

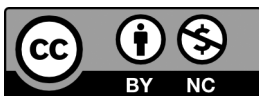
# Becoming and Lines of Flight: Angela Carter’s Rewriting of the “Sleeping Beauty” Narrative in *The Lady of the House of Love*

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**Abstract:** Angela Carter’s *The Lady of the House of Love* rewrites the “Sleeping Beauty” pattern by transforming its central functions—female suspension, enclosure, masculine intervention, awakening, and redemptive closure—into mechanisms that unsettle rather than stabilize feminine identity. Drawing selectively on Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of becoming and line of flight, this article argues that Carter’s tale does not simply reverse familiar fairy-tale roles but reworks the narrative mechanism through which feminine identity and closure are produced. The Countess is not a passive princess awaiting rescue, nor simply an empowered vampire, but an unstable figure suspended among victim, predator, aristocratic lady, desiring woman, and living corpse. Her castle externalizes this suspended becoming as a Gothic space of decay, repetition, and undead duration rather than a protective site of preservation. The soldier’s arrival further unsettles the rescue plot: his kiss is not a heroic or erotic act that restores the heroine to life, but a contingent act of care that interrupts the vampiric and fairy-tale script without producing romantic resolution. The Countess’s death and the afterlife of the rose, therefore, mark a tragic break in the inherited pattern, opening onto what may be read as a fragile line of flight rather than a completed liberation. Carter’s rewriting reveals fairy-tale salvation itself as a narrative mechanism that fixes feminine identity in passivity and completion. Her tale leaves behind an unresolved remainder—a fragile, troubling residue—through which the “Sleeping Beauty” pattern becomes open to new and disturbing meanings.

**Keywords:** Angela Carter; *The Lady of the House of Love*; Sleeping Beauty; Becoming; Line of Flight



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## 1 Introduction

Angela Carter’s *The Lady of the House of Love* radically rewrites the “Sleeping Beauty” narrative pattern. The sleeping princess becomes a vampire Countess; the destined prince becomes an accidental young soldier; the expected awakening kiss gives way to a contingent gesture of care; and the pursuit of romantic fulfillment and social restoration gives way to death and the rose’s troubling posthumous existence. Carter’s rewriting, therefore, challenges not only familiar fairy-tale roles but also the narrative logic through which identity, desire, space, and closure are conventionally organized.

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This article uses the term “Sleeping Beauty pattern” heuristically rather than genealogically. Since the tradition varies across Perrault, the Grimms, and later popular adaptations, the term refers not to one authoritative source but to a recognizable cluster of narrative functions—sleep, enclosure, masculine intervention as actant, awakening, and marital or social restorative closure. Although the awakening kiss and marriage do not appear in identical forms in every version, they have become dominant modern shorthand for a narrative logic in which female suspension is resolved through masculine intervention and social restoration.

Carter retains many recognizable elements of this structure: the enclosed female body, the castle, the young male visitor, the soldier’s kiss, and the promise of transformation; yet she redefines the function of each element. The castle no longer preserves order but becomes a Gothic apparatus of decay; the heroine is no longer maintained in innocent passivity but divided between incompatible identities; and the gesture of contact no longer restores life through marriage but opens a movement away from conventional resolution. Although the tale also draws on vampire fiction, Gothic conventions, decadent aristocracy, the Dracula tradition, and echoes of *Beauty and the Beast*, this article focuses on how those intertexts deform the structural logic of the “Sleeping Beauty” pattern.

