innocent but not naïve'.