

*LOOKING FOR THE FOREST IN THE TREES:
DJUNA BARNES'S NIGHTWOOD AND THE CARNIVALESQUE*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a poststructuralist analysis of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* as a "carnavalesque" text marked by an engendered difference.

The first chapter is composed of selected biographical material, considerations of previous critical analyses of Barnes's work, and the primary establishment of my approach to *Nightwood*. It culminates in an analysis of a passage from *Nightwood* which illustrates the "carnavalesque" nature of Barnes's discourse and introduces the following discussion of the "carnavalesque" in theory.

The second chapter is a description, analysis, and distillation--*via* the commentary of Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida's concept of "différance"--of Bakhtin's concept of the "carnavalesque" as presented in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *The Dialogic Imagination*. This process yields a functional concept of the "carnavalesque" that will be used as the rudiment of my particular reading of the text. I also, briefly, consider Barnes's text as an arguably "carnavalesque" writing.

In the third chapter, I examine *Nightwood* as a self reflective text engaged in a carnivalizing of the subjective critical paradigms determining and delineating our reading of both historical and fictional

discourses at least since the nineteenth century. For example, I examine how *Nightwood's* aphoristic practice confounds a conventional development of character, how *Nightwood* inverts the hierarchical relationship of "plot" over "image", and how it overturns the traditional priority of "speech" over "writing".

Chapter Four is a reading between *Nightwood* and *The Confessions of St. Augustine* and between *Nightwood* and *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*. It examines *Nightwood's* carnivalesque relationship to certain predominant Pauline paradigms and *Nightwood's* perverse adoption of certain Ignatian methods of "composition".

In the fifth chapter, I examine *Nightwood's* engagement with Freudian psychoanalytic theory and consider Barnes as what Kristeva would call a "writer of abjection". In the course of doing so, I also consider the possible effects of the gender of the author on the writing of the text.

ABBREVIATIONS

Lewis and Short

Lewis and Short's Latin Dictionary. Eds. C.T.
Lewis and C. Short. Oxford: Clarendon Press,
1889.

Liddell and Scott

Greek-English Lexicon. Compiled by H.G.
Liddell and R. Scott. Oxford: Clarendon Press,
1871.

OED

The Oxford English Dictionary.

INTRODUCTION

Djuna Barnes's novel *Nightwood* has been admired for its poetic and modernist qualities by readers like T.S. Eliot, Kathleen Raine, and Dylan Thomas. At the same time, it has been criticized as a narcissistic and too-private or perverse—even "sick"—work by Graham Greene, and it has been dismissed as mere rhetoric or "blubbery prose" by Ezra Pound.¹ Critical consensus on its value as "art" has not been *Nightwood's* lot. However, there has been general agreement on the text's difficulty: most critics agree that *Nightwood* offers intricately complex writing, no matter if this complexity is assumed to arise from modernist experimentalism, some form of psychological verisimilitude, excessive rhetoricity, or just plain bad writing. The first part of my argument is that the complexity of *Nightwood's* language, rather than being a rhetorical adjunct to the plot, is the primary generative feature of the text and should be the focus of any analytical consideration of *Nightwood*. Traditionally, the language which conveys or presents a novel's plot or theme has been held to be secondary to the plot or story which it purportedly tells and valued in relation to its non-obstructive or transparent qualities. In the terms of this desire for a clear or transparent medium of linguistic presentation, complex language like that of *Nightwood* could be considered as an example of unnecessary obfuscation or excessive rhetoricity. However, in *Nightwood*, what appears to be obfuscation is part of a complex rhetoric that is an essential part of this novel's creative attempts at subverting the traditional preference for plot over language and some

of the related conventions of epistemological, theological, and psychoanalytic discourses.

Nightwood dialectically engages the discourse-rendered world by turning it upsidedown and targeting that which it represses, its underworld--night, the unconscious, the *untermenschen*. Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian "dialogist", has identified this type of novelistic enterprise as the "carnavalesque"--the necessary generative, revelling and revelatory, inversion and subversion of established order. The thesis of this dissertation is that Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* is, fundamentally, a carnivalization of traditional (hegemonic) literary and non-literary (philosophical, theological, psychoanalytic) discourses. *Nightwood's* carnivalization of these orthodoxies is of particular interest because it is one of the very few "carnavalesque" texts written by a woman and because Barnes wrote it, not within the (domestic, social, subjective) sphere of women's writing delineated by Austen, G. Eliot, the Brontës, Woolf, Colette, Rhys, etc., but within the (intellectual) sphere of writing by men, the very sphere of the orthodox itself.²

I should qualify my use of Bakhtin's "carnavalesque", however, as I have not simply adopted a *modus operandi*, or an ideology, from *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* or *The Dialogic Imagination*. My use of the "carnavalesque" is, first of all, always informed by Roland Barthes's and Julia Kristeva's concepts of "intertextuality" and by a recognition of

Nightwood's insistence on structurality. It seems that the "reality" behind *Nightwood's* writing is always a reality of structures-- hierarchical relationships, binary oppositions, etc.--, and it is this reality that is always being questioned, or exposed, by the novel. Where traditional philosophy and religious and literary interpretation ascend to a meta-position from which to account for all the variables of life and/or text, *Nightwood* descends to "structure" and thus, honestly, offers no resolution. This is, perhaps, why so many texts cross through *Nightwood*; because the text itself is not a resolved thing. Its references are not centripetally directed to its own internal, fictional, ideal world, nor do they signify centrifugally toward some external non-textual reality: they are always of a text-to-text nature--from *Nightwood* to the texts of Montaigne, Donne, Eugène Sue, Shakespeare, Loyola, the Bible, the "Book of Concealment", newspapers, maps, children's drawings, tattoos, etc., etc. In short, *Nightwood's* references are always to other scripts in a general system of language.

The myriad explicit references in the text give us but the clue to the intertextuality of *Nightwood*, which goes beyond citation and reference itself. In a sense, citation and reference are the symptoms of *Nightwood's* intertextuality. Beyond the proper names and inverted commas, *Nightwood* seems preoccupied with certain paradigmatic discursive structures that inform the meanings of Western writing ("in a preoccupation that was its own predicament" [p. 47]). Thus, I do not,

as a general rule, but with one notable exception, argue for specific texts or sources that Barnes may have been carnivalizing, nor do I attempt to prove that Barnes actually read any of the texts that I read *Nightwood* through--with the exception of the Freudian text. The texts that I have chosen to "face up to" *Nightwood*, including the Bakhtinian text, offer operative paradigms of the conventional structures that *Nightwood* seems to be engaging with or to be composed by: whether or not Barnes was familiar with these texts is almost entirely beside the point.

My use of the "carnavalesque" is also informed by Jacques Derrida's (non)concepts of "writing" and "*différance*" and by a recognition of *Nightwood's* insistence on the written (everything from tattoos to hieroglyphs and letters) and on "difference" and deferral. Chapter Two of this thesis is in part a reading of Bakhtin between Plato and Derrida, and it develops a poststructuralist concept of the "carnavalesque" as one of those "nonsynonymous" terms that "inscribe *différance* within themselves", (as Alan Bass puts it in a footnote to Derrida's *Margins of Philosophy*).³ Thus, my use of the "carnavalesque" is always marked by deconstructive or Derridean concerns with the undecideabilities of signification that do not mark the Bakhtinian text. *Nightwood*, with its ambiguities and evasions or subversions of meaning, practically demands a poststructuralist reading informed by deconstruction. In a sense, its carnivalesque inversion and solicitation of "phallogocentric" structural paradigms is a deconstructive practice

in itself. This is why I have employed certain Derridean concepts to solicit and "open up" Bakhtin's (very Platonic) "carnavalesque".

The fifth chapter of this thesis makes explicit what is always at work in the preceding chapters: Freud is "always coming on board", to use a phrase of Derrida's.⁴ It is almost impossible, now, to discuss the "carnavalesque"--with its dream logics, fantasies, perversions, etc.--without at least assuming the Freudian text. I have also found it impossible to avoid Freudian psychoanalytic theory in reading *Nightwood*, with its dreams, unconsciousnesses, undecidable identities, desires, and somnambulistic states. Again, my reading of Freud is often poststructuralist and is informed by various writings of Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Catherine Clément, and Jacques Derrida.

I have tried as much as possible to avoid categorizing *Nightwood*, mostly because the text itself seems to resist the formalizing impetus of categorization *per se*. Thus, I do not, for the most part, treat of the text as modernist, American, English or as a specifically lesbian novel, preferring to read it in the terms of the intertextuality stated above. I suggest that it is a "carnavalesque" text not so much to identify it (although, in effect, I do identify it as "carnavalesque") as to identify some of its strategies of signification.

I have also tried to avoid imposing a specific critical methodology on my reading of the text. Undoubtedly, my approach to the text is poststructuralist in the sense that it proceeds from poststructuralist considerations of the instability of signification and subjectivity and that many of its strategies are adopted from the so-called poststructuralist theorists. However, poststructuralism is almost impossible to define conclusively--the differences between the various poststructuralist theories and/or practices also resist definitive categorization. My approach to the text might be better described as a "reading between" which attempts to heed Derrida's advice that "above all it is necessary to read and reread those [...] in whose margins and between whose lines I mark out and read a text simultaneously almost identical and entirely other [...]"⁶ My research began with a reading of *Nightwood*, then proceeded to a reading of texts (Bakhtin, Kristeva, Derrida, Freud) that I thought might help in solving some of the interpretative problems posed by *Nightwood* and texts that I thought might work as illuminating intertexts (Augustine, Loyola, for example). But I soon found that my analyses were not proceeding in a linear and progressive fashion: for example, I would begin reading *Nightwood* from a "Freudian" perspective only to find that at a certain point, the perspective would turn around and I would be reading Freud from *Nightwood's* perspective. Thus, the reading presented here is often a "reading between" a subject text and an object text that sometimes change their positions, which is a rather "carnavalesque" manoeuvre.

Although I have tried, as I've already noted, to avoid contextualizing *Nightwood*, during the course of my acquaintance with this text, I was led, inexorably and almost despite myself, to a consideration of the relevance of the gender of the author. I had hoped (rather naively) that adopting a poststructuralist stance would make such a consideration unnecessary: I was particularly anxious to avoid marginalizing *Nightwood*, to avoid seeing it as a marginal production "mimicking", perhaps perversely, seminal works like *Ulysses* or, say, "The Wasteland". (After all, it does appear that, by the end of the 'thirties, *Nightwood* was as well known as Joyce's "Work in Progress", although it rather quickly dropped from sight after that.) However, my avoidance of the gender question did not solve this problem of marginalization, and it left too many questions unanswered. Why has *Nightwood* receded from public view, despite the attention that other writers have paid to it and despite its similarities to other revolutionary projects, of the period, written by men? Why has the intellectual impetus of Barnes's work been so frequently ignored or denied by the critics? (Notable among the few critics who recognize Barnes's intellectualism is Jane Marcus, who nonetheless states that "we are not accustomed to thinking of Djuna Barnes as a learned woman, a scholar as well as a writer". I was startled when I first came across this statement, for, in my perhaps isolated reading of *Nightwood*, I had never considered her as anything but a "learned woman".) Why has her project been so often identified as following or responding to Joyce's or T.S. Eliot's, for example? Why has she been called the *female*

Rabelais?⁷ And why, paradoxically, does her work not fit easily into the general context of "women's writing"? Why has her work been castigated by some critics for being too morbid, too difficult, too metaphysical or too Proustian to be included in the canon of women's writing?⁸ Barnes's works, and *Nightwood* in particular, seem to have fallen into some sort of no-(wo)man's ground between the (arguably) unorthodox writings by men and women's writing.

This is *Nightwood's* difference: largely excluded from the dominant canon because its intellectualism has been denied and largely held at bay in the minority canon of women's writing because of its suspiciously intellectual and difficult bent, *Nightwood* is not properly aligned with either camp. This difference, which is irreducible, is sustained by the unresolved questions about the relevance and specifications of the gender of the being that writes. If there is one thing that a study of *Nightwood* can teach us, it is that the writer's gender, however that gender may be constructed, does make a difference, but the difference that the writer's gender makes may not be quite what we expect it to be.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM CONFIDENCE TO DOUBT: A HISTORY OF READING *NIGHTWOOD*

Who was Djuna Barnes? This is a surprisingly difficult question to answer given that she was of the twentieth century, the century of documentation and data, and lived among much-recorded and often-analyzed characters in one of the most notorious settings of recent history. If we were to attempt an answer, to say "this was Djuna Barnes", we would somehow have to overcome the fact that the first part of her life was virtually unrecorded, that her birth was unregistered, her parents' marriage uncertified, that she never attended school or any other institution that might document her existence. We would also have to accommodate our concern to the fact that most contemporary reports and portraits of the adult Barnes are the products of passing acquaintanceships with her or with myths and rumours of her. Those closest to Barnes, as Shari Benstock has noted, "protected her need for privacy by not commenting on her at length in their memoirs".¹ Between rumour and the protections of privacy, where do we find the Djuna Barnes?

Of course, the most obvious place to find this writer, or any disembodied writer for that matter, is between the covers of those texts bearing her name as a signature of author-ity. "By their works shall ye know them." There are a number of Barnes critics who subscribe literally to this view and read all of Barnes's poems, stories, plays and novels as one large autobiographical *roman à clef*. Her "recognized" biographer, Andrew Field, has given the virtuoso performance of this manner of reading and actually grounded many of his psycho-biographical

suppositions (and statements-of-fact) on the "evidence" of her texts. This is a dubious course for a literary biographer to follow and Field's practice (which also excludes documentation of quotations and the identification of many of his informants) often renders his work useless to any sort of scholarly study of Barnes. A classic example of Fieldean analysis is his predication of Barnes's entire oeuvre on her experience--although an experience never mentioned by Barnes herself--of the violence of an incestuous father:

Wald Barnes, Henry Budington, Basil, Titus, Wendell, which is, by the way, a traditional Barnes family name. It does not take much to understand why this tale of cold and stupid horror has always remained the story behind the story in Barnes's writing, either removed or disguised or only obliquely told [....] Such a life. Dostoevsky and Faulkner even working together probably couldn't have invented it.²

The realization seems to have escaped Field that this "life", which he has divined from her fictions, might well be an invention itself.

