SLIP   PAGE: Angela Carter,
In / Out / In the Postmodern Nexus

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> Man is a practical even a penurious animal, and as such he has
> little patience with multiple labels. Some say "furze" and some say
> "gorse," but none, in a state of nature, will say both. Faced with
> two terms for the same thing, one tends to cast about for a dis-
> tinction.   w. v. QUINE, *Quiddities*

THE PREOCCUPATIONS OF literary theory are inseparable from
their characteristic metaphors. The way one talks about the ways
in which others talk may take its intellectual shape, its disciplined
conceptual management, from phenomena as stark, and as occult,
as models, but its expressive content, the actual placing of others'
talk (in categories, in displays, in whatever discursive museum),
flies the colours of metaphor.[1] Romantic criticism and its numer-
ous inheritors, such as biographical criticism, speak in organic
metaphors of growth, development, maturation, flowering, whole-
ness and perfection. New Criticism, another distant inheritor, pre-
serves the array of organic metaphors, but adds distinctive turns
of its own. The integrated wholes that New Criticism discovers
comprise paradoxical double strands: aesthetic certitude flowers
out of ambiguous incertitude, often held in mature perfection by
nothing more substantial than a fluttering tone. Formalist criticism
projects both mechanical (function, structure, concinnity) and
isolating (motif, device, code) metaphors. Marxist criticism meta-
phorizes literature as systematic exchange between distinct levels:
mirrors, reflection, production, consumption, commodification
and class as ground, consciousness, identity, or mere disparity.
These metaphors, immensely fruitful in focusing complex textual
detail, discover only what they project.

Metaphors, however characteristic, are seldom the objects of
examination and self-consciousness. They are more likely to wear

the masks of translucency and fact, as being simply "things as they are." Christopher Norris has shown the extent to which philosophy attempts to "ignore or repress the figural dimension of language" (5). (It has never been clear whether New Critics were aware of the metaphoricity of their own language even while they pursued it in the language of others.) One of the joyful lessons of post-structuralism has been the insistence upon candid self-awareness: put metaphors up front, inscribe them (where they have come from, their passports, visas, all their slippery twists and turns) into the problematic. Post-structuralism's metaphors embrace puns, riddles, puzzles, paradoxes and aporia to show that literary texts can be held neither to single manifestations of (ideological) principles nor to reductive claims concerning conventions and genres. Genuinely heuristic metaphors, it is implied, stress the co-availability of contradictory terms. Excluded middles are retrieved and (re)placed squarely within textual foregrounds. Post-structuralism speaks, *characteristically*, in other metaphors of openness and fields: networks, threads (tangled, perplexed, wound and unwound, followed and lost), wefts, weavings, de-weavings, ruptures, chiasmic zigzags, labyrinths. Unlike New Criticism's images of multiplexity, discovering always aesthetically integrated and closed text, post-structuralism's metaphors project an instable and open text. If one begins to read according to the splintered mosaics of post-structuralist theory, then certainties will become uncertainties, boundaries will tremble and collapse, enclosures will split open and explicit ideological location will turn into the illusive play of random position. Serious terms, their conceptual enclosures ruptured, metamorphose into playthings, keeping a serious use only under erasure. As Derrida argues, the problem of textual classification, genre, can never look the same. A genre must be seen to exemplify the delusion of boundaries (so congenial to normal interpretive models) as either a transient rigidification of the textual field or as a momentary lapse of the reader's attention.

Is "postmodernism" a genre? Is it only a label for an historical period? What kind of boundaries does it possess? Are there entities either within or without its boundaries that might be, preposterously, (re)placed? In this paper, I shall argue that postmodernism is peculiarly the nexus of boundaries that traverse

