Compare the ways in which Carter combines the fairy tale and the Gothic in ‘The Courtship of Mr Lyon’ and ‘The Tiger’s Bride’

Below are some suggestions for what your essay might contain. However these are not prescriptive, feel free to develop your own response as much as possible.

You could:

* Compare the openings of each story – you might explore the Winter setting and the use of snow as a symbol – how does the opening differ in feel and tone in each story? You may feel the first story seems much more romantic and fairy tale like whereas the second seems much harsher in tone.
* Compare the character of Beauty in each story. Does she fit the Gothic female stereotype of a victim? To what extent is she objectified? Look at the change of narrative from 3rd and 1st person- why do you think Carter makes this change and what does is add to our view of Beauty?
* How does the father figure compare in each story – does Carter change Gothic or fairy tale conventions through this character?
* The setting of the Beast’s home. Compare and contrast each setting –inside and out. Does either seem like a fairy tale castle or fit the isolated castle of the Gothic? Carter often gives her settings a greater symbolism – what is symbolic in either setting?
* Compare the supernatural character – the Beast - in each story, and the way Beauty feels about him. Does she feel scared by him in either story? What aspects of his character does she notice?
* Compare and contrast the storyline of each story? Are there any differences in the events which take place? You might explore the card game, the use of gifts, the automaton and the horse ride in the second story.
* Compare the endings of both stories – in particular the way that in the first, the Beast becomes a man and in the second, Beauty becomes a Beast. Discuss in detail these differences and the ways Carter changes the fairy tale and subverts the Gothic. Which ending do you prefer and why?
* What do you think is the theme of each story? How does Carter subvert the fairy tale in the second story? You may feel the second story has more of a happy ending than the first; what is Carter trying to say here? What aspect of human ‘civilised’ society and its treatment of women does she explore? The idea of human/animal transformation is often used in Gothic stories – is it used in the same way here?
* Do either of the stories make use of typical Gothic symbols? You might look at the use of masks, the rose, jewels, mirrors, animals, colour …

In the exam you will have one hour to answer a question like this and you will have to write without your book. However, for this practice, I would use your book and spend a little longer.

 Other Critical Viewpoints

Beauty ponders the ‘different logic’ by which the Beast and his companion live. Carter thus, here as elsewhere, openly acknowledges the ‘differentness’ of this world which she has created. As a reader we therefore should not bring our normal sensibilities to bear upon this tale. She wants us to approach the tales with a mind uncluttered by established thoughts or prejudices. The reference to Eve reminds us of a prejudice established by the creation story and perpetuated since by the major religions, one effect of which has been female subservience. Eve’s original sin, as in ‘The Bloody Chamber’, is linked to women’s frailty in general. The Tiger’s desire to see Beauty naked should not be seen as some unpleasant voyeurism, but simply to see her as she really is, as opposed to how she is dressed and ‘constructed’ by society. The Tiger precipitates this by taking the lead. The wind which always seems to announce his presence is an elemental force indicating his power; potentially destructive, but essential to life. The reciprocal nature of their undressing suggests how power and delicacy, desire and beauty, man and woman can coexist. In Carter’s version it is not the lion which lies down with the lamb, but the lamb which must ‘learn to run with the tigers’.

<https://schoolweb.rgsw.org.uk/english> then look for 6th form and ‘The Bloody Chamber’

The automaton, an imitation of Beauty, is an intriguing symbol. Beauty does not recognize herself at first, but later decides to send this imitation out into the world. The assumption that no one will notice the difference is a comment on how patriarchal society simultaneously idealises and marginalizes women. While considering the allegedly soulless existence of animals, this young woman muses angrily on the emptiness of the ‘imitative life amongst men’ that she has been allowed by her father. The mutual revelation that takes place between Beauty and the Beast is quite touching, despite its fantastic weirdness. The woman now accepts the Beast as ‘courteously curious as to the fleshly nature of women’ and she reciprocates the desire to do ‘no harm’.

In deciding not to return to the world of men, represented primarily by the greedy opportunism of her father, the woman realizes she has been changed by her experience. She no longer resembles the image of her former beauty as displayed to her by the automaton: a ‘smiling girl…poised in the oblivion of her balked simulation of life’. Carter allows the narrator to give a succinct summation of the feminist concept of the ‘male gaze’ – ‘the market place where the eyes that watch you take no account of your existence’ – but she compares that gaze to the blindness of the automaton, suggesting it is a manufactured and unnatural response, not an irrevocable condition of masculinity per se.