Shari Benstock notices that there seems to be a problem with the application of biographical criticism itself to Barnes's texts. When "the mysterious unreality of *Nightwood* has translated itself into accounts of Barnes's life [....] Djuna Barnes becomes a pathetic victim of the Parisian nightworld, her 'basic heterosexuality' undermined by the evils of a lesbian community, her beauty lost in drunken brawls, her wit turned acid [....] she is Nora [...] a victim of the drugged, alcoholic,

sexually ambiguous Paris nightworld". This "myth" perpetrated by the "cultists" of biocriticism is so predominant that Benstock finds it difficult to "offer alternatives to the crass efforts at psychoanalysis indulged in by most commentators on her life and work".³ Benstock does manage to redistribute the critical emphasis, however, by considering Barnes within a particular context--that of the "Women of the Left Bank", the group of predominantly lesbian expatriates settled in the *rive gauche*/Montparnasse area of Paris through the first third of the century. I will return to Benstock's study of Barnes and analysis of her work when I discuss the history of Barnes criticism: what I wish to stress here is Benstock's dissatisfaction with the sort of analysis that necessarily presupposes an unassailable relationship between life and text. As Benstock has demonstrated, not only does such an approach provoke a disagreeable image of Barnes herself, it also leads to very limited readings of her texts.

In an interesting essay on Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, Gayatri C. Spivak prefaces part of her analysis with the following:

I do not know how to read a *roman à clef*, especially an autobiographical one. I do not know how to insert Woolf's life into the text of her book. Yet there is a case to be made here. I will present the material of a possible biographical speculation, adumbrate a relationship between life and book that I cannot theoretically present, consider the case made, and give a certain reading.⁴

There is a case to be made for "biographical speculation" as part of a theoretical approach or "practical enterprise that produces a reading".⁵ I cannot resurrect Barnes or make of her a human subject/object for analysis, but I can incorporate or present the "material" (*materia*, matter, apparatus, fabric, text [OED]) of a "possible" "speculation" (exercise of the faculty of sight, contemplation, conjectural consideration [OED]) in order to "adumbrate" (sketch in, overshadow [OED]) "a relationship between [Barnes's] life and [her] book[s]". Obviously, I am not concerned with verifiable Truth: I am interested only in the possibility of employing texts of views, conjectures and opinions (biography) as I fill-in-by-casting-a-shadow-over (read) the texts signed "Djuna Barnes" in order to "produce a reading" of those texts. This is not to deny Barnes's existence--certainly she lived, breathed, and had her being--but to acknowledge that I "do not know how to insert [Barnes's] life into the text of her book[s]". (It may well be the case, as Barnes asserts, that "[e]very writer writes out of his life", but it is not necessarily so that we can simply reverse the procedure and arrive at the writer's life again).⁶ I do not even know how to begin answering the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: I can, however, present the following materials gleaned from the small number of texts that do attempt to answer the question and chosen for their possible usefulness in a reading (the lineaments of which will be discussed later) of the Barnesian text.

Djuna Barnes was born on June 12 1892 on a farm near Cornwall-on-Hudson in New York State.⁷ She was the second of five children and only daughter of Elizabeth Chappell, a violinist and a furniture-maker's daughter from Leicestershire. Barnes's father, Wald, was a spoiled "bohemian" *cum* subsistence farmer with a predilection for exotic experiments in marital arrangements and child-rearing: he was a practising bigamist, adulterer, and pre-potent sire, a fundamentalist of American individualism--with a streak of early Hebraic patriarchy--and an utter failure at generating fiscal wealth of any sort. This last "attribute", and Wald Barnes's whimsical indifference to its significations, seemed to have marginalized the Barnes family in their relationship to both the indigenous rural society and the summering Greenwich Villagers.

Wald Barnes apparently never felt constrained by social proprieties, or even "legitimacies". Indifferent to, or disdainful of, one of the most conventional forms of patriarchy, the assumption of the surname (or sire's name) by legitimate offspring, he had dropped his given name, Henry Budington (II), in favour of his mother's maiden name, Barnes, and a variable series of Christian names (he was "Harold" around the time of his daughter's arrival). If nomination is indeed intimate with identity (as identification), then we can see that Djuna Barnes's social legitimacy was already at risk--at least linguistically--before her birth. Her naming is even more problematic: "Djuna" is either an agreed upon change from the given name "Djalma"--after the

prince in Sue's *The Wandering Jew*--following a younger brother's insistent mispronunciation of that name; or it is the collapsing of "Djalma" and "una", her older brother's infantile logism for the moon, and thus the name given her at birth. (Her father seemed to have a fondness for the rare or self-composed name: his sons were called Thurn, Zendon, Saxon and Shangar. Thurn later changed his name to Thurn Budington, while Shangar changed his to Charles ["Bud"] Barnes.) "Barnes", as we have seen, could not have been her proper surname. "Budington" may not have been the right name either: Barnes herself acknowledged that she may well have been illegitimate and neither marriage license nor birth certificate exist to prove or disprove that supposition. Given the admixture of familial, nominal, and legal irregularities or uncertainties comprising Barnes's "bohemian origins", one might be forgiven for suggesting that Barnes was almost "born" to be a "modernist".

It is interesting that Barnes chose to retain this pseudo-patronymic, especially as name-changing seems to have been a family trait, for the name places her, at once, in two camps. On the one hand, as the name of the father, "Barnes" aligns her, although questionably, with the patriarchal system of descent and propriety. On the other hand, as the maiden name of the grandmother, "Barnes" also signals an elision or refusal of patriarchal imposition. As both her father and grandmother were writers of sorts, the name offers an additional significance. Like "Djuna", which is either the mispronunciation of the

proper masculine name of a character in a novel or the mingling of that proper masculine name with a feminine neo-logicism, "Barnes" can function as a signature to two apparently opposing discourses--the proper, meaningful and rational, "masculine" discourse that constitutes literary and philosophical tradition and the improper, nonsensical or "prattling", "feminine" discourse against which reason defines itself. In this sense, her name itself signals the different, alembicated discourse that constitutes her writing.⁹

Like Virginia Woolf, Barnes was educated only informally: unlike Woolf, she did not seem to find this education ignominious. Of course, Woolf's quite just complaint was that she was denied a formal "higher" education simply because she was of the gender considered unable to benefit from such learning. Barnes, on the other hand, escaped any formal schooling because, first of all, her father considered state-controlled education an unnatural check on a child's innate individualism and, secondly, he was unable to afford a tutor. Woolf, who was certainly the more "advantaged", tended to view her education in terms of deprivation: Barnes, whose studies were often occluded by the necessities of minding younger siblings and doing farm chores, seems, like Blake, to have treated hers as an early license to study and write as she pleased. We should remember, though, that Woolf's education, under the direction of her father, was placed in the hands of governesses and her mother, members of a distinct educational "under" class.⁹ Barnes had the peculiar advantage of being taught by her

paternal grandmother, Zadel Barnes Gustafson, who had been, in her earlier days, a journalist, poet, biographer and novelist, an acquaintance of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Eleanor Marx (daughter of Karl), and, interestingly, an attendee at the Wilde salon in London. Zadel does not seem to have been a particularly "good" writer, or even a noteworthy feminist (although she was one of the less than 1% of American women divorced in 1877), but she was certainly well-read, of a revolutionary bent, and appears to have been a stimulating teacher if we are to judge by her granddaughter's career.

The construction of a taxonomy of Barnes's early readings has not yet been attempted--at least, as far as I know--and is quite beyond the scope of the present study, but it seems reasonable to argue that by the time Barnes began her journalistic career (at 18) she had more than a passing familiarity with a considerable portion of Great, and not so great, Literature. Certainly, her early interviews, poems, short stories and plays--as well as her later comments--suggest acquaintanceship with the Authorized Version of the Bible, with Chaucer, Dante and Shakespeare, and Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, as well as the works of Rabelais, Montaigne, Fielding, Sterne, Thackeray, Dickens, Wilde, Kipling, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Proust, Strindberg, Ibsen, Synge, Yeats, Thoreau, Emerson, Poe, and Holmes. I don't think it would be irrational to assume that she was first introduced to at least some of these texts by her grandmother.¹⁰ She was also likely exposed to her own family's literary productions: her grandmother's work, including

the "quasi-spiritualistic" *The Foundation of Death*, a successful book (five printings) written by Zadel and her second husband during their years in London; her Theosophical grandfather Buddington's *Man Makes His Body, or the Ascent of Ego Through Matter*; and her greatgrandfather (renowned spiritualist and medium to the "great" on the "other side") Thomas Buddington's *Dissolution or Physical Death, and How Spirit Chemists Produce Materialization, by M. Faraday and Historical Revelations of the Relation Existing Between Christianity and Paganism Since the Disintegration of the Roman Empire, By the Roman Emperor Julian (Called the Apostate)*.¹¹ The writings of her grandmother's peers, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Harriet Beecher Stowe, were probably made available to her as well. Whatever its actual lineaments, her grandmother's curriculum, with its apparent indifference to or avoidance of an exclusive and categorical organization of readings, can scarcely be considered an incidental force in the cognitive development of her granddaughter. In fact, it may well have engendered the host of artistic and metaphysical problems, as well as the exotic vocabulary and catalogue of styles, that absorbed and characterized Barnes's writing throughout her working life.

Considering the nature of Barnes's education, it may seem odd that she has been criticized (or congratulated) for her inconsistent attitude toward feminist organization. Shari Benstock notes that "the tone of some of [her] early articles on suffrage might suggest that Barnes was not sympathetic to the movement" and Andrew Field quotes (happily, one

suspects) her opinion of "the exaggerated posturing of the contemporary feminist movement" (Field's words): "*--These women!! Why don't they do something? Or knit socks for their husbands!*"¹² I do not think it necessary to examine Field's unsubstantiated implications--his antipathies to feminism are self-evident. However, Benstock's suggestion that Barnes "eschewed group causes and refused to become part of a 'sisterhood,' probably from fear of jeopardizing her individuality" is interesting and could bear some elaboration, or at least a bit more speculation.¹³

Andrew Field states that "[t]he family in which Djuna Barnes grew up was a matriarchy over which 'Mother' Zadel presided with benign but very considerable power behind her odd son".¹⁴ At the risk of supporting Field in his confusion of figures from Barnes's history and characters from her texts--he has apparently drawn this conclusion from his reading of *Ryder*--I must confess that I find it easy to read into these texts, with their figurations of the female as large and indomitable and of the male as small or insufficient, an underlying experience of matriarchal hegemony. But this is a matriarchy "behind [the] son", for the benefit of the son in the absence of the father, and a substantial propping up of the façade of patriarchy. This particular structure has, of course, a sterling pedigree within the history of patriarchal systems, and it is scarcely the argument for the early feminist influence in Barnes's life that Field supposes. Barnes's grandmother may have been a considerably powerful matriarchal figure,

but the system which ensured her "benign" power made virtual slaves of Barnes's mother and Wald's other wife. Still, I may be able to extract something useful from Field's assertion by altering the focus and suggesting that the roots of Barnes's "attitude" towards "sisterhood" are posited in a reactive suspicion that any *organization* of female power is merely the black backside of patriarchy. In other words, I would like to suggest that Barnes may have been less influenced by examples of matriarchy than suspicious of the unanswerable *power* (which can never be "benign") inherent in any sort of -archy.

Barnes's eclectic education ended when, according to Field, she "was 'given' to Percy Faulkner, 52, the brother of her father's mistress, in 1910 by Wald and Zadel".¹⁵ This is such an enticing little story, and such a complement to my previous suggestion, that I include it among the biographical "materials" presented even though Field has done nothing to substantiate it. ("Now it has been confirmed", he announces and leaves the "by what" and "by whom" to his reader's imagination.) Apparently this marriage didn't last long: by 1911 Barnes was living in New York with her newly-divorced mother and younger brothers and attending, very casually, art classes at the Pratt Institute and The Art Students League. Her encounter with formal education was doomed to be brief, however, for she soon found herself the sole financial support of her mother and brothers. Like her grandmother before her, she took to journalism and was soon contributing regularly, as a freelance illustrator and columnist, to *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. By 1914, she

was also writing "local-colour stories", "a few murder and suicide stories", and a good many interviews for *The Press*, *The World*, and *The Morning Telegraph*. Barnes apparently told Field that by the time she was 25 "she was earning \$5000.00 a year, a most handsome salary for the time". Her "greatest reportorial feat" was her submission to forcefeeding so that she might be able to comment more accurately on the "violations" suffered by the hunger-striking English suffragettes.¹⁶

Despite the distinction of her early success, however, Barnes seems to have been inclined to view her journalism as something she did to pay the bills. As her reputation increased, and with it her earning power, she began to spend less time on journalistic projects and more on her paintings, sketches, poems, and short stories. In 1916, Guido Bruno published *The Book of Repulsive Women*, a collection of eight poems and five sketches of a decidedly decadent nature depicting the progress of a "fallen" woman (or women) through urban depravity to suicide.¹⁷ The irony, the influence of European Decadence, and the postlapsarian urban themes that were to distinguish, for so many critics, her later work as definitively modernist were already in evidence prior to the entry of the United States into the First World War. In 1918, one of her short stories, "A Night Among the Horses", won an O. Henry prize, and, in 1919, the Provincetown Players opened their season with her first play, *Three From the Earth*. (As she retreated from full-time journalism, Barnes was also doing a considerable amount of reading: she studied, among others, Chekhov, Synge, Strindberg,

Ibsen, Joyce, and O'Neill, who was in turn to become an admirer of Barnes. The influences of these readings on her early works have been frequently commented on, and I do not have anything new to add; but I should note, at this point, that Barnes was an avid reader throughout her life and served numerous literary apprenticeships.) After the war, her work began to appear in *The Little Review*, *Smart Set* and *Vanity Fair*.

