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THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY, OR, INTERTEXTUAL TRAVEL AND ANGELA CARTER'S DE/CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY

by

Karen Jane Engle 

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of English

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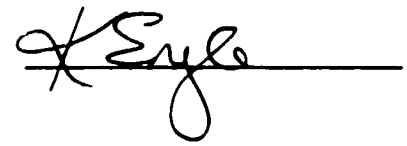

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Do not think that one has to be sad in order to be militant, even though the thing one is fighting is abominable. It is the connection of desire to reality (and not its retreat into the forms of representation) that possesses revolutionary force.

Michel Foucault, Preface to Anti-Oedipus (xiii-xiv)

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Through A Glass Darkly, Or, Intertextual Travel and Angela Carter's De/Constructions of Identity** submitted by **Karen Jane Engle** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Arts**.

Dr. Daphne Read

Dr. Teresa Zackodnik

Dr. Nasrin Rahimieh

August 16, 1999

For Dr. Shelley King, who showed me Carter in the first place.

Abstract

Deconstruction, revision and renewal are the underlying themes of this project on intertextuality in the fiction of Angela Carter. I have selected two short stories and one novel to explore Carter's feminist intertextual methodology. Although strikingly different in feeling, "The Erl-King," "The Scarlet House," and Nights at the Circus all insistently demystify notions of pure origins and, through these demystifications, re-figure identity as an ongoing, shifting act of narration. In the first and third chapters respectively, I read "The Erl-King" and Nights at the Circus and explore how female characters navigate past literary formulations of Womanhood and re-narrate themselves by revising past texts. The second chapter examines Carter's subversive re-presentation of Woman's castration from her origins in "The Scarlet House."

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I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Daphne Read, for her tremendous support -- both intellectual and personal -- throughout this process. Also, I am grateful to Dr. Teresa Zackodnik for her invaluable insights and suggestions.

Finally, I must acknowledge my parents, without whom I would never have begun this project, let alone seen its completion.

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Introduction: Bovine Ruminations

"We live in Gothic times," Carter writes in her Afterword to Fireworks (Burning Your Boats 460). She describes the Gothic as "cruel tales, tales of wonder, tales of terror, fabulous narratives that deal directly with the imagery of the unconscious -- mirrors; the externalised self; forsaken castles; haunted forests; forbidden sexual objects" (459). Its grand themes are incest and cannibalism and it "deals entirely with the profane" (459). She defines the "singular moral function" of the Gothic tradition as the provocation of "unease" (459).

Small wonder that incest, cannibalism and unease abound in Carter's writing. From the beautiful and compassionate love between a brother and sister in The Magic Toyshop, to the horrible sexual relationship of a father and daughter in "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter," to Colonel Kearney's ironic charges of cannibalism in Nights at the Circus, Carter retains and re-presents these grand, dark themes. Dis-ease is central to her fiction, and she produces it with such exquisite linguistic performances that readers are by turns surprised, confounded and paralyzed by the sublime horror of her imagination. Her writing is a perfect example of the cannibalistic ethos: ardent followers of Carter attest to a never quite satiated hunger for her baroque inscriptions.

Or, rather, her re-inscriptions.

One of the most fascinating things about Carter's writing is her extraordinary capacity for re-imagining literary themes and images. In "Notes from the Front Line," she describes her methodology as a ransacking and debunking of diverse mythologies:

> I feel free to loot and rummage in an official past, specifically a literary past, but I like painting and sculptures and the movies and folklore and heresies, too. This past . . . is a vast repository of outmoded lies, where you can check out what lies used to be à la mode and find the old lies on which new lies have been based. (41)

Carter's looting of the archives marks her writing as a form of *bricolage*. *Bricolage*, as Jacques Derrida describes,

> builds its castles with debris . . . the discourse of *bricolage* can confess itself, confess in itself its desire and its defeat, provoke the thought of the essence and the necessity of the already-there, recognize that the most radical discourse, the most inventive and systematic engineer are surprised and circumvented by a history, a language, etc., a *world* . . . from which they must borrow their tools, if only to destroy the former machine of war or the hunt, constructed to destroy. (Of Grammatology 139)

Carter is a *bricoleuse* par excellence. She builds her Gothic castles out of the ruins of Western culture and, through her re-constructions, sabotages its mythologies.[1] Salman Rushdie describes Carter's intertextual *bricolage* in his introduction to Burning Your Boats, writing: "Baudelaire, Poe, *Dream*-Shakespeare, Hollywood, panto, fairy tale: Carter wears her influences openly, for she is their deconstructionist, their saboteur. She takes what we know and, having broken it, puts it together in her own spiky, courteous way" (xiv).

Carter describes this revisionist strategy in a curious metaphor: "just keep on chewing the cud" ("Notes from the Front" 41).[2] "Chewing the cud" refers to the unique digestion process of cows. During digestion, of course, the consumed product is transformed -- its structure breaks down and dissolves into disparate elements. In cows, this process occurs over an extended period of time by virtue of their three stomachs; food breaks down into both nutritive and waste products through multiple cyclings from one stomach to another.

As a bodily process, the cow's digestive system is an apt metaphor for Carter's revisionist work. Carter re-works the body of Western literature, often

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[1] Carter's intertextuality is not limited to the Western tradition. Fireworks, for example, emerged in part from the time she spent living in Japan.

[2] "Chewing the cud" is an image Friedrich Nietzsche invokes by way of disclaimer in his prefatory remarks in On the Genealogy of Morality. Describing the art of reading, he writes:

> I admit that you need one thing above all in order to practice the requisite *art* of reading, a thing which today people have been so good at forgetting -- and so it will be some time before my writings are "readable" -- you almost need to be a cow for this one thing and certainly *not* a "modern man": it is *rumination*. (10).

I suspect that Carter's allusion to cows and their extended digestion process is a reference to Nietzsche's Genealogy, for her method of bricolage is decidedly genealogical. She proposes a historiographical model of "descent" and knits relations of power to the "writing of history." See Michel de Certeau's The Writing of History for a useful critique of historiographical practice and Michel Foucault's "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" for his analysis of Nietzsche's Genealogy.

through material manipulations. Flesh is a prime tool in her deconstructions. She removes diverse mythologies from the abstract by situating them within the body; it is a process of disturbing literalization. In "'Is She Fact or Is She Fiction?': Angela Carter and the Enigma of Woman," Anne Fernihough cites Carter's assertion that "she likes to 'reduce everything to its material base'" (102). "The Scarlet House," Carter's horrific re-presentation of Sadeian pornographic conventions, is a perfect example of her materialist deconstructions. Through the figure of Madame Schreck, Carter attacks Freud's conception that Woman's identity and development are grounded in her castration. The tale is constructed around "the unimaginable wound of [Madame Schreck's] sex" which the narrator characterizes as "the mouth of an oracular cave" (421, 424). Schreck's horrific wound materializes the horror of castrated Womanhood and the violence it performs against female subjectivity.

To merge the sexual with the geological, Carter's brand of *bricolage* is an unending process of erection and erosion. Traveling through literary, philosophical and psychoanalytic archives, she attacks the phallicism of Western traditions -- "going straight for the testicles" -- and undermines, uproots and destabilizes their shaky foundations ("Notes from the Front" 38). Her texticular attacks do not, however, replace phallicism with images of women and wolves running together, notions of mother goddesses or appeals for "Ur-religions." In The Sadeian Woman, Carter writes that "[m]other goddesses are just as silly a notion as father gods," and explains in an interview that at the time

of writing her book on Sade, she "was getting really ratty with the whole idea of myth . . . [and] the sort of appeals by some of the women's movements to have these sorts of 'Ur-religions' because it didn't seem to me at all the point. The point seemed to be the here and now, what we should do now" (SW 5; "Interview with Anna Katsavos" 13).

There are no utopias and no teleologies in Carter's fiction; there is only revision. In Nights at the Circus, Lizzie's stolid materialism (her favourite opera? "*Marriage of Figaro*, for the class analysis") illustrates Carter's anti-utopian vision (53). Responding to Fevvers' hysterical New-Womanish idealism that "once the old world has turned on its axle so that the new dawn can dawn, then, ah, then! all the women will have wings, the same as I . . . The dolls' house doors will open, the brothels will spill forth their prisoners", Lizzie ripostes: "It's going to be more complicated than that . . . This old witch sees through a glass, darkly. You improve your analysis, girl, and then we'll discuss it" (285-86). Correspondingly (and definitely parodically), Lizzie shrewdly describes her anti-utopian perspective through the resurrection and revision of Saint Paul's nostalgic description of Man's [sic] present disconnection from perfect knowledge, and His eventual unification with the unmediated pure presence of YHWH: "[f]or now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Carter's anti-utopic vision also results in a persistent refusal of narrative closure. Her formal endings are characterized by an incompleteness which marks the infinite possibilities for intertextual re-combination and declares the

need for more work to be done. Carter's short story "The Erl-King" concludes with the protagonist's as yet unrealized imagination of a murderous end to her crisis of subjectivity. Similarly, in "The Scarlet House," the imprisoned narrator concludes the tale by affirming her ongoing narrative resistance to the Count's psycho-sexual tortures: "This world's a vile oubliette. Yet in its refuse I will find the key to free me" (428). The open-endedness of both stories insists on the impossibility of exiting discursive formations and the consequent need for strategies of resistance. In each tale, Carter proposes the strategy of narrative revisionism.

Carter's refusal of narrative closure is complemented by her destabilization of Platonic discourses of the origin. Foucault's discussion of the origin in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" links it with the language of essences and truth:

> [T]he pursuit of the origin . . . is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities . . . . The origin always precedes the Fall. It comes before the body, before the world and time . . . . The final postulate of the origin is linked to the first two in being the site of truth. (142-43)

Carter's writing opposes the origin at every turn. Her fiction persistently declares that there is no essence to identity, no escape from the body, no outside to time or space and no site of Absolute Truth.

I have selected two short stories and one novel to explore Carter's deconstructive *bricolage*. Although strikingly different in feeling, "The Erl-King," "The Scarlet House," and Nights at the Circus all insistently demystify the origin and, through these demystifications, re-figure identity as an ongoing, shifting act of narration. My specific focus in this thesis is the relation of the origin to literary and philosophical formulations of female identity. In the first and third chapters respectively, I read "The Erl-King" and Nights at the Circus and explore how female characters navigate past literary formulations of Womanhood and re-narrate themselves by revising past texts. The second chapter examines Carter's subversive representation of Woman's castration from her origins in "The Scarlet House."

In the first chapter, "Lost in the Woods, Found in the Labyrinth: Imagining the Subject of Intertextuality in 'The Erl-King,'" I read "The Erl-King" as pastiche, a text composed of other texts. By constructing the story from a myriad of fragments -- borrowing her tools from Western cultural archives -- Carter signals the impossibility of a single, pure origin. In this tale, the girl-narrator's desire for self-representation is complicated both by the Erl-King's attempts to entrap her and by the proliferation of literary constructions of Woman she encounters in the labyrinthine woods. The protagonist resists the Erl-King's desire to ensnare her by imagining a different ending to Robert Browning's poem "Porphyria's Lover." Significantly, her resistant revision occurs at the tale's ending and is narrated in the future tense, thereby signaling its incompleteness. While I argue that this

incomplete revision marks the impossibility of the girl's subjectivity within the Erl-King's realm, it also, as I will show, more hopefully illustrates Carter's anti-teleological orientation.

I pursue Carter's anti-teleological refusal of both beginnings and endings in the second chapter, "Tracing a Condition: Carter's Re-Presentation of Pornography in 'The Scarlet House.'" In this story, the origin is linked with memory and narrative. Battling a sadistic Count's attempts to obliterate her memory through psycho-sexual torture, the female narrator re-formulates her absent origins as a space of textual resistance. Relinquishing the quest for her authentic history, the captive woman constructs a series of inter-related tales from her residual store of mnemonics and transforms the void in her memory into a narrative strategy of survival. Using Derrida's description of the movement of différance as a "strategy without finality," I argue that the female narrator's ceaseless re-combination of textual threads is a resistant and hopeful response to the tortures of the Scarlet House ("Différance" 111). Because of the horrific conditions in which she deploys her mnemonic strategy, Carter's representation of the protagonist's unending self-narration is ultimately ambivalent. Nevertheless, "The Scarlet House's" refusal of finality resonates with the conclusion of "The Erl-King"; both suggest that self-representation is necessarily and thankfully always already incomplete. In "The Scarlet House," the girl-narrator's need to continually re-construct her story mirrors Carter's intertextual project of telling and re-telling the old myths, lies and stories.

For the reader, hope emerges in Carter's fiction by abandoning the search for authentic origins, unified subjects and hermetically sealed narratives. Through this relinquishment, the reader is transported to a vantage point which Derrida describes as "the other side of nostalgia" ("Différance" 127). In the third and final chapter, "Life in the Intertext: Revisions of Identity in Nights at the Circus," I explore Carter's anti-nostalgic and frolicking hopefulness in Nights at the Circus. The novel is a carnivalesque celebration of identity as fragmented, performative and constantly under revision. Through Fevvers, the story's marvelous and hybrid heroine, Carter de/constructs identity and desanctifies the origin. On the first page, Nights returns to the "origins" of the Western canon -- Greek literature -- and re-tells the story of Leda and the swan. This re-telling both refuses the construction of Greek literature as classical and pure origin, and establishes the novel's larger project of rupturing the equation between identity and essence.

Carter's repeated return to and revision of origins invokes notions of travel. In each chapter, I explore travel and mobility in relation to the female protagonists' navigation through representation and self-representation. I use "The Erl-King's" description of the woods as a mutable and "subtle labyrinth" to imagine the girl narrator traveling through literary history and re-working its images of Woman (186). I pursue this labyrinthine model of revision in "The Scarlet House." In contrast to the girl-narrator's physical mobility in "The Erl-King," the protagonist of "The Scarlet House" is denied physical movement. Her

mobility is exclusively psychical: she resists the Count's attacks by traveling through "the labyrinths inside [her] head" (425). I conclude my explorations of travel and the labyrinth in the final chapter by arguing that Fevvers' spatial and temporal mobility mirrors Carter's labyrinthine model of intertextuality. The labyrinth is simultaneously a structure of circumscribed and boundless possibilities; it refuses the existence of a bird's-eye view hovering above history or outside discourse, but offers interminable passageways and countless journeys within its walls. Further, unlike conventional models of travel -- paradigms of departure and return which valorize the origin -- travel inside the labyrinth is never completed: there is neither exit nor center. Similarly, there is no arrival in Carter's fiction, there is only departure; or, as I argue in my conclusion to this thesis, there is only re-direction.

By arranging these three chapters in this sequence, I have constructed my own narrative of Carter's work. I begin with "The Erl-King," a story of defamiliarization and Woman's castration from her origins in which the girl-narrator's resistant revisionism is in its infancy. Next, I explore "The Scarlet House's" more developed representation of narrative resistance to female castration in the protagonist's mnemonic inter-connections. In the final chapter, narration is no longer merely defensive; as Fevvers' grand Confidence trick of a life story illustrates, it is a carnivalesque and "positive" power.[3] Nights proffers a

[3] Foucault refers to the "positive" nature of power in his History of Sexuality. Refusing the notion of repression in his discussion of sexuality, he writes:

> But let us assume in turn that a somewhat careful scrutiny will show that power in modern societies has not in fact governed sexuality through law and sovereignty; let us suppose that historical analysis has revealed the presence of a

heartening vision that narrative -- de/constructive and transfigurative narrative -- changes everything. Literary pasts do not control, determine or fix representation; they are there to be ransacked and re-worked.[4]

Carter's Gothic brand of cud-chewing results in roccoco, oozing and unforgettable fiction; her images haunt the labyrinths of my mind. Describing her style as "formal and outrageous, exotic and demotic, exquisite and coarse, precious and raunchy, fabulist and socialist, purple and black," Rushdie declares that Carter "was too individual, too fierce a writer to dissolve easily" (ix). And, if some of her "puddings . . . are excessively egged" as he attests, it is only because her brilliant and baroque love of cholesterol never allowed her to confine her critique or curb her vision.

> veritable "technology" of sex, one that is much more complex and above all much more positive than the mere effect of a "defense" could be . . . (90).

Similarly, Carter's intertextual *bricolage* is not merely defensive; she constructs alternate visions of identity by emphasizing fragmentation and revisionism.

[4] One interesting example of intertextuality within Carter's oeuvre, between "The Erl-King" and Nights at the Circus, elucidates the narrative I have developed in this project. Fevvers' high-wire performance opens with her "behind tinsel bars, while the band in the pit sawed and brayed away at 'Only a bird in a gilded cage'" (Nights 14). Then, glimpsing the trapezes above, Fevvers breaks out of her own cage: "she seized hold of the bars in a firm grip and . . . parted them" (14). Later, Fevvers escapes diminishment by the Russian Grand Duke who desires to imprison her within a fantastically tiny cage "made out of gold wires with, inside, a little perch of rubies and of sapphires and of diamonds . . . . The cage was empty. No bird stood on that perch, yet" (192). In "The Erl-King," by contrast, the bird-cages are disturbingly occupied. Whereas Fevvers' successfully capitalizes on her status as an object of the gaze, the lost women in "The Erl-King" do not survive the gaze -- the Erl-King has transformed young girls into birds and imprisoned them in cages. Now, as the narrator relates, "the birds don't sing, they only cry because they can't find their way out of the wood, have lost their flesh when they are dipped in the corrosive pools of his regard and now must live in cages" (192). By concluding this project with the celebratory representation of performative identity in Nights, I emphasize that the cages of representation are not locked and immutable structures, but open to transformation through revision.

Lost in the Woods, Found in the Labyrinth:

Imagining the Subject of Intertextuality in "The Erl-King"

With its shifting narrative voices and multiple strategies of defamiliarization, Angela Carter's short story "The Erl-King" is, for me, one of her most enigmatic tales. First published in 1977 and later anthologized in The Bloody Chamber, Carter's collection of revisionist fairy tales, "The Erl-King" is "like a system of Chinese boxes opening one into another" (186). Although I have endeavored to weave together an intelligible plot summary, each attempt has unraveled after two or three sentences. These repeated failures lead me to conclude that there are only four things I can say definitively about the tale's plot: a young girl is walking in the woods; she meets a creature named the Erl-King; the two of them engage in some form of sexual relationship; and, the Erl-King poses a threat to her survival. I cannot describe "what actually happens" between them after the girl articulates her feelings of danger because the story has no actual conclusion; the tale shifts into the future tense with a different narrator. This third-person narrator concludes the story by describing the possible but unactuated event of the Erl-King's murder. Correspondingly, "The Erl-King" begins long before its first lines. The narrator's opening description suggests that the woods are ancient and laden with significance, their past and multiple histories vaguely discernible but ultimately lost in the overgrowth:

> Once you are inside it, you must stay there until it lets you out again for there is no clue to guide you through in perfect safety; grass grew over the track years ago and now the rabbits and the foxes make their own runs in the subtle labyrinth and nobody comes. The trees stir with a noise like taffeta skirts of women who have lost themselves in the woods and hunt round hopelessly for the way out. (186)

These woods are alive with memories and markers of the past. Similarly, the body of the tale is rich with intertextual references to discourses of Woman in the canons of Western literature and philosophy.[1] Because of the prevalence of these allusions, I read "The Erl-King" as a pastiche, a text composed of other texts, its beginning occurring long before the opening lines.