Existing scholarship has productively approached Carter’s fairy-tale rewritings from feminist, Gothic, intertextual, narratological, and Deleuzian perspectives. Yet less attention has been paid to how these dimensions converge at the level of narrative function: that is, how Carter transforms enclosure, suspension, masculine intervention, awakening, and closure into mechanisms that unsettle rather than stabilize feminine identity. Feminist readings have foregrounded Carter’s demystification of female silence and passivity. Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère (2011), for instance, reads Carter’s *Sleeping Beauty* revisions in relation to repetition, curse, and vampiric transformation, showing how the familiar fairy-tale pattern is “revamped” through Gothic displacement. Fan and Hu (2011) similarly emphasize Carter’s rewriting of female silence and passivity in the Grimm tradition, foregrounding the recovery or reconfiguration of women’s voices in the fairy-tale form. Relatedly, Buchel (2004) interprets the tale as a troubled escape from the realm of the “eternal feminine,” while Rodríguez-Salas (2008) further examines the close circuit between femininity and vampirism in Carter’s representation of the Countess. Wang and Gao (2019), from the perspective of thematic parody, also discuss Carter’s transformation of the classic “Sleeping Beauty” tale. Other critics have examined the story through its Gothic and intertextual dimensions: Hagopian (2007) traces its relation to Apuleius and Gothic narrative, while Pérez-Gil (2015) discusses the Tennysonian intertext and the Countess’s shadowy, aestheticized enclosure. Deleuzian approaches have also been useful for understanding Carter’s interest in desire, transformation, and unstable subjectivity, as seen in Ocaña’s (1996) work on Carter, Deleuze, and Guattari, and in Swyt’s (1996) discussion of Carter’s “becoming-narrative”. These studies illuminate important aspects of Carter’s rewriting, but they tend either to foreground feminist demystification or to treat Gothic and intertextual elements as thematic revisions rather than as transformations of narrative function.

Carter’s rewriting is therefore best understood not as a simple reversal of gender roles, but as a transformation of narrative function. The familiar signs of the “Sleeping Beauty” pattern remain visible, yet they no longer lead toward the same destination. Sleep becomes undead suspension; enclosure becomes a mechanism of repetition rather than protection; masculine arrival becomes accident rather than destiny; and the kiss no longer guarantees awakening, marriage, or social restoration. What changes is not only the meaning of these motifs, but the work they perform within the tale.

Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of becoming and line of flight offer a useful vocabulary for describing this change, provided that they are used in a limited and textual sense. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, becoming, in Deleuze and Guattari’s

(1988) terminology, never signifies imitation or teleological transformation within a fixed subject identity; rather, it names a process that unsettles fixed positions and opens identity to movement, relation, and difference. A line of flight, likewise, should not be reduced to mere liberation. It marks a rupture of rigid molar assemblages that opens continuous differential movement, yet such a rupture can remain fragile, destructive, or permanently unfinished. This article, therefore, uses these concepts not to turn Carter's story into a philosophical allegory but to describe the narrative effects of her rewriting: the Countess's movement among incompatible identities, the castle's failure to stabilize meaning, and the ending's refusal of redemptive closure.

## 2 Becoming: Between Sleeping Princess and Vampire Countess

If the traditional "Sleeping Beauty" pattern depends on the heroine's fixed position as a silent, passive, and waiting body, Carter's rewriting begins by disturbing precisely this position. The Countess in *The Lady of the House of Love* is not simply a Gothic substitute for the sleeping princess, nor a monstrous reversal of ideal femininity. She occupies several incompatible roles at once: aristocratic lady, vampire predator, imprisoned victim, desiring woman, and living corpse. Her identity is therefore not presented as a stable essence, but as a shifting and contradictory arrangement of positions that contaminate one another.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) concept of becoming helps describe this instability. Becoming is not imitation, nor a movement from one fixed identity to another; rather, it unsettles stable categories and produces zones of proximity between forms of life that are usually kept apart. The Countess does not simply change from princess into vampire, or from vampire into liberated woman. She remains suspended between identities. Carter's rewriting thus does not replace the passive princess with an empowered monster. Instead, it exposes the instability already hidden within the fairy-tale image of the enclosed and waiting woman.

The Countess still recalls the "Sleeping Beauty" pattern. She is enclosed in a castle, separated from ordinary social life, and associated with suspended time. Like the sleeping princess, she appears as a female figure cut off from history and positioned in relation to the possible arrival of a young man. Yet Carter changes the meaning of this suspension. The Countess is not innocent, unconscious, or safely preserved for future awakening. She is awake within her imprisonment and painfully aware of the repetition that governs her existence. Her condition is not sleep but undead duration: she continues to exist, yet without development, future, or release.