Around 1919 or 1920, the date is uncertain, Barnes followed the general artistes' migration to Europe. She travelled on a commission from *McCalls* and money borrowed from Peggy Guggenheim and landed in Paris with two letters of introduction, one to Pound and the other to Joyce. (The former was to lead to a fond, if guarded, relationship-- Pound was later to say of Barnes that "she sure weren't too cuddly"-- while the latter was to prove the threshold of a lifelong friendship.) Between the *McCalls* money and earnings from submissions to magazines "back home", Barnes was able to secure a fairly comfortable life for herself. After a brief spell in Berlin in the early twenties (with Thelma Wood, Marsden Hartley, Berenice Abbott, Isadora Duncan, and a considerable amount of cocaine, according to Robert McAlmon),¹⁹ she bought a flat on the rue St. Romain and set up housekeeping with her lover, Wood, an American silverpoint artist. Barnes's sexual orientation was always ambiguous--she variously admitted and denied lesbianism as she admitted and denied feminism--and she was rumoured to have had a variety of lovers of either sex (among them Marsden Hartley, Robert

McAlmon, Laurence Vail, Jane Heap, and Natalie Barney), but the ten year affair with Wood was her one serious attempt at a sustained relationship and, thus, perhaps bears its own pointed significance. Certainly, her three best-known works belong, in one way or another, to this period in her life. Her first novel, *Ryder*, and her infamous oblique account of the expatriate "lesbian ladies" in Paris, *Ladies Almanack*, were both published in 1928; and *Nightwood*, considered by many the "best" of her works, was begun in 1931 upon the dissolution of the affair. For ten years after *Nightwood's* publication, Barnes remained "silent": her only other major work, *The Antiphon*, was begun in 1947 following another significant separation, the death of her mother.¹⁹

Ryder, the text which Barnes declared "the female *Tom Jones*", quickly became a best-seller.²⁰ It was critically acclaimed as "the most amazing book ever written by a woman", "the most amazing thing to have come from a woman's hand", "a modern embodiment of the robust humour of Rabelais and the whimsical raciness of Laurence Sterne", "a thing of abundant high spirits and of a robust and salty humour".²¹ Eugene Jolas, himself, sung Barnes's praises in *transition*: "She has caught life prismatically in a humour that, I dare say, no women, and few men, have succeeded in giving us."²² Of course, there were a few pejorative reviews as well--a certain G.S.M. complained that "these conceptions of the essence of salty old Adam in human nature are not for 'lady writers' to paint"--but it is apparent even from these that

Barnes had certainly created a stir.²³ *Ryder's* reception, and the clandestine success of anonymously and informally published *Ladies Almanack*, marked perhaps the highest point of Barnes's public career.²⁴

Nightwood comes of a darker era. Conceived in a personal bereavement, its development punctuated by periodic drunkenness and bouts of incapacitating depression, and its maturation always threatened by penury and the increasing likelihood of war, *Nightwood* marks Barnes's commitment to a new sort of writing—a much more opaque, more difficult, more "poetic", sort of writing. She no longer cared to produce saleable material and the influential *literati* responded accordingly: despite her lingering reputation as a reporter and the author of *Ryder*, no-one in the United States would touch the new book. It suffered three years of unrepentent rejection before the American novelist Emily Coleman and Edwin Muir took it upon themselves to forcefully introduce the text (titled *Bow Down*) to T.S. Eliot, now editor at Faber. Eliot succumbed, but not before engineering the reduction of the book by more than half (from over 190,000 words to some 65,000) and suggesting a new title. Faber & Faber published *Nightwood*, with a foreword by Eliot, in 1936 in England. Despite Eliot's backing—and Dylan Thomas's assurances that it was "one of the three great prose books ever written by a woman"²⁵--*Nightwood* never attracted the loud acclamations and declamations that followed *Ryder's* appearance. Rather, its reviewers seemed smitten by a great ambivalence. Graham Greene offered the paradigmatic remark that "[a]

sick spiritual condition may have gone into this book, but it is rare in contemporary fiction to be able to trace any spiritual experience whatever, and the accent, I think, is sometimes of a major poet".²⁶ Desmond Hawkins, in his recommendation-with-reservation, adds that "its effect may be described as 'Hamlet' without everyone but the Prince".²⁷ Peter Quennell, writing for the *New Statesman and Nation*, finds it "an extremely moral work", then asks the reader to "imagine the worst of hangovers, complicated by acute remorse--and extreme retrospective jealousy--all thickened into a view of modern civilization and contemporary social life that, for bitterness and crazy violence, leaves the darkest chapters of *Ulysses* far behind".²⁸ The book did not sell particularly well: Eliot had been a wise editor to insist that Barnes "be paid no advance".²⁹

Nightwood was published in the United States in 1937, reprinted in 1946 and 1961, and translated into Swedish, French and German, but it never produced enough revenue to support Barnes. *Ryder*, after demand waned following the second printing in 1928, went out of print for over fifty years (until 1979, when Barnes finally stopped quarreling with the publishers). Only the generosity of friends like Peggy Guggenheim and Samuel Beckett kept her from starvation during this period. Barnes's financial decline, however, was merely symptomatic of her growing resignation before the horrors of quotidian existence. When the Occupation began in France, Barnes was suffering her second nervous breakdown. Emily Coleman found her in a mental hospital and convinced

Guggenheim, who was displaying some exasperation at Barnes's continued dependency, to pay at least her fare back to the United States. It was a rescue with some irony: Barnes detested her native country and, over the next forty years, frequently lamented her inability to ship herself back to Paris or London. Perhaps consigning herself to an inevitable devolution, Barnes now chose hermitage in a room-and-a-half walk-up flat in Greenwich Village over the restitution of her journalistic career. This was to be her last home and the workshop of her final production, *The Antiphon*.

This play was published, in 1958, only through the persistence of Muir and Eliot and the support of Dag Hammarskjöld, who had been introduced to Barnes's work by his friend Muir. Aside from a "concert reading performance" of it at Harvard in 1956, a reading arranged by Muir, the play was only ever staged in Swedish (translated by Hammarskjöld and Karl Ragnor Gierow) at the Royal Dramaten Theatre in Stockholm, February 1961. A reviewer dubbed it "one of Dramaten's great performances".³⁰

In the English-speaking world, *The Antiphon* was assumed to be "unplayable", a work of "literature" rather than of the theatre. Many of its reviews displayed the same sort of ambivalence that greeted *Nightwood* in 1936 which suggests that we cannot simply assign that earlier ambivalence to a general mood of impending catastrophe. The reviewer for the *TLS* remarked that:

The Antiphon, because of its uncompromising bitterness and its equally uncompromising language, is even less likely than *Nightwood* to prove popular, but it is probable that there will always be one or two eccentrics who think that it gives its author the first place among women who have written verse in the English language.

And Norman Dorn, in an article for the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote:

One supposes that "The Antiphon" can be meant as a hymn of hates, another allegoric elegy to the England past and passing, or one more Samuel Beckett-like glimpse of futility. Yet, with its dissonance of "dear estrangement" --people merely impinging upon each other rather than communicating--this verse play may well have depth of vision comparable only to James Joyce.³¹

There is, however, one noticeable difference between the reviews of *The Antiphon* and those of *Nightwood*: the former tend to consider Barnes in an historical context, specifically that context generally labelled "modernism" and assumed, by the late 1950s, to be part of the pre-war "past". As Kathleen Raine noted in her review for *New Statesman*:

One may say that Djuna Barnes is to early Eliot what Samuel Beckett is to Joyce. The emergence of two such remarkable writers, whose flowering is so late as to bloom in another world, ought at least to remind us of the astonishing transformation of language that was undertaken and achieved in the Twenties [...]³²

And it is here, with Barnes's translation into a "flower" of "modernism", that I will temporarily close this presentation of

"material" of "possible biographical speculation[s]", adding only that Barnes continued to write poetry, publishing odd bits and pieces, until her death at the age of 90. She apparently left her last large piece-- a verse narrative intended to rival *The Divine Comedy*--uncompleted. I will, of course, be returning to this material periodically as my analysis of Barnes's text proceeds, and I will be examining the conjunction of Barnes and "modernism" in Chapter Two. The task which immediately presents itself, however, is the articulation of strategies of examination and analysis that will suggest the angles of my critical speculations. To this end, I offer the following history of, and critical commentary on, the phenomenon of "Barnes Criticism". By focussing on what I perceive to be the insufficiencies of the established critical apparatus to the texts upon which it has been afixed (or upon which it has been forced), I will be laying out, and justifying, the margins of my own reading of the Barnesian text.

I. CRITIQUES AND CRITICISMS

And what is the perverse mechanism of fame that can have an artist be honoured as she has been by her greatest fellow artists and then be put on display in a dim hallway of contemporaneity like an heirloom that is too good to put away but does not merit frequent contemplation.³³

One academic anxiety becomes poignantly clear as one reads through that small, select, collection of material comprising "Barnes Criticism": the writers, at some point, usually feel it incumbent upon them to address Barnes's lack of popularity with the reading public. By way of explanation, they offer Barnes's recalcitrance, or indifference to her own "marketability"; her literary and historical position, half-hidden in the shadows cast by Joyce and Eliot; the difficulty in assigning particularly her later works to a genre; the alienating obfuscations of her language, and of her "metaphysics"; and the general institutional neglect of works written by women. Of course, all these explanations may well apply to the case. But, I am not concerned, at the moment, with their validity: my interest is more with the need that gave rise to these explanations and the attendant effect of this need on the texts in which it transpires.

James B. Scott, in *Djuna Barnes*, and Louis Kannenstine, in *The Art of Djuna Barnes: Duality and Damnation*, both state that, for the reasons mentioned above, Barnes has been virtually ignored by the critical fraternity (a significantly male contingent) and the reading public in general.³⁴ These two critics intend to set the record straight: "it is indeed time to give Djuna Barnes her due".³⁵ Andrew Field, if we note the epigraph to *Djuna: The Formidable Miss Barnes*, feels the same compulsion.³⁶ "Miss Barnes", as all three significantly insist on calling her, must now be rendered accessible to the public. Why? Because she was "one of the most talented and fascinating literary

figures of the twenties"; because *Nightwood* "has come to appear as a pivotal book, a precursor of the time-liberated interior novel"; because Faulkner, Lowry, Anaïs Nin, and John Hawkes have all admitted her ponderable influence on their work; because "she is a stylist, an innovator and even an inventor of literary language"; and because she is the "last survivor of the great generation of early twentieth-century modernists in English literature".³⁷ (It should be noted that all three texts were written during Barnes's lifetime.) Of course, most of these justifications are valid enough, but one begins to feel that, having identified and priced their found "heirloom" and having apparently justified her expense, Field, Scott and Kannenstine now produce her for our contemplation and edification.

Herein lies a problem: the pedestal is erected, Barnes and her work fixed upon it, and not one of the three erectors is able to evade this manufactured quintessence of "The Formidable Miss Barnes". This image may be too forced, relying blatantly on the conventions of the politics of gender and of the artist-critic relationship, but I think it is a useful analogue for a large part of Barnes Criticism and will provide an object over and against which to set a proposal for another, different, reading of the Barnesian text.

Before going on with that, however, I would first like to be a bit more specific in my criticism of these three seminal texts (the only book-length studies to date, excepting doctoral theses) of Barnes

Criticism.³⁸ I begin with the first published, James B. Scott's *Djuna Barnes*, a text bearing the tell-tale dedication: "This book is for all my women friends, and my wife." One can only assume that he intends to educate these women, because he goes on to say, in the "Preface", that his study is "partially anachronistic; it is addressed to readers who for the main part have yet to read the works herein discussed", and that Barnes's "works can be understood--with effort"--presumably also with Scott's aid to reading.³⁹ However, as a general guide to Barnes's writings, *Djuna Barnes* is both comprehensive and fair. Scott covers the bulk of the canon, giving each part its synoptic due and refusing to qualitatively valorize *Nightwood* over the other works. It is to Scott's credit that, unlike Kannenstine, he does not see the writings preceding *Nightwood* as, for the most part, series of developmental stages, ridden with experimental failures, but as works worthy of attention in their own right.

Yet, the problem, if I may designate it as such, with Scott's text arises precisely from the kind of attention he devotes to Barnes's works. In order to deal with texts that make "unaccustomed use" of "standard words", that confound "our expectations of a linear and chronological presentation", that reverse "the usual associations between life and hope versus death and despair"--making "the ruined state the positive one"--and that find that "the meaninglessness of life lies precisely in its meaning", Scott pulls out of his sleeve a fundamental concept of his own, "inverted naturalism".⁴⁰ Thus, Scott

rationalizes, or renders understandable, the apparently irrational, undecidable, or obscure, practices of Barnes's writing. "Inverted naturalism", according to Scott, is simply a meliorization of the "hard realism of naturalism". If "naturalism" is deterministic and pessimistic "about man's ability to shape the world to his will", then "inverted naturalism" is writing that treats positively of this dilemma: life is tragically "meaningless", but death is "an affirmation and a triumph".⁴¹ What is more, "inverted naturalism", like "naturalism" before it, holds that life may be nonetheless "understood". Barnes, as an inverted naturalist, "sees life as meaningless but as quite understandable. In the deepest sense, her stories can be said to show *how* and *why* death can be the only real affirmation in a meaningless universe."⁴²

An entire series of questions go begging about this concept, and I will come back to them in a moment; but first I offer Scott's *how* and *why* of "inverted naturalism". Scott contends that the "best writers" of the 1920's, "typified by Joyce, Eliot, and Miss Barnes", disillusioned with a world marked by war, violence, crass materialism, and the erosion of idealism, found themselves deprived of any "hopeful real-life models".