These intimations of the past do not operate as signposts for navigation out of the woods. Rather, the rustling trees and overgrown pathways suggest how "easy [it is] to lose yourself in these woods" (187). My reading of "The Erl-King" begins with this notion of the woods as a labyrinth always already in existence. The story occurs entirely within the space of the woods; no possibility of exit is ever articulated. However, this labyrinth is not built of stone; it is animate and in flux. The narrator's description of lost pathways, "withered blackberries" and the "blackish water [which] thickens, now, to ice" creates a

[1] See, for example, Harriet Kramer Linkin's article "Isn't It Romantic?: Angela Carter's Bloody Revision of the Romantic Aesthetic in 'The Erl-King.'" Linkin identifies multiple allusions to nineteenth-century lyric poetry and argues that "the leaved woods which house the erl-king might furnish an anthology of William Blake, Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, John Keats, Percy Shelley, Robert Browning and Christina Rossetti" (307).

sense of mutability (186). This notion of a circumscribing, yet changing/changeable structure is central to my reading of "The Erl-King." The woods operate as a discursive and circumscribing structure; wandering the labyrinth of literary histories and discourses about Woman, women have permanently lost their bearings. Nonetheless, the possibility for resisting and changing these structures exists in the woods' mutability. The combined flexibility and inescapability of these labyrinthine woods invokes the Foucauldian concept of the inextricability of power from resistance and refuses a strictly repressive reading of power. In The History of Sexuality Michel Foucault destabilizes conventional formulations of power as "a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state" (92). Rather, he argues that power is an unstable and shifting network of force relations "produced from one moment to the next . . . . Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (93). Further, Foucault's formulation of power as omnipresent and unstable locates resistance as its inseparable companion. He writes that "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (95).

My reading of "The Erl-King" hinges on this Foucauldian pairing of power with resistance. One effect of power in Carter's narrative is to produce both the girl-narrator and the reader as lost. Consequently, I conceive of resistance as the multiple acts of self-location both the girl-protagonist and the reader perform

in order to combat this situation of being lost. For the girl-narrator, self-location comprises a dual process: resistance to the Erl-King and her quest for subjectivity. Movement, moreover, is central to the girl's resistance; although confined within the discursive space of the woods, the first-person narrator is mobile. Actively traveling through "the subtle labyrinth" of intertexuality, she navigates multiple representations of Woman and attempts to articulate her own desires. My failure to produce a more coherent summary of "The Erl-King" signals the notion of the reader as lost. In my analysis of the reader's attempts at self-location, I explore the ways in which Carter highlights the interpretive act and identifies interpretation as a form of self-location. The story's inconclusiveness and its enigmatic intertextuality signal the active nature of interpretation and, therefore, the process and politics of meaning construction.

I have divided my discussion into three main sections. Beginning with a study of the labyrinth, the first section, "Power and Meaning," explores the connections between intertextuality, the construction of meaning, and power. The second section, "Woman, Mobility and Resistance," builds on my discussion of intertextuality and the labyrinth and engages with the girl-narrator's navigation through literary formulations about Woman. In the third section, "Desire and Absence," I examine psychoanalytic formulations of Woman as lack(ing), as the first-person narrator attempts to resist her obliteration by the Erl-King. In each section, the notion of the woods as an inescapable, but shifting discursive structure is central.

Power and Meaning

"The Erl-King's" representation of the processes of meaning and subject-formation hinges on the notion of traveling through an inescapable space; this spatial model is encapsulated in the tale's single reference to the woods as a "subtle labyrinth" (186). These labyrinthine woods are a means of conceptualizing the structures of power through which all -- writer, reader and character -- move. Further, just as the first-person narrator never exits the woods, never re-traces her steps or locates a magic thread to guide her outside, the reader is similarly refused any exit. The narrator's repeated reference to "you" in the opening paragraphs situates the reader firmly and inescapably inside. A model of movement within entrapment, rather than departure and return, is produced in these woods.

For the reader, navigating these woods is complicated by the maze of Carter's language. "The Erl-King's" shifting narrative voices indicate the tale's general blurring of positionality, a confusion which cuts across questions of space, time and narrative voice. From the tale's beginning, slipping pronouns and sliding tenses suggest that "The Erl-King" is, in Daphne Marlatt's terms, a "labyrinth of language" (32). On one level, "The Erl-King" is a series of broken contracts between writer and reader. Like the young girl who voyages trustingly into the woods on a visit to granny, the reader cracks the spine of this tale with certain expectations of intelligibility. Just as the girl traveler in this story never reaches granny's house, the reader is similarly refused everything from a finite

ending to a clear differentiation of one narrator from another. The confusion only increases with the realization that Carter's slippery pronouns produce the reader as a character. The third-person narrator's early assertion, for example, that "You step between the fir trees and then you are no longer in the open air; the wood swallows you up" situates the reader firmly within the woods and the labyrinth of Carter's language (186). The girl-narrator's journey through these woods is a non-teleological navigation through a field of language that is anything but transparent in its meaning. Just as the voice shifts into the first-person, the third-person narrator signals this linguistic confusion, remarking "[i]t is easy to lose yourself in these woods" (187).

Marlatt's notion of a "labyrinth of language" also offers a means of situating the myriad of intertextual references within the story. She defines this labyrinth as "an ancient structure I found my way into . . . full of interconnecting passageways, trapdoors, melodious charms, vivid and often incomprehensible images on the walls . . . a continuous walking that folds back on itself and in folding back moves forward" (32). In the "Erl-King," the woods represent this "ancient structure" of Western literature; they are characterized as "a system of Chinese boxes opening one into another" through which the girl-narrator wends her way (186). "The Erl-King" is constituted by a seemingly unending series of literary fragments. The title, for example, refers to a German Romantic poem by Goethe entitled "Erlkonig."[2] Allusions to other Romantic writers, various

[2] My thanks to Liz Koblyk for identifying both this allusion to Goethe's poem and the myriad of references to *Hamlet* -- a play I have somehow escaped reading.

Shakespeare plays, and Greek mythology constitute just some of the intertexual play within "The Erl-King." The girl's journey through the woods, then, is also a voyage into literary history.

In "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" Frederic Jameson identifies intertextuality and pastiche as defining elements of postmodern aesthetics. Defining pastiche as parody "without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists," Jameson identifies postmodern texts as superficial and apolitical (73-74). He argues, moreover, that these texts are akin to Plato's simulacra: "the identical copy for which no original has ever existed" (75). Jean Baudrillard also refers to the simulacrum in "The Evil Demon of Images and the Precession of Simulacra." Baudrillard posits that we are living in a simulated reality composed entirely of images. He writes that:

> For us the medium, the image medium, has imposed itself between the real and the imaginary, upsetting the balance between the two, with a kind of fatality which has its own logic . . . . The fatality lies in this endless enwrapping of images . . . which leaves images no other destiny than images . . . . [I]mages become more real than the real. . . in a kind of vertigo in which . . . it does no more than resemble itself and escape in its own logic, in the very perfection of its own model. (194-95)

As both Baudrillard's reference to fatality and Jameson's characterization of pastiche as "speech in a dead language" suggest, this notion of the simulacrum signals, for them, a death of meaning and intelligibility (74).

While "The Erl-King" embodies both Jameson's and Baudrillard's description of the simulacrum, the story's engagement with discursive formations of Woman and the battle for subjectivity contest their equation of pastiche with "depthlessness" (Jameson 70). Further, "The Erl-King" effects a radical re-formulation of the very notion of intelligibility by presenting a model for reading and identity formation which insists upon the reader's acknowledgment of being always already located inside a labyrinthine social structure. The story simulates a discursive reality which produces a means of conceptualizing the subject's shifting relations to power, desire, signification and identity. Carter's revisionary intertexuality in "The Erl-King" destabilizes Western literary and philosophical traditions. Pastiche within "The Erl-King" is a subversive act.

The story opens with the voice of a third-person narrator describing a woodland scene, a description which sets the tone for the ensuing moments of intertextuality within the tale. As the narrator remarks, this wood is removed from the time and space of quotidian existence: "You step between the fir trees and then you are no longer in the open air; the wood swallows you up" (186). Liminally situated between autumn and winter, the tale is set in a kind of no-time, teetering on the brink of death:

> Now the stark elders have an anorexic look; there is not much in the autumn wood to make you smile but it is not yet, not quite yet, the saddest time of the year. Only, there is the haunting sense of the imminent cessation of being; the year, in turning, turns in on itself. (186)

The effects of this opening are multiple. First, the reader is given a sense of being outside, or separated, from the social. As the first-person narrator later comments: "I thought that nobody was in the wood but me" (187). Further, danger accompanies this sense of isolation. Combined with the unhealthy silence and the haunting gloom of the wood, the narrator's representation of the rustling trees as "taffeta skirts of women who have lost themselves. . .and hunt round hopelessly for the way out" produces a sense of inescapable entrapment (186). This paradoxical description of the traveler as simultaneously outside (the social) and inside (entrapped!) ultimately situates the outside within a circumscribing structure and, therefore, the possibility of a space outside power is refused.

In troubling the categories of outside and inside within a forest context, "The Erl-King's" opening alludes to forest scenes like that in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream. Dream's* structure of departure and return reflects a similar preoccupation with power and location.[3] Beginning inside Theseus' palace and, therefore, within the social sphere of law and judgment, the play

[3] David Bevington argues that this departure/return structure develops "the motif of love as an imaginative journey from reality into a fantasy world . . . ending in a return to a reality that has itself been partly transformed by the experience of the journey" (147).

quickly moves into the fantastical and chaotic forest world. The seeming restoration of order at the play's ending is marked by the humans' return to Athens. Shakespeare's representation of the forest-world, however, suggests that the characters' initial departure from Athens is in no way an escape from power and structure. The repeated clashes between Oberon and Titania, as well as the lovers' ensuing entanglement with the fairy world and each other, indicate that these woods are as embroiled in battles over power as is Theseus' court. Further, a paradox is generated by this framing structure. In its attempt to simultaneously articulate a clear division between the inside social world of Athens and the outside space of the forest while containing the outside subversive world within the social order, the structure folds in on itself.

Carter's representation of the woods in "The Erl-King" pushes this structural paradox further by collapsing the Athens/forest binary and thus fully dissolving the distinction between inside and outside. Subverting *Dream's* organization around notions of departure and return, "The Erl-King" begins inside the woods -- the space supposedly outside of convention. Further, the reader's explicit moment of entrance, articulated in the third-person narrator's declaration that "You step between the fir trees," occurs after the reader has already been implicitly located within the woods in the description of the opening paragraph: the reader is thus always already located within the narrative.

Carter's destabilization of the Athens/forest binary in "The Erl-King" affirms the impossibility of a space outside power. Significantly, the woods of

"The Erl-King" do not constitute a pristine, idyllic setting; they are tainted, tinged by relations of power. Instead of clear blue skies and bright green images of fecundity, the narrator speaks of "sulphur-yellow interstices in a sky hunkered with grey clouds," light which strikes "the wood with nicotine-stained fingers," anorexic trees and the silence of "a sickroom hush" (186). Signaling the "omnipresence" of power, the opening of "The Erl-King" also produces a series of complex relations reflecting power's "intentional and nonsubjective" nature (History of Sexuality 93-94). While the effects of power are visible in Carter's representation of the decaying wood, no origin or source of this power is identified. Rather, Carter produces an anonymous atmosphere of danger. As the first-person narrator comments in her initial account of walking through the woods: "The trees threaded a cat's cradle of half-stripped branches over me so that I felt I was in a house of nets" (187).

This sense of power as an anonymous but ever-present force acquires particular significance as the reader undertakes the project of making sense of Carter's narrative. On one level, "The Erl-King" is a familiar narrative of a young girl's journey into sexuality and her struggle for subjectivity. And, like many of Carter's tales in The Bloody Chamber, this character's voyage is portrayed as analogous to the experiences of fairy-tale heroines. As the third-person narrator articulates early on, however, these familiar narrative threads do not provide the reader with verifiable interpretive clues: "A young girl would go into the wood as trustingly as Red Riding Hood to her granny's house but this light admits no

ambiguities and, here, she will be trapped in her own illusion because everything in the wood is exactly as it seems" (186). Within the space of the woods Western metaphysical notions of objective Truth and Reality are dislocated by the "illusions" of subjective perception. Although referring ostensibly to the young girl traveler, this statement wrests from the reader all hopes of achieving an authentic and verifiable understanding of the ensuing narrative. This dislocation effects a vast leveling of the interpretive field; as a result, no single interpretive position is privileged as the Real One. Ultimately, this splitting of meaning from "Reality" reveals the silent partner of truth: power. As Foucault writes in Power/Knowledge:

> [T]ruth isn't outside power, or lacking in power . . . . Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power . . . . There is a battle "for truth", or at least "around truth" -- it being understood . . . that by truth I do not mean "the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted", but rather "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true" . . . [it is] a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays. (131-32)

Once embroiled in the labyrinth of Carter's writing, the impossibility of Platonic Truth becomes intelligible. Further, the distance between reader, character and

writer dissolves and the reader recognizes her or his undeniable location "inside the text" from which exit is impossible. In "The Erl-King" the reader travels through discursive formations like the protagonist and makes meaning like the writer.

In Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse, Rosemary Hennessy argues that the reader's authorial ability to construct meaning is implicated in power. She writes:

> Reading . . . is the ideological practice of making a text intelligible. And as such it is much more than simple deciphering. It is the necessary and inescapable process of *making sense* by negotiating the dis-cursive materiality of one's lived reality. Once reading is understood in this way, the difference between reading and writing collapses. Both are activities of *making* sense -- of and through the systems of difference available at any historical moment. (14-15)

Both Hennessy's notion of making meaning and Foucault's discussion of truth and power foreground the act of interpretation. Carter similarly highlights the active nature of producing meaning in "The Erl-King" through her labyrinthine language. My earlier inability to construct a clear and definitive plot summary, for example, signals that any synopsis I do furnish is inevitably one of my own construction. Accordingly, the third-person narrator's description of the young girl who "will be trapped in her own illusion because everything in the wood is

exactly as it seems" refers also to the reader's project of constructing meaning (186). However, the narrator's comment reflects more than the story's characterization of interpretation as subjective. In its refusal of tyrannical notions of Reality and Truth, "The Erl-King" re-fashions Platonic notions of intelligibility. Consequently, I read Carter's tale as a mimetic text reflecting the omnipresence of power and its enmeshment in both the history of Western literature and the interpretation of that history.

Woman, Mobility and Resistance

Daphne Marlatt's explanation of her desire to pursue the history of Western literature through the "labyrinth of language" resonates with "The Erl-King's" attention to the processes of self-location which are exemplified in both the reader's act of interpretation and the girl-narrator's quest for subjectivity. Marlatt describes the

> incomprehensible images on [the labyrinth's] walls, all of them pointing, pointing me farther along -- the thread, the desire to know, *gno-*, narrative, tugging in my hands. lifeline (trying to make sense of it all). the pull of syntax (arranged in order) I felt my way by. trying to find something familiar, something I recognized: so I could be found in the midst of all these meanings pointing elsewhere. (32-33)

Similarly, Carter's image of "women who have lost themselves in woods and hunt round hopelessly for the way out" orients the Foucauldian battle around

truth specifically to literary-historical discourses about Woman (186). In these woods, the girl-narrator battles with particular historical representations of the Truth about Woman and attempts to locate herself within its labyrinthine structure. As Teresa de Lauretis writes in "The Technology of Gender," ideological constructions of Woman locate her as "an essence inherent in all women (which has been seen as Nature, Mother, Mystery, Evil Incarnate, Object of [Masculine] Desire and Knowledge, Proper Womanhood, Femininity, et cetera)" (9). Carter introduces some of these discursive images through a series of literary allusions, many of which center around images of dead, raped, mad, murdered and imprisoned women. References to Philomela, Persephone, Ophelia, and Porphyria signal "The Erl-King's" attention to Western literary images of Woman as passive, silent and violated.[4] In addition to literary representations of femininity, Carter invokes the Master narrative of Psychoanalysis and its formulation of Woman as Lack. The girl's journey

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[4] The literary links I outline below are by no means exhaustive - I suspect that the references I have identified in this story comprise only a small portion of the tale's allusions.
a) As Linkin identifies in her essay, the girl-narrator's imagined imprisonment by the Erl-King in which he "mocks [her] loss of liberty" recalls William Blake's 1783 poem "Song." In addition to this reference, I read allusions to Keat's "Ode to a Nightingale" and, consequently, the myth of Philomela, Procne and Tereus. As the conflicting versions in Edith Hamilton's Mythology and Robert Graves' The Greek Myths indicate, it is unclear whether Philomela or Procne's tongue is cut out. Further, while some versions write that Philomela became a nightingale and Procne was transformed into a swallow, other accounts reverse these metamorphoses. Either way, I read the girl's description that "I have seen the cage you are weaving for me; it is a very pretty one and I shall sit, hereafter, in my cage among the other singing birds but I - I shall be dumb, from spite" as a revision of this myth by writing the possibility of resistance into Philomela's (or Procne's) silence, a silence initially produced from the excision of her tongue (191).
b) The girl-narrator's comment that "He could thrust me into the seed-bed of next year's generation and I would have to wait until he whistled me up from my darkness before I could come back again" refers to the rape of Persephone by Hades and her subsequent imprisonment in the underworld for four months each year (189). See Hamilton's Mythology, pp 49-54. Again, thanks to Liz Koblyk for drawing my attention to this allusion.
c) I discuss allusions to both Ophelia and Robert Browning's "Porphyria's Lover" in the following pages.

through the woods images her negotiation into subjectivity, a negotiation which entails an ongoing struggle between the interpellation of the ideological images and histories she encounters and her own self-articulation.