each other. The problem of boundaries has become central issue in many theoretical writings about literature. It is not merely that post-structuralism's metaphors evoke images of boundaries in various stages of disrepair and dissolution, but nearly all current theory does so as well. Bakhtin, for instance, might be said to have developed a literary theory that exclusively inhabits boundaries. For Bakhtin everything depends upon the kinds of transactions that are possible across boundaries: that divide languages, cultures, historical periods, speakers as well as the private, axiological worlds that their utterances entail. Narratology and semiotics concern themselves with the drawing of boundaries between signifying systems, codes, types of speech acts, levels of discourse, metonymic segments, shifts in voice or focalization. The pervasive emphasis upon boundaries (either the capacity, in theory, to draw them or the incapacity to do so) makes every cultural entity strange. The conceptual machinery exists to allow anyone to transgress all boundaries and, strapping on a propulsion system of mysterious benefit, to deduce oneself into a notional world of insubsistencies and insipidities. Once stable period-terms, such as "Renaissance," do not stand up well against either suspicion or proliferation with regard to boundaries. The Renaissance, which once fixed the demarcations for a period in European cultural history that ranged from Petrarch (or Giotto) to Milton, its boundaries essentially temporal if also cultural and national, now seems to designate a loosely intrathreaded cluster, like uncombable elf-knots, of discursive practices, ways of writing and otherwise employing symbols. (The true "Renaissance" person, hence, is the one whose symbology replicates, say, Spenser or Cervantes.) Postmodernism's utility and charm lies in focusing with dazzling exuberance the problem of boundaries. Whatever wanders within its nexus (and everything, anything at all, might) reflects, *nota notae*, the gargantuan incertitude of the whole.

Even graduate students at the University of Ultima Thule will have heard that "postmodernism" is a slipshod term. It does too much work, and thus no single task well. It lends itself, as E. A. Grosz remarks, to "evasion and ambiguity" (8). It has proved depressingly not to be "straightforwardly chronological" (Arac x-xi), but always displaying itself in remote times, embarrassingly

out of synch with its period-founded definition(s). Furthermore, despite its evasiveness, postmodernism has never admitted simple solutions, and no writer who uses the term may expect to be let off easily. (If there were academic prisons, where everyone's candidate for Worst Offender against the norms of clarity and good sense could be penned, the cells would rankle with theorists of the Postmodern.) To "have a position" on postmodernism seems to entail "not just to offer an analysis of its genesis and contours but to let the world know whether you are for it or against it, and in fairly bald terms" (Arac xii). One is likely to be held to standards higher, both for clarity and for theoretical acuity, than the topic itself will allow. What the graduate students at Ultima Thule may not know is that postmodernism bears within itself a nebulous frontier, an unmapped zone of bogs and tangled brush, between its uses as a period, and as an analytic-descriptive, term. It is a secret boundary that lies between radically disparate dimensions of experience, or between ways of perceiving that experience, that effectively blank out each other's vision. What (to invert Quine's dictum in this paper's epigraph) should one do faced with one label and diverse experiences? One may conflate, of course, and thus follow the normal course of writers on postmodernism when, or if, they admit this multiplicity. One may also, borrowing yet another phrase from Quine, play with the "fiction of sharp distinctions" (57).

More than any other insight into postmodernism, the students at Ultima Thule need to know that the disparate uses of the term drag along with them two separate, and differently organized, baggage-trains. As a concept, postmodernism (if it *is* a concept) unpacks in more than one manner. In effect, there are two distinct archives, two sets of relevant primary and secondary texts, behind the usage of "postmodern." As a period-term, it possesses a vast baggage of analysis that turns directly towards the state of Western culture either to describe the contours of popular and mass media expression or to highlight the cultural manifestations ("commodifications") of the most recent stage in the history of its industrial-economic infrastructure. The period, of course, is always NOW, this "post-age" (Ulmer), and many kinds of evidence are available to its cartographers. (An intelligent student now asks, "What

evidence would be irrelevant?" The brightest rejoins, "*How* could any evidence be irrelevant?") The essays collected in the recent *Postmodernism and Continental Philosophy* illustrate the voraciousness of the enterprise: all thinking about the present, the issues, the difficulties, all advertized solutions, coheres within the umbrella schema. This archive inspires analyses that slip towards reification, granting to "postmodern" a unitary hanging-togetherness that one would no longer cheerfully accord to, say, "Renaissance."

The first archive constructs postmodernism as this period-term, esurient in its consumption of evidence, exiguous in its production of interpretation, to name NOW. All culture reflects the economic forces that have created the conditions of its possibility: it shows, in the torsions of commodification, its acned etiology. "That the logic of commodification has come to structure every aspect of contemporary life, not least the culture-aesthetic," David Bennett writes, "is now a commonplace of periodizing theories of postmodernism" (17). What has happened, Fredric Jameson mordantly observes, is that "aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation" ("Postmodernism" 56). Fresh, novel-seeming commodities flood contemporary marketplaces driven forward by economic forecasts, the calibration of trends, the capitalist ferocity with regard to market-expansion. Jameson's analysis displayed, the graduate students at Ultima Thule can easily see that postmodernism is only a stage, a mere period, in the history of late capital ("Postmodernism" 60, 78). (It is not a purpose of this paper to argue that Jameson, or anyone, is *wrong*. No terrier-questions about, say, airplanes, for which commodity the technology of production is said to lag thirty or so years behind that of the drawing board, shall be allowed to slip in.) There are many echoes: postmodernist culture, Terry Eagleton writes, will "dissolve its own boundaries and become coextensive with ordinary commodified life itself, whose ceaseless exchanges and mutations in any case recognize no formal