They were faced with essentially three choices: they could write naturalistically about the actualities of this violent century; they could begin looking backward for their models; or they could try to do both.⁴³

Of course, Eliot, Joyce and Miss Barnes followed the latter course. Barnes's efforts resulted in an "inverted naturalism" informed by a nostalgia for the "longed-for certainties of the past", hence her recourse to past or archaic forms, her "unaccustomed use" of "standard words", and the meldings of past and present that confound "our expectations of a linear and chronological presentation".⁴⁴ Thus, Scott wraps up and annuls the problematics of Barnesian discourse.

Scott's discourse, however, provokes another series of problems. Can the "meaningless" be "understood"? What is the relationship of "understanding" to "meaning", then? If life is "meaningless", what does death "affirm"? And, what is death a "triumph" over? Can there be "affirmation" and "triumph" in a meaninglessness that necessarily (one assumes) precludes the structural polemics of right and wrong? And what, then, does Scott "mean" by "meaningless"? I bring up these unaddressed questions primarily to illustrate the tension within Scott's discourse, and his analytic attitude, away from a reading that admits of problems, dissociations, fragments, ambiguities, and toward a centripetal, unifying, reading of texts. Nothing, supposedly, escapes the whirlpool of understanding: "meaninglessness" functions meaningfully within this system of signification and, therefore, may be apprehended rationally. Barnes's works are organized, according to Scott, around "center[s] of focus", or "center-of-consciousness" characters, or narrators, informed by a central teleology (the solace, affirmation, of death), and orchestrated, in the "deepest sense", by an

omniscient understanding of "life" in all its "meaninglessness". Such a reading renders Barnes's works peculiarly conventional, unitary, rational, "safe".⁴⁵ You see, "her works *can* be understood--with [ameliorating, rationalizing] effort". This effort can only be sustained at the expense of a recognition of the Barnesian texts's own strategies over and against centrality, safety, and rationality (strategies which Scott admits, but evades) and even, ironically, at the expense of sensible, conventional, reading itself. (For example, in his struggle for a central theme in *Ryder*, Scott concludes that the book is actually about Wendell Ryder's confrontation with society, which is a most peculiar reduction of the text's various themes.)⁴⁶ Despite his disquisitions on the "fragmentary" nature of Barnes's later works, Scott presents us with a circumnavigable, knowable, "heirloom", amenable to a rationalist sensibility.

Louis F. Kannenstine, in *The Art of Djuna Barnes: Duality and Damnation*, takes fewer pains than Scott to reconcile us with Barnes's entire canon. For Kannenstine, "the uneven and sometimes flawed work" that precedes *Nightwood* presents the artist's own struggle to develop a coherent thematic and stylistic practice.⁴⁷ *Nightwood* "towers over all of Djuna Barnes's previous work, excelling it in organizational perfection, intensity of conception, and power of phrasing".⁴⁸ A work of near perfection, it "takes a prominent place in the 'subjective-feminine' tradition in modern fiction [...] in the broad tradition of the novel of sensibility [...] forming a kind of bridge between the stream-

of-consciousness novels of Virginia Woolf and the 'interior' novels of Anaïs Nin".⁴⁹ Moreover--and this is of special concern to Kannenstine--"*Nightwood* brings the aims of the novel perhaps as close as possible to those of poetry, particularly with respect to the poetic image." *The Antiphon* is primarily "a continuation of formal experimentation with an accompanying increase in complexity and obscurity", a natural development out of *Nightwood* and away from accessibility.⁵⁰ Yet, it cannot eclipse *Nightwood*, a text that more readily places itself in the larger (and more important?) context of a "tradition".

Unlike Scott, as well, Kannenstine approaches Barnes's texts with a specific, identifiable, methodology, from a formal critical stance rather than from a "common sense". His pragmatic analyses of passages are the "close readings" of Practical Criticism, and his focus on the poetic image (as defined by Pound) and his conclusion that Barnes's images have "[a]n ineffable quality [...] that analysis not only cannot diminish, but cannot even touch" indicate a theoretical alliance with American New Criticism.⁵¹ Kannenstine projects this attitude onto the functioning of *Nightwood* and *The Antiphon* themselves:

Their lines are intensely worked and tightly constructed into complex units that stand firmly on their own ground, independent and resistant to ultimate breakdown or exhaustion by analysis. These highly formal late writings are evidence of their author's self-effacement, of a willful depersonalization of voice through which the work stands independent of its creator.⁵²

Thus a fundament of Barnes's genius accomodates the New Critical, and, indeed, imagist, apprehension of poetic functioning.

Kannenstine's entire project (to delineate the "Duality and Damnation" informing all aspects of Barnes's work) rests on his conception of the Barnesian image. Noting that, in *Nightwood*, the image is defined as "a stop the mind makes between uncertainties", and taking sustenance from Pound's definition—"that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time"—Kannenstine argues that much of "Miss Barnes's art" can be viewed as an "architectonic" arrangement of poetic images intertwining "in a complex pattern to render a higher reality".⁵³ This "higher reality" consists of a recognition of the essential "duality of being": to live is to be "divided", caught in the flux of an ineluctable duality.⁵⁴ To "stop [...] between uncertainties", to stand on the middle plane between contraries, is to assume the static "halt position" of the image, realizing, paradoxically, "both total coherence and dissolution". It is also, contradictorily in view of the proffered paradox, to "abolish[] duality", to lose one's identity in union with another, to be "damned" without capitulation.⁵⁵

Kannenstine's problematic view of the structure of the image is posited as the single, informing, structure of Barnes's life and work: the character's "lives are struggles to become one unqualified whole, either one thing or the other, but they are blocked by the recognition

of their duality"; "[m]ystery, in essence, is the subject of *Ryder*, the ambiguity of suspension between nature and humanity, life and death, man and woman [...] there is no state that does not partake of its opposite"; beneath Barnes's "apparent split between introverted and extroverted states of mind, she had been working toward a new thematic consistency"; Barnes's "central vision" is that "Being is a terrible state of tentativeness or suspension, never resolved but certainly terminating in death, ending in the mystery that initiated it"; "[a]ll in all, *Nightwood's* imagery, narrative structure, and generic mutability are determined by Djuna Barnes's urge toward centrality" or "syntheses of dualities".⁵⁶

Certainly, there are multiple difficulties with Kannenstine's image of Barnes's informing image. On the one hand, he posits a "consistency", a totality of "coherence and dissolution", an "urge toward centrality", a consuming "higher reality"--a sort of dialectical, transcendental, synthesis of duality--and the image itself as static middle grounds (or principal foundations) of Barnes's system. On the other hand, and much to the disruption of his argument, his own reading of Barnes brings him to the realization that to "stop" on the middle ground is to lose identity, to die, to *end* in the initiating "mystery" (the "ineffable quality" that speaks disaster for the literate), to dissolve into nothingness. (We should remember that Pound, himself, could not finally continue to presume the stasis of his image, hence the development of "vorticism".) There is a gap between the imposition

of his theory and the effect of his practice into which his "heirloom" appears to have escaped, having slipped his grasp. (It is interesting that Kannenstine places Barnes *between* Woolf and Nin, *between* "the early innovators of this century and the later generations of experimental writers".⁵⁷ Perhaps it is also significant that, under a chronological ordering of texts, Kannenstine's should occupy the middle position.) My argument with Kannenstine is that his own productive reading of her text is confounded by his conception of "Miss Barnes" as an imagist poet. His insistence on a transcendental and centralist teleology seriously inhibits his very suggestive reading of the simultaneous "total coherence and dissolution" of *Nightwood's* images.

Andrew Field's dual biography/biocritical analysis, *Djuna: The Formidable Miss Barnes*, is another story altogether. As the *only* biography of Djuna Barnes, it stands on enviable ground, and Field takes a roguish--or slovenly?--advantage of this position. As I have already noted, he documents neither reference nor quotation, providing readers, instead, with a lengthy, unannotated, bibliography through which to wade at their leisures, and he happily indulges in his own particular brand of neo-pseudo-Freudian (I can find no more descriptive term) analysis at every significant turn. He also, as we have seen, quite unabashedly confounds Barnes's characters with her family, her friends, and herself. I offer another exemplary passage, this time on *The Antiphon*, illustrating all of the above.

The name Miranda is another important and clear transference--Miranda is the daughter of Prospero, of course, but there may be a Miranda closer to hand. The only death certificate that could be located for the period in which Djuna's friend Mary Pyne died belongs to Miranda Pyne. It could be a close relative and another Barnes name transference. However that may be, as one critic observed, Miranda is Djuna, as were Julie of *Ryder* and Nora of *Nightwood* before. The hostility towards the father by Djuna-Julie-Miranda is a simple continuation of a well-articulated basic Barnes theme, but it is only in the discarded drafts of *The Antiphon* that there is shown at last the precise basis of the hostility between mother and daughter.^{5a}

One wonders why "Miranda" should be an "important and clear transference". Unlike *The Tempest's* Miranda, *The Antiphon's* Miranda is fatherless, not motherless, and her hatred of her dead father certainly exceeds Prospero's daughter's defiance of a father that she loves. The reference to a Miranda Pyne is almost entirely beside the point, even if Mary Pyne was indeed a Miranda. Mary Pyne is a rather shadowy figure about whom we know very little--certainly not enough to construe her as the "original" of Miranda. One also wonders about this anonymous "one critic", for doubtlessly it would be interesting to read this critic's argument for such a certain and total identification of author and characters.

I would suggest that, rather than actually being a work of biographical criticism, *Djuna: The Formidable Miss Barnes* is itself a "novel", perhaps taking some direction from Truman Capote's *In Cold*

Blood (it is as painstakingly researched) or from Barnes's own early interviews. With a Capote-like disregard for the "establishment", a regard that is perhaps more arrogant than critical, Field has attempted to demolish the conventionally contrived barriers between fiction, history, and criticism. Unfortunately, he has none of Capote's tools, neither the wit nor knowledge of his "field", to deliver purposive, telling, blows. His is not an avant-garde work of literary scholarship; it is a derivative story about an eccentric vagrant making her way along the twisted paths of the artistic life, a story that commences by proclaiming itself: "This is the story of Djuna Barnes. It is a tale of two cultures, three generations, and a major writer of our time."⁵⁹ His "criticisms" all function relative to the legend that he is creating, and Barnes does emerge from this study a "legend", albeit subject to human foibles. For Field, Djuna is "The Formidable Miss Barnes" whose texts amount to no more than exposés on her remarkable character. Unfortunately, his is the only extensive biography that we have to date.

I am treating these three very different texts as paradigmatic of one of the general trends that I have noted in my reading of Barnes Criticism to date. In response to the fragmented, trans-generic (or antigeneric), poetically obscure, metaphysically oblique, nature of Barnes's writing, these critics have, in general, felt compelled to introduce or impose mediating themes ("inverted naturalism"), formal structures (Kannenstine's "image"), or laudatory legends in their analytic, or biographic, attempts. Symptomatic of all these endeavours

is a general repression of that which in Barnes's texts eludes their restrictive schemes or structures: there are evidences of repression in Kannenstine's refusal to deal with the anomalies produced by his own analysis and in Scott's refusal to note the very fundamental problems in his genially composed "inverted naturalism" as an explication of Barnes's "metaphysics". Field's predetermined exposition of Barnes's "personality" is so repressive that Barnes's texts often seem little more than stigmata. Barnes's works are "difficult", but I have sincere doubts about the ability of the strategies of imposition and repression to reduce this difficulty.

Obviously, the past several pages of this chapter have been leading up to, composing, a contest of theoretical perspectives. I have tried to show, very briefly, why the texts by Scott, Kannenstine, and Field are inadequate to the task of analyzing Barnes's works, and that this inadequacy is a result of these critics's "blindness" to their own discourse, of an unwitting repression of that which contradicts or evades their ostensible arguments--or stories. It is as though each critic has approached the text with an entire armoury of critical and theoretical presuppositions in his hands and has summarily dismissed or redesignated anything in the texts that did not yield meaning under the application of his tools.