Teresa de Lauretis describes this negotiation as the process of gender construction in "The Technology of Gender." Her argument that "[t]he construction of gender is the product and process of both representation and self-representation" describes the girl-traveler's negotiation into subjectivity (9). De Lauretis' conception of subjectivity as a combination of representation and self-representation marks the possibility for resistance to discursive power. She affirms the centrality of resistance, or agency, to her formulation of subjectivity as she writes:

> To assert that the social representation of gender affects its subjective construction and that, vice versa, the subjective representation of gender - or self-representation - affects its social construction, leaves open a possibility of agency and self-determination at the subjective and even individual level of micropolitical and everyday practices. . . . (9)

De Lauretis' articulation of the inextricability of agency from discursive representations, moreover, supports my reading of power in "The Erl-King" as unstable and anti-hegemonic.[5] Further, the story's overarching narrative

[5] I am drawing on Gramsci's formulation of hegemony which envisions the possibility of counter-hegemonic movements emerging from within oppressive spaces. Robert Bocock argues that Gramsci's reading of Marx "emphasized both the constituted and the constitutive aspects of human agencies of change" (16). Similarly, my reading of "The Erl-King" locates the woods as

structure, which opens with a third-person voice, then shifts to the girl-traveler's first-person account, and finally concludes with another third-person narration, becomes intelligible through de Lauretis' notion of subjectivity as a combination of representation and self-representation. These shifts in narrative voice highlight language as the site of the subject's constitution and, finally, demonstrate Catherine Belsey's definition of the subject as both the "grammatical centre of initiatives . . . and a subjected being" (49). My reading of the girl-traveler's journey into subjectivity proceeds from this combination of self-narration and her representation by an other.

Added to these shifts in narrative voice, "The Erl-King's" temporal mode changes repeatedly. Significantly, the story's re-presentations of literary fragments are not contained within a narrative past; rather, they are articulated in past, present and future voices. "The Erl-King's" revision of Robert Browning's poem "Porphyria's Lover," for instance, marks the tale's final narrative shift; it is recounted in the future tense by the girl-traveler. Following the girl's description of the murder, the story shifts again into a third-person voice.[6] This emphasis upon multiple temporal modes suggests that "The Erl-

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oppressive but not tyrannical; the term "anti-hegemonic," then, signals this possibility of resistance from within discourse.

[6] These shifts in voice and tense occur within the space of a few sentences:

> My hands shake. I shall take two handfuls of his rustling hair as he lies half dreaming, half waking, and wind them into ropes, very softly, so he will not wake up, and softly, with hands as gentle as rain, I will strangle him with them. Then she will open all the cages and let the birds free; they will change back into young girls, every one, each with the crimson imprint of his love-bite on their throats. (192)

Browning's poem, by contrast, is the (first-person) dramatic monologue of a male narrator. Speaking in the past tense, the narrator recounts the murder of his lover, Porphyria. Following his realization that "Porphyria worshiped me," the narrator decides to preserve the moment and, therefore, grant Porphyria's desire to "give herself to me forever" (34, 25):

King" does not conceive of Western literary history as a fixed and stable entity, fully discernible within a locatable past. Carter's engagement with intertextuality, then, troubles Western notions of linear time. De Certeau's description of historiography in The Writing of History suggests that the very act of resurrecting past events and texts destabilizes notions of the past as an accomplished and static unit separated from the present by an impassable gulf. He writes: "Thus founded on the rupture between a past that is its object, and a present that is the place of its practice, history endlessly finds the present in its object and the past in its practice" (36). In "The Erl-King," the dissolution of this gap between past and present also insists that the past matters -- that the present is informed by literary and historical images. Carter is particularly insistent upon the role of history in contemporary constructions of female identity. She affirms this connection in her discussion of women and pornography in The Sadeian Woman, writing: "our flesh arrives to us out of history, like everything else does" (9). "The Erl-King's" repeated re-presentation of past textual figurations of Woman links contemporary discourses with historical formulations of Woman.

Carter's engagement with intertextuality also enables the imagination of new figurations of female subjectivity. Similarly, De Certeau argues in his

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Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain. (37-43)

discussion of historiography that the future is created through this process of resurrecting the past:

> [T]aking the dead or the past back to a symbolic place is connected to the labor aimed at creating in the present a place (past or future) to be filled . . . . [Writing] liberates the present without having to name it. Thus it can be said that writing makes the dead so that the living can exist elsewhere. (101)

Correspondingly, I read "The Erl-King" as engaged in the act of imagining a possible future in which the girl-traveler is enabled to articulate her desires. This act of imagination is produced in part through the re-membering of past texts. Power is, moreover, central to de Certeau's description of historiographical practice. Foucault affirms this connection between power and history when he writes that "The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning" (P/K 114). Carter's engagement with intertexuality and her revision of the canon signals this battle over power. Far from an attempt to write over historical representations of Woman and to produce new meanings of the old stories, "The Erl-King" infuses images of resistance within these discursive representations in order to posit a future of new possibilities. The story's veiled allusion to the myth of Philomela exemplifies this strategy. Imagining her fate as one of the Erl-King's captured birds, the girl-narrator asserts that "I - I shall be dumb from spite" (191). Although her imprisonment and silence are sustained,

the girl writes resistance into a state traditionally aligned with passivity and weakness.

In addition to the story's imagination of a future through intertextuality, "The Erl-King" presents these literary allusions in a severed format. The tale's obscure reference to Ophelia, "He said the owl was a baker's daughter; then he smiled at me," illustrates the fragmentary nature of the tale's references (188). By excising the fragments from their original narrative homes, "The Erl-King" effectively destabilizes conventional interpretations surrounding these texts. The sheer obscurity of the Ophelia allusion, however, signals a further subversion of notions of originary contexts. Ophelia's reference to the owl, which occurs after the onset of her madness, operates enigmatically within its seemingly original context.[7] Yet, as David Bevington suggests, Ophelia's remark can be traced back to an even earlier legend "about a baker's daughter who was turned into an owl for being ungenerous when Jesus begged a loaf of bread" (1102). Carter's re-presentation of Ophelia's enigmatic statement plays with the desire to establish linear traces back to identifiable origins, and suggests that it is madness to seek after authentic beginnings. Although traces can be established, they produce only an increasingly complex web of associations -- beginnings are unlocatable. This unlocatability illustrates Foucault's assertion in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" that the origin "lies at a place of inevitable loss" (143). The Platonic claim to Original Truth and Intelligibility is ruptured through this abandonment of the futile quest for the origin. With this abandonment of

[7] See *Hamlet*, IV.V.38-74.

conventional formulations of intelligibility, Nietzsche's distinction between origin and interpretation gains currency. He writes in On the Genealogy of Morality that:

> every purpose and use is just a sign that the will to power has achieved mastery over something less powerful, and has impressed upon it its own idea . . . of a use function; and the whole history of a 'thing', an organ, a tradition can to this extent be a continuous chain of signs, continually revealing new interpretations and adaptations. . . . (55)

Carter's revisionary impulse, then, signals a shift in power. Just as the girl-traveler narrates a part of her own story within "The Erl-King," Carter inserts her pen into the vast tradition of Western writing and transforms it in the process. Rather than effacing the canon's portrayal of femininity, "The Erl-King" launches a dual process of highlighting traditional constructions of Woman and imagining new relations of power.

"The Erl-King's" presentation of fragments, coupled with its destabilization of linear time, forges a link between the subject's relation to "the past" and the battle for subjectivity. The girl-traveler encounters multiple discursive traces in the woods and must navigate these fragmentary images of Woman even as she struggles with the Erl-King. These battles with historical images and the Erl-King recall my earlier discussions of the girl-narrator's navigation through labyrinthine discursive structures. The labyrinth depicts the subject in a non-teleological and

active negotiation within a circumscribing, yet anti-hegemonic social structure; the subject's agency is discernible in her movement through the system. Similarly, the girl-traveler in "The Erl-King" is disconnected from her origins and lost within the discursive space of the woods, but she is nevertheless mobile. She does, after all, narrate a part of her own story. The concept of the labyrinth, then, enables the crucial and integral articulation of resistance within oppressive structures.

Desire and Lack

The girl's disconnection from her origins signals more than a Nietzschean severance of origin from purpose; it also resonates with psychoanalytic formulations of Woman's lack of desire. Luce Irigaray argues that Woman is denied both the experience and the expression of desire within conventional psychoanalysis. In her description of Freud's vision of female development, Irigaray remarks that this refusal of female desire coexists with the effacement of the little girl's origins. She writes in Speculum of the Other Woman:

> [T]he little girl [must] abandon her relation to the origin and her primal fantasy so that henceforth she can be inscribed into those of men which will become the "origin" of her desire . . . . She is crazy, disoriented, lost, if she fails to join in this *first* male desire. This is shown, specifically, in the way she is forced to renounce the marks of her ancestry and inscribe herself on man's pedigree. She leaves her family, her "house," her name . . . her family tree,

> in favor of her husband's . . . . She is left with a void, a lack of all representation, re-presentation, and even strictly speaking of all mimesis of her desire for origin. (33,42)

In order to "become a woman," the little girl must align herself with absence and abandon any attempt to articulate her own desires (22). Correspondingly, the girl-traveler in "The Erl-King" is nameless and anonymous. She walks into the Erl-King's domain and sleeps in his house. Struggling against becoming another caged bird within his walls, she is "well and truly castrated [within] this economy" (Irigaray 32).

In Carter's tale, the girl's desire to articulate herself is complicated by her sexual desire for the Erl-King:

> His touch both consoles and devastates me; I feel my heart pulse, then wither, naked as a stone on the roaring mattress . . . . I go back and back to him to have his fingers strip the tattered skin away and clothe me in his dress of water, this garment that drenches me, its slithering odour, its capacity for drowning. (190-91)

Desire is yoked with danger, a coupling which demands perpetual negotiation by the girl traveler as she battles to articulate herself within a complicated and conflicting labyrinth of power, desire and history.

Surviving her entrance into sexuality and her subsequent struggle for subjectivity depends in part on the girl-narrator's ability to position herself, to

articulate her desires and to resist her representation as both lost and lacking within the circumscribing system of signification. Writing of the impossible space feminist subjects navigate between discursive Woman and the lived experience of historical women, de Lauretis asserts that women must seek to articulate themselves within the gaps of hegemonic discourses (26). This dual process of resistance and self-articulation is conceptualized in "The Erl-King" in terms of the girl's circumscribed locomotion.

This notion of desire and circumscribed locomotion recalls the reference to the wind at the end of a paragraph detailing the girl's awakening sense of sexual desire. Referring to her "girlish and delicious loneliness," the first-person girl traveler proceeds with an allusion to Christina Rossetti's nineteenth-century poem "Goblin Market," a poem engaging with the experience and expression of female desire (187). The coexistence of this "house of nets [and] the cold wind" with "heavy bunches of red berries as ripe and delicious as goblin or enchanted fruit" signals the inextricable commingling of desire with power. As Foucault writes: "Where there is desire, the power relation is already present: an illusion, then, to denounce this relation for a repression exerted after the event; but vanity as well, to go questing after a desire that is beyond the reach of power" (History of Sexuality 81-82). This emphatic coupling of desire with power contributes to an anti-hegemonic vision of the functioning of power within society, a vision which, in turn, enables the articulation of possible sites of resistance.

My conception of power within "The Erl-King" as anti-hegemonic, however, does not negate the existence of imbalances or inequalities within the shifting network of social relations. The Erl-King retains a dangerously powerful position in his sexual relationship with the protagonist, a situation illustrated in the girl's assertion that the "Erl-King will do you grievous harm" (187). Perhaps the most significant explanation for this power imbalance is her alien status: she is not at home. The Erl-King, conversely, is cozily situated at his hearth in the heart of his birthplace. Juxtaposed against the rapidity with which she loses herself is the Erl-King's intimate knowledge of the woods. The narrator's belief that he "came alive from the desire of the woods" establishes a link between the Erl-King's location "at home" and his command of the environment (188). He knows the secrets of the wood. Able to distinguish "which of the frilled, blotched, rotted fungi are fit to eat" from the brambles "he will not touch [because] the Devil spits on them at Michaelmas," the Erl-King clearly belongs (188).

This characterization of the Erl-King as comprehending the language of the woods, a language which the girl-narrator does not possess, suggests the structure of the Lacanian Symbolic. As she proceeds into the sexual relationship, the narrator also enters the realm of signification and language and discovers her status as foreigner. According to Lacan's formulation, the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real are separate and distinct realms. However, as I argued at the beginning of this chapter, Carter positions both the reader and the girl as always already inside the woods: a distinct moment of

entrance into signification does not exist. In troubling Lacan's structuralist divisions, Carter emphasizes Woman's differential relation to, not her exclusion from, language. While the Erl-King can read the secret signs of the wood, the third-person narrator remarks that for the interloper "there is no clue to guide you through in perfect safety" (186). Marlatt describes this differential relation, writing: "women know the slippery feel of language, the walls that exclude us . . . language is no 'tool' for us, no extension of ourselves, but something we are 'lost' inside" (33-35). Whereas the Erl-King is an extension of the woods and his command of its language is a manifest effect of these origins, the narrator is engaged in a perpetual battle for self-representation in an alien language and a foreign land.[8]

The girl-traveler's navigation through desire and danger culminates in a moment of crisis towards the narrative's end. As she watches the Erl-King gaze at her, the girl identifies the threat of disintegration she faces in their sexual relationship. She states: "Your green eye is a reducing chamber. If I look into it long enough, I will become as small as my own reflection, I will diminish to a point and vanish" (191). The loss of her subjectivity is the danger against which the girl battles as she enters sexuality. However, as the confusing events of the final paragraphs suggest, this battle is not a simple matter of "Her" versus "Him" in a finite quest for power. Both her negotiation of power and desire and the

[8] For Lacan, Woman is lost because she cannot enter the social realm of signification. Therefore, Marlatt's notion of women as lost "inside" and Carter's representation of "the taffeta skirts of women who have lost themselves in the woods" revise this Lacanian formulation to suggest that women are lost within discourse (186).

process of subject-formation are unending, encompassing, in Foucauldian terms, an entire cultural network of force relations (History of Sexuality 93).

At first glance, the girl-narrator's experience as the object of the Erl-King's gaze suggests a version of Jacques Lacan's mirror stage and the Imaginary realm. Seeing her reflection in his eyes, the narrator experiences a sense of vertigo at the image, for it is small, fixed and static. She states: "The gelid green of your eyes fixes my reflective face. It is a preservative, like a green liquid amber; it catches me. I am afraid I will be trapped in it for ever like the poor little ants and flies that stuck their feet in resin before the sea covered the Baltic" (191). The reflection is a unified image which not only threatens her sense of self, but also operates in contradistinction to the structural confusion of voices and tenses in the rest of the narrative. As Slavoj Zizek asserts: "Far from assuring the self-presence of the subject and his vision, the gaze functions as a stain, a spot in the picture disturbing its transparent visibility and introducing an irreducible split in my relation with the picture" (125). This articulation of the gaze also evokes Laura Mulvey's early analysis of women as objectified, specularized and disempowered by the male gaze. A closer look at Carter's representation of this scene, however, reveals a more complex imaging of power, resistance and subjectivity.

In addition to seeing her reflection, the girl-narrator also describes "the black hole in the middle of both [Erl-King's] eyes; it is their still centre, looking there makes me giddy, as if I might fall into it" (191). This black hole evokes the

psychoanalytic formulation of the void and the realm of the Lacanian Real. According to Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, the Real is "a brute, pre-symbolic reality which returns in the form of need . . . . The Real appears in whatever concerns the radical nature of loss at the centre of words and being" (375). For feminist theorists this notion of the Real bears particular relevance in its linkage with Woman's designation as "[dwelling] beyond LANGUAGE and gender identity" (376). This conventional location of Woman as pre-symbolic links her with the Real and its associations with loss. Moreover, because Woman is identified with this absence, she is posited as the site of lack from which desire emerges. In "The Erl-King," Carter illustrates the inter-relatedness of the Real with both the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The girl-narrator looks into the Erl-King's eyes and sees both herself and a void; in his eyes she is the void, the "hole in the midst of the symbolic order" (Zizek 46).

While Lacan contends that Woman does not exist because she does not signify, Carter refuses any easy and fixed positioning of Woman by vertiginously collapsing his structuralist model of the subject's development. Zizek describes Lacan's notion of Woman as outside signification and therefore non-existent in his discussion of existence and symbolization:

> [E]xistence is synonymous with symbolization, integration into the symbolic order -- only what is symbolized fully "exists." Lacan uses existence in this sense when maintaining that "Woman does not exist" or that "there is no sexual relation."

> Neither Woman nor the sexual relationship possess a signifier of their own, neither can be inscribed into the signifying network, they resist symbolization. (136)

The instance of recognition in which the girl-traveler witnesses her potential dissolution in the Erl-King's eyes marks the most urgent moment of crisis within the text. The danger she faces through their sexual relationship entails far more than a recognition of her fractured and incomplete subjectivity; succumbing to the Erl-King's gaze and, by extension, his mode of signification, signals the dissolution of her being. However, as Silverman argues,

> It is preposterous to assume either that woman remains outside of signification, or that her sexuality is any less culturally organized . . . than that of her male counterpart . . . . female sexuality would seen [sic] to be even more exhaustively and intensively "spoken" than is male sexuality, to be a site where numerous discourses converge. (189)

By conflating the Real with the Imaginary and the Symbolic in the girl's account of the Erl-King's gaze, Carter similarly refuses to position Woman as outside of and excluded from Language. This refusal opens up the possibility for the girl-narrator's resistance to the Erl-King's dissolving gaze.

As Foucault articulates, "[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (95). Thus, Carter posits a way out of this crisis within its very

articulation. I read this potential escape through Zizek's re-formulation of Lacan's assertion that "You never look at me from the place from which I see you" (126). Complicating Mulvey's analysis of women as victimized by the gaze, Carter positions the girl-narrator as the grammatical subject; she is the I/eye watching the Erl-King gaze upon her.[9] He, conversely, occupies the object position in the sentence. Similarly, Zizek's discussion of the gaze in Lacan also differentiates the eye from the gaze. Zizek writes: "For Lacan, these objects [gaze and voice] are not on the side of the *subject* but on the side of the *object*. The gaze marks the point in the object (in the picture) from which the subject viewing it is already *gazed at*, i.e., it is the object that is gazing at me" (125). This splitting of the I/eye from the gaze, and the subject from the object, opens up the possibility for resistance, a resistance signaled by the subsequent suggestion of the Erl-King's murder.[10]

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[9] The term "eye/I" signals the combined significance of vision and language to the category of the subject. In Lacan's theory of the subject, the eye/I marks an essentially split and alienated subjectivity. Lacan's mirror stage, which precipitates the subject's entrance into the symbolic, is the moment when the subject becomes alienated from himself through vision. [I refer to the subject as male in keeping with Irigaray's argument that, "any theory of the 'subject' has always been appropriated by the 'masculine' . . . Theoretically there would be no such thing as woman" (133, 166).] Silverman describes the mirror stage as the subject's "[apprehension of] both its self and the other -- of its self as other. When a child sees its reflection, that reflection enjoys a coherence which the subject lacks -- it is an ideal image" (157). Lacan describes this recognition as a mis-recognition: the ideal image exists "in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him" (in Adams 898). Further, Lacan identifies this moment as one of the "crises of alienation around which the subject is organized, since to know oneself through an external image is to be defined through self-alienation" (Silverman 157). This crisis of alienation produces a split subjectivity "between the 'I' perceived and the 'I' perceiving," a split encapsulated in the formulation of "eye/I" (Belsey 51).

This privileging of vision in Western theories of subjectivity has a long history and is, moreover, culturally specific. Johannes Fabian traces this ideological positioning of vision as "the noblest sense" in his discussion of memory and anthropology in Time and the Other (106). See especially pp. 105-41.

[10] This splitting also locates the girl as simultaneously subject and object; she is at once the grammatical subject of the sentence and the object of Erl-King's gaze. This dual location recalls de Lauretis' discussion of the subject as a "product and process of both representation and self-representation" and refuses notions of the subject as a sovereign individual (9). The concept of

Although existing in potentia, this possible resistance is never realized within the present tense of the narrative. Shifting into the future tense and (re?)turning to a third-person narrator, "The Erl-King" ends with a series of intertextual references and revisions. In a reversal of "Porphyria's Lover," for example, the girl prepares to strangle the Erl-King with his own hair. Following this as yet un-realized murder, the narrator then describes the girl's subsequent liberation of the birds-cum-women from their cages, and her final act of re-stringing the Erl-King's fiddle in a manner reminiscent of Delilah's cutting of Samson's mane. The tale dissolves into virtual unintelligibility as the final sentence describes the music emanating from this newly-restored fiddle: "The bow will dance over the new strings of its own accord and will cry out: 'Mother, mother, you have murdered me!'" (192).[11] This strange presentation of intertexuality in the future or, rather, this posited but as yet unaccomplished revision of past texts leaves the reader in a state of limbo. Past, present and

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the "Individual," as Silverman outlines, "posits an entity that is both autonomous and stable" (126).

[11] This murder scene is a complex joke on psychoanalytic conceptions of castration anxiety and the castrated/castrating Mother figure. In Freud's vision of male development, the boy's first love object is his mother and, though he must reject her out of convention, she remains so for life (Irigaray 31). The mother, however, is a dangerous figure who "is able to nourish but also to kill, rape, or poison the sexuate body of the child" (37). Her castrated status, and the boy's resulting fear that she will castrate him out of her penis-envy, is central to this representation of the murderous mother. Writing of male castration anxiety, Irigaray argues that

> The possibility of losing his penis, of having it cut off, would find a real basis in the *biological* fact of woman's castration. The fear of not having it, of losing it, would be re-presented in the anatomical amputation of woman, in her resentment at lacking a sex organ and in her correlative "envious" urge to gain possession of it. (51)

In "The Erl-King," the conflation of the girl-narrator with the Mother in the story's final sentence, her murder of the Erl-King, and her phallic act of "[carving] off his great mane with [his] knife" produces this image of the castrating Mother (192). The Erl-King, moreover, is positioned as the man who never gets over his desire for and fear of the mother; it is his instrument -- the phallic fiddle -- which "[cries] out: Mother, mother, you have murdered me!" (192).

I suspect the line, "Mother, mother, you have murdered me" is also an allusion to Shakespeare, but I have not yet located it.

future collide in these final paragraphs and produce an overwhelming sense of incompleteness and possibility. Carter's engagement with pastiche produces this temporal conflation and, moreover, subverts Jameson's characterization of pastiche as depthless and apolitical. Fragments of past literary texts are resurrected and suspended in the possibility of modification, a move which troubles notions of the past as finished and fixed. The modification, moreover, both is and is not realized; although this murderous ending is posited in the text, its location in the future renders its actual narrative occurrence potentially unactuated and definitely unverifiable.

By reversing positions with the Erl-King in her re-enactment of Browning's poem, the girl moves to gain control of the narrative and to articulate her existence. However, this attempted coup occurs within the woods; confined inside this discursive space, she has access only to its mode of signification. She imagines an escape inside a language and a literary tradition that has historically excluded, violated and murdered her. By writing the tale's ending in the future tense, then, Carter emphasizes the girl-traveler's as yet unrealized attempt to extricate herself from her proscribed location with death and absence. This temporal shift complicates de Certeau's notion of creating the future. Her entrapment within the discursive space of the woods limits the girl's imagination of different narratives, a limitation encapsulated in the very notion of revision. The ending of "The Erl-King" is represented in the future as a means of demonstrating that the space does not yet exist for the girl to symbolize her own

desires. De Lauretis details this situation as she describes the movement of the subject of feminism: "It is a movement between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses: those other spaces . . . in the margins of hegemonic discourses and in the interstices of institutions " (26). The girl-traveler of Carter's story is thus limited to carving out a zone within the "interstices" of the labyrinthine woods in which she perpetually moves as a foreigner. Ultimately, Carter's re-formulation of Woman's connection to gap and absence subverts Lacan's linking of Woman, absence and existence. By depicting these gaps in discursive structures as sites of resistance and possibility, Carter posits the gap as a means towards self-representation.

Conclusion

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, "The Erl-King" has long operated for me as an enigma, as a moment in The Bloody Chamber when the reader's quest for coherence and unambiguous, discernible meaning is most frustrated. The concept of enigma includes the notion of lack: a hole in the text which produces a gap in the reader's understanding. Zizek's discussion of Lacanian lack in Looking Awry describes this notion of a textual hole. He writes that "What circulates between subjects in symbolic communication is of course ultimately the lack, absence itself, and it is this absence that opens the space for 'positive' meaning to constitute itself" (131-32). Moving beyond the Freudian

equation of lack with the female wound, then, absence signals both incompleteness and possibility; it is the space in which we are simultaneously confronted with the impossibility of transparent communication and the hole through which, as readers, we dive in the hopes of producing a strand of intelligibility. In this formulation of absence as possibility, the Lacanian connection of desire with lack becomes intelligible. As Ragland-Sullivan writes in her discussion of sexual difference and Lacan, "LACK makes desire possible for both sexes . . . [it is] a 'lack-in-being', common to both sexes . . . which . . . creates loss and forms the necessary distance from the other's jouissance" (422-23). Lack is the site from which desire emerges.

For the reader of Carter, the gaps in her texts produce a desire for wholeness and intelligibility which, although perpetually frustrated, nonetheless launches the reader's journey into meaning-construction. Further, the tale's presentation of textual fragments enables the re-vision of Western literary narratives about Woman; because these allusions are severed from their literary contexts, they can be re-formulated by Carter, the girl-traveler and the reader. The animate nature of the woods, moreover, encapsulates this relation between desire and revision; the girl-narrator's desire to articulate herself within the discursive walls of Western literature is enabled by her revisionist impulses which, consequently, transform the labyrinthine passageways. These notions of desire and lack are also targets of Carter's revisionary pen, for she contests the conventional psychoanalytic equation of Woman with lack and absence in her

representation of desire in "The Erl-King." Ultimately, "The Erl-King" re-figures absence as a space of possibility in which the girl-traveler is enabled to imagine her desires and the canon of Western literature is produced as unstable and changeable.

In the next chapter, I pursue notions of sexual and textual holes in "The Scarlet House," Carter's feminist revision of Sadeian-style pornographic literature. Like my discussion of "The Erl-King," I argue that "The Scarlet House" represents the act of narration as a primary mode of resistance against entrapment.

Tracing a Condition: Carter's Re-Presentation of Pornography in "The Scarlet House"

"Nothing is more material, physical, corporal than the exercise of power."
Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge (57)

Towards the conclusion of Chapter 1, I argue that Carter re-configures psychoanalytic formulations of female lack by constructing the gap as a site of self-representation. Although "The Erl-King" is ultimately an ambivalent tale -- the protagonist is hopelessly entrapped within discourse -- Carter highlights the as yet unrealized potential for the girl's self-articulation. In this chapter I re-examine notions of textual holes and castrated femininity in Carter's short story "The Scarlet House." First published in 1977, "The Scarlet House" is the horrifying tale of a young woman's imprisoned existence inside a Sadeian-style house of sexual torture. Like "The Erl-King," this tale is characterized by uncertainty; it is the story of a young, nameless woman's failed attempts to remember both her capture and her arrival at a place she calls the Scarlet House. The gaps in the protagonist's memory produce a dizzying narrative and consistently frustrate the reader's attempts to construct a Truthful or Verifiable interpretation. However, the gaps in "The Scarlet House" exceed "The Erl-King's" textual ambiguity; they are markers of extreme and prolonged violence.

In the Scarlet House, a Sadeian Count and his horrifying assistants endlessly torture kidnapped women in order to annihilate their memories. Framed as the young woman's repeated and repeatedly failing quest to recover her past, Carter's narrative is actually the story of an unrelenting and inescapably violent present.

This violence is not only sexual, it is explicitly pornographic: "The Scarlet House" self-consciously reproduces conventions of heterosexual pornographic literature. Carter had a particular interest in heterosexual pornography and the history of "erotic" violence.[1] One year after writing this tale, she published a book-length study of the Marquis de Sade, The Sadeian Woman, in which she argues that conventional pornography provides an accurate representation of

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[1] Carter uses the terms pornographic and erotic interchangeably in The Sadeian Woman, a move which troubles the twentieth-century attempt to define pornography by opposing it to another, equally amorphous category labelled "erotica." In "Why is There No History of Pornography?", Joan Hoff points out that:

> [b]eginning in the 1920s and 1930s, U.S. intellectuals began to make highly subjective distinctions between erotica and pornography that had no historical or etymological rationale. They automatically assigned a reputable (and primarily heterosexual) past to the former, but not to the latter. Although this attempt to distinguish between the two is at most an arbitrary and artificial product of three generations of writers, literary and theater critics, and journalists, it has so captured the imagination of the liberal establishment that its relatively recent arbitrary and self-interested origins have been obscured. (27)

By collapsing the distinction between these terms, Carter not only exposes its arbitrariness, but also points to the utter lack of consensus as to what pornography actually *is*. However, the word "erotic," which derives from the Greek eros, contains a sense of pleasure. I see pleasure as purposely absent from Carter's representation of violence in "The Scarlet House." She argues in The Sadeian Woman, moreover, that sensuality is wholly absent from Sade:

> [He] explores the inhuman sexual possibilities of meat; it is a mistake to think that the substance of which his actors are made is flesh. There is nothing alive or sensual about them. Sade is a great puritan and will disinfect of sensuality anything he can lay his hands on; therefore he writes about sexual relations in terms of butchery and meat. (138)

Given my reading of "The Scarlet House" as Carter's feminist response to the Sadeian tradition and the dangers of aligning pleasure with violence against women, I do not use the terms "erotic" and "pornographic" interchangeably in this chapter. Instead, I refer exclusively to the story's violence as pornographic.

women's status in the world and that Sade's writing offers a particularly lucid look at various figurations of female identity:[2]

> In the looking-glass of Sade's misanthropy, women may see themselves as they have been and it is an uncomfortable sight. He offers an extraordinary variety of male fantasies about women . . . . The hole the pornographer Sade leaves in his text is just sufficient for a flaying; for a castration. It is a hole large enough for women to see themselves as if the fringed hole of graffiti were a spyhole into territory that had been forbidden them. (36)

Carter characterizes sexual violence as central to the tradition of heterosexual pornographic literature. Writing that sexual relations are always an expression of social relations, she argues that pornography obscures the social: "The sexual act in pornography exists as a metaphor for what people do to one another, often in the cruellest sense; but the present business of the pornographer is to suppress the metaphor as much as he can and leave us with a handful of empty words"(17). "The Scarlet House" refuses this tradition of suppression and actively links the social with the sexual.

Carter suggests that while "all such literature has the potential to force the reader to reassess his [sic] relation to his own sexuality," pornography which is artfully constructed is profoundly subversive:

> When pornography abandons its quality of existential solitude

[2] While Carter does not explicitly identify heterosexual pornography as her particular focus, her argument is exclusively derived from analyses of these sources. Similarly, my discussion in this chapter refers exclusively to the Western heterosexual literary tradition of pornography.

> and moves out of the kitsch area of timeless, placeless fantasy and into the real world, then it loses its function of safety valve. It begins to comment on real relations in the real world. Therefore, the more pornographic writing acquires the techniques of real literature, of real art, the more deeply subversive it is likely to be in that the more likely it is to affect the reader's perception of the world. (19)[3]

"The Scarlet House" is a subversive feminist pornographic narrative -- it is porn with work to do. Carter's narrative challenges the reader to reassess not only pornographic representations of women, but also the very definition of pornography. The story reproduces many of the conventions of porn Carter identifies in The Sadeian Woman: archetypal characters, abstracted settings and a first-person female narrator. These conventions are re-produced differently, however, and these deviations constitute the story's subversiveness. Jacques Derrida describes this type of intertextual play as the movement of *différance*; traces of past texts and traditions are identifiable in "present" texts but are represented differently: "[I]t is this constitution of the present, as an

[3] Carter repeatedly genders the porn reader as male, an essentializing move which I read in light of Gayatri Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism. Spivak notes in "The Problem of Cultural Self-representation" that "it is not possible, within discourse, to escape essentializing somewhere . . . In deconstructive critical practice, you have to be aware that you are going to essentialize anyway. So then strategically you can look at essentialisms, not as descriptions of the way things are, but as something that one must adopt to produce a critique of anything" (51). I read Carter's critique of porn in The Sadeian Woman as directed towards a more generalized social system, rather than individual consumers. Further, by publishing The Sadeian Woman and "The Scarlet House," Carter troubles her own polemical and essentializing statement: she read porn, analyzed it and produced her own version of the pornographic tale. Finally, her assertion that women can learn from reading Sade immediately complicates any simplistic identification of porn consumers as male. The reader of pornography is undeniably indeterminate.

'originary' and irreducibly nonsimple (and therefore, *stricto sensu* nonoriginary) synthesis of marks, or traces of retentions and protentions . . . that I propose to call archi-writing, archi-trace, or différance ("Différance" 116). "The Scarlet House's" differential relation to conventional porn literature ruptures the very category of "the pornographic," and illustrates Derrida's assertion that the movement of différance "instigates the subversion of every kingdom" (123).

No universal or uncontested definition of pornography exists. Citing Justice Potter Stewart in their introduction to For Adult Users Only: The Dilemma of Violent Pornography, Susan Gubar and Joan Hoff note that "no one can define pornography, but everyone knows what it is when they see it and especially when they begin to argue about it" (8). The "genre" of pornography is as vague and elusive as the conventional timeless and spaceless setting of the porn narrative. In "The Scarlet House," Carter re-presents pornography as a condition rather than any containable literary or filmic genre. From Carter's engagement with philosophic and psychoanalytic representations of Woman in "The Scarlet House," I read "the pornographic" as a long-standing systemic tradition of doing violence to Western female subjectivity. Carter's project in this story is to deconstruct these traditions of violence and to imagine potential modes of individual and collective resistance.

I have divided my discussion of "The Scarlet House" into two sections. In the first section, "Establishing a Trace," I begin by linking "The Scarlet House" to conventions of porn, and especially Sadeian, literature. Traces of Western

philosophic and psychoanalytic theories about Woman are woven into Carter's representation of Madame Schreck and the Sadeian Count. Focusing first on Madame Schreck, I argue that the tale's grotesque representation of her orifice deconstructs diverse and abstracted myths of female identity through a process of graphic literalization. Next, I locate the Count as a conventional Sadeian pornographer and explore Carter's deconstruction of his philosophy of chaos. Through Madame Schreck and the Count, Carter links pornography with the traditions of Western philosophy and psychoanalysis. In dissolving the distance between porn, philosophy and psychoanalysis, "The Scarlet House" ruptures the notion of pornography as an identifiable and containable genre, and re-presents it as a series of interrelated discourses which construct Woman as Lack(ing).

In the second section, "Connected and Resistant," I explore notions of the lost origin in relation to the narrator's failing memory and the three versions of abduction she relates. Beginning again with Derrida's notion of the trace, I explore how the narrator resists the Count's attacks on her subjectivity by re-locating her "origins" in her mnemonics. Using these mnemonic traces, the narrator constructs multiple narratives which have neither authentic beginnings nor determinable endings; it is a labyrinthine strategy based upon the "systematic randomness" of her interconnections (428). Carter's representation of the labyrinth in "The Scarlet House" differs from its appearance in "The Erl-King" and therefore produces an alternate vision of resistance. The labyrinth's shifting significance portrays the movement of *différance* as the "non-full, non-

simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name 'origin' no longer suits it" (Derrida 115). Carter's differential representation of the labyrinth reflects its flexibility and consequent hopefulness as an image of resistance.

Establishing a Trace

My initial reading of "The Scarlet House" left me feeling brutalized. The reader is denied any temporary respite from the story's troubling images; its unapologetically graphic portrayal of sexual violence effectively disavows the practice of censorship. Significantly, Carter argues in The Sadeian Woman that censorship of pornography is primarily motivated by a refusal to acknowledge the epidemic of sexual violence in the Western world. Carter's refusal of censorship in "The Scarlet House" insistently represents violence as a sustained and pervasive condition. Thinking violence as a condition rather than a series of individual acts marks its institutionalization within Western society. Through censorship, Carter argues, the deployment of violence by political institutions as a means of sustaining power is eclipsed:

> But to show, in art, erotic violence committed by men upon women cuts too near the bone, and will be condemned out of hand. Perhaps it reveals too clearly that violence has always been the method by which institutions demonstrate their superiority. It can become too vicious a reminder of the mutilations our society inflicts upon women . . . . It suggests,

> furthermore, that male political dominance might be less a matter of moral superiority than of crude brute force and this would remove a degree of glamour from the dominance itself. (SW 22-23)

Carter's reference to "crude brute force" evokes Nietzsche's notion of the will to power. As I outlined in my discussion on "The Erl-King," Nietzsche argues that systems, institutions and traditions accrue dominance through the exercise of force rather than any pre-ordained and incontestable right to rule. Carter's grotesque representation of Madame Schreck demythologizes pornographic (including philosophic and psychoanalytic) discourses about Woman; she is the literal embodiment of diverse Western myths of female identity. Her gruesomeness exposes the implicit violence of the myths she embodies. Similarly, the story's unflinching refusal to shield the reader from its violence enables its deconstruction of the Count's discourses about memory and female identity. "The Scarlet House" identifies the Count's continual mutilation of women's bodies and minds -- his reliance upon crude, brute force -- as the methodology by which he (re)produces his power.

Defined as "the paradigm of sexuality," Madame Schreck is an archetype of multiple discursive formulations of femininity (424). Carter argues in The Sadeian Woman that archetypal characters are a favourite convention among pornographers, but that these archetypal representations are devoid of all traces of humanity: "Since all pornography derives directly from myth, it follows that its

heroes and heroines . . . are mythic abstractions . . . . Any glimpse of a real man or woman is absent from these representations of the archetypal male and female" (6). Madame Schreck is an archetypal and overdetermined figure; heaped with multiple and contradictory images of Western femininity, she represents Woman at Her most horrifying extremes. She is the Virgin and the Whore, an object for worship and veneration who is somehow far more bestial than a human subject. In her description of the Count's highly structured Tarot Game, the narrator recounts:

> Madame Schreck, of course, is the High Priestess or Female Pope. The Count has given her a blue robe to wear over that terrible red dress that reminds us all, every time we see it, of the irresoluble and animal part of ourselves we all hold in common, since we are women. She is the paradigm of sexuality. At her hairy hole we all pay homage as if it were the mouth of an oracular cave. (424)

The story's repeated references to Madame Schreck's orifice link her with psychoanalytic formulations of women as castrated. Her gaping wound and the world it opens into testifies to the violence of these notions of Woman as lack. Carter argues in The Sadeian Woman that pornographic representations of violence reflect the centrality of the myth of castrated Woman in Western systems of power:

> The whippings, the beatings, the gougings, the stabbings of erotic violence reawaken the memory of the social fiction of the female wound, the bleeding scar left by her castration which is a psychic fiction as deeply at the heart of Western culture as the myth of Oedipus . . . . (23)

Through Madame Schreck, the reader is faced with the pornographic reality of the myth of castration: it is a violent wounding of female subjectivity.

Madame Schreck's embodiment of Woman as lack, however, is coupled paradoxically with her characterization as the aggressive and murderous mother who "likes to gorge upon the unborn young of rabbits. She acquires the foetuses from laboratories; she has them cooked for her in a cream sauce enriched with the addition of the yolk of an egg" (419).[4] Madame Schreck is, then, both Excess and Lack; she is a literal imagining of a castrated, monstrous mother. Kaja Silverman argues in The Subject of Semiotics that these figurations of "Woman as plenitude and Woman as lack are two alternative cultural projections by means of which Man is assured of always having the phallus" (188). In her definition of the phallus, Silverman writes that "it refers not only to the privileges of the symbolic and the fullness of being which can never

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[4] Irigaray describes this Freudian formulation in Speculum of the Other Woman. Quoting Freud's essay on "Femininity," she writes:

> Another variant of the pre-oedipal relation to the mother is "the fear of being murdered or poisoned, which may later form the core of a paranoiac illness" . . . . The system structuring paranoia -- and theory too perhaps -- seems indeed like a play to achieve mastery through an organized set of signifiers that surround, besiege, cleave, out circle, and outflank the dangerous, the embracing, the aggressive mother/body . . . . [The mother] is able to nourish but also to kill, rape, or poison the sexuate body of the child. (36-37)

coexist with those privileges, but to the penis whose sacrifice activates them" (187). She further stresses that the phallus exceeds its anatomical representation and that "the symbolic order . . . is a machine which can be operated by [anyone] in the absence of [the Father] . . . . Moreover, no matter who actually assumes responsibility for operating the machine, that person -- even if it is the mother -- will always represent the phallus" (185). Madame Schreck is this castrated and dangerously excessive phallic mother. She is overloaded with multiple figurations of female identity, all of which emerge from binary structures of language. By heaping these paradoxical images on to Madame Schreck, Carter depicts the subversive movement of *différance*. She re-presents the myths as impossible contradictions, causing the lot of them to collapse under the weight.

Although potentially subversive, Madame Schreck is an ambivalent figure for, as Silverman argues, constructions of female lack and excess function to reify a phallic symbolic structure. A terrorist in her own right, her power is contingent upon her continued complicity with the Count's philosophical paradigm. This role of sexual terrorist links Madame Schreck with the Sadeian tradition, particularly the title character in his novel Juliette. Opposing Juliette to Sade's other paradigmatic woman, her submissive sister Justine, Carter writes that "[t]he life of Juliette exists in a dialectical relation to that of her sister . . . . She is, just as her sister is, a description of a type of female behaviour rather than a model of female behaviour and her triumph is just as ambivalent as is

Justine's disaster" (Sadeian Woman 78-79). Juliette avoids the relentless traumas her sister Justine undergoes by "[abandoning] the praxis of femininity" (78). Like Madame Schreck, Juliette "is a woman who acts according to the precepts and also the practice of a man's world and so she does not suffer. Instead, she causes suffering" (79). But, as Carter insists, "[in Sade] the whip hand is always the hand with the real political power" (24). In "The Scarlet House" it is the Count, not Madame Schreck, who carries the whip: "when visiting his women, he never forgets a whip" (422).[5] He defines and enforces all of the roles in his Tarot Game. Madame Schreck wears the clothes he demands, sits on the throne he designates, and dances and screams for his pleasure. Although the terms of her entrapment are different than those of the women she tortures, Madame Schreck is similarly reduced to a "sexual functioning"; she is not a woman but a Symbol (Sadeian Woman 16).

Schreck's wound serves another function in Carter's tale: it is a hole through which the reader enters the horrors of the Scarlet House. Carter argues in The Sadeian Woman that every pornographic narrative contains this sexual/textual hole:

> In pornographic literature, the text has a gap left in it on purpose so that the reader may, in imagination, step inside it . . . . Many pornographic novels are written in the first person as if by a woman, or use a woman as the focus of the narrative; but this

[5] This phrase comes directly from Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra and explicitly conflates the Sadeian Count with the Western philosophical tradition (Nietzsche 93).

> device only reinforces the male orientation of the fiction . . . . This technique ensures that the gap left in the text is of just the right size for the reader to insert his prick into . . . . (14-16)

The reader's repeated location at the entrance to Madame Schreck's orifice marks her hole as the text's pornographic gap and the encompassing symbolic structure of the Count's philosophy . Through the lens of her wound, the reader enters the Scarlet House, a world literally structured and maintained by the Count's repeated violations of female subjectivity. If Madame Schreck's orifice is the "painted red door" to the interior of the Count's Scarlet House, then this interior is parodically womb-like -- another bloody chamber.[6] Inside this chamber, the Count repeatedly violates the bodies and memories of his female prisoners.

As he erases and scrambles their multiple histories, the Count identifies memory as a constructed palliative designed to conceal the world's truly chaotic nature:

> Memory is the grid of meaning we impose on the random and bewildering flux of the world. Memory is the line we pay out behind us as we travel through time -- it is the clue, like Ariadne's, which means we do not lose our way. Memory is the lasso with which we capture the past and haul it from chaos towards us in nicely ordered sequences, like those of baroque keyboard music. (419)

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[6] The Bloody Chamber is Carter's 1979 collection of revisionist fairy tales. In the title story of the collection, a feminist re-write of *Bluebeard,* Carter links the womb with the sadistic Count's own bloody chamber -- a secret room containing the tortured and dead bodies of his former wives.

Significantly, he communicates almost exclusively via philosophical pronouncements; he is a king of the metaphysical aphorism: "Remembering is the first stage of absolute forgetfulness, says the occult Count, who goes by contraries," and, "'God is random,' says the Count who believes in the irresolute triumph of time over its own rectification, memory" (419, 425). His rhetoric is dizzying. And also strategic. The Count's aphorisms occlude the violence with which he deploys his "dissolving philosophy" and produces the chaos he posits (425-26).

According to Carter, philosophy is a key tool of the pornographer. She argues that pornographic literature utilizes philosophical abstraction in order to conceal its underlying ideologies:

> So pornography reinforces the false universals of sexual archetypes because it denies, or doesn't have time for, or can't find room for, or, because of its underlying ideology, ignores, the social context in which sexual activity takes place . . . . Therefore pornography must always have the false simplicity of fable; the abstraction of the flesh involves the mystification of the flesh. As it reduces the actors in the sexual drama to instruments of pure function, so the pursuit of pleasure becomes in itself a metaphysical quest. The pornographer, in spite of himself, becomes a metaphysician. (16)

The Count's metaphysical ramblings conceal his pornographic status. In her multiple representations of the Count's philosophy and her insistent descriptions of the erotic torture he both sanctions and personally executes, however, the narrator unveils the Count's pornographic function. Describing the Count for the first time, she writes: "Chaos is coming, says the Count, and giggles; the Count ends all his letters 'yours entropically' and signs them with the peacock's quill dipped in the blood of a human sacrifice" (417). Towards the narrative's end, she recounts his assertion that "Man is an animal who insists on making patterns . . . all the world you think so highly of is nothing but pretty floral wallpaper pasted up over chaos" (427). The narrator juxtaposes these professions against her descriptions that he "has perfected a complex system of forgetting" (419), and "[t]he Count prepares chaos in his crucible . . . he makes an institution out of chaos" (427). Her account of the Tarot game systematically deconstructs his chaotic ideology: "He reads the patterns the hallucinated pack make at random and so he invokes chaos. He has methodology. He is a scientist, in his way" (424). The narrator's demystification of his aphoristic vituperations exposes the Scarlet House as a site of systematic and pornographic torture. The Count does not discover chaos: he creates it. Beneath the glaring light of the narrator's deconstructions, the Count's system is stripped of all appearances of arbitrariness: his philosophy of chaos is produced exclusively through the bodies and minds of women.

For the Count, subjectivity is grounded in memory and his project is to destroy subjectivity. His "dissolving philosophy" is deployed against women for the express purpose of obliterating their memories and procuring their annihilation. Luce Irigaray argues in Speculum of the Other Woman that "[w]e can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the 'masculine'" (133). Irigaray's analysis is an ironic echo of diverse Western philosophic and psychoanalytic theories, from Plato and Freud onwards, which perpetually deny the humanity of Woman. Her inherent weakness and her passionate and irrational nature are all arguments which have been marshaled against Woman in order to contain and silence her. The Count's philosophy belongs in this phallocentric tradition which Irigaray contests. In his paradigm, women are inherently animalistic; the Tarot game is designed to reveal this essentially bestial nature. His philosophy precludes the possibility of a female subject. "The Scarlet House" disturbingly illuminates Irigaray's argument that "[t]heoretically there would be no such thing as a woman. She would not exist. The best that can be said is that she does *not exist yet*" (166). The Count's philosophy attempts to ensure the impossibility of female subjectivity.

The metaphysical pornographer's quest to obscure his ideological position through abstraction is strengthened by a conventionally indeterminate setting. Carter writes that: "[p]ornography . . . assists the process of false universalizing. Its excesses belong to that timeless, locationless area outside history, outside geography, where fascist art is born" (SW 12). In "The Scarlet

House," the Count's predilection for abstraction is mirrored in the enigmatic location of his prison. The Scarlet House is a place seemingly removed from time and space. Each version of arrival the protagonist narrates involves a journey away from the initial site of her capture and into unknown territory. In her first description she recounts that

> [t]hey hauled me off at the end of a rope they tied to the back of one of their motorcycles and made me run, tumble, bounce behind them on my way to the Scarlet House . . . . The Scarlet House was built of white concrete and looked to me very much like a hospital, a large terminal ward. (418)

The girl's second story of capture describes a "gloomy [train] journey" followed by a nightmarish carriage ride which "lurching, ponderous, took me into the deepening shadows of the night, which seemed to be moving across the fen to engulf me" (420). At the end of this journey she is deposited in "a dark courtyard virtually enclosed by tall, black trees; the gates shut immediately after we were inside" (420). In this second version, the Scarlet House is a "rambling, brick-built, red-tiled place, half farmhouse, half country mansion . . . wholly dedicated to the Count's experiments" (421). The narrator's third and final description of capture is a horrific "Middle-European nightmare" which begins with an account of her father's murder and her rape by a militaristic group of men (424). Following her rape, the girl is taken to an "armoured car waiting outside" and driven to an ambiguous army-type setting where "Madame Schreck, in a smart

uniform of drab olive, with sheer black stockings and those six-inch heels of hers that stab the linoleum as she walks, took my particulars at the mahogany desk" (423). In this account the Scarlet House is a "block-house with red-painted doors" (423). The specific nature and location of the Scarlet House are impossible to determine from the girl's multiple versions of capture. Taken individually, each account is already ambiguous; when the three versions are placed alongside each other, the only common elements are that the Scarlet House is elsewhere and inescapable.

Although the location of the Scarlet House is indeterminate, its comparison to schools, barracks, brothels and hospitals suggests that the world is, however indefinitely, present inside this space which is so adamantly portrayed as outside of everything. These traces of the world differ from Carter's assessment of conventional porn as outside time and space, and make "The Scarlet House" a porn narrative of *différance*. As she fulfills the timeless and placeless convention through her multiple descriptions of capture and journey, the narrator simultaneously denies the existence of any space outside of or isolated from ideology.

The narrator's particular descriptions of the Scarlet House evoke Michel Foucault's discussion of modern disciplinary society in Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. In his discussion of panopticism, Foucault argues that modern armies, schools, hospitals and families are "disciplinary institutions"

whose purpose is the production of "useful individuals" (211). For Foucault, "discipline" is not a specific institution or apparatus but

> a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a "physics" or an "anatomy" of power, a technology. And it may be taken over either by "specialized" institutions (the penitentiaries or "houses of correction" of the nineteenth century), or by institutions that use it as an essential instrument for a particular end (schools, hospitals), or by pre-existing authorities that find in it a means of reinforcing or reorganizing their internal mechanisms of power . . . . (215)

The Scarlet House is a disciplinary institution. The Count's ultimate project is the preservation of his power; he seeks to produce disintegrated subjects wholly incapable of resistance and stripped of all memory of their former lives. Far from reflecting the Count's chaotic rhetoric, however, the Scarlet House is actually a rigidly structured house of "discipline." The Count's particular modes of discipline -- sexual and physical torture -- are deployed in the name of education. The narrator states: "The count comes personally to the Scarlet House to give us our lessons" (420). These "lessons" consist of the careful destruction of his prisoners' memories, a destruction designed to obliterate all consciousness of existence: "We are his harem and also his finishing school.

The curriculum is divided into three parts. First, we learn how to forget; second, we forget how to speak; third, we cease to exist" (426).

The protagonist's very act of narrating testifies to her survival of the Count's curriculum. However, the female narrator of "The Scarlet House" is also a marker of the pornographic tradition as a whole. Carter's characterization of this protagonist also unmistakably links her with Sade's representation of Justine -- his most submissive and masochistic female character. Notwithstanding, the narrator of "The Scarlet House" differs from Justine in important ways.

Carter describes Justine as "a good woman in a man's world. She is a good woman according to the rules for women laid down by men and her reward is rape, humiliation and incessant beatings. Her life is that of a woman martyrised by the circumstances of her life as a woman" (38). Despite the repeated violations she undergoes, Justine never resists or expresses anger. Consistently assuring her many captors and abusers that she will not betray them, Justine repeatedly offers herself up for violation. Immediately following her rape by Saint-Florent, for example, Justine witnesses Jasmin and the Count de Bressac engaged in anal sex. She then overhears their plot to murder de Bressac's aunt. Justine recounts that when de Bressac notices her concealed figure, "I did not put them to the trouble of dragging me from my sanctuary; I stepped forward immediately and, falling at their feet [cried out for pity]" (505). Added to her own inviolable submissiveness, Justine also aids the sacrifice of other victims. Following her escape from St. Mary-in-the-Wood, she is captured

by Monsieur de Gernande and taken to his remote chateau. When Gernande orders her to assist him as he bleeds his wife, Justine responds: "Whatever the loathing I sensed for all these horrors . . . I had no choice but to submit with the most entire resignation" (640). Justine's docility, figured in her refusal to resist her attackers or aid other victims, is repeated throughout the novel. Carter argues that Justine's lack of resistance is compounded by an utter absence of anger and moral outrage: "She is incapable of anger or defiance because of her moral indifference; she feels no anger at the sufferings of her cell mates" (54).

The narrator of "The Scarlet House" is placed in strikingly similar conditions to the terrors Justine experiences. The Count's threat to the narrator as he holds the "sacrificial knife . . . made of black obsidian" is an exact echo of Gernande's words to Justine: "As of the present moment you inhabit the world no longer, since the least impulse of my will can cause you to disappear from it" ("SH" 423; Justine 635). The Scarlet House, with its legion of kidnapped women and its maze-like interior resembles Justine's description of St. Mary-in-the-Wood, a monastery in which she is imprisoned by four libertines[7]. Justine is twenty-two years old and "nearly a virgin" when she enters the monastery (567). The girl-narrator of "The Scarlet House" twice refers to herself as twenty-two at the time of her abduction. In her second version of capture, she writes: "I

[7] See especially pp 578-80 for Justine's account of the monastary's maze-like interior. Carter's description of St. Mary-in-the-Wood in The Sadeian Woman likewise echoes her representation of the Scarlet House:

> Brought here by force, their girls are released from the pavilion only by death. It is as if the place of terror and privilege is a model of the world; we don't ask to come here and may leave it only once. Our entrance and exit is alike violent and involuntary; choice has nothing to do with it. But our residence within this confinement is not upon equal terms. (42-43)

glimpsed the last of the world in which, until that aghast moment, I'd spent twenty-two years of girlhood" (420). Then, during her third account, she repeats: "Twenty-two years of my life have unfurled in this room like a slow, quiet fan . . . . I had been a virgin. I was in great pain" (422-23). Placed in similar situations, Justine and the narrator of "The Scarlet House" differ in their expression of anger and resistance.

Justine's proffered explanation for refusing to rebel reveals a complete internalization of her assigned role as sufferer: "What possibility of hesitation had I? Was he not my master?" (687). Whereas the conventional female narrator does not question her situation, Carter's narrator uses her voice to resist, deconstruct and expose the Count. Her expression of anger at the story's end is a significant departure from the tradition of docility initiated by Justine: "I examined the abused flesh of my breasts and belly and felt, not sorrow I'd been so mauled, but anger the Count had mistreated me" (428). This differential expression of anger, moreover, leads her directly into a fervent commitment to resist the Count's strategies of annihilation: "and what if it's only that the puppet turns against the puppet-master: Isn't the puppet-master dependent on the submission of his dolls for his authority?" (428).

As Carter notes in The Sadeian Woman, the effects of Justine's submissiveness extend beyond her own plight. During her imprisonment in Roland's castle, for example, Justine is offered multiple opportunities to murder him and end his reign of terror. She refuses each opportunity, however, and

these refusals ensure the murder of yet more women. Justine's submission is a marker of her individualism, a position which precludes any empathy for or organization with other prisoners.[8] In contrast to Justine's destructive individualism, the narrator in "The Scarlet House" passionately insists upon her connection with the other imprisoned women. She recounts:

> I need hardly tell you that we, the women of the Scarlet House, live in absolute isolation, although the planned interpenetration of all our experience gives us a vague but pervasive sense of closeness to one another. When on a pillow wet with tears, I live over again the fatal moment of capture, it might be your dread I feel, or yours, or yours -- a different kind of dread than mine which, nevertheless, I experience as though it were my own and so I draw nearer to you all. (425)

This recognition of common experience opens up the possibility for collective resistance; by moving beyond Justine's isolated and individualistic expression of suffering and into an articulation of systemic violence, the possibility for political change is created. As the narrator indicates, however, this organization is only in its infancy: "[W]hen we are forced to play at the Tarot Game, I and the rest of the minor arcana, I sense I may be, in some as yet formless and incoherent way, almost a legion of selves" (426). The women's unfinished organization and unattempted revolution by the story's end marks "The Scarlet House" as anti-

[8] Carter characterizes Justine as a "bourgeois individualist" and argues that her "virtue, in action, is the liberal lie in action, a good heart and an inadequate methodology" (54-55).

utopian. Like the unrealized freedom recounted by the girl-narrator at the end of "The Erl-King," the unaccomplished revolution inside the Scarlet House signals that the conditions do not yet exist for liberation.

While the prisoners' unrealized organization reflects the narrative's general refusal of closure and containment, it is explicitly connected with the narrator's multiple addresses to the reader: "I need hardly tell you that we, the women of the Scarlet House . . ." (425). Carter dissolves all safe and, by implication, fictional distance by disturbingly transporting the reader inside this inescapable space. This hailing both destroys the safety in abstraction and collapses any distinction between inside and outside; the reader is undeniably inside the text and ambiguously connected with its violence. At one moment, the narrator distinguishes between the reader and the other women of the Scarlet House. A few lines later, however, this distinction collapses and the reader is invited to identify with the Count's victims (425). The reader is neither victim nor victimizer, but exists somewhere else. This ambiguity is central to the possibility of political change. Homi Bhabha argues in The Location of Culture that a new space of possibility is created by moving beyond binary expressions of opposition:

> The language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the terms of the master and the slave, the mercantilist and the Marxist, but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place

> of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics. (25)

By hailing the reader, a reader who is "neither the one nor the other," the narrator creates this new space of unarticulated possibility. The narrator's address to the reader constitutes a moment of politics; situated inside a pornographic system, the reader is challenged to respond. The outcome is purposefully undetermined for, as Carter's narrative suggests, combating pornographic representations is not a simple matter of declaring allegiances, being for or against "it," or of supporting or negating the practice of censorship. As Bhabha writes: "[t]he challenge lies in conceiving of the time of political action and understanding as opening up a space that can accept and regulate the differential structure of the moment of intervention without rushing to produce a unity of the social antagonism or contradiction" (25). Rather, "The Scarlet House" operates as an initial questioning of the technologies of pornography and summons the reader to interrogate the conditions of its possibility.[9]

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[9] Taking my cue from Foucault's interrogation of sex in The History of Sexuality, I read "The Scarlet House" as refusing repressive and totalizing representations of pornography. Rather, Carter's designation of a pornographic condition demands an analysis which acknowledges power as a network of interrelated and shifting discourses. Her tale enables questions which echo Foucault's interrogation into the discourses of sex

> In a specific type of discourse on sex, in a specific form of extortion of truth, appearing historically and in specific places (around the child's body, apropos of women's sex . . .) what were the most immediate, the most local power relations at work? How did they make possible these kinds of discourses and, conversely, how were these discourses used to support power relations. . . . (97)

Only by locating and examining pornography as a series of shifting and interrelated discourses can an effective political critique be formed.

Connected and Resistant

While a collective organization and revolt is unrealized by the narrative's end, Carter does represent the possibility of individual resistance inside the Count's domain. The narrator of "The Scarlet House" has been violently wrenched from her home and stripped of all capacity for self-representation. Her name is unknown and she has been "erased and substituted and played back so many times [her] memory is nothing but a palimpsest of possibilities and probabilities" (424). The Count's eradication of her origins invokes Irigaray's argument that Freud's theory of female development is castrating on multiple levels. In addition to her "atrophied member," Woman is also cut off from her origins (22). Irigaray's description of the little girl's castration from her origins, which I cited in my discussion of "The Erl-King," resonates with the narrator's experience inside the Scarlet House. The captive woman is without name or history; she is an icon for the lost origin which, according to Foucault, is irrecoverable. ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality," 143). Both Foucault's description of the irretrievable origin and Nietzsche's splitting of origin from purpose mark the emergence of an anti-teleological and anti-tyrannical mode of historiography, a practice which focuses on ruptures and discontinuities rather than linearity and an evolutionary orientation.

Carter's depiction of the lost origin in "The Scarlet House" reflects its ultimate irretrievability. In her representation of the Count, however, Carter suggests that even the refutation of origins can be harnessed for tyrannical

purposes; under the Count's rule, the discourse of the absent origin is an ideological position reeking of the will to power. Despite her inability to remember anything beyond the fact of its existence, the girl-narrator fervently professes a life before her abduction -- her three narratives of capture testify to this prior life. These three versions also identify her abduction and arrival at the Scarlet House as the moment in which the knowledge of her history began to disappear. The moment of abduction becomes a new origin -- the place to which she returns each time she follows a different thread of memory. In "The Scarlet House," the absent origin has a definite and traceable history: it is produced by the Count as a means of (re)establishing his autocracy.

The Count's philosophy of chaos is predicated on a privileging of the absent origin. He relies upon his captives' relentless desires to pursue their authentic and expired pasts -- to make of their origins a destination -- while he renders the very quest impossible. The Count desires his prisoners to believe their subjectivity is lodged in the retention of fixed and stable memories, in a knowledge of their origins, so that his repeated attacks on their memories permanently destroy their capacities for self-representation.

The narrator's survival depends upon her ability to refuse the Count's paradoxical privileging of the origin and "to change the rules and make a new game" (Katsavos 13).[10] She avoids the fatal abyss of his philosophy by shifting her quest away from the possession of her authentic history to the retention of

[10] In an interview with Anna Katsavos, Carter makes this remark while discussing the figure of Fevvers in her novel Nights at the Circus.

"certain precious mnemonics" and the formation of "inter-connection[s]" (425, 427). In other words, she creates an ever-shifting network of connecting memories by following the traces of her erased origins.

Derrida describes this notion of the trace in "Différance" as seminal to the movement of signification. The trace marks a relation to both the past and the future and constitutes "what is called the present" in its differential relation to these temporal modes (116). This relation of difference, moreover, links the trace with seemingly contradictory notions of disappearance and appearance: "Always differing and deferring, the trace is never as it is in the presentation of itself. It erases itself in presenting itself, muffles itself in resonating, like the *a* writing itself, inscribing its pyramid in *différance* (124). For Derrida, the trace, or the movement of *différance*, enables a mode of signification which moves beyond traditional Western binary structures and therefore evades the language of origin/telos and presence/absence:

> In the delineation of *différance* everything is strategic and adventurous. Strategic because no transcendent truth present outside the field of writing can govern theologically the totality of the field. Adventurous because this strategy is not a simple strategy in the sense that strategy orients tactics according to a final goal, a *telos* or theme of domination, a mastery and ultimate reappropriation of . . . the field. (111)

While the Count regards her eroding memories as a sign of his victory, the narrator re-conceives of these erasures as traces -- not to follow back and discover "the way things were," but to pursue, without end, a proliferating network of inter-connections.

The narrator's mnemonics reflect Derrida's notion of the trace: they mark her abduction and the erasure of her memories as they simultaneously signal the possibility for the construction of new narratives:

> I am beginning to reconcile myself completely to the fact that they may not contain any element at all of real memory . . . It was hard to bear, at first, but soon I understood how the hawk, the face without a mouth, the eyes without a face, are all the residue of the world I still carry with me that does not elude me . . . . Small items, meaningless in themselves, and yet keys to an entire system of meanings. (426)

By relinquishing the pursuit and desire for her authentic origins, the narrator is able to embrace her failing memory as "a palimpsest of possibilities and probabilities" and survive the Count's tortures through the incessant play of *différance* (424). In this alternate paradigm, she foregrounds the instability of her memory: its gaps and nonlinearity. By abandoning the conventional model of history as teleology, she uses her eroding memory strategically in order to narrate a different history -- one that cannot be killed. The gaps in her memory are more than a simple reiteration of the lost origin; by following the trace of her

mnemonics the narrator also refuses the origin's binary counterpart: the destination. Just as the play of *différance* is "a strategy without finality," the captive woman's insistent representation of her failing memory is also a refusal to be forgotten or silenced (Différance 111). Because her story cannot be wholly accounted for, it resists containment and closure.[11] The narrator's final declaration marks her project as ongoing and anti-teleological: "This world's a vile oubliette. Yet in its refuse I will find the key to free me" (428). Although she evades the Count's annihilating philosophy through this undirected play, her situation is at best ambivalent: her strategy is "without finality" because her tenure in the Scarlet House is unending. Her ability to resist the Count's philosophy depends upon her success in a second and far less defined battle against herself. This second battle is intelligible in the narrator's repeated comparison of her brain to a maze. While "The Erl-King" represents the

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[11] I am drawing upon Cathy Caruth's fascinating analysis of *Hiroshima, mon amour*, a film directed by Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras which foregrounds issues of memory and forgetting within a traumatic post-war context. Caruth writes that Resnais

> had originally been commissioned to make a documentary on Hiroshima, but after several months of collecting archival footage he had refused to carry out the project, claiming that such a film would not significantly differ from his previous documentary on concentration camps . . . . In his refusal, . . . Resnais paradoxically implies that it is direct archival footage that cannot maintain the very specificity of the event . . . . I would suggest that the interest of *Hiroshima, mon amour* lies in how it explores the possibility of a faithful history in the very indirectness of this telling. (27)

The final line of Resnais' documentary on concentration camps, *Nuit et brouillard*, suggests the implicit danger of forgetting which such artistic productions (unwittingly) make available:

> And there are those of us who sincerely regard these ruins as if the old concentration camp monster were dead under the ashes, who pretend to be hopeful before this image that moves away, as if one could be cured of the concentration-camp plague, we who pretend to believe that all of this is of one time and of one country, and who don't think to look around us, and who don't hear the endless cry. (in Caruth 122)

This remark, coupled with Caruth's analysis of *Hiroshima mon amour*, suggests that ultimately, fixed and completed images work to efface the reality and significance of an event. In "The Scarlet House," the indirectness of the narrator's telling prevents the death of her story.

labyrinth as an all-encompassing external structure through which the protagonist moves, "The Scarlet House" produces the maze as an internalized structure inside the narrator's mind. This internalization of the labyrinth shifts the discussion from one of mobility and possibility, to a scenario in which the protagonist is as lost within herself as she is in the Count's domain.

Madame Schreck and the Scarlet House are both connected with this image of interpellation. Relating (again) her first introduction to the Count and the Scarlet House, she states: "He himself, such is his magnanimity, received me in a vast, echoing hall hung with extravagant tapestries. I retain only the most confused recollections of its exterior but I know the inside perfectly well now. It is a maze of cells like the inside of a brain" (423). Then, during her third narration of capture and imprisonment, she recounts her father's murder: "His white hair floods with blood as red as the painted house of Madame Schreck, who is waiting for me in the subterranean torture-chamber deep at the heart of the maze of my brain, the Minotaur with the head of a woman and the orifice of a sow" (423). Madame Schreck and the Scarlet House elide in their dual-representation as external realities and internalized images. Schreck's virginal, animalistic, whorish, castrated and excessive body is a painted scarlet house, the structure inside which the Count attempts the annihilation of his female prisoners. The narrator's capacity for resistance is dependent upon her refusal to be interpellated into the Count's formulation of female identity and thus

lose herself in the horrific and contradictory structure of Madame Schreck's scarlet body.

Her assertion of fearlessness at the sight of Schreck's orifice illustrates the narrator's refusal to be interpellated into the Count's formulation of female identity: "And where there's no hope, there's no fear either. Not even fear of Madame Schreck, through whose hole we must all crawl to extinction, one day; unless it is the way to freedom" (428). This potential for freedom lies on the other side, outside the wound and, presumably, the ideology of castrated femininity. However, this journey through Madame Schreck's hole, a disturbing image of re-birth, cannot result in any absolute, utopian freedom for, as Foucault writes, there is no outside or escape from power: "[p]ower is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (HS 93). The narrator, moreover, is emphatic about the impossibility of escape and the death of hope. The traces of this laboured journey, the discursive after-birth, would follow both narrator and reader to this enigmatic "other side." This freedom on the other side of Madame Schreck's hole is neither death nor escape from the Scarlet House; rather, it emerges out of the narrator's relinquishment of the impossible search for authentic origins and her refusal to participate in the Count's memory game. Derrida writes of a hope which emerges from the play of *différance*, a hope located on "the other side of nostalgia" which is beyond the totalizing language of essences, beginnings and endings (127). The other side of Madame Schreck's wound is analogous to this "other side of nostalgia"; it is

not outside discursive structures, but beyond its binary language of origin/telos, presence/absence and being/lack.

Conclusion

She is another Scheherezade -- telling stories from the wound of castrated femininity to save her life. The imprisoned narrator creates the conditions for her survival by refusing the Count's attempts to isolate her both geographically (from her place of origins) and psychically (from the other women prisoners): she re-locates her origins in her mnemonics, and fervently declares her connection with the other kidnapped women. The Count's attempts at isolation are analogous to defining pornography as a contained and identifiable genre; such a move eclipses the systemic condition of violence. Through the narrator's refusal of isolation, she exposes the network of Western discourses contributing to the violation of female subjectivity. "The Scarlet House" describes the dehumanizing nature of the Sadeian tradition in conjunction with psychoanalytic conceptions of female identity as rooted in a female wound(ing). Western philosophy is similarly implicated in this pornographic condition because of its traditional equation of Woman with flesh, passion and danger. The interconnectedness of these discourses is finally intelligible in the horrifying orifice around which the tale is centered. Madame Schreck's hole is dizzyingly overdetermined: it is the site of ongoing abuse; it marks the gaps in the narrator's memory and therefore her initial experience of violence; it is the embodied representation of bleeding and lacking Womanhood; and, finally, it is

an ideological structure from which we have yet to exit. Carter's representation of pornography as a condition emerging from a series of linked discourses in "The Scarlet House" resonates with Foucault's description of power as "the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (HS 93).

Significantly, "The Scarlet House" does not produce a finite beginning or ending. The tale begins with a memory re-construction in process, "I remember, I'd been watching a hawk," and ends with her declaration of ongoing resistance (417). Like Carter's subversion of origins and endings throughout the tale, this refusal of narrative closure is a form of resistance. The narrator's successful resistance is poignantly marked as she recounts her own future: "And so I established the declension of my undoing, from capture to annihilation: the hawk, the face without a mouth, the eyes without a face. After that will come nothing. I shall be perfectly silent" (428). Her declaration of silence is one way of moving beyond Western binary systems of signification and pornographic figurations of female identity. The best she can do within the Scarlet House is refuse the Count's mode of signification and silence is one potential tool of resistance. Her assertion of silence, however, is paradoxical; her story already exists in "The Scarlet House." Therefore, the possible cessation of her voice will never erase the story she has already told. Just as she paradoxically recounts her forgetting of the Viennese nightmare under the Count's tortures -- "This

morning, the Count busily erased all the tapes of my Viennese apocalypse; I am glad of it, it was a vile memory" -- the trace of her tale survives (428).

In the third and final chapter, I leave the horrors of this wounded fiction behind to explore Carter's jubilant representation of shifting identity and intertextual revisionism in Nights at the Circus. Through Fevvers, the novel's fantastic and exuberant heroine, Carter celebrates the strategic power of narrative.

Life in the Intertext: Revisions of Identity in Nights at the Circus

Nights at the Circus (1984) is a novel about identity. Through Fevvers, the novel's marvelous and uncontainable hybrid heroine, Carter debunks traditional notions of essences and origins, topples binary figurations of gender, and posits a specular and performative model of identity. As Anne Fernihough argues in her eloquent analysis of Fevvers, "the concept of 'the enigma of woman' is both foregrounded and systematically undermined in the novel" (90). She further suggests that for the reader, the challenge of Fevvers is in learning to abandon the quest for her bellybutton and so evade the binaristic trap of her slogan, "Is she fact or is she fiction?" (Nights at the Circus, hereafter Nights, 7). In this final chapter, I argue that Carter's destabilization of identity resonates with her intertextual project. Through her insistent and parodic use of intertextuality in Nights, Carter simultaneously erects and erodes not just traditional formulations of essence and gender, but also undermines the discourses of canonicity and history as teleology.

Combined with her dizzying use of intertextuality in the novel, Carter's representation of Fevvers' grotesque body both refuses the unitary identity of the subject and debunks the conventional formulation of the canon as a linear, fixed

tradition. The canon, like Fevvers' shifting identity and grotesque body, is not a contained unit but a series of threads that can be unraveled and re-combined in infinite permutations and combinations. As a result, discussing "identity" in Nights is itself a high-wire performance; for, while the novel is about identity, it is more specifically about refusing the very category. Like "The Erl-King" and "The Scarlet House," Nights' subversive use of pastiche suggests that life in the intertext is not only a strategy of survival, but the best possible mode of refusing hegemony, celebrating multiplicity, and abandoning the quest for origins.

My discussion in this chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, "Returns to the birthplace," I argue that, as in "The Erl-King" and "The Scarlet House," Carter's manipulation of origins and endings in Nights is seminal to the novel's destabilization of identity and intertextual re-formations. The next section, "'But can one sign with a perfume?' Or, How does Fevvers endorse her cheques?" examines names and namelessness in "The Erl-King," "The Scarlet House" and Nights. Coupled with the protagonists' unknown names in the two short stories, Fevvers' profusion of signifying "handles" deconstructs the Western world's traditional formulation of proper names as repositories of essential identity. I begin the third segment, "Spectacular forgery," by re-stating Teresa de Lauretis' notion of gender as "the product and process of representation and self-representation" which I examined in chapter 1. Focusing on the aspect of "self-representation," I explore Fevvers' self-construction and her laughing assertion of the confidence trick at the novel's end in relation to

Jacques Derrida's discussion of laughter in Ulysses. I conclude my discussion of both the novel and the thesis in the fourth and final section, "Envoi: Re-directions," a heading which echoes the concluding structure of Nights. In my envoi, I link Fevvers' grotesque body to Carter's re-formations of the Western literary tradition and forge an analogy between Carter's revisionist writing and the structure of the labyrinth.

Returns to the birthplace

Like "The Erl-King" and "The Scarlet House," Nights is obsessed with beginnings and endings. At the outset of the novel, Carter returns to the lofty Greek origins of Western literature and, in Fevvers' "raucous and metallic voice [that clanged] of contralto or even baritone dustbins" (13), re-presents the classic story of Leda and the swan:

> As to my place of birth, why, I first saw light of day right here in smoky old London, didn't I! Not billed the "Cockney Venus", for nothing, sir, though they could just as well 'ave called me "Helen of the High Wire", due to the unusual circumstances in which I come ashore -- for I never docked via what you might call the *normal channels*, sir, oh, dear me, no; but, just like Helen of Troy, was *hatched*. Hatched out of a bloody great egg while Bow Bells rang, as ever is! (7)

Fevvers' unceremonious recital reflects Carter's refusal of the category of "high culture" which classical Greek literature conventionally epitomizes. In Rabelais and His World, Mikhail Bakhtin describes this traditional opposition between high and low, classical and grotesque. While the classical body is self-contained, impenetrable and self-consistent, the grotesque body "is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (26). Carter's re-construction of Leda and the swan nimbly dislodges its sanctified originary status; for, as the daughter of this mythic coupling, Fevvers is also the grotesque scion of Greek literature. Further, by infusing the classical with the grotesque through Fevvers' re-telling, Carter deconstructs the conventionally hygienic opposition between high and low, classical and grotesque.

In The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White signal the importance of complicating the high/low structure in their discussion of the fairground. Arguing that Bakhtin's writing exhibits two different models of the grotesque, they describe his first model as the polarized opposition I outlined above. The second model, they write, conceives of the grotesque as

> formed through a process of hybridization or inmixing of binary opposites, particularly of high and low, such that there is a heterodox merging of elements usually perceived as incompatible, and this latter version of the grotesque unsettles any fixed

> binaryism. It is this latter notion . . . which is more adequate to thinking the complexity of high-low relations on the site of the fair. (44)[1]

Fevvers' grotesqueness emerges from her hybridity, her identity as a bird-woman. Constantly transgressing its own limits, her body repeatedly merges the conventionally classical with the grotesque; as the narrator relates, there is "no flaw in the classic cast of her features, unless their very size was a fault in itself, the flaw that made her vulgar" (20).[2] Fevvers' enormous size and aggressive occupation of space unnerves Walser almost to the point of fainting:

> Fevvers yawned with prodigious energy, opening up a crimson maw the size of that of a basking shark, taking in enough air to lift a Montgolfier, and then she stretched herself suddenly and hugely, extending every muscle as a cat does, until it seemed she intended to fill up all the mirror, all the room with her bulk. As she raised her arms, Walser, confronted by stubbled, thickly powdered armpits, felt faint . . . . (52)[3]

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[1] As Stallybrass and White indicate, the fairground is intimately linked with this second, more complex formulation of the grotesque. Fairgrounds, circus rings and freak shows are favourite settings in Carter's fiction. For example, the traveling freak show in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman and the gothic fairgrounds in "The Loves of Lady Purple", like Nights, represent the grotesque as this destabilizing "heterodox merging of elements."

[2] As Fernihough describes, Fevvers' performances as Cupid and the Winged Victory in Nelson's brothel also mark the novel's in-mixing of the classical with the grotesque. (See esp. 98-99)

[3] Jack Walser, a young American journalist "with a characteristically American generosity towards the brazen lie," is on a quest to discover the "truth" about Fevvers (10). After interviewing Fevvers and her adoptive mother Lizzie in London, Walser decides to "sign up with Fevvers on Captain Kearney's Grand Imperial Tour" and follow the aerialiste to "the world's most fabulous cities" (91, 90). The novel, published in 1984, follows Fevvers, her socialist witch-mother Lizzie ("there was ex-whore written all over her" [13]), and Walser from London to Petersburg and finally Siberia as they travel with Colonel Kearney's Circus in the year 1899. Accordingly, Nights is divided into three sections: *London*, *Petersburg* and *Siberia*.

This overwhelming "Cockney Venus," "six feet two inches in her stockings" with a face "broad and oval as a meat dish," embodies Carter's subversive brand of intertextuality which re-forms and exceeds the canon by making it into so many thousands of threads, constantly unraveling and re-combining into "new and not so new" forms (Nights 12; Burning Your Boats, xiv).[4]

Although different from the stark literalization of myth that Carter produces through the figure of Madame Schreck in "The Scarlet House," Fevvers' re-telling of Leda and the swan reflects Carter's general commitment to demythologizing.[5] In The Sadeian Woman, Carter defines mythology as "consolatory nonsense" and argues that it works by "obscuring the real conditions of life. This is why [it was] invented in the first place" (5). The appearance of this de-sanctification of origins at the beginning of Nights at the Circus is no coincidence. Carter constructs the first page of Nights as a re-construction: In the beginning (of the novel) she returns to the beginning (of Western culture) and re-presents the beginning. Formulating the beginning as always already a return, Carter rejects the Platonic notion of origins as pure presence, evoking Michel Foucault's argument that "[w]hat is found at the

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[4] In his introduction to Burning Your Boats: The Collected Short Stories, Salman Rushdie describes Carter's intertextual words as "new and not-new, like our own . . . She opens an old story for us, like an egg, and finds the new story, the now-story we want to hear, within" (xiv). Fernihough makes a similar point, writing that "[l]ike Fevvers' body, the text of Nights at the Circus is itself a carnivalesque body, which has ingested the whole of European culture and, in its bloated and uncontainable state, released it again in all manner of reconfiguration, inversion and parody" (97).

[5] Carter declares this commitment in "Notes from the Front Line," writing:

> This investigation of the social fictions that regulate our lives . . . is what I've concerned myself with . . . This is also the product of an absolute and *committed materialism* - i.e., that *this* world is all that there is, and in order to question the nature of reality one must move from a strongly grounded base in what constitutes material reality . . . I'm in the demythologising business. (38)

historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 142). Disparity and dissension are re-organized through Carter's intertextual play into new stories of origins, stories which carry residual markers and are always open to re-formulation. Derrida's discussion of the movement of différance resonates with Carter's destabilization of origins in Nights. Arguing in "Différance" that any "new" formulation, movement or theory always bears a residual trace of what came before, he writes:

> [t]he practice of a language or of a code supposing a play of forms without a determined and invariable substance, and also supposing in the practice of this play a retention and protention of differences, a space and a temporization, a play of traces -- all this must be a kind of writing before the letter, an archi-writing without a present origin, without archi-. (118)

Exhibiting the movement of différance, this first moment of intertextual intervention in Nights ruptures the origin and all its accompanying notions of essence, identity, linearity and teleology.

Fevvers' mysterious beginnings generate the space for her to weave this Leda and the swan story of creation. As she comments to Walser, "[h]atched; by whom, I do not know. Who laid me is as much a mystery to me, sir, as the nature of my conception, my father and my mother both utterly unknown to me, and, some would say, unknown to nature" (21). Similar to "The Erl-King's" re-

configuration of the gap as a site for the articulation of desire and "The Scarlet House" narrator's appropriation of her obliterated memory to produce her own palimpsestic tales, Nights at the Circus re-figures Freud's notion of Woman as lacking (penis, history, home) into the potential for self-representation and material gain. Fevvers literally capitalizes on Freud's economy of lack by using her mysterious origins as a marketing ploy: "her slogan, 'Is she fact or is she fiction?' And she didn't let you forget it for a minute; this query, in the French language, in foot-high letters, blazed forth from a wall-size poster, souvenir of her Parisian triumphs, dominating her London dressing room" (7). Like Carter's figuration of the castrated and bleeding orifice in "The Scarlet House," the gaping hole of Womanhood is not a void in Nights but an opening. Fevvers and the two women protagonists of "The Erl-King" and the Scarlet House" are all versions of Scheherezade; using their absent origins as zones of articulation, they produce narratives for survival, self-representation and, in Fevvers' case, global and economic mobility.

"But can one sign with a perfume?" Or, How does Fevvers' endorse her cheques?[6]

Two of these Scheherezades are nameless, the third oozes a different signifier out of every pore. The namelessness of the narrators in "The Erl-King" and "The Scarlet House" and Fevvers' profusion of names reflect a similar

[6] From Derrida's "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce" (591).

refusal of fixity and containment. In "The Erl-King," the narrator's namelessness is part of the text's overall strategy of defamiliarization; along with its shifting narrative voices, the reader is denied any concrete indication of who is speaking or when it is spoken. Namelessness in "The Scarlet House" is an ambivalent marker of both violence and resistance. The protagonist's dispossession -- her castration from her origins -- and the Count's erosion of her uniqueness are reflected in her anonymity. However, she re-configures this obliteration into her own palimpsestic surface on which she constructs, erases and re-makes herself in an unending process.

In contrast to these anonymous narrators, Fevvers overflows with names. "Helen of the High Wire" and the "Cockney Venus" (7), "Angel of Death" (70), "Flora; Azrael; [and] Venus Pandemos" (77) are just some of the monikers attached to her throughout the text. Against the endless proliferation of these appellations which, in part, signal her uncontainability, the name "Sophie" appears in seeming opposition. It is her proper name, "her legal handle," around which a sense of prohibition and power hover (13). Walser signals "Sophie's" prohibitive quality at the narrative's end when he abstains from using it to question her: "'Fevvers . . .' he said. Some sixth sense kept him from calling her Sophie. They were not yet sufficiently intimate" (294).

"Sophie" suggests the existence of a "real Fevvers" underneath the bleached blond hair and pounds of makeup, an essential nature which only the sublime experience of terror can unveil and an authentic expression of love can

recognize. But this suggestion of an "essence of Fevvers" is just one of the jokes Carter plays on the reader in Nights (9). The narrator's remark that Fevvers might someday "bottle the smell, and sell it" marks the joke (9). The description of Fevvers' essence as a smell -- external, overpowering and identifiable -- satirizes the internal and enigmatic kernel Freud imagined in his infamous "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality."[7] The paradoxical mass production of this fetid essence renders impossible the notion of identity as a unique and non-reproducible set of characteristics.

Traditionally, the proper name is an incarnation in the fullest biblical sense: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1-2).[8] This elision of the Word with flesh and essence traces back to the Western world's story of creation. In the Garden of Eden, Adam's power to name functions as a conferral of identity and an avowal of a pure and fixed origin. The name is the linguistic essence of a subject's identity. Emile Benveniste describes this relation of language to subjectivity in Problems

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[7] Citing Freud's notorious declaration in the 1905 essay that female sexuality "is still veiled in an impenetrable obscurity," Fernihough notes that during this fin-de-siècle period, "any number of philosophers, psychoanalysts and sexologists, as well as writers and artists, were preoccupied with *das ewig Weibliche*, the 'eternal feminine' or essence of woman" (90). Like Fernihough, I read Nights' 1899 setting and parodic preoccupation with the "essence of Fevvers" in the context of this proliferating concern about the enigma of Woman.

[8] I want to place a caveat on my phrase "fullest biblical sense," for, as Derrida describes in "Des Tours de Babel," the biblical text is full of confusion, polyphony and multiplicity:

> Babel: today we take it as a proper name. Indeed, but the proper name of what and of whom? At times that of a narrative text recounting a story . . . in which the proper name, which is then no longer the title of the narrative, names a tower or a city but a tower or a city that receives its name from an event during which YHWH "proclaims his name" . . . This story recounts, among other things, the origin of the confusion of tongues, the irreducible multiplicity of idioms, the the necessary and impossible task of translation, its necessity *as* impossibility. (250)

My invocation of the Logos in "John" draws upon and interrogates its conventional location within a platonic paradigm of intelligibility and self-identical-ness.

in General Linguistics, stating "[i]t is in and through language that man [sic] constitutes himself as a *subject* . . . 'Ego' is he who *says* 'ego.'" That is where we see the foundation of 'subjectivity,' which is determined by the linguistic status of 'person'" (qtd in Silverman, epigraph). However, as Jacques Derrida suggests in Of Grammatology, the articulation of the proper name, whether in speech or in writing, undermines its uniqueness. Arguing that its repeatability counteracts its claim to a unitary essence, he writes: "[w]hen within consciousness, the name is called proper, it is already classified and is obliterated in being named. It is already no more than a so-called proper name" (109). In Nights, the recounting of Fevvers' "naming ceremony" parodies Adam's sacred power of naming; it is the collective group of whores in Nelson's brothel, representatives of the fin-de-siècle New Woman, who designate her as "Fevvers" -- a corrupt version of "feathers." The aerialiste describes the scene for Walser, relating: "[w]here, indoors, unpacking me, unwrapping my shawl, witnessing the sleepy, milky, silky fledgling, all the girls said: 'Looks like the little thing's going to sprout Fevvers!'" (12).[9] Her official christening further unravels

[9] The figure of the New Woman first appears in the 1880s and 1890s in both Britain and America. Sally Ledger writes in "The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism" that the rise of the New Woman "was symptomatic of an ongoing challenge to the monolithic ideological certainties of mid-Victorian Britain" (22). Ledger notes in The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle that the New Woman was an unstable category: "She was, variously, a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet; she was also often a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth-century women's movement" (1). In Nelson's brothel, representatives of the New Woman abound. As Fevvers relates, they spring into action after Nelson's death and prepare to fend for themselves:

> Louisa and Emily . . . saved sufficient to set themselves up in a little boarding-house in Brighton . . . Annie and Grace had also set by a little store between them and now elected to pool it in order to start up a small agency for typing and office work, for Grace could rattle away on those keys of hers like the best of castanets and Annie had such a head for figures she'd been keeping Ma Nelson's accounts

the name-essence equation: "when we took her down to Clement Dane's to have her christened, the vicar said he'd never heard of such a name as Fevvers, so Sophie suffices for her legal handle" (13). Lizzie's dismissive remark, "[Fevvers] she will be till the end of the chapter," suggests that names are a function of narrative, not nature. The arbitrary designation of "Sophie," moreover, subverts the traditional Adamite equation between naming and identity and empties Fevvers' "proper name" of any essential significance.

In addition to Fevvers and Sophie, the aerialiste possesses a myriad of other names which confound the search for her essence and echo her incredible size. Fevvers busts out of every page of the novel like her Iron Maiden corset which "poked out of the empty coalscuttle like the pink husk of a giant prawn emerging from its den, trailing long laces like several sets of legs" (9). This Winged Victory's profusion of names dissolves the Adamite link between name and identity and suggests that there is no sum, only parts. Rather than adding up to form a coherent and consistent identity, the aerialiste's multiple signifiers depict her as a collection of surfaces and varying performative angles. Picasso's famous Cubist painting, "Girl before a mirror," illuminates this notion of Fevvers as a collection of surfaces.[10] Multiple uni-dimensional surfaces, asymmetries and bold colours characterize the *mise-en-abyme* image of a girl looking at her reflection looking at her. Fevvers, her reflection and the mirror in the *London* section of the novel paint a similarly incoherent image: "One lash off,

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straight for years. (45)

[10] My thanks to Mario Trono who first described this cubist vision of figuring identity as the performative inscription of multiple planes on the surface of the body.

one lash on, Fevvers leaned back a little to scan the asymmetric splendour reflected in her mirror with impersonal gratification" (8). Fevvers, Sophie, Cupid, the Cockney Venus . . . do not penetrate to any essential core; rather, they bounce off the reflective and performative surfaces of her body.

Nevertheless, Walser is not the only character to regard the proper name as a sacred and essential marker of the aerialiste's identity. Both Christian Rosencreutz and the Russian Grand Duke mysteriously know Fevvers' christened name. Significantly, the danger they each pose to the aerialiste's life is most palpable when they reveal this secret knowledge. Rosencreutz identifies the bird-woman, the "goddess of in-between states " as his exclusive formula against aging (81). No Oil of Olay for this "heretical possibly Manichean . . . neo-Platonic [Rosicrucianist]"; this troubled mystic intends to distill her "mysterious spirit of efflorescence" and use it as an "*elixum vitae*" (77, 79, 83). Mistaking her flesh for essence, Christian Rosencreutz uses her christened name as he prepares to possess her. Fevvers describes her fearful response: "I can't tell you what a turn it gave me, when he called me 'Sophia.' How did he stumble over my christened name? It was as if he put me in his power, that he should know my name, and, though I am not ordinarily superstitious, now I became strangely fearful" (81).

Then, at the end of the *Petersburg* section, the Grand Duke uses his vodka glasses to write out "Sophia." His less cabalistic but equally fantastic desire is to shrink Fevvers and add her to his wondrous collection of "objets d'art

and marvels" (187). An exquisitely-styled Fabergé-style egg designed especially to house a diminished Fevvers sits empty, awaiting her arrival:

> It was white gold and topped with a lovely little swan, a tribute, perhaps, to her putative paternity. And, as she suspected, it contained a cage made out of gold wires with, inside, a little perch of rubies and of sapphires and of diamonds, the good old red, white and blue. The cage was empty. No bird stood on that perch, yet. (192)

The Duke's scheme for capturing and reducing Fevvers reflects his desire to contain her within a fixed and symbolic identity. Her threatened diminishment from the Duke's gaze is a striking contrast to the enormous space she occupies when performing in her own gilded cage. By spelling out the aerialiste's proper name, the Duke intimates his intentions to reduce and imprison her. Fevvers' resultant dis-ease is described by the narrator: "Ooo-er, she thought. The familiar, goose-walking-over-a-grave feeling that Tom-Tit-Tot suffers in the old story. She hated to be called, by strangers, Sophia" (187).

Derrida notes that the enunciation of prohibited or secret names is an act of violence: "Violence appears only at the moment when the intimacy of proper names can be opened to forced entry. And that is possible only at the moment when the space is shaped and reoriented by the glance of the foreigner" (Of Grammatology 113). Both Rosencreutz and the Duke intend real violence against Fevvers. By using her proper name to establish their power,

Rosencreutz and the Duke commit initial acts of violation. Or do they? Ironically, both megalomaniacs utter a different version of her "legal handle": Sophia.

I will speak therefore of a letter.[11] And this letter is what most immediately undermines the supposed power of Fevvers' proper name. Sophie may be her legal handle, but the perverted Rosencreutz and the maniacal Duke both call her Sophia. This shift, from an *e* to an *a*, exhibits the movement of différance which ruptures the language of presence and empties the name of all its supposed primal power. The movement from "Sophie" to "Sophia" reflects the novel's refusal to produce any character as fixed, unified or coherent. Differing and deferring by a letter -- the last letter of the name and the first letter of the alphabet -- they unwittingly trace the movement of différance to reveal a hole in Rosencreutz's cosmology and a structural weakness in the Duke's Fabergé-like cages. As Derrida relates, "[d]ifférance instigates the subversion of every kingdom" ("Différance" 123). Babel-like, the differing and deferring repetition of "Sophie" in the narrative subverts its seemingly sacred status and marks the novel's celebration of confusion and multiplicity. It is the trace of différance which saves Fevvers from being shrunk, penetrated, killed and imprisoned by the two figures seeking to capture and contain her non-existent essence.

[11] This paragraph is a deliberate re-production of Derrida's introduction to "Différance."

Spectacular Forgery

Carter's play with names in Nights shows that there is no penetration to the heart of identity. Through Fevvers, identity is formulated as a matter of representation. More specifically, it is a shifting and complex combination of representation and self-representation. Teresa de Lauretis' notion of gender as "the product and process of representation and self-representation" aptly describes the non-essential and undefinable nature of identity in Nights ("Technology of Gender" 9). This combination of representation and self-representation, and its indeterminate relation to notions of authenticity, is imaged in the novel's final scene -- Walser and Fevvers' sexual consummation.

Learning that prior to this erotic union Walser had accepted her self-representation as the "only fully-feathered intacta in the history of the world," Fevvers begins to laugh (294). Gathering strength, her Rabelaisian carnivalesque laughter "spilled out the window" and eventually "began to twist and shudder across the entire globe, as if a spontaneous response to the giant comedy that endlessly unfolded beneath it, until everything that lived and breathed, everywhere, was laughing" (294-95). She laughs at the "deceived husband" and the success of her narrative enterprise. "You mustn't believe what you write in the papers!" she informs the credulous journalist, and then concludes their pillow talk, and the novel, with the triumphant declaration: "It just goes to show there's nothing like confidence" (294-95). Is she fact or is she fiction? Yes. Carter identified Mae West as one of the sources for Fevvers and,

as Fernihough describes, "what is most interesting about Mae West in relation to Fevvers is that she evoked the paradoxical feeling in her audiences that she was both absolutely *performed* and absolutely *herself*" (92). Fevvers is the female version of Nietzsche's being who says Yes to himself [sic]. Her confidence, her exalted Yes, manifests itself in the grand confidence trick of her narrative and is distilled into her all-embracing "yes-laughter" at the story's end (Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone " 588).

Derrida describes this "yes-laughter" in relation to identity and "the uniqueness of the signature" in "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce":

> Now if laughter is a fundamental or abyssal tonality in *Ulysses*, if its analysis is not exhausted by any of the forms of knowledge available precisely because it laughs at knowledge and from knowledge, then laughter bursts out in the event of the signature itself. And there is no signature without *yes*. If the signature does not amount to the manipulation or the mention of a name, it supposes the irreversible commitment of the person confirming, who *says* or *does yes*, the token of some mark left behind.
>
> (589-90)

For Fevvers, her laughter is her signature and her signature is a forgery. But "forgery" inaccurately suggests falsity and to label her laughter as false sustains the potential for the truth of her signature, her anatomy, her identity to be

uncovered. To assert "forgery," in other words, is to risk falling from the high wire into the language of essences.

Notwithstanding, "forgery's" economic (a forged cheque) and entrepreneurial (to forge ahead) connotations signal Fevvers' active marketing of herself. She is an economically savvy modern-day Scheherezade. Carter bluntly asserts in an interview with Anna Katsavos that "Fevvers is out to earn a living" (13). And, as the narrator remarks,"[y]ou'd never think she dreamed, at nights, of bank accounts, or that, to her, the music of the spheres was the jingling of cash registers" (12). The tale she tells Walser in the *London* section is an intricately woven narrative, "You did not think of calculation when you saw her, so finely judged was her performance," designed to garner publicity, attract audiences and accrue wealth (12). To hunt out the veracity of her story ("forgery" in the first sense) is to become mired in questions of identity which eclipse her entrepreneurial forging ("forgery" in the second sense).

Carter emphasizes that Fevvers' narrative is, quite simply, narrative: "the stuff she says in the beginning about being hatched from an egg, that's what she *says*. We are talking about fiction here, and I have no idea whether that's true or not . . . Part of the point of the novel is that you are kept uncertain" (Katsavos 13). An uncertainty, moreover, that is left purposefully unresolved. Fevvers' highly suspicious remarks following her confession of Liz's socialism and Nelson's magic clock situate the problem of her identity firmly in the observer's gaze. Although explicitly addressing Walser, Fevvers' declaration also envelops

the reader: "We told you no other lies nor in any way strayed from the honest truth. Believe it or not, all that I told you as real happenings were so, in fact; and as to questions of whether I am fact or fiction, you must answer that for yourself!" (292). Walser never does "answer" the question. All the reader learns from his gaze is that "she indeed appeared to possess no navel but he was no longer in the mood to draw any definite conclusions from this fact" (292). By ending the novel with this return to Fevvers' elusive origins, Nights refuses narrative closure; her yes-laughter is only a response to the success of her forgery, not a revelatory anatomy lesson.[12]

Envoi: Re-directions

This non-ending-by-way-of-returning-to-the-beginning does not produce a perfect circular structure in the text. Carter institutes a fourth structural break immediately following Fevvers' re-constitution and Walser's spontaneous recovery from amnesia. The final four pages of the novel are written as an Envoi. The "envoi," as Alan Bass notes in his translation of Derrida's The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond, is multivalent and polyphonous in meaning. He glosses:

> The noun *envoi* can mean the action of sending . . . kickoff, something that is sent (especially in the senses of message, missive, or dispatch), the concluding stanza of a ballad that

[12] The indeterminability of Fevvers' claim as "the only fully-feathered intacta" is compounded by the uncertainty of the signified, for the phrase refers both to her hymen and to her hybridity.

> typically serves as a dedication, the lines handwritten by the author or a book as part of a dedication . . . . Both "invoice" and *envoi* are homonyms of "in voice" and en voix: the "Envois" are written in many voices . . . . The derivation from *via* leads in the direction of voyage, with its etymological link to *via*ticum (traveling money) . . . *s'envoyer* . . . can mean to send oneself, transitively or intransitively . . . one's en-voy (also *en-voi*) or representative has to be one's double or ghost . . . . (xx-xxi)

To Bass' list I add the word *envol* which means to take flight. All of these significations (and undoubtedly more) resonate with Carter's flights of fancy in Nights and her unfinished intertextual project. Carter sends a dispatch at the novel's ending, signifying on the socialist dispatches Lizzie writes in candle wax and sends home via Walser and the "diplomatic bag" (292). Both Lizzie's dispatches and Carter's envoi are a series of traveling and untranslated messages which are sent but do not necessarily ever arrive; for, as Bass remarks in a different introduction to the same work, the envoi "may or may not emerge at its addressed destination" (Kamuf 485). Carter's envoi returns the reader to the novel's opening story of Fevvers' enigmatic origins, but the return is more accurately a re-direction. The myth of Leda and the swan is again revised through the novel's sexual/textual intercourse when "Fevvers 'feminizes' Walser at the end of the novel, swooping down on him and gleefully smothering him in feathers, reducing him to the passive Leda figure" (Fernihough 98).

Carter's ceaseless re-making of the Western literary corpus in Nights is reflected in the moulting and subsequent renewal of Fevvers' grotesque body in Siberia. When she arrives in the native village, the aerialiste is in a state of extreme disrepair:

> Freed from the confines of her corset, her once-startling shape sagged . . . She lacked the heart to wash her face and so there were still curds of rouge lodged in her pores and she was breaking out in spots and rashes . . . Where was that silent demand to be looked at that had once made her stand out? . . . She was so shabby that she looked like a fraud . . . . (276-77)

Almost as though "a spell were unraveling," Fevvers is in the process of "moulting" (271). Unlike the clowns' faces which, once chosen, are fixed for the life of the performer, Fevvers' body is an unsettled surface.[13] Her broken wing and sprouting roots delineate her body's mutability.

Fernihough argues that Fevvers' moulting "plays cleverly with notions of essentialism, luring us into the expectation of access to some kind of bodily authenticity," but ultimately functions to reveal the performativity of gender (94).

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[13] Buffo the head clown solemnly relates the process by which all clowns invent and fix their faces:

> We can invent our own faces! We make ourselves . . . . The code of the circus permits of no copying, no change. However much the face of Buffo may appear identical to Grik's face, or to Grok's face, or to Coco's face, or Pozzo's, Pizzo's, Bimbo's faces, or to the face of any other joey, carpet clown or august, it is, all the same, a fingerprint of authentic dissimilarity, a genuine expression of my own autonomy. And so my face eclipses me. I have become this face which is not mine, and yet I chose it freely . . . and, in that moment of choice . . . exists a perfect freedom. But, once the choice is made, I am condemned, therefore, to be "Buffo" in perpetuity. (121-22)

Similar to Fevvers' body, clown faces are inscribed surfaces and their identities are determined by the masks which they invent.

Drawing on Judith Butler's notion of gender as "the stylized repetition of acts through time," she suggests that the disruption of Fevvers' daily circus performances in the *Siberia* section mark the "groundlessness of gender" (95). Rather than uncovering a concealed identity beneath the surface of her body, Fevvers' deterioration simply produces a different image of the elusive performer -- that of a shabby fraud. Foucault's description of the body in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" illuminates the significance of Fevvers' mutability: "The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration" (148). Similarly, Fevvers' body is a palimpsestic surface which is continually re-inscribed across time and space.

Time looms large in the novel. From Lizzie's de-formations of time in the London dressing room using Nelson's French clock which is always set at noon or midnight, "the time of change and revolution," to the disintegration of time in Siberia, the confusion of temporality is always foregrounded (Russo 170). For Lizzie, the disappearance of Nelson's clock after the train explosion represents a dangerous loss of control. She whispers to Fevvers: "Prepare yourself for the worst, gel; we've lost the bloody clock, haven't we . . . We'll soon lose all track of time, and then what will become of us. Nelson's clock. Gone" (226). Sure enough, this loss of control is manifested, after an undefined passage of time, in Fevvers' corporeal disintegrations: "Freed from the confines of her corset, her

once-startling shape sagged, as if the sand were seeping out of the hour-glass and *that* was why time, in these parts, could not control itself" (276-77). The body is a temporalizing (marking time) and temporized (marked by time) structure. Temporality is manifested through bodily experience: time only becomes time through its intercourse with the body.

Through the image of her body as a leaking hourglass, Fevvers' injury, disintegration and renewal are all linked with de-formations in the time-scheme. The disruption of linear time in *Siberia* and the accompanying alterations in Fevvers' body reflect the movement of différance as "*spacing*, the becoming space of time or the becoming time of space (*temporization*)" ("Différance" 116). Carter's subversive intertextuality re-forms the "canon" into a temporized and temporizing body, a body which bears traces both of the old and the as-yet-unformed. Derrida explains this model of re-formation as the differing and deferring movement of différance which "[keeps] within itself the mark of the past element, and already [lets] itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past" ("Différance" 116). By thinking Carter's intertexual play through the movement of différance, the recurring figures and images within her oeuvre can be read as re-directions which all refer to and enable each other. For example, Carter's initial opening up of the Leda myth in her 1967 novel The Magic Toyshop already contains the trace of its future re-working in Nights. All

of these traces of the "past", "present" and "future" in Carter's writing connect to form a labyrinthine model of writing.

The possibilities for interpretation and critique in Nights alone are infinite within this labyrinthine model. Readers can choose any intertextual strand and pursue it down a particular pathway, which will inevitably intersect with other threads, without ever culminating in a completed picture.[14] Like the narrative of Babel which "recounts, among other things . . . the irreducible multiplicity of idioms [and] the necessary and impossible task of translation," a totalizing reading of Nights, like all of Carter's work, is necessarily impossible to produce ("Des Tours de Babel" 250).[15]

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[14] Carter makes this point in "Notes from the Front Line," stating: "I try, when I write fiction, to think on my feet -- to present a number of propositions in a variety of different ways, and to leave the reader to construct her own fiction for herself from the elements of my fictions" (37).

[15] In "The Scarlet House," for instance, one literary strand I did not pursue is my suspicion that the narrator's final tale of capture is a re-working of Freud's story of the primal murder in Totem and Taboo. Similarly, "The Erl-King's" dizzying collage of fairy tales, German and English Romanticism, Shakespeare, Greek mythology . . . is a spectacular example of Fernihough's comment in relation to Nights that to write about Carter "always runs the risk of tautology" (90). A final example: in an earlier version of this chapter, I focused exclusively on the *Siberia* section and examined Carter's parody of conventional Western travel narratives and ethnographies, a thread of analysis I decided to abandon out of frustration at the negative critique and seriousness which emerged in my discussion, and which I believe eclipsed the seminal *jouissance* of Carter's text.

My epigraph to this thesis is from Foucault's preface to Anti-Oedipus. It insists on the pleasures of analysis even and especially in a critique of the terrible. Pleasure and terror are everywhere in Carter. Despite "The Scarlet House's" horrific subject matter, Carter's style is dazzlingly and delectably satiating. Her textuality brilliantly re-produces the style of conventional pornographic narratives she outlines in The Sadeian Woman. On the flip side, the exuberant pyrotechnic performances of Nights are repeatedly interrupted. The terror of Madame Schreck and her museum of women monsters, the ape-man's brutal abuse of Mignon ("[f]rom the monkey house, echoing on the night air, came a rhythmic thud as the Ape-Man beat his woman as though she were a carpet" [114]), and the tale of Mignon's erstwhile job posing for the dead with its disturbing suggestion of necrophilia are all disturbing offshoots from the trajectory of the novel. And yet they are not properly offshoots at all -- these divergent threads are indicators of passages *not* taken; they mark the text's multi-voicedness and the innumerable stories which remain untold.

In my discussions of "The Erl-King" and "The Scarlet House," I described the labyrinth as an image of mobility and hope. Its interminable passageways, absence of a center and infinite combinations of linking corridors produce an image of Carter's intertexual revisionism as a transformative, fluid and unfinished process. The labyrinth is, moreover, an anti-linear yet closed system -- there is no outside, no escape. Carter re-shapes time through space (updating the old through her position in the Now) and space through time (re-imagining the Now through temporal manipulations), but, as she insistently illustrates in all three narratives, we are always already inside the text and inside a discursive framework.[16]

There is no distilled descriptor for what Carter does to the canon; after reading her stories, there is no canon recognizable as such. A polymorphously perverse corpus, but not a canon. Taking my cue from Derrida's refusal to name Différance -- which is "neither a word or a concept" -- I leave Carter's textual manipulations undefined. Derrida concludes his discussion of différance with this refusal:

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[16] I have already discussed her inclusion of the reader in both "The Erl-King" and "The Scarlet House." In Nights, she brilliantly implicates the reader during the breakdown of time and space in the *Siberia* section. As Fevvers and Lizzie traverse the tundra, an identity crisis seizes hold of Fevvers:

> But there she stopped short, for the notion that nobody's daughter walked across nowhere in the direction of nothing produced in her such vertigo she was forced to pause and take a few deep breaths, which coldly seared her lungs. Seized with such anguish of the void that surrounds *us*, she could have wept and only restrained herself from doing so because of the satisfaction tears would give her foster-mother. (280, emphasis added)

The reader is inside the text and inside ideology -- not even the trackless wastes of Siberia are free from discursive formations.

> There will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being. And we must think this without *nostalgia*, that is, outside the myth of a purely maternal or paternal language, a lost native country of thought. On the contrary, we must *affirm* this . . . in a certain laughter and a certain step of the dance. From the vantage of this laughter and this dance . . . the other side of nostalgia, what I will call Heideggerian *hope*, comes into question. (127)

Anti-nostalgic, visionary, laughing, caustic, hopeful, differing and deferring: Carter's is "a strategy without finality" and an anamorphic perspective (111). Anamorphosis is a technique of *trompe l'oeil* in the visual arts; its characteristic elements are perspectival readjustments and the depiction of difference within sameness. Jurgis Baltrusaitis explains that "[a]namorphosis . . . plays havoc with elements and principles; instead of reducing forms to their visible limits, it projects them outside themselves and distorts them so that when viewed from a certain point they return to normal" (1)[17] By approaching the same work from different angles, concealed images appear and previously dominant elements are de-formed. The anamorphic *trompe d'oeil* is a deconstructive technique; for, once the viewer sees the hidden image, all future "readings" of the canvas bear the trace of this alternate perspective. Although not explicitly stated, the

[17] Hans Holbein's painting The Ambassadors (1533) is the paradigmatic example of the anamorphic perspective. The majority of the canvas is characterized by an uncanny realism: "[t]he numbers and letters, the globes, the texture of the clothes are almost deceptively life-like" (Baltrusaitis 91). But, in the bottom middle of the painting, "[a] strange object, like a cuttle-fish bone, floats above the floor" (91). If the viewer "stands very close, looking down on it from the right," the anamorphic nature of the image is disclosed and the object re-forms into the shape of a skull (91).

presence of a viewer is necessary for this anamorphic shift to be actualized.[18] In a similar spirit, Carter's anamorphic literary strategy, her differential re-presentations of "the old lies" which readers subsequently reexamine, ensures that nothing ever looks the same again ("Notes from the Front" 41).

[18] Fred Leeman draws attention to the viewer's role in Hidden Images: Games of Perception, Anamorphic Art, Illusion from the Renaissance to the Present, writing that the spectator "re-form[s] the picture himself [sic]" (9).

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