frontiers which are not constantly transgressed" (141). Its boundaries slipping irreversibly into dissolution, postmodernism as an historical period shows, throughout its commodified culture, a number of bleak, downcasting characteristics. Jameson notes its depthlessness, its weakening of historicity, its "deep constitutive relationships" to new technologies, among other features and, in general, a pervasive "waning of affect" ("Postmodernism" 58, 61). Writers within the first archive seldom evince much enthusiasm for postmodernism. It is difficult to esteem artifacts that seem endlessly to repeat similar patterns and rules for combination, like bright little *lego* blocks, always remote, keeping their distance even while urging consumption. There is too much fragmentation, too much bittiness, all wan and inauthentic, and dark, implacable forces make things tick.

Neo-Marxism is not the only course run within the first archive. Jean-François Lyotard, whom Eagleton identifies as making "ageing-hippie points" (93), sees postmodernism as a descriptive term to designate the state of culture in the wake of all the "transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts" (xxiii), a culture for which all master narratives have decayed and ceased to grip. Though difficult to separate postmodernism from modernism in these terms, a sweeping overview of the NOW emerges with great clarity: many small narratives replace the large ones of the past, distinct language games, a kind of micro-ludism, crowd the playfield. Only a slight lateral shift reveals the bizarre playfield of the NOW that Jean Baudrillard has discovered: a discursive space wholly filled, jampacked indeed, with images, simulations, displacements of "reality." Simulation, he writes, is the "generation of models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" ("Simulacra" 166). A "precession of simulacra" maps and, in so doing, engenders the territory of the present. The age of simulations is also, it seems, the age of the disappearance of history which, like dead trees in certain societies, now commands only "symbolic necessity," killed by stupefaction and the mithridatization in the face of too many images and too much information, though still capable of supporting the weight of a few victims ("The Year 2000" 27, 20-21). These are not all the same thing, the most perceptive

students will point out, and they make quite different claims upon one's powers for cognitive synthesis. Yet they do agree upon the fragmentary discreteness of the postmodern NOW, its tentacular technologies and mind-numbing replications. They agree that it is something new (though anticipated, always already, from the industrial revolution and the origins of international capitalism), even if "fresh" might not be *quite* the term. Theories of postmodernism as an historical period, Bennett writes, "rather than as aesthetic genre or style typically entail a notion of cultural *coupure*" in which the present is updated in, and by, defamiliarization (30). If postmodernism is considered as a period, and not as "aesthetic genre or style," then it will have to be mapped in fairly stark colours with large, heavily marked (though perhaps wholly illusive) boundaries.

The second archive constructs postmodernism as a highly flexible analytic-descriptive term capable of isolating conventions, devices and techniques across the range of all the cultural products (though architecture, painting and fiction seem privileged) that can be caught in a widely flung transnational net. Postmodern, in the writings of the second archive, is very much an "aesthetic genre or style" and very little a period term. Both Ihab Hassan and Linda Hutcheon, in their many discussions of postmodernism, have used the term in this sense. Postmodernism, Hassan writes, is (in contrast to modernism) "playful, paratactical and deconstructionist . . . it recalls the spirit of the avant-garde, and so carries sometimes the label of neo-avant garde" (91). Its playfulness is "the vice and joy of postmodernism" (105). Postmodernist art forms, thrusting their play into the foreground, constituting it as a dominant, are normally seen as "fundamentally self-reflexive . . . self-consciously art (or artifice)" in that there is no mistaking them (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 1). There is no illusion of translucency, no pretence of windowness, to delude the reader/viewer, but only the hard intellectual work of playing intricate formal games. The sense that postmodernism involves play, or is perhaps *essentially* play, seems widespread within the second archive as a positive, even laudatory, judgement upon style and mannerisms. (Writers in the first archive may also discern a playfulness in postmodernism, but they are more likely to judge this

negatively, as trivial or misdirected.) Allen Thiher, discussing the "play of language within language" that characterizes postmodernism, argues that the "postmodern lives in a world in which play has become a generalized and shared therapeutic metaphor to describe the ontology of both language and fiction" (160). As a stylistic or generic term, postmodernism does more or less the same conceptual work that another term, "metafiction," performs ("*see also* metafiction," advises the entry on postmodernism in the index to Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody*) and thus invites one, in Quine's phrase, to "cast about for a distinction."