The types of analysis that might be proposed in their stead are not necessarily "better" or more "pure", but they are perhaps more

attuned to the difficulties presented by Barnes's texts. One way to approach the texts is to reverse the impulse to make Barnes's works acceptable to a conventional apprehension of the tradition of Great Literature and to see them as functioning against that apprehension and its related expectations. This type of analysis assumes a subversive political position and attempts to demonstrate that the texts occupy a similar, if not the same, position. If we acknowledge that Great Literature is a predominantly masculine field, sustained by a society organized around the Phallus (or God, authority, law), then we can undoubtedly say that most of Barnes's works, with their distinctively feminine and often lesbian content, function subversively within or against this tradition.⁶⁰

Certainly, this is the line of argument taken by feminist critics like Shari Benstock, Sandra Gilbert, and Annette Kolodny, who find in Barnes's writings a valuable "critique of woman's place in Western society" and literature and a striking inversion or subversion of expected literary values.⁶¹ Gilbert suggests that we read *Nightwood* "as a revisionary response to male modernist touchstones like *Nighttown* and *The Waste Land*" and Kolodny comments that the same text "places its readers in precisely that situation in which the main characters of more recent women's fiction find themselves: that is embroiled in the hopeless task of trying to decode or decipher a strange and incomprehensible reality".⁶² In other words, the Barnesian text is both a response to significantly masculine constructions and an exposé

of the crippling chaos underlying and escaping these constructions. Shari Benstock claims that "[t]he nightwood serves as a frightening symbol of the irrational and bestial in which civilization's corruption works its effects" and that, to a certain extent, the "purpose" of the novel is the revelatory dissection of the masculinist myth of "genuine values".⁶³

This is also the angle which Jane Marcus takes in her comprehensive essay "Laughing at Leviticus: *Nightwood* as Woman's Circus Epic". Marcus initially describes her essay as "a feminist interpretation which argues, among other readings, that *Nightwood* is a brilliant and hilarious feminist critique of Freudian psychoanalysis".⁶⁴ She also describes her essay as part of "an effort to read race, class, and gender back into the discussion" on modernism.⁶⁵ For Marcus, "Barnes is the female Rabelais, the articulator of the woman's body/bawdy", and *Nightwood* is a woman's carnivalesque exposé of "fascism" in all its ideological, political, psychoanalytical and "masculine" forms.⁶⁶

It is interesting that Gilbert, Benstock, and Marcus, in particular, focus on *Nightwood*, a text which causes many lesbian feminist critics apparent discomfort. The latter seem more inclined to proffer *Ladies Almanack* as the exemplary text and castigate *Nightwood* for its bowing down to a conventional portrait of lesbian angst. While Blanche Wiesen Cook celebrates *Ladies Almanack* as "Djuna Barnes's frolicsome romp"

(perceiving it as an ameliorization of the pervasive melancholia of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*) and Bertha Harris commends it as "a document of lesbian revolution", Lillian Faderman finds that *Nightwood* is primarily a reiteration of Proust's "Gomorrhe", Louÿ's *Chansons de Bilitis*, and the group of texts constituting the nineteenth-century French decadent writings on lesbianism, writings by men for the titillation of men.⁶⁷ "Barnes", suggests Faderman, "called on her knowledge of lesbians in literature rather than in life in order to write her own novel", and thus catered to conventional morality by portraying lesbians as tortured, displaced, and doomed. Faderman, however, is disinclined to be too harsh on such an admirable historical figure as Barnes and so she attempts to equivocate by suggesting that "[p]erhaps the difference in [Barnes's] perspective in these two works is because *Ladies Almanack* was intended for her friends and printed privately, while *Nightwood* was written for the public, who demanded that their expectations regarding lesbian suffering be fulfilled". (This criticism does not sit well with Benstock's informed comment that Barnes "never thought it possible that [*Nightwood*] could have commercial success".)⁶⁸

Between these two camps of feminist readers, between those who extol *Nightwood* as "a revisionary response to male modernist touchstones" and those who hail *Ladies Almanack* as "a document of lesbian revolution", we can locate the fundamental--and already familiar--problem with this type of approach to Barnes's writings. (The

two camps seem to have become more and more polarized in the last few years, and one sometimes gets the feeling that each side is more interested in declaring any text—or, more properly in this case, any writer—under analysis "theirs" [as opposed to the "other women's(?)" or "men's"] than in achieving any sort of "reading" of the text "in its own right".) The attempt to force Barnes's work, as subversive agent, into specific artistic, literary, historical, or sociological contexts, whether performed by critical conservatives like Scott and Kannenstine or critical radicals like Gilbert and Faderman, will always be confounded by the ambivalent, ambiguous, and enigmatic nature of Barnes's language itself. Monique Wittig recognizes this and points out, in "The Point of View: Universal or Particular", that such forcing does "no favor to [Barnes], but also no favour to" her "lesbian" readers. "For it is within literature [in general] that the work of Barnes can better act both for her and for us", as an unconventional writing which does not preserve the *status qua*.⁶⁹ And, Marilyn Reizbaum, in "A 'Modernism of Marginality': The Link Between James Joyce and Djuna Barnes", suggests that *Nightwood*, in its resistance to "typing and definition", actually teaches us to read more difficult, "modernist", texts in an other way, beyond or without the conventional critical contexts: "In our present ability to read *marginality*, to read *Nightwood*, perhaps we can reread *Ulysses* in a way which discovers the other."⁷⁰

Certainly, it can be most useful to enlist the support of Barnes's texts in arguments against the phallogentrism and homophobia of the

Great Tradition, but any analysis of her texts as specifically "feminist" or "lesbian" on the bases of characters, themes, or "what these books are about" will always prove insufficient to the doubletalking Barnesian discourse.⁷¹ We must not forget that, in the Barnesian text, Woman is both a "Saint" and a "cow sitting on a crumpled grin".⁷² The problem is neither the theme nor the character: the problem is the "language".

I am not about to abandon what is essentially a feminist position on the strength of these dissensions from certain types of feminist criticism: I merely wish to demonstrate that any critical position which valorizes texts on the basis of their *usefulness* to that position is bound to be inadequate to any analytic enterprise foregrounding those texts themselves. It seems that the general and the particular are, here at least, insufficient to each other.

Shari Benstock sets us off in a potentially more productive direction when she notes that "the problem of style" in the texts of Barnes (and Stein) has attracted more than its share of critical attention. Here again there appear to be at least two critical camps: those, like Scott, who focus on "style" either because they do not understand the "subject matter" or they wish to "sidestep" the "ideological questions that discussions of subject matter might have entailed"; and those, like Edmund Wilson, for whom "style" is "code", a

way of obscuring improper subject matter.⁷³ According to Benstock, however:

Recent feminist criticism has made the works of both [Barnes and Stein] more accessible, providing corrective readings to the earlier ones. Specifically, the "problem of style" has been shown to be the effect of an interpretive strategy that disguises misogyny in the distinctions between style and substance and in the operation of criticism itself. The text has been likened to a woman's body whose envelope (style or code) must be broken in order for the substance to be recovered and explained.⁷⁴

Despite her unassailed presupposition that there *is* such a thing as a "corrective" (correct?) reading, Benstock delivers the germinal seed of what I would more willingly call a "productive" reading of the Barnesian text. In the distinctions between "style" and "substance", between the means of expression and the expressed meaning, is a disguised repression of all that would offend or evade orthodox conceptions of the propriety of meaning of language as Truth. With Barnes's texts, I argue, there *is* indeed a "problem of style": the problem of a "style" that will neither submit to nor disengage "substance"; of a means of expression that remains indistinct from expressed meaning; of a discourse that holds, like Blake's, that there is "no Body distinct from [the] Soul".⁷⁵ Benstock notes that "Barnes's early critics thought her style 'perverse', only to realize that her subject matter was perversion itself", and this realization greatly

exceeds simple recognition of a harmony of diction and theme.⁷⁶ In the *night wood*, it becomes very easy to lose sight of meaning.

The critical approach that I am advocating incorporates, to a certain extent, the attitude and many of the strategies of the feminist approach, especially some of those of Benstock and Marcus. This type of analysis, however, is essentially "deconstructive", an approach to the text that focuses on the "problems" (the contradictions, paradoxes, aporias, ungrammaticalities, and illogicalities which threaten or disrupt totalizing apprehension) that the text presents rather than bypassing them or attempting to stuff them, unwieldy as they are, into a determinable meaning or motivation. The intent of such an analysis is to recognize and demonstrate how the discourse of the text can actually work against the determination of meaning, how it can subvert a conventional (or "phallogocentric") interpretation by functioning indeterminately, undecideably.⁷⁷ The "deconstructive" approach does not, like much of feminist criticism, operate as a method derived from a system or predetermined set of ideas. "Deconstruction" is, rather, a flexible critical practice of reading/writing aimed at and reactive to the assumed correspondences between method, system and meaning. In other words, "deconstruction" can be seen as a variable set of strategies for dismantling (literary, philosophical, critical, etc.) texts's claims of authority and of determinable meaning by a practice of incessant rhetorical questioning. This approach has nothing to do with establishing the "truth" of texts, and everything to do with

discovering how texts establish and disestablish their own "truths". Obviously, this type of approach is much more "rhetorical" than the first, concentrating on the text at the level of discourse rather than considering comparative abstractions like character and content; however, in its implications, it sustains the same capacity for politicization. It also, and this is its greatest commendation in this instance, gives us a chance to address the radical and unruly elements in the Barnesian discourse that have caused such exquisite problems for the Barnes Critics.

Before launching into a more expansive articulation of this approach, however, I think it would be useful to establish a little history of considerations of Barnes's "style". This will be essentially a history of "stylistic" readings of *Nightwood* for that is the most studied and written about text, as well as being the focus of my own analysis. Obviously, there is going to be some fluctuation in the "meaning" of this word "style": for some critics it will be a matter of genre (novel or prose-poem?) or of structure (spatial form, temporal arrangement); for others it is more a matter of diction, of tropes or more specific verbal units, of the words themselves. I will try, throughout this history, to accommodate all of these different "styles" as functionings at the level of discourse.^{7e}

II. FROM CONCERNS WITH STRUCTURE TO POSTSTRUCTURALIST CONCERNS

As Benstock has suggested, the stylistic peculiarities of Barnes's discourse have certainly been noticed and fretted over by the critics: Scott notes that there has been a "certain amount of 'critical infighting'", particularly over the "structure" of *Nightwood* which is seen as a non-linear, non-chronological, arrangement of thematically, imagistically, or symbolically related terms, phrases, or, as Scott would have it, "tableaux".⁷⁹ Scott goes on to elaborate his thesis that the text is composed of a collection of tableaux reflecting back and forth to each other, providing each other with details that will complete the single, unitary meaning of each (individually incomplete thus necessarily only "apprehended" in isolation by the reader). Field, without discussing it much, aligns himself with Scott.⁸⁰ Kannenstine advocates a greater complexity of structure: the patterns of *rococo* art, the "arabesque pattern with its intricate interlace [...] a figure for the novel's interlaced and recurring images, terms, and symbols".⁸¹ His offer of a figure, or trope, for the novel's structure is in keeping with his view of a bifurcated construction, ostensibly "an art of ornamentation" but actually informed by a "substructural symmetry", "a central vision", a "sense of intuitive order", or meaning beyond the scope of mere ornamentation. Thus, "the images intertwine in a complex pattern to render a higher reality". The repetition of terms and phrases actuates the cohesion of the "main themes", ensuring the structural (which is always thematic) unity of the text.⁸²

Both Scott and Kannenstine cite, with relative correctives, the opposing theories of Joseph Frank and Walter Sutton on the structural principles of *Nightwood*. For Frank, the "father" of stylistic analyses of *Nightwood*, the central principle is spatial form, an attempt to chart, following Lessing's aesthetics and Pound's poetics, the changing relationship between plastic art (space) and poetry (time). Literary form, Frank argues in 1945, is challenging its designation as the art of time and is moving in the direction (via the work of Proust, Pound, Eliot, Joyce, and Barnes) of the spatial. "Spatial form" is an aesthetic arrangement of imagistically or symbolically significant details independent of "any time-sequence of narrative action", finding, rather, textual cohesion in "the continual reference and cross-reference of images and symbols that must be referred to each other spatially through the time-act of reading".⁹³ Sutton, on the other hand, argues in 1957 for a pragmatic reading aware of the historical position of both novel and tale. It is indisputable that the story takes place in "the cosmopolitan world of displaced Europeans and expatriated Americans in the post-World-War I years", and that there is a chronological progression, in fact, throughout the novel.⁹⁴ It is significant that Sutton, the only one whose structural theory--although it is an elegant argument against the excesses of imagism--does not deal with the repetitive or reflective nature of the discourse but relies on analyses of characters as representing literary themes developed temporally, is dismissed almost out of hand by the others.

They all seem to agree that a conventional, progressive-narrative, apprehension of the text's structure is an impossibility.

Obviously, Barnes's particular use of words, terms, images, phrases, tableaux, is causing some problems in the critical fraternity. The majority of those who have addressed the question of the novel's "structure" have found themselves, in some way, having to answer in terms of repetition, reflection, patterning, and yet they cannot agree on either the nature or effect of these functions. Kenneth Burke, whose important essay "Version, Con-, Per-, and In-: Thoughts on Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*" first appeared in 1966, offers no conciliation.^{es} He does, however, offer the first movement away from concentration on the novel's formal "structure" and toward an analysis of its verbal "stylistics". What is more, Burke demonstrates that a "rhetorical situation [...] underlies the poetics of the book", that the text's "stylistic tactics" are at once "poetic" and "rhetorical".^{es} Of course, Burke is a rhetorician (current head of the American neo-Aristotelian family) and his concerns are rhetorical in the best classical tradition, a fact which distinguishes him from Frank and Sutton and renders his essay more pertinent to my own endeavour. Aside from this, however, Burke's recognition of the rhetorical/poetical nature of Barnes's discourse undoubtedly marks a new twist in approaching the "problem of style".

Reading *Nightwood* through his reading of Augustine's *Confessions*, Burke finds that "vert-family of terms"--around which, he claims, Augustine built his "theology of motives" (*perversion to conversion*, "[e]ven the word 'universe' belongs here")--is alive and functioning in Barnes's text.⁸⁷ He indicates (he can do no more in the circumstances, for Barnes had refused him permission to quote from the text) that the word "turn" appears five times in the passage in which Nora meets Robin, the initial scene of Nora's *conversion to perversion* through the bisexual Robin. This activity he calls a *nova*, "the sudden flaring forth of a term" which gives it an uncharacteristic or added significance.⁸⁸ In this particular case, Burke finds the *nova* emphasizing a "transcendence downwards", Nora's *conversion* being the (blasphemous) opposite of Augustine's. Certainly, the text presents many such *novae*: there are, for example, seven occurrences of "now" in the first paragraph of the section "Go down, Matthew", a section in which Matthew does indeed "go down", uttering the words "Now [...] the end--mark my words--now *nothing, but wrath and weeping*"; there are seven "doll"s in one paragraph elaborating on the "third sex" or "uninhabited angel"; and we find four "shadow"s in a paragraph on the ontological "calamity" "that we are all seeking".⁸⁹ Burke finds these *novae* working rhetorically (persuasively, in the Ciceronian sense), building up "the sense of a Puritan morale even while running counter to the Puritanical", so that the theme of unrequited love, even though between "inverts", may seem properly--and in the best tradition--lamentable.⁹⁰

There is much of interest in Burke's essay and I will be returning to it frequently throughout this thesis. What I want to stress at this point, however, is its forging of a new line of approach to the difficulties of Barnes's writing. Of course, I recognize the appropriateness of Benstock's complaint in this case: neo-Aristotelian rhetoric, in its insistent distinction between "style" and "substance", is no less misogynist in its implications than Burke himself in his devotion to hierarchical, entelechial, arrangements of reality. Yet, his initial solicitation of the barriers between poetics and rhetoric, and between the novel and rhetoric, opened up a whole new field of potential analyses.⁹¹ After Burke, it becomes increasingly difficult to dismiss the more enigmatic or ambiguous passages of Barnes's work as "mere rhetoric".