The Beast’s gift of teardrop earrings seems to be a coded plea for her to listen to his emotional distress. When she fixes them to her ears she finds them ‘very heavy’, but they are all she chooses to wear to meet the Beast again in his room. In one way this resembles the use of jewelry and nakedness in ‘The Bloody Chamber’, but in this tale the woman makes the choice of her own free will, without coercion, to decorate herself with the evidence of masculine sentiment. They are the last things to change in the story…The ending seems to be advising the reader that it might be a good idea for men and women to see each other as they really are and that mutual recognition of a shared animal nature is the basis of happiness in human relationships.

**York Notes Advanced ‘The Bloody Chamber’ Steve Roberts, London 2008**

The male power and sexual energy of the Beast, so strongly represented in the resonating language of the final section, can be embraced as part of a dynamic, liberating relationship. Significantly, this takes place amidst the Beast’s detritus. This grotesque aspect of human nature is very important to Carter. In stripping humanity back to its bare, physical essentials we get back to a true grasp of what it is to be human, rather than the polished and false version which has emerged out of centuries of society’s strictures. So Beauty has her skin stripped away, the dressy earrings return to the natural beauty of water as she undergoes a sort of baptism back into a natural existence. Simultaneously, the tiger has reverted to his natural state, liberated by Beauty’s accepting response.

<https://schoolweb.rgsw.org.uk/english> then look for 6th form and ‘The Bloody Chamber’

**The Beauty and the Beast Stories**

Notes from <https://schoolweb.rgsw.org.uk/english> - 6th form and ‘The Bloody Chamber’

Good notes can also be found at http://www.gradesaver.com/the-bloody-chamber/study-guide

**The Courtship of Mr Lyon**

A deliberately ambiguous parody of the original Beauty and the Beast fairy tale. Beauty is first

portrayed within a conservative and domestic role of housewife and faithful daughter.

However, she is not the pure and humble model of the fairy tale; she is vain and seemingly all

knowing. This side of her character at first leads her to reject the Beast as he is too different

from herself. She goes to his house only out of filial duty to her father. However, throughout

the story a transformation takes place and she grows to love the Beast for who he is,

eventually submitting to him. Hence, Carter shows the transferring of a young girl’s affections

from father to lover as she matures sexually.

The Beast is also transformed throughout the story. Unlike in the original tale, this change is

arguably a psychological one within Beauty’s own mind, rather than a physical one: Carter

omits the ‘enchanting spell’ that bound Beast in the original. Despite all of this, Carter’s

ending is relatively closed and lacklustre compared to ‘The Tiger’s Bride.’ Unlike in other

stories, the Beast has actually lost his beastliness and natural desires; perhaps the passion

has been drained from their relationship, as suggested by the ‘drift of fallen petals’ at the

story’s close. Moreover, in this story, the stripping off of layers has, in one sense, had a

negative effect.

**The Tiger’s Bride**

Another parody of ‘Beauty and the Beast.’ In this story, Beauty is portrayed as a pawn at the

hands of male-dominated, patriarchal society. She is used as a bartering tool by her father

and stands naked before the Beast to fulfil his desires. Her rigid, subservient role as a woman

is mirrored by a mechanical doll who serves her whilst in the Beast’s house.

However, in contrast to the heroine from ‘The Courtship of Mr Lyon’, Beauty in this story is

earthier and more comfortable with the physical/ bestial side of her humanity. This is seen in

her love for horses and leads eventually to her shedding her skin and becoming a Beast

herself, an ironic reversal of the original Beauty and the Beast story. She is appalled by the

Beast’s falsely human identity and prefers him when he has stripped off his disguise.

She is more aware of herself than Bluebeard’s wife. She knows that the fairy stories and

superstitious fables told to her as a child have effected her perceptions in adulthood. She has

been indoctrinated by a fear of the male figure in general; that, if she is not submissive and

well-behaved, he will ‘gobble her up’. This, in turn, has given her an instilled fear of the Beast

and the imminent consummation of their relationship. However, in having the initiative to

undress herself and approach the Beast’s ‘carnivorous bed’, Beauty discovers that ‘his

appetite need not be my extinction’ and she is liberated by the experience. She has rejected

the greedy, rigid world of her father and embraced her own carnivorous desires. We see

Beauty liberated from her constrictive humanity and from the many ‘skins’ she has acquired

through a life in the world.

In contrast, the Beast is initially ashamed of his bestiality and of his beastly desires. He hides

his true nature from Beauty behind a mask of false humanity and he lives alone, isolated from

society and fearful of exposure. Thus, Beauty’s understanding of the Beast by the end of the

story, and her wish to be like him leads to the Beast’s own liberation. The open ending to this

story has more energy and a greater sense of release compared with ‘The Courtship of Mr

Lyon’.

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