The distinction, even for those with a gift for that special fiction, has not been easy to locate. At the University of Ultima Thule, the graduate students, an ordinarily well-intentioned group, manifest signs of irritation at the task. They understand metafiction well enough, and can recognize that Renaissance texts, such as *Hamlet* or *Don Quijote*, while full of *it*, are paradoxically lacking in postmodernism.[2] As an epithet to label style(s), postmodern, applying to architecture or zoögraphics as well as to fiction, encompasses more than metafiction. However, as the inventor of the term, William H. Gass, remarks, it is easy to join "meta" to words, creating, as desire prompts, any number of "lingos to converse about lingos" (24). The "meta" terms creep up on postmodernism ("metadrama," of course, "metacinema," "metafilm" or, as you like it, "metavideo"), swamping its greater utility and scope. The most viable distinction appears to be, after all, the appeal to culture. Writers in the second archive do refer to postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon, though not consistently or with any precise model of culture in mind. "We live," Hassan writes, "in a time of political terrorism, moral improvisation, spiritual *bricolage*" (196). There is no mechanism behind this appeal to culture, no bogey of international capitalism, neither a myth of History's inevitable on-goingness nor of its unlamented end, but merely the bare postulate of a determining "culture." (*Why* is our age one of political terrorism? Are the spiritual *bricoleurs* to be found everywhere? Only in New Age religions? In Islam or the Roman Catholic Church as well? Hassan does not ask these questions.) Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction*, a concise encyclopedia of the second archive, formulates an hypothesis of cultural oscillation

in which historical periods shift between epistemological and on-
tological ages. In an ontological age, writers become preoccupied
with the creation of fictional worlds (and care less how worlds
come to be known, or about the cognitive difficulties they raise)
and fashion complex, bevelled texts that incorporate plural world-
hoods. Modernism reflects an epistemological dominant; postmod-
ernism, an ontological dominant. "In postmodernist texts . . .
epistemology is *backgrounded*, as the price for foregrounding on-
tology" (*Postmodernist* 11). There is no mechanism behind Mc-
Hale's model anymore than behind Hassan's. All fictions project
"worlds," but some, in an age when an ontological dominant
operates, such as this postmodern one, do so "in full view and in
slow motion" only, it may be, abruptly to suspend the world-
making process (McHale, "Telling Postmodernist Stories" 563),
but *why* this should be so remains defocused. The shifts, it must
appear, simply occur, known *post hoc* through the formal, stylistic
properties of the texts that they make possible.

One possesses, thus, in "postmodern," a term that both con-
flates disparate ways of talking and discongruent bodies of evi-
dence, but also promotes superfluous distinctions. No one who
shaves with Ockham's razor would invest a penny's worth of
energy in its uncertain rewards. Yet recent literary and cultural
theory has returned obsessively to its lure. Taming postmodernism,
making it assume subservient, domestic positions, often seems to
be, if not the only, the best game in town. Jameson claims that his
pluralistic approach to postmodernism has been an attempt to
"outflank" it ("Regarding Postmodernism" 54), though his fierce
charge through all the thickets might rather seem to be an attempt
to capture it definitively. (The famous *New Left Review* essay is
more a cage, an almost-sealed yet leaky pen, than an ambush.) I
want now to propose an altogether different approach to post-
modernism: confront it (that is, the diverse kinds of evidence that
"it" constellates) as an educational challenge. Postmodernism is a
paradigm-case of the problem of boundaries and slipping catego-
ries: collapsing borders, fuzzy sets and unmappable zones. For the
inveterate collector of literary nomenclature, it is the true Disney-
world.