Her beauty intensifies this contradiction. Carter (1975) describes it as "a symptom of her disorder", a phrase that overturns the usual function of beauty in fairy-tale narrative. In the "Sleeping Beauty" pattern, beauty usually confirms the princess's value: innocence, desirability, and the promise of eventual restoration. In Carter's story, however, beauty is pathological. It no longer guarantees harmony or purity, but rather signifies her unnatural, deathlike existence and the inherent contradiction of her being. The Countess is beautiful because she is fixed in an impossible image of feminine desirability; yet that very beauty marks her as deathlike, excessive, and unlivable. Her body, therefore, becomes the sign of a narrative order that has made femininity desirable by making it passive, enclosed, and almost dead.

Carter also refuses to present the Countess as simply powerful. She kills the men who enter her castle, but this violence does not express complete autonomy. It is ritualized by ancestry, curse, appetite, and repetition. She inherits not only aristocratic privilege but also a script that compels her to repeat the same scene of seduction and death. Her predatory role is therefore inseparable from her victimization. She consumes others, but she is also consumed by the

history that produces her. In this sense, Carter's vampire Countess is not the opposite of the sleeping princess. Both figures are enclosed, suspended, and made meaningful through the possible arrival of a man. Carter's revision lies in making this structure visibly violent and internally divided.

The Tarot cards dramatize this tension between interpretation and entrapment. Carter presents the Countess as shuffling, laying out, reading, and gathering up the cards, "constantly constructing hypotheses about a future which is irreversible". This grants her an interpretive activity denied to the conventional sleeping heroine: she reads destiny rather than merely waits for it. Yet the future remains "irreversible". The Tarot, therefore, condenses her constrained agency: she can interpret the script, but not escape it.

The castle gives spatial form to this condition. Its "chill, shuttered room", dust, darkness, and decaying interiors do not need to be read as an independent Gothic setting; they externalize the Countess's suspended becoming. In the traditional "Sleeping Beauty" pattern, the enclosure preserves the heroine until awakening. In Carter's tale, enclosure preserves only repetition. The castle keeps the Countess intact by preventing change. Its atmosphere of decay shows that perfect preservation is also a form of living death. The surrounding images of roses and "perpetual summer" likewise do not promise fertility or romance. They suggest beauty without renewal, duration without history, and desire already shadowed by death.

This is why the Countess's becoming cannot be understood as a movement toward simple liberation. She is not progressing from passivity to agency, from monstrosity to humanity, or from imprisonment to freedom. Rather, she remains caught among positions that the conventional fairy tale normally separates. She is both victim and predator, both woman and vampire, both aristocrat and captive, both desiring subject and scripted body. Her becoming resides in this ongoing interstitial flux of conflicting subject positions. Carter makes visible a feminine identity that cannot be contained by the binary structure of passive heroine and active rescuer.

The moment when the Countess turns up, *Les Amoureux* and "dealt herself a hand of love and death," condenses this contradiction. The card joins the two forces that define her existence: the desire for human contact and the fatal structure of vampiric repetition. Love cannot enter her world without death, yet the phrase "dealt herself" suggests that she is not merely a passive recipient of fate. She participates in the event, but only through a game whose rules have already been written. Her action is therefore neither free choice nor simple submission. It is a constrained agency at the point where the inherited script begins to tremble.

The soldier's arrival does not resolve this becoming; it intensifies it. Unlike the prince of a conventional rescue plot, he does not understand the symbolic role he has accidentally entered. The Countess reads the signs before he does, while his rational innocence prevents him from recognizing the Gothic and fairy-tale codes around him. His presence exposes her to a form of contact that her vampiric existence has made impossible, but it does not offer her a stable alternative identity. The Countess is neither restored to humanity nor safely contained as a monster. She remains suspended between positions that the inherited "Sleeping Beauty" pattern normally keeps separate. Carter's rewriting makes this suspension visible, while leaving the possibility of escape to the later scene of care, where the expected awakening kiss becomes a fragile and tragic line of flight.

### 3 Line of Flight: The Failed Awakening and the Refusal of Closure

Carter's disturbance of the "Sleeping Beauty" pattern becomes most acute at the moment when the tale seems

closest to fulfilling it. In many modern versions of the pattern, the kiss functions as the privileged sign of awakening, masculine intervention, and romantic closure. Carter (1975) preserves this expectation only to undo it: the soldier does not arrive as a destined prince, and his gesture is not a triumphant romantic kiss but an accidental, bodily, and unexpectedly tender act of care. Instead of marriage, awakening, or restoration, the encounter leads to the Countess's death and leaves behind the ambiguous sign of the rose.

The soldier's entrance weakens the structure of heroic rescue from the beginning. He is not seeking a princess, a bride, or a magical adventure; he is a young English officer on leave who "decided to spend the remainder of his furlough exploring the little-known uplands of Romania"(Carter, 1975). His arrival has the quality of casual travel rather than a heroic quest. In a conventional rescue plot, the prince's arrival confirms that the heroine has been waiting for the correct man and that the narrative has always been moving toward this encounter. In Carter's version, chance replaces destiny. The Countess reads his arrival through the Tarot as a moment of "love and death", but the soldier remains largely unaware of the symbolic weight of the situation. He stands where a prince might be expected to stand, but without the prince's knowledge, intention, or authority.

Carter's characterization of the soldier further unsettles masculine rescue. As "a virgin," "untempted," and "rational", he is resistant to the Countess's vampiric world, but not heroic. His innocence is also ignorance: he fails to recognize the Gothic order surrounding him. His accidental presence interrupts the script, but it provides no redemptive alternative.

The kiss itself radically revises the fairy-tale ritual of awakening. Carter's kiss is neither fully erotic nor heroic. It occurs after the Countess wounds herself: "When he kissed it better for her, as her mother would have done had she lived, the Countess shuddered". The sentence shifts the emotional structure of the scene. The soldier does not kiss her as a conventional act of romantic possession; instead, he responds to her injury with an unexpected gesture of care, which momentarily shifts the logic of the encounter away from erotic appropriation. The displacement from lips to wound alters the conventional symbolic expectation of the kiss, making it less an erotic gesture and more an ambiguous act of care.

The maternal comparison should therefore be read with caution. The phrase "as her mother, had she lived, would have done" does not establish a fully developed maternal alternative to the tale's erotic or vampiric structures; rather, it briefly introduces a form of tenderness absent from the Countess's inherited world. Her lineage is marked by blood, curse, hunger, and aristocratic death, and the soldier's gesture does not undo that history. What it does is momentarily interrupt the expected relation between blood, desire, and violence. In the vampire logic that governs the castle, blood calls forth hunger, feeding, and death. In this scene, however, blood calls forth care. The wounded body does not become an object to be consumed; it becomes a body to be soothed. This alteration is brief, but it is decisive because it complicates the scene of seduction and rescue without converting it into a stable structure of maternal care.

The wound is central to this revision. In the conventional tale, the heroine's body is preserved in ideal beauty until awakening. Carter instead presents a fragile, bleeding, and exposed body. The kiss does not fall on sleeping lips but on injured flesh. This shifts the scene from romantic idealization toward bodily vulnerability. The Countess encounters a form of touch that is not immediately governed by predation, conquest, or scripted romance. Yet this tenderness does not produce a stable life. Her response—she "shuddered"—suggests that the kiss unsettles rather than resolves her condition. It marks a threshold at which the inherited pattern can no longer continue in its conventional form, but it delivers neither the social restoration of canonical folk tales nor the stable domestic order promised by romantic marital resolution.

The Countess's death is consequently neither simple punishment nor straightforward redemption. The soldier's kiss does not rescue her from ordinary life; it breaks the repetition of her vampiric condition. After this contact, she can no longer remain what she was. Carter, therefore, refuses to separate transformation from loss. The scene does not celebrate death as freedom; rather, it shows that the inherited plot cannot imagine her passage into another life without destroying the conditions that have made her recognizable.

The Countess's disappearance opens what might be called a line of flight, though the movement is neither simple escape nor triumphant liberation. For Deleuze and Guattari, a line of flight does not name escape in the ordinary sense; it marks the point at which an arrangement breaks open and can no longer reproduce itself in the same way. In Carter's tale, the arrangement that breaks open is the fairy-tale mechanism itself: the sequence that should move from female suspension to masculine intervention, awakening, marriage, and closure. The Countess's death interrupts this sequence without offering a clearly stabilized alternative within the narrative logic.

The rose left behind after the Countess's death condenses this unresolved movement. In the "Sleeping Beauty" tradition, the rose often evokes beauty, enclosure, erotic promise, and eventual awakening. Carter retains these associations but darkens them. The rose is connected to the Countess's body, blood, and wound; it is not merely a romantic token but a material remnant of the encounter. It carries the trace of tenderness, violence, and death at once. As a result, it does not stabilize the meaning of the ending. It keeps the story open by refusing to decide whether the Countess's disappearance should be read as liberation, sacrifice, punishment, or loss.

The rose also carries the tale beyond the castle. When it enters the soldier's world, the Gothic plot does not simply give way to modern rationality. The soldier belongs to the daylight world of masculinity, military discipline, imperial mobility, and apparent reason. The narrative does not explicitly identify the historical war in which he will fight, but his profession as a soldier and the story's early-twentieth-century setting invite the reader to consider that the external world is not simply a realm of health or redemption. The opposition between Gothic darkness and modern daylight is therefore complicated: the soldier leaves one death-world for another that, while different, is not necessarily more benign.

The ending thus redirects attention away from male triumph and toward the Countess's absence and the rose's afterlife. The soldier leaves one house of death only to return to another death-world. The Countess's disappearance breaks the fairy-tale script, but the rose carries the memory of that break into history. The tale moves from an enchanted enclosure to modern war without offering either space as a secure alternative. In this sense, Carter's rewriting of closure is anti-teleological: the narrative does not move toward marriage, restoration, or moral settlement, nor does it merely replace happiness with horror. The kiss is tenderness, accident, and destruction; the rose is a love token, wound, relic, and trace of bodily rupture. The line of flight lies in this refusal of final capture, but it remains tragic because the tale can imagine an escape from the inherited script only as disappearance.

## 4 Conclusion

Angela Carter's *The Lady of the House of Love* rewrites the "Sleeping Beauty" pattern not by simple inversion, but by altering the functions that make the pattern recognizable. The enclosed woman, the castle, the male visitor, the kiss of the soldier, and the rose all remain, yet each is made to work against the expectation it seems to summon. What should preserve innocence becomes a mechanism of decay; what should awaken the heroine exposes the impossibility of her restoration; what should close the tale leaves behind a disturbing remnant.

The Countess's becoming is therefore inseparable from the tale's formal disturbance. She is neither a passive princess nor an empowered monster, but a figure suspended among an aristocratic lady, a vampire, a victim, a predator, a desiring woman, and a captive body. The castle sustains this suspension through rooms, rituals, objects, and repetitions that keep her between life and death. When the soldier's tender gesture interrupts this order, it does not release her into the ordinary world. It breaks the pattern at the cost of her disappearance.

The rose that opens in the soldier's barracks carries this unresolved break beyond the castle. It is a bloom and wound, a love token and relic, a trace of tenderness and a sign of historical death. Through it, Carter refuses the inherited movement from waiting to rescue, awakening, marriage, and closure. Her revision of *Sleeping Beauty*, therefore, reveals romantic salvation itself as a narrative mechanism: one that makes female identity legible by fixing it in passivity, rescue, and completion. Carter's tale disturbs that mechanism, leaving in its place not liberation in any simple sense, but an open and troubling remainder.

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