In the mid-1970s, as both Modernism and Freudianism became more distant and monolithic, this interest in Barnes's "style" transformed itself into a focus on the subjective, or psychoanalytic, nature of Barnes's language. Critics began to pay more attention to the phenomena of the "alienation" and "autotelia" of the artist, of the crisis of signification (language) brought about by the recognition of the unconscious, of the fragmentation of the speaking (writing) subject. We have already seen Scott (1976) and Kannenstine (1977) embroiled in questions of the meaningful "meaninglessness" or paradoxical duality of life. Charles Baxter in "A Self-Consuming Light: *Nightwood* and the Crisis of Modernism" (1974) finds that "Matthew O'Connor's drunken

collapse in the bar, in a bonfire of rhetoric, also signals the rhetorical collapse--or deflation--of *Nightwood* itself", and that "*Nightwood* [...] is an artistic dead-end, teetering on the edge of incomprehensibility or silence". "[In] *Nightwood* the aesthetics of words become the anesthetics of verbal rituals whose efficacy has vanished."²² Elizabeth Pochoda, in "Style's Hoax: A Reading of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*" (1976), suggests that it is about the end of writing, that *Nightwood* "bows down before its own impotence to express truth", and that it is this paradox of the end of writing sustained in writing that holds this text together--while tearing it apart. By the penultimate chapter, "the novel has already jettisoned language". "[T]here is nowhere for the prose to go. The end is factual and brief [...] The novel ends in wordlessness and failure, with the impasse of life intact and its contradictions nicely exposed."²³ Surprisingly, Pochoda maintains the old distinction bothering Benstock: "And what of this style which soars with breathtaking virtuosity at the same time that it is yoked to a tawdry deed? It is sublimely out of whack with its subject matter." But then, this is all part of the contradiction and paradox holding the text together. If the "hoax"--the necessity of the "lie"--is one of the novel's principal themes, then the style plays out that theme to the hilt. There is, finally, "nothing we can take at face value" and "the only resolution must come from the breakdown of its beautiful style to wordlessness".²⁴ (Although, it is interesting to note how much text--at least 4 more pages of it--is generated by that "wordlessness".)

Edward Gunn, in "Myth and Style in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*" (1974), sees the text spun in the gap between a "personal past" and "an historical and cultural past", between an individual and collective unconscious. *Nightwood*, he intimates, is essentially a religio-psychoanalytic reading of "the mind in tension; historically and individually created in unknown, unknowable circumstances akin to concepts of Dionysian darkness, chaos, and formlessness, yet shaped unconsciously by a fusion of actual memory and given religious-cultural myths".⁹⁵ In a fine Jungian gesture, Gunn exposes the characters as allegoric or archetypal positions and the text itself as purely representative (variations of the verb 'to represent' dominate this diction) of the subject's endeavour to regain a unified consciousness. On the Freudian hand, Robert Nadeau (1975) insists that the "understanding of the structure of man's interior life revealed in the narrative is remarkably close to that advanced by Sigmund Freud only a few years before Barnes began work on the novel". In the "dream world" that is *Nightwood*, characters represent "the interior workings of the human mind at different points along the continuum of psychic experience".⁹⁶ Nadeau offers us the following ca-librations,

Robin = Id

Nora, Felix, Jenny = Superego

O'Connor = Ego,

and suggests that the text is essentially the dream in which the id's instinctual needs are fulfilled as they cannot possibly be (without catastrophe) in waking life.

It becomes apparent that by the mid-1970s the rhetorical "excesses" of Barnes's text were becoming considerably less "problematic". Rather, critics seem to have assumed that any "problem of style" is merely symptomatic of the text's modernist, mythic, or dream-like nature. Thus the problem begins to exist as an integral part of the definition: the critic who insists that Barnes's style is problematic is rendering a *definition* rather than a criticism. By the mid-1980s, at least two critics, Laurence Schehr and Alan Singer, were addressing the question of *Nightwood* as a definitively problematic text within the larger context of the contemporary post-structuralist concern with the problematics of "writing".⁹⁷

I must pause, at this point in the "little history", to explain that we are now dealing with a quite different, if intimately related, conception of "rhetoric" to that held by Burke in the '60s. In his acrobatic reading of *Nightwood* on the double lines of Poetics and Rhetoric, Burke shook up the conventional genre distinctions that had so complicated earlier stylistic readings of the text. However, he still clung to the mutually exclusive style/subject matter split that Benstock finds so inappropriate to the reading of Barnesian texts. Both Schehr and Singer write in the wake of significant artistic and critical

reappraisals of this split and the exposure of its well-disguised maintenance by the presuppositions of a traditional (at least, post-Kantian) idealist philosophy. Within the context of the related English-language literary tradition, at least since the eighteenth century, the novel has been distinguished from poetry on the basis of the nature of the relationship between style and substance, form and content. I will be examining this distinction in more detail in Chapter Two: for the moment, I would like to emphasize that the novel has been generally conceived of as a "story" with plot, characters, settings and themes--in short, with substance--that are mimetically justified (realistic, truthful). The "style", or means of expression, is secondary to the "story" and the reality it mimes: ideally, the presenting language should be "transparent", should not obtrude onto the scene of the story. Poetry, on the other hand, exhibits quite a different (and very much contested) balance of style and subject matter. I have neither the time nor the space to delineate the critical arguments that have raged over the subject: suffice it to say that whether we are talking about Augustan conceptions of the decorous propriety of style to subject or the Romantic privileging of style over subject matter in the lyric, poetry is not conceived of as pure *mythos* (plot) "rendered" by a transparent language.²⁰

"Style" or "form"--whether a reflection or a revelatory elaboration of a poem's veritable subject matter--are obviously very much part of its generic categorization. These splits between poetry and prose, and

between style and substance, and the host of idealist presuppositions about the relationship of language as "reference" or "expression" to an objectifiable Truth or reality that enforce and maintain such splittings, have themselves been made the objects (rather than the limits) of many a modernist discourse. Among the writers in English, Joyce, Stein, Beckett, and, as I will argue, Barnes, were all involved in questioning, in practice, the efficacy of distinctions between style and substance, and between genres, and challenging the dominant conceptions of language as referential to or expressive of any sort of objective (ideal) Truth. As Beckett remarked of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: the *Wake* "is not about something; it is that something itself".⁹⁹

In their earnest attempts to explicate these modernist/post-Freudian/post-Nietzschean texts in terms familiar to their rationalist discipline, many English and American critics seem to have missed the point of Beckett's pronouncement: modernist texts like the *Wake* not only do not yield to critical analysis founded on the assumption of a distinction between style and subject matter, they actively challenge that assumption.

The subsequent development of post-structuralist literary theories (semiotic, hermeneutic, deconstructive, etc.--any means of looking at the "how" or "if" rather than the "what" of "meaning") under the impetus of the crisis in understanding introduced, in part, by these modernist texts has been, by now, well-mapped and the theories themselves well-

disseminated. I wish only to illustrate, briefly, how this alteration in critical apprehension (or misapprehension) has affected our conception of "rhetoric". First, having been denuded of the connotations of *ulterior* or *conscious* motives giving rise to the need to persuade, the term "rhetoric" is no longer simply defined as "eloquence" or "the art of persuasion" but, to use Paul de Man's words, as "the study of tropes and of figures".¹⁰⁰ (If this seems like a return to the Aristotelian text, it often is.)¹⁰¹ These "tropes" and "figures" are considered in a light quite different from that projected by the eighteenth-century classicists of rhetoric. This new light is distinctly Nietzschean, derived from a predominantly French reassessment of Nietzsche's "marginal" theory of tropes.¹⁰² As de Man notes, in Nietzsche's "rhetoric":

[...] tropes are not understood aesthetically, as ornament, nor are they understood semantically as a figurative meaning that derives from literal, proper denomination. Rather, the reverse is the case. The trope is not a derived, marginal, or aberrant form of language but the linguistic paradigm par excellence. The figurative structure is not one linguistic mode among others but it characterizes language as such.¹⁰³

The significance of the Nietzschean understanding of the trope is that it "marks a full reversal of the established priorities which traditionally root the authority of the language in its adequation to an extralinguistic referent or meaning, rather than in the intralinguistic resources of figures".¹⁰⁴ In other words, this "new

light" reveals the ineluctably rhetorical nature of language.¹⁰⁵ That language is rhetorical, determinably self-referential, seems to be a premise upon which texts like *Finnegans Wake*, *How It Is*, *The Unnameable*, and, I suggest, *Nightwood* were created.

Certainly, both Schehr and Singer read *Nightwood* as a text premised upon the rhetoricity of language. Schehr, in "Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*: Dismantling the Folds", argues that the text proposes its own theories of fiction, "of the production of the sign and of its implementation", and thus creates its own seemingly "natural" mode of "meaningfulness".¹⁰⁶ Singer, who devotes a third of *A Metaphorics of Fiction: Discontinuity and Discourse in the Modern Novel to Nightwood*, insists that Barnes's discourse subverts the "hegemony of literal meaning" by supplanting *mythos* with metaphor. It is metaphor rather than plot, according to Singer, that acts "as the formal arbiter of contextual differences that make narrative movement originally possible".¹⁰⁷ Mythos as metaphor.

Unfortunately, although both critics offer interesting and useful critiques of Barnes's text, neither seems willing to take their analyses beyond what they perceive to be the boundaries of "literary criticism". Singer is actually very careful to distinguish his project from Derrida's and de Man's: "We must distinguish between the epistemological problems upon which deconstructionism thrives, for these are voluntary responses to the world, and the methodological

imperatives that the novel imposes, for these are formal necessities."¹⁰⁸ Lurking here, in the forced dichotomy between "epistemological problems" and "formal necessities", are the skeletal remains of the old style/subject matter split; and this despite the fact that Singer has taken much direction from the texts of de Man for whom a "rhetorically conscious reading" is inevitably an involvement with epistemology and ontology. "For the metaphysical categories of presence, essence, action, truth, and beauty do not remain unaffected by such a reading."¹⁰⁹

Donna Gerstenberger, in "The Radical Narrative of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*", follows Singer to a certain extent by focussing on the narrative which "constantly calls attention to itself as narrative, validating its own existence as 'story' at the same time that it destabilizes, in almost every case, the explanatory power of narrative, based on the notion of historical origins". (I will be considering Gerstenberger's brief demonstration of *Nightwood's* destabilization of the "myth" of origin in Chapter Four of this thesis.) Gerstenberger goes one step further than Singer by at least broaching the areas of ontology and epistemology, but her comparatively brief essay is especially interesting for its general and suggestive statements about *Nightwood's* engagement with the principal organizing structures of Western metaphysics:

[...] *Nightwood* demands [...] a reading against the dominant text of binary oppositions by which the Western world inscribes itself. It is a

novel that rages against the imprisoning structures of the language and narratives of the "day", which create a history built on the oppositions of night/day, past/present, reason/madness, "normal"/"abnormal", truth/falsehood, gender, and origins (both historical and textual). It is a book that relentlessly undermines grounds for categorization. [...] even the language of the novel works to slip the acculturated binary assumptions of signifier and signified [...]'¹⁰

In "Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*: where man is with wo(e)", Mairéad Hanrahan offers a careful rhetorical reading of the text's presentation of the problem of "identity", that concept of unicity, definition and self-knowledge sustained by the dominant text of binary oppositions. According to Hanrahan, *Nightwood* demonstrates that the fundamental human condition is "confusion" and that any determinacy (any identification or writing) that would end or still that confusion is an illusion. "Writing, the creation of images, can 'fix', can create something definite from the 'space between', where being human is itself in question", but, as Hanrahan shows, this writing "is wrought with words whose meaning immediately wobbles".¹¹ Read as delimiting addenda to Singer's *A Metaphysics of Fiction*, Gerstenberger's and Hanrahan's articles can also be seen as a general introduction of sorts to the analytic practice that I am proposing.

This "little history" of "stylistic" analyses of *Nightwood* has, I hope, not only delineated what has been done in this area but also suggested what has not been and what may yet be done. Although it is not a "well-known" work, *Nightwood* has drawn a steady stream of

criticism and commentary in the wake of its publication; yet, despite this consistent and thoughtful attention, the sort of careful and lengthy rhetorical reading that the text seems, to me, to be demanding has still to be performed. It is within the context of this critical gap that I wish to project a "rhetorically conscious reading"--or to follow the reading that the rhetorical text is already suggesting.

I note that I have been continually referring to the difficulty of Barnes's text, its ambiguity and evasions or subversions of meaning, without either specifying or demonstrating that difficulty. Perhaps a sample reading of a notably difficult passage--one that has consistently drawn Barnes Critics--might serve as sufficient demonstration and, at the same time, open the way to more elaborate analysis of the text itself.

IV.