The two archives overlap and coincide. They form this nexus not only because they appeal to some of the same evidence, but also because whatever becomes evidence (for either archive) can be analyzed in both ways. (After all, the world does not naturally brim with evidence. Jameson does leave his Californian home each morning to wade knee-deep in evidence. What becomes evidence is always argument's kidnapped child.) I shall look at a short tale in Angela Carter's 1979 collection, *The Bloody Chamber*. All the narratives in this collection retell traditional European folktales from a feminist perspective imbued with psychoanalytic insights. All the tales in *The Bloody Chamber* are artful, resonant with the allusive interplay of other texts, perhaps "wan" in their affects; all, powerful in their historicity, in their awareness of human temporality within its socio-cultural chains. I shall argue that the tale I have chosen to discuss, "Lady of The House of Love," exemplifies the nexus of intersecting archives. On its surface, the tale seems to possess only those properties that writers of the second archive esteem. It is heavily overcoded and calls upon a number of intertextual frames. It is a piece of fiction "about" fiction in which, without explicitly citing a specific antecedent fiction, a large number of motifs associated with vampire tales are playfully reprised. The actual title is itself overcoded. It calls to mind the houses in Medieval literature (e.g., "The House of Fame") or the allegorical houses in works such as *The Faerie Queene* but also such common frames as manor houses, family properties that descend through generations, and brothels. The "lady" of the title suggests the aristocratic associations inherent in the notion of a "house" such as the doomed Lady of Shallot. The title turns out to be ironic and that, too, is the kind of textualist duplicity that appeals to the second archive. Surely, it would seem that this is the kind of fiction that makes writers of the first archive despondent and grimly judgemental, that flaunts its depthlessness, that shows the "certain flatness" that Jameson finds in the art of this late capitalist period ("Regarding Postmodernism" 30), that promotes pastiche at the expense of parody and that actively displaces historicity by the "play of random stylistic allusion," by (in some sense) intertextuality ("Postmodernism" 64-66). "Lady of The House of Love" displays, surely, the "waning of affect" that Jame-

son laments. Yet, for all that it is formally decontextualized and transnational in its orientation, the tale clamorously proclaims its recognition of context, its historicity.

I shall begin by giving the "story" in a series of basic narrative macropropositions in order to show the *fabula* as clearly as possible. It is early in this century. A beautiful young woman lives in an old castle. She is a vampire. She is the daughter of Nosferatu. She feeds on young men. An old woman helps her find young men to devour. She is always ravenous. She does not like to kill young men. She would like to be human. A young, beautiful Englishman arrives. He is an officer in the British army. He rides a bicycle. He is invited into the castle and given a meal. The vampire turns up the card of the Lover in her Tarot deck. She falls in love with the Englishman. He is innocent and heroic. He wishes to help the young woman whom he perceives as a sickly, underfed child. She invites him to bed. He follows because he fears for her health. He would like only to protect her. She breaks her glasses. She cuts her finger on a shard of glass. He kisses the wound as, he believes, her mother would have done. He puts her to bed and sleeps on the floor with his jacket for a pillow. In the morning she is dead. He returns to Bucharest. In Bucharest he receives a telegram ordering him to rejoin his regiment. He discovers that, unknowingly, he has carried with him a black rose that he had found on the young woman's dead body. It is still fragrant. His regiment embarks for France.

Carter makes full use of literary resonances. One could say, using an older terminology, that she plays with literary allusions, or, using the analytic lexicon of semiotics, that she requires the reader to bring numerous "intertextual frames" to bear. At one point, the beautiful daughter of Nosferatu is actually called "the tenebrous belle." The archaic phrase, in its very archaism, does the job of calling for a frame drawn from the previous reading of literature. (It should call to mind Romance writing in general, a very specific poem by John Keats, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," or even the strong associations in French literature with the word from which derives "tenebrous" — *tenebre, tenebreux* — a word much loved by French poets of the latter nineteenth century.) Consider the way Carter begins her narrative. The number of

stylistically self-conscious words with literary associations, the heavy overcoding, is evidentially explicit:

> At last the revenants become so troublesome the peasants abandoned the village and it fell solely into the possession of subtle and vindictive inhabitants who manifest their presences by shadows that fall almost imperceptibly awry, too many shadows, even at midday, shadows that have no source in anything visible; by the sound, sometimes, of sobbing in a derelict bedroom where a cracked mirror suspended from a wall does not reflect a presence; by a sense of unease that will afflict the traveller unwise enough to pause to drink from the fountain in the square that still gushes spring water from a faucet stuck in the lion's mouth. A cat prowls in a weedy garden; he grins and spits, arches his back, bounces away from an intangible on four fear-stiffened legs. Now all shun the village below the chateau in which the beautiful somnabulist helplessly perpetuates her ancestral crimes.
>
> Wearing an antique bridal gown, the beautiful queen of the vampires sits all alone in her dark, high house under the eyes of the portraits of her demented and atrocious ancestors, each one of whom, through her, projects a baleful posthumous existence; she counts out the Tarot cards, ceaselessly construing a constellation of possibilities as if the random fall of the cards on the red plush tablecloth before her could precipitate her from her chill, shuttered room into a country of perpetual summer and obliterate the perennial sadness of a girl who is both death and a maiden.
>
> Her voice is filled with distant sonorities, like reverberations in a cave. . . . Her hair falls down like tears.   (93)