The perfume that her *body* exhaled was of the quality of that *earth-flesh* fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the *odour* of oil of amber, which is an inner malady of the *sea*, making her seem as if she had invaded a *sleep* incautious and entire. Her *flesh* was the texture of plant life and *beneath* it one sensed a frame, broad, porous and *sleep-worn*, as if *sleep* were a *decay* fishing her *beneath* the visible surface. About her *head* there was an effulgence as of phosphorous glowing about the circumference of a *body of water*--as if her *life* lay through

her in ungainly luminous deteriorations--the
troubling structure of the born somnambule,
who lives in two worlds--meet of child and
desperado. (pp. 34-35)

One of the most noticeable things about this passage is that it by far exceeds the linguistic demands of mimetic prose. What might be considered "proper referents" to the "character" being "described"--"body", "flesh", "head", (scent, texture, sight)--are thoroughly troped, described in metaphors which are, in turn, qualified by similes (a sort of figuration to the second power). Where we might expect a significant delineation of a central character, we are given an intricate series of metaphors, metonymies, and similes which fold in upon each other. As Singer puts it, "[h]ere the expository function of plot [as character development] is supplanted with a practice of linguistic foregrounding". (*Mythos as metaphor.*) Of course, this emphatic practice is a recognized characteristic of Barnes's particular subversion of genre distinctions: Eliot himself noted, in his Introduction to the text, that it would perhaps appeal more to readers of poetry. Yet, there is something even more potentially destructive than a simple threat to generic boundaries going on here. Singer continues: "Instead of forming consistent expectations about character, the precipitous elaboration of metaphor divests contextual markers of their mediating power by throwing into question their continuity with the rest of the text."¹¹² Certainly, were I to perform a character study, I would be attracted to this conglomeration of tropes, "body", "earth", "flesh", "sea", "sleep", "decay", and "water", offered under the

figuration of "Robin". However, I should soon find--as Singer has found--that these tropes exceed, by far, the contextual specification of the character Robin and that any expectations of semantic or thematic coherence or consistency in the figural language of the text that could lead me to abstract an articulate "meaning" as regards this character would be confounded by that language itself.

We might, of course, attempt to read this character symbolically (poetically), as an allegory, say, or a personification of theme. In the above quotation, we find that via "odour" ("perfume", "smells"), "her" "body" is entangled, grammatically and metaphorically, with "earth" (via "flesh")--exposing, or re-presenting, the Adamic configuration of the human derivation from clay--and the "sea" (later a "body of water"), relaying back to those origins that which crawled out of them. The association is extended with the contextual markings of "decay": "fungi", feeding on decay; "inner malady"; "luminous deterioration", the combustive decay by fire (by light). This field of paradigmatic associations delineated by the mortal body (decaying, female), the earth and sea (origins, mothers), and the sanctity peculiar to the madonna (halo effect) bears a weight of connotations (sacred and secular) that are decidedly conventional in terms of the dominant organizing principles of Western, particularly Christian, phallogocentric thought. But what of the confusion (or con-fusion) of the field with this apparently significant "sleep", this *nova* in the "centre" of the passage?

Quite obviously, "sleep" is a dominant trope (whether metaphor, simile, catachresis or metalepsis) in this passage (as it is in the text itself): but what does it trope? How does it function in the paradigmatic or archetypal configuration recognized above? Does this text help us to establish some sort of correspondence between the foregrounded "vehicle" and a determinable "tenor" (which would lead us to the text's proper meaning in the way that Burke claims "turn" does)? There are three "sleep"s to be addressed in this immediate passage: that which is invaded by "her"; that which wears away the "frame" "beneath" "her" "flesh"; that which is "decay fishing her beneath the visible surface". Between them, there is some dishevelment of the oppositional relationship of interior/exterior. "Sleep" is something "invaded", penetrated, entered into, being made the surround of that "her" entering it; and it is something interior, wearing away the "frame" "beneath" the "flesh" (as boundary, demarcation, between inside and outside, above and "beneath"). "Sleep" is at once interior *and* exterior, above *and* beneath, active/male (wearing, fishing) *and* passive/female (being penetrated): it is possible to see an unusual logic working to disrupt, or put into question, the coherence of the passage with the introduction of oppositions that are not exclusive. And if this "sleep"ing trope problematizes these principal binary oppositions--inside/outside, above/beneath, active/passive--which, as Derrida has so clearly demonstrated, have organized "phallogocentric" discourse, what is it suggesting about the valorized and mutually exclusive binary oppositions--*female/male, mortal/immortal,*

madonna/whore, etc.--organizing my symbolic reading? Apparently the unity of such a reading, of the presuppositions supporting such a reading, is being fractured by a "doubling-up" of oppositions, a radical ambiguity, introduced by this illogically rendered "sleep".

Nor will reference to the "sleep"s in other passages of the text reduce the ambiguity of this trope. If sleep is, here, "decay", in another passage it is a preservative: "I saw her come awake and turn befouled before me, she who had managed in that sleep to keep whole" (p. 145). *Nightwood's* "sleep" touches upon both Donne's metaphor for life (the chronology of aging and decay) as a sleep (p. 97) and the timeless preservation of Snow White and Rip van Winkle. "Sleep" also, at once, offers the immunity of anonymity--"the eternal incognito" (p. 88)--and renders us, like Endymion, vulnerable to another's advance (pp. 103-4). Between immunity and vulnerability, between "the great sleep of the elephant and the fine thin sleep of the bird" (pp. 85-6), is "sleep" troped as the enigmatic "slain white bull" (p. 80), a polyvalent figure of potency, power and sacrifice. (Could this bull be the slain bull of Mithraism, or Zeus in his pursuit of Io?) Whatever "sleep" might "be"--life, life-in-death, death-in-life, death, time, or timelessness--the text offers no contextual demarcations of it. The term seems to shimmer or vibrate across a textual field roughly constituted, perhaps, by Donne, Keats, fairytales and classical myth, although the text gives no indication that the limits should be set at these. At any rate, this "trope" will not be pinned down. Rather than

maintaining a symbolic system of correspondences through which the trope could be distilled to render a vehicle and a tenor, the text goes the other way, laying layer upon contradictory layer of tropes so that any possible "origin" or original referent can only be a confusion of oppositions already at work in the general text of Western discourse (from myths of the perennially resurrected fertility gods, who "sleep" from autumn to spring, to Freud's unconscious). If there is to be meaning in this text, and of course there is, it is not to be found on the basis of referentiality, correspondence, consequence, or coherence.

The above "sample analysis" has, I hope, demonstrated some of the "problems" offered by the Barnesian text as well as some of the possible advantages of practicing "rhetorically conscious readings" of that text. I also hope that it has at least suggested the involvement with "metaphysics" that such a reading--and such a text--demands. I still need, however, to establish some recognizable hinge on which to hang my projected study of *Nightwood*. The literary theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and, in his footsteps, Julia Kristeva offer just such a hinge: the concept of the "carnavalesque". As Kristeva notes, the carnivalesque discourse "breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics, and, at the same time, is a social and political protest": it disrupts the phallogocentric semantic hegemony in "figures" of "repetition, 'inconsequent' statements (which are none the less 'connected' within an infinite context) and non-exclusive opposition, which function as empty sets or disjunctive additions".¹¹³

In short, carnivalesque language behaves in much the same way that we have seen *Nightwood's* language behaving. In the following chapter, I will elaborate on and examine Bakhtin's and Kristeva's conceptions of the carnivalesque in literature before going on with a reading of *Nightwood* as the carnivalization of specific phallogocentric discourses.

CHAPTER TWO

THROUGH THE CARNIVALESQUE TO UNCERTAINTY

It may be said Jakobson works with poetry because he has a Pushkinian love of order; Bakhtin, on the contrary, loves novels because he is a baggy monster.¹

This concept-metaphor of the "carnavalesque" (or "carneavalesque") has become very popular in literary criticism recently. Of course, everyone loves a carnival, a holiday from the "normal" order of things, so the metaphor is attractive to us in itself. It also has the advantage of seeming to be a "universal" concept: does not every documented culture revel in some sort of carnivalesque behaviour at some time or other, and does not history, as we understand it, suggest that human communities have indulged in carnivalesque performances since "time immemorial"? This universal, prehistoric concept, seemingly innate to humanity, with all its presuppositions of an anarchy that needs to be released periodically and temporarily for the sake of or because of the "orderliness" of human society, is as a dream come true for the literary critic who would canonize works previously denigrated or ignored out of the evaluative, racial, social, or sexual prejudices of literary institutions. As Michael Holquist notes, Bakhtinian carnivalesque theory throws a "weird light on our received models of intellectual history" by attending to the marginal (the obscure, the virtually unheard of, Pírges of Holicarnassus among the Greeks, Musaus in the 19th century) as much as to the mainstream itself.² This oblique angle of approach to literary canons and history has interested more than a few contemporary critics, who have been quick to employ Bakhtinian theory in their redefinitions of literary orthodoxy.³ And, as

Jane Marcus has demonstrated in "Laughing at Leviticus", Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, because it shakes up (solicits) orthodoxies, offers useful ways of approaching a text like *Nightwood* which the same orthodoxies reject or wrongfully categorize.

However, there is this problem in taking up the "carnavalesque" as a stave against the force of a phallogocentric sword: the authoritative "power" of the "carnavalesque" in these critical wars is dependent upon an assumed universality that presupposes, in its turn, constancy, unity, originality, a certain transcendentality, that Bakhtin's own carnival, in its performance, puts firmly into question. Thus, I shall not arm myself with a Bahktinian concept with the intention of proving, say, the "value" of *Nightwood* within the larger contexts of literary tradition; but I do think it would be helpful to examine Bakhtin's "carnival" as a general metaphor for the sort of productive strategies that *Nightwood* practices. It will, I hope, prove a useful and elaborative metaphor.

To lay the ground for this short examination of Bahktinian theory, I want, first of all, to show how helpful it might be to a feminist or poststructuralist analysis of Barnes's text, in comparison to other encyclopaedic, taxonomic, historical/theoretical readings of literature and/or the novel such as Northrop Frye's profound *Anatomy of Criticism*, or Kenneth Burke's all subsuming *Grammar, Rhetoric, and Symbolic*, or even Ian Watt's specific *Rise of the Novel*.⁴ Its helpfulness lies in

this, that Frye's spiralling cycles, Burke's entelechial ladder, Watt's linear ascension ("Rise") of the novel, as models of intellectual and literary history all owe their theoretical structures to the ideological strictures of a Western metaphysical tradition dominated by the concepts of presence and authority, God and truth, wholeness and unity—in short, Derrida's "phallogocentrism".⁵ In the field of conventional novel theory and criticism, as I noted in Chapter One, the phallogocentric imperative manifests itself in valorized distinctions between form and theme, between style and plot-character-setting, between mere rhetoric and "truth". Theme, the triad plot-character-setting, and the "truth" (the realm of the signified) are implicitly privileged over form, style, and rhetorical ornamentation (the realm of the signifier) as determinants of the novel's validity and value. Very simply put, in a "good" novel, the signifier must correspond to, be adequate to, its signified in such an harmonious and unobtrusive fashion that the reality which the novel purports to "mime" (as mimetic fiction) can be seen through the signifier's glass-like surface. The novel is conceived of as primarily *mythos* (used in a general sense which also encompasses *ethos* and *dianoia*): we read it, it is implied, for the "story", characters, and themes—for its signifieds—rather than for the craftiness of its signifiers, which is the formal impetus of poetry (at least since the decline of the epic). This grounding of the signified in the novel corresponds precisely to the phallogocentric grounding of the subject in the world: both groundings rely on the inherent, and overlapping, presuppositions of unity or wholeness (the

harmony of form and theme, the unified subject), autonomy (the self-sufficiency of the closed plot, the presence-to-itself of the Cartesian subject), authority (the thematic manifestation of an authorial intention, the presence of the speaking subject as origin of meaning), and truth (plot-character-setting as authentic mimesis, the subject capable of objectifying lived experience, of knowing). The effect of this conceptual grounding is that it reduces the signifier--the means of expression, the rhetorical or figural level of fiction--to an inferior status. It makes it supplemental or secondary to the essential novelistic function of "miming" established social and cultural realities. Within this context, *Nightwood*, which has been identified as anything from a prose-poem to mere rhetoric, can only appear as, at worst, a pretentious mistake and, at best, an assimilable subversive tendency. (But such assimilation could only be performed by a gross disfiguration or radical amputation of parts of the text. The night-time text of female experience is not so easily digested by phallogocentrism, as Burke's erratic attempt at treating it as "lamentation" demonstrates.)⁶

On the other hand, Bakhtinian theory--which was spawned in the midst of a social, political, cultural revolution far from the quietude of Canadian, American, and British universities--is suspicious of such dominant concepts in their claim to an all-subsuming, irreducible, status. There is little evidence in Bakhtin's work to fully align him with the Marxist critics. As one of his translators, Caryl Emerson,

points out, "for Bakhtin 'dialogic' does not mean 'dialectic'; his universe owes much more to Kant than to Hegel [...] in place of the comfortable patterns of synthesis and *Aufhebung*, Bakhtin posits a dualistic universe of *permanent* dialogue".⁷ We should remember, too, that Bakhtin fell foul of the Stalinist authorities and spent several years in internal exile in Kazakhstan. But then, there is also little to align him positively with what might be called Western "capitalist" criticism, particularly when we consider the challenge to orthodox Western concepts of individualism and subjectivity in his concepts of the "dialogic" and "heteroglossia". Bakhtin's "politics", not unlike Barnes's, seem to consist, for the most part, of a suspicion of the repressive authority ("monologism") of any dominant ideology which will not admit of difference. For Bakhtin, the "authoritative word"--the (very symbolic) signifier that assumes an inviolable correspondence to its autonomous signified and is thus distanced from the relative play and modifications of "everyday language"--is actually only one interactant in an open-ended struggle with the subject's own "internally persuasive words", arbitrary signs which are always relative to cultural, historical and personal contexts and thus incapable of a one-to-one correspondence with any signified. I will elaborate on different aspects of this struggle in the following examination of Bakhtin's theory: what I wish to foreground here is that this theory of the "novel" occupies the interstice between the "authoritative word" and the word of relativity and possible difference: it assumes the arena of their entanglement and struggle which is always, at least, two-sided.

This "site" accommodates the marginal, obscure, or subversive text as easily as it does the mainstream text by opening up the critical scope to a recognition of the "other" that is always already involved with the "one". The positing of such a space by Bakhtinian theory is what privileges it as a ground on which to base analyses of texts like *Nightwood*. I might also suggest that if one wishes to analyze "monstrosities", perhaps one should first go to the "baggy monster".⁸

But, as I suggested above, there is more to Bahktinian theory and its concept-metaphor of the "carnavalesque" than this attractive gesture of overturning the hegemony of singular, determinable, meaning and eliciting the possibility of usurpation by other meanings, or non-meaning. I want to draw forth this excess, this supplement to the central Bahktinian project, because I suspect that the excess is the "carnavalesque" itself in practice. In order to do so, I will, first, recite and, then, solicit a reading of Bahktin's carnivalesque theory of the "novel" as it is presented, primarily, in *The Dialogic Imagination* and, to a lesser extent, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Rabelais and His World*.⁹

I.

The four essays in *The Dialogic Imagination* (and, to a considerable extent, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Rabelais and His World*) were written out of Bakhtin's realization that there is no comprehensive "stylistic" theory (or "Poetics") of the novel as a unique genre. Prior to the twentieth century, according to Bakhtin, considerations of the novel were based on a conception of it as an inhabitant of the house of "mixed rhetorical genres", and, at least from the middle of the nineteenth century, these considerations primarily took the form of studies in composition and thematics. Only since the 1920s have there been serious studies of novelistic "style" as such; however, these studies have tended to focus on the stylistics of a particular novelist or novel, and "the stylistic *specificum* of the novel as genre [has] remained as before unexplored".¹⁰ (I should note, here, that even the works of Lukács [*Theory of the Novel*] and Watts are insufficient to Bakhtin's conception of the *specificum* of the genre, for they are involved with the privileging of certain "types" of novels as generically definitive.) Bakhtin contends that the foci of contemporary stylistic analyses—on the "individual artistic personality of the author, the literary school, the general characteristics of poetic language or of the literary language of a particular era"—"all serve to conceal from us the genre itself, with the specific demands it makes upon language and the specific possibilities it opens up for it".¹¹ In other words, all previous attempts at coming to terms with the novel as

genre have been obfuscating displacements or evasions of the primary question--What is, what can be, the *novel*?

What *is* the novel? I will try to delineate Bakhtin's "answer" as briefly, and as simply, as I can, but the course plotted is not one easily made straight. Bakhtinian theory is neither precisely formal nor systematical; rather, it tends to exceed form and system by an orientation toward that which resists closure, that which is "living" language still in the process of becoming.¹² Bakhtin does not deal in sets and categories as much as he does the movements and forces disrupting formal fortifications. (In a sense, Bakhtin's delineation of the history of the novel is, if I may play on the etymology of the verb 'to delineate', a drawing out of the threads holding more rigidly structured literary theories together. It has the effect of an unravelling force applied to the seams of convention's dress.) Thus, there are no "hard and fast rules" to the Bakhtinian project which would give my own attempt at delineation a prescribed shape. I must, therefore, resort to pulling a few threads myself.

The first thread to take hold of is "novel" itself--this is, after all, the foregrounded term in the translated text. In this fortunate instance, the English term is more accommodating to Bakhtin's thesis than the Russian *romana* with its derivation from the romance genre. Thus, we are, by a linguistic accident, afforded a conducive etymological play denied Bakhtin himself. Bakhtin's concept of the

"novel" never deviates from the sense of the "new", the innovative, that which opposes the "old" as "other than old" (OED). The relationship of "new" to "old" is not a standing-in-opposition, or a stasis of opposition, but an active, even violent, opposing. The "new", as the force of "becoming" has always been embroiled in a struggle with the force of resistance to change, the "old". And these forces are interdependent, utterly inextricable. (We should recall, here, Emerson's suggestion that "Bakhtin posits a dualistic universe of *permanent* dialogue" which, perhaps, bears more resemblance to the Freudian struggle between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, or to a Manichean view of existence as perpetual opposition, than to Hegelian dialectics.) Whereas Bakhtin's "history" does posit a beginning of the novel successive to the formation of the "older genres" and the development of writing itself, his study of parody (the fundamental tool of the oppositional force in literature according to Bakhtin) yields the following:

It is our conviction that there never was a single strictly straightforward genre, no single type of direct discourse--artistic, rhetorical, philosophical, religious, ordinary everyday--that did not have its own parodying and travesty double, its own comic-ironic *contre-partie*.¹³

I will return to the entanglement of parody and novel in a moment, with a fuller explication of this relationship, but what I wish to stress here is that "novelness", as parody, as opposition to the established or

the old, has *always* existed. The possibility of the "novel" has thus always already infiltrated discourse of every sort.

But I need to tie together the threads of novel and parody--at least so that the knot can be "seen". Parody, as Bakhtin perceives it, bears both its conventional denotation of a degrading imitation and a weight of transforming force. This force--the force of laughter--is directed toward not only the object but, most importantly, toward the "direct" (conventional, authoritative, representational) word oriented solely toward the object. The "direct" word, in the parodic movement, becomes reified, objectivized, itself an image ridiculed, and the system of significations supporting it in its designation as "direct", purely representational and absolutely serious, is ruptured, shaken from its stranglehold on reality and "transformed from the absolute dogma it had been within the narrow framework of a sealed-off and impermeable monoglossia into a working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality".¹⁴

This seems like a tremendous amount of effect for a simple laugh, and I think that a more explicit outline of this mechanism would not be amiss. "Direct discourse" only is and has its being within a conception of language as the single-voiced, authoritative, representative of the world. Between the word and its object is an uninhibited and singular causeway of meaning, and this relationship is inviolable. This conception of directly representational language and its denial of the

possibility of another word, an other's word, intruding into the ordained causeway compose the fundamental model of what Bakhtin calls "monoglossia", or language unconscious of its complete subjection to its own myths of single-voicedness and homogeneity of meaning. The languages of authority and officialdom, of law, religion, mysticism, and even (until very recently) philosophy, are all forms of monoglossia.¹⁵ Each projects its own myths of hierarchy, its own valorizations and historical closure, as the modes of truthful signification and resists, by thorough exclusion, the possibility of other significations.

Parody, the "indirect linguistic expression of laughter", shoulders its way into monoglossia, thrusting its word onto the scene of the orientation of word-toward-object and taking hold of the "direct" word in order to make an object of it, to present the representational as the represented.¹⁶ Parody takes the distanced, hierarchized and valorized word and brings it up close, right into contemporaneity, for scrutiny. As Bakhtin notes:

Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it.¹⁷

This exhumation of the "direct" word and its object from its historical and metaphysical closure, and the subsequent examination and insertion

of it into the play of contemporary, "living" language by the agency of an other, parodic, word--by laughter--is part of the coming-to-consciousness of language itself. The sterile power of the myth is dispelled: language is conceived, conceives itself, as heterogenous, as "heteroglossia", multi-voiced and multi-contexted. Witness that hegemonic term of the critical endeavour--"meaning"--becoming, *via* Joycean parodic word-play, "meinungs", "maymeaminning", "maimoomeining", and, in the process, losing its "power" as it gains in generative possibilities.¹⁹

I have laid this mechanism out as a sequence: in the beginning there was the "direct" word, then came parody. Partly, this was done to facilitate the reading, but it may also serve to demonstrate the power of monoglossial myths. The authoritative discourse, the "direct" word, is marked by its "pastness", its already-completedness, which is--if we turn it around and look at its backside--primarily the projection of its "to be", its fulfillment in futurity, into a positively valorized, idealized past--an Eden, a Golden Age, the origin of the Word (the confusion of alpha and omega).¹⁹ This intimation of "pastness", it should be recognized, is outside of and has virtually nothing to do with "actual historical sequence".²⁰ To distinguish it from contemporary discourse (the always yet-to-be-completed, infected with possibility, the never-as-good) on the basis of a temporal separation is to yield to the idealizing myth of monoglossia. For example, we might note the distinction made by some Joyce scholars between the

"maymeainning of maimoomeining" and the meaning of Joyce's "meaning" that they feel justified in attempting to establish. The implication of this attempt is that it is possible to set "meaning" in a sort of determinative metaposition over the Joycean text. But is this possible? Have not the heterogeneous possibilities of "meaning" foregrounded by Joyce always been lurking in the wings? Obviously, they have: Joyce's word-plays are as etymological as they are inter-lingual. And we should not forget that "meaning" has always been complicated by the possibility of the lie. The myth which feigns "actual historical sequence" is simply the hierarchizing and valorizing force of monoglossia that has always been attended by "its own parodying and travesty double". In other words (and there are always other words), the "past" and the "contemporaneity" of language have always been embroiled and implicated in each other in a process of doubling, in ambivalence.

Parody is the mechanical principle of "novelness", and laughter (both gay and serious, "cheerful and annihilating", "ambivalent") the force that activates and actuates it. I should mention, at this point, that Bakhtin does not ignore other "indirect linguistic expression[s] of laughter"--irony, the joke, and the various forms of the comic--but that he does, in practice, assume the privileging of parody through its widespread application in literature. As a practice of degrading imitation, it is perhaps the most forceful model for his theory of the novel. And, unlike the joke, for example, parody has the advantage of being

able to be sustained through a text or a series of texts. It is a resilient form of double-voiced "linguistic expression" that lends itself particularly well to the ineluctable force of laughter.

Are we now in a position to say what the novel is? Perhaps the answer is simply: novelistic discourse = novelness = a tendency, a force, something scarcely to be gotten hold of or set down. Although Bakhtin does acknowledge a "prehistory of the novel", an acknowledgment that yields a con-fusing concept of pre-novel novelness, and although he does recognize conventional accounts of the historical development of the novel, a recognition that is adulterated by his positing of the roots of the novel far deeper into the prehistory of the "genre" than has been done before (or since), he offers no formal definition of the novel itself beyond this characteristic novelness. (The historical distinction between pre-novel novelistic discourse and the novel is a boundary that he frequently threatens to obliterate. For example, he comes within a hair's breadth of calling the Socratic Dialogues "novels".)²¹ Certainly, he does mention "that sturdy skeleton of plot and composition that we have grown accustomed to demand from the novel" as a distinctive structure, but is not that which "we have grown accustomed to" always the target of the force of "novelness"?²² Are not "structures" themselves--the set, the formed, the lineaments of genre--threatened with mutation in any operation of force? The concept of the novel as genre becomes impossible: what we are realizing in the "novel" is an anti-generic force.

We are, apparently, coming up against a particular conflict within Bakhtin's theory, a conflict between his recognition of anti-generic "novelness" and his attempt at establishing a "stylistics" of the novel as "genre". Before going on with this, however, I want to make one more sally into *The Dialogic Imagination*, this time focussing on the "difference" that is a "dialogue" (if somewhat violent) between the anti-generic novel and the literary genres, particularly poetry. I light on poetry because it is so perfectly "opposite to" the novel in both the conventional and the Bakhtinian views. As such, it provides a useful illustration of the solicitation of the conventions of genre by the novelistic forces. I will begin by first reducing the field from discourse in general to the "word" which is the minimal unit of meaning and "the central problem" of theory in Bakhtinian terms: "If the central problem in poetic theory is the problem of the poetic symbol, then the central problem in prose theory is the problem of the double-voiced, internally dialogized word, in all its diverse types and variants."²³ Bakhtin's use of the term "poetry", or of what has been translated as "poetry", does not completely coincide with the contemporary Western conception of the genre. What Bakhtin refers to as poetry we might more readily define as, say, "lyrical" or "symbolist" poetry. In many ways, Bakhtin's use of the "poetic" corresponds to the English Romantics's rendering of the "poetic" as a pure subjectivity, an absolute affinity of mind and object. (It also bears some resemblance to Eliot's "objective correlative".) According to Bakhtin, the "indispensable prerequisites of poetic style", "in the majority of poetic

genres", are "the unity of the language system and the unity (and uniqueness) of the poet's individuality as reflected in his language and speech".²⁴ However, it should be noted that Bakhtin considers these stylistic "prerequisites" to be conventionally contrived, and he suggests that the "traditional stylistic categories" and the "philosophical conception of poetic discourse in which they are grounded, are too narrow and cramped".²⁵ His use of the "poetic" should, perhaps, always be read with this reservation in mind, although he, himself, seems quite happy to use the "poetic" in this conventional and limited sense. Following Bakhtin's suggestions, I have delineated the oppositional participants in the "difference" that is a "dialogue" thus:

<i>Poetic Word</i>	<i>vs</i>	<i>Prose Word</i>
1. one voice		1. two voices
2. one accent		2. two accents
3. two meanings possible		3. two meanings
4. orientation solely toward its object.		4. orientation towards object and toward other word(s) of the same orientation.

The "poetic" word, although capable of producing two meanings, or double meaning, in its tropaical function, knows only one context--that of its author's voice and accent, the "expressions" of the author's "point of view". It is directed solely towards its object, and, should it acknowledge another word, from outside of its own context, directed toward that object--to follow Bakhtin's organic metaphor--it

acknowledges it as neutral, "as the word of no one in particular". "No one hinders [the poetic word], no one argues with it": it sustains its inviolable purity in an authoritative gesture of contextual exclusion. Shall we say