The "distant sonorities" that fill her voice also fill the narrative. I shall cite only one example. Cats seem to have, perhaps quite unfairly, a bad reputation in popular literature, but Carter makes this cat perform a double role: it both fits into the pattern of supernatural allusions as a vehicle or agent and *also* registers the environment by showing fear. Later in the narrative, Carter re-employs the cat image to define the English officer. As he follows "Nosferatu's sanguinary rosebud" into her bedroom, "He was struck, once again, by the birdlike, predatory claws which tipped her marvellous hands; the sense of strangeness that had been growing on him since he buried his head under the streaming water in the village, since he entered the dark portals of the fatal castle, now fully overcame him. Had he been a cat, he would have bounced backwards from her hands on four fear-stiffened legs, but

he is not a cat: he is a hero" (103). Such heavy allusiveness marks a *literary* narrative, a manifestation of High Art as pastiche, an intelligent, self-conscious instance of the literary effects writers of the second archive admire. Even the young English officer is, it seems, an overcoded character from other stories. He is innocent and several times Carter emphasizes his "virginity." She does not call attention to the virginity of Nosferatu's daughter, though that epithet would describe her as well: as they enter the bedroom together, ". . . she keeps up a front of inconsequential chatter in French while her ancestors leer and grimace on the walls; however hard she tries to think of any other, she only knows one kind of consummation" (103). The English officer is as innocent as a hero in a child's romance ("he does not yet know what there is to be afraid of"), or, indeed, like many of the great heroes of older romance forms, like, say, Perceval, Galahad or Red Cross Knight. He is, thus, a special kind of hero, one who can encounter Evil and, having no secret evil hidden in his mind, remain untouched.

Carter's English hero is so pure that he cannot recognize the evil that Nosferatu's daughter represents. He does not even seem to realize that the invitation into her bedroom is, superficially at least, an invitation to sexual pleasure. Carter describes his state of mind as he enters her bedroom: "Then he padded into the boudoir, his mind busy with plans. We shall take her to Zürich, to a clinic; she will be treated for nervous hysteria. Then to an eye specialist, for her photophobia, and to a dentist to put her teeth into better shape. Any competent manicurist will deal with her claws. We shall turn her into the lovely girl she is; I shall cure her of all these nightmares" (107). When he kisses her bleeding finger, he does so thinking of himself as doing only what her mother would have done, and the ironic reversal of roles is lost on him, though not upon the reader who has brought the correct intertextual frames to the task.

One might very well wonder how such an artful narrative — so bursting with its self-conscious craftiness, its elaborate literariness, its allusions, its coded phrases in French ("suivez moi," "vous serez ma proi") — could do anything but fulfil the postmodernist criteria of literature as, among so many other things, the "play of language within language." Carter's tale is transnational, de-

contextualized, formal in all respects. Or is it? Consider some of the questions that anyone might ask whose literary interests were contextual.

First, consider the narrative's explicit setting. Carter sets the action in the Transylvania of traditional vampire legends. However, she also specifies it as a part of Romania and Bucharest, the national capital, is cited. Is there significance to this part of Europe other than as the traditional locale of vampires? Should one remember, or forget, the history of Eastern Europe prior to the First World War? Second, Carter both obliquely and then precisely indicates the time of the narrative. The young English officer is introduced in this manner: "One hot, ripe summer in the pubescent years of the present century, a young officer in the British army, blond, blue-eyed, heavy-muscled, visiting friends in Vienna, decided to spend the remainder of his furlough exploring the little-known uplands of Romania" (97). In the conclusion, it is stated exactly that "his regiment embarked for France" (108). Should one pursue, or neglect, the apparent suggestion that this was the summer of 1914, the final calm before the Great War began? Should one note, as good readers, that the soldier leaves from Vienna for his trip? Is it important that Vienna was the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, of which Romania was a part? Third, should one make anything of the bicycle? It is, to be sure, a mode of transportation that a young Englishman in 1914 *might have* chosen. Still, it is forcefully, unmistakably even, encoded into the text. It is mentioned repeatedly and more than once described as "rational." Should one infer, or neglect, the apparent allusion to England's advanced technology and industrial power? Perhaps one should infer that the narrative, in part anyway, seems to deal with the contrast between English "rationality" and Eastern European superstition? It is important to remember that the First World War pitted industrial nations against one another and that, in the up-shot, Europe was transformed. The future was shown to have been on the side of technology and industrialization, not superstition, not tradition. The dilapidation and decay of the village and the vampire's castle suggests something further. When the young Englishman is escorted to meet Nosferatu's daughter, he is surprised "to find how ruinous the interior of the house was —

cobwebs, worm-eaten beams, crumbling plaster" (100) and later, bending to pick up the Tarot cards that she has let slip in her surprise at seeing him, he is once more surprised to see that the carpet "was part rotted away, partly encroached upon by all kinds of virulent-looking fungi" (101). The reader, having (in this case) the right extratextual frames, would find it difficult to read the tale's physical descriptions and *not* think about European civilization prior to the War — that "old bitch gone in the teeth" as Ezra Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley remarks. Fourth, the reader may also try to look into the extra-textual future of the narrative. One may infer that the narrative is about death in a wider sense than seems evident at first. The vampire kills passing shepherds and lustful, but careless, young men who wander through the deserted village, and she herself dies, but the narrative also implies the more massive, and the more significant, deaths that occurred in the War. The very class to which the young English-man belongs was wiped nearly out. His own death in the war, implicit in the conclusion, may represent the much larger national catastrophe, or, at least, the reader may draw this inference. The fruit of that War, for England as well as for the Continent, was the decimation of an entire generation and a social class.

What should the reader make of the black rose? If one reads the narrative only as a "formalist" (pejorative epithet of uncer-tain range) analyzing motifs, discovering patterns, one might see it as a sexual symbol. Nosferatu's daughter actually imagines that she will hand it to him with just that significance: "And I leave you as a souvenir the dark, fanged rose I plucked from between my thighs, like a flower laid on a grave. On a grave" (107). Strikingly over-coded (overdetermined, in the specifically psychoanalytic sense), the black rose is also a symbol of difference, of isolation and lone-liness. Thus Patrick White, in his *The Aunt's Story*, uses the sym-bol of the black rose to express Theodora Goodman's isolation, her radical set-apartness. She bears it with her into madness and captivity. A black rose may also be, as the liturgical colour for grief, mourning, and penitence, a symbol of death. The English-man, one remembers, carries it with him as he embarks for France. The symbol of the black rose, so explicitly sexual, asserts the tale's

historicity, its recognition of the bleak forwardness of human temporality.

There are many more contextual questions that a reader might either ignore or neglect. The castle of vampires itself, one might observe, contains not merely decay, but relationships of subordination and subservience. Carter's narrative concerns power. It is marginally about the power of a feudal class over peasants and servants. It is made quite clear that the relationship of the castle to the village is a feudal one. The servant within the castle seems unmistakably bound feudally to the House of Nosferatu. If one reads more closely, it is possible to perceive an even more important hierarchy of subordinations. The beautiful vampire does not like to kill, she would like, somehow, to be human. (It is the sheer impossibility of being human, of responding to kindness with kindness, or of exchanging love for love, that seems to kill her.) Here is how Carter describes her state of mind:

> All day, she lies in her coffin in her négligé of blood-stained lace. When the sun drops behind the mountain, she yawns and stirs and puts on the only dress she has, her mother's wedding dress, to sit and read her cards until she grows hungry. She loathes the food she eats; she would have liked to take the rabbits home with her, feed them on lettuce, pet them and make them a nest in her red-and-black chinoiserie escritoire, but hunger always overcomes her. She sinks her teeth into the neck where an artery throbs with fear; she will drop the deflated skin from which she has extracted all the nourishment with a small cry of both pain and disgust. And it is the same with the shepherd boys and gipsy lads. . . .   (96)

What power makes her do what she loathes? The answer seems to be symbolized by the leering, grinning ancestral portraits that are mentioned more than once. The weight of tradition chains her to her loathed fate. However, this tradition does not seem to be identical with the decaying tradition of European political power, concentrated in the Vienna that was the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The narrative explicitly identifies the beautiful vampire's male line of descent: ". . . her claws and teeth have been sharpened on centuries of corpses, she is the last bud of the poison tree that sprang from the loins of Vlad the Impaler who picnicked on corpses in the forests of Transylvania" (94). When her father was killed, staked out at a crossroads by an Orthodox

priest while she was still a baby, he cried: "Nosferatu is dead; long live Nosferatu" (95). A tradition has fallen upon her, and the narrative is quite unmistakable that it is a male tradition. She is subordinated, within her decaying castle ("[d]epredations of rot and fungus everywhere" [94]), dressed in her "antique" wedding gown, to a tradition established, and maintained, by men. The leering, ancestral portraits forcefully incorporate this male tradition into the narrative.

Carter's "Lady of The House of Love" demonstrates that, even when the text appears crystalline in its artfulness, evidently hostile to "real" human issues, such as history and temporality, there will be conclusions for the contextualist to draw. Once the right questions have been posed, the narrative shows that it is about more than the sad fate of vampires, more even than the sad fate of empires and armies. It is also about the fate of women in a patriarchal world. It is about power, and who, in such a world, normally possesses power. The wedding dress, seen from a contextualist perspective, becomes more than a pathetic element in the theatrical setting of rot and decay, more even than a crafty allusion (salient in the intertextual welter, Miss Havisham mysteriously smiles) to other texts. Once the narrative's feminist preoccupations and concerns have been identified, the wedding dress emerges abruptly as the most poignant motif of all: the symbol of women's voicelessness, subordination and narrowly limited expectations, their unelected social roles handed down, in a patriarchal society. One may certainly argue that Carter uses history in a "destabilizing" manner, problematizing without interpreting, as Hutcheon writes of *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* ("Postmodern Problematizing" 380), equally a positive or a negative textual property (depending upon the archive), but it is also the case that a genuine concern for human deprivation, what has not found fulfilment in history, pervades the text.

Postmodernism designates a nexus of intersecting discourses, constituting separate archives, each largely blind to opposed discursive formations. It exemplifies the fruitfulness of post-structuralist metaphors that project splintered, instable textual mosaics in which all categories, both genres and periods, will display the decay of boundaries and, inevitably, their degenerescence. It also

shows the relevance of those other metaphors about boundaries that characteristically play important roles in Bakhtin's thinking: metaphors in which alien languages confront each other in public fora, in which different speakers, bearing with them dissimilar axiological worlds, exchange utterances, seeking meanings that will never reside exclusively in either's speech. Mocking the duplicitous "fiction of sharp distinctions" (behind, or beyond, the ineluctably fuzzy borders of which stuff falls, and then falls again), postmodernism offers the opportunity to read both texts and culture with "parted eye" in which, as Hermia exclaims in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, everything "seems double" (Shakespeare 241). It is an opportunity, and neither a catastrophe nor a punishment for the fallen *gerede* that one must speak, since the possibilities for reflexivity, for self-consciously inscribing the problematic of one's own explorations, are always exciting. For the time being, it may be the most provocative, splendidly liminal specimen of what Howard Felperin calls the "slippery grounds of discourse" (123) available. And, as a discursive nexus, it continues to open towards multiplex investigations.

NOTES

1 This is not the place to analyze the paradoxicality inherent to the classificatory procedures of museums. In "The Discourse of Museums," I discuss some aspects of the duplicity of collections and the appeal of this doublesidedness for two postmodern writers, Murray Bail and Robert Kroetsch. Precisely because they unselfconsciously encode the aporia of sets, categories and boundaries, museums (or the idea of a museum) have become a *topos* of post-structuralist thinking and (some) postmodernist writing. See Donato; Stewart.

2 A cursory examination of *DAI* for the years 1983 to 1986 (vols. 43-46) reveals that there were nine Ph.D. theses written on "postmodernism" during those years. For the most part they deal with individual writers, such as Richard Brautigan, Iris Murdoch, Robert Creeley and Lord Byron(!), but there are also theses devoted to postmodernist fantasy, drama, dramatic theory and Paraguayan poetry. All these theses appear to have been written from within the second archive, using "postmodern" as a totalizing term for the sum of metafictional techniques and focusing upon "innovative literature." Only Jerry Andrew Varsava's thesis shows, in its abstract, a recognition of the first archive, and then only to refute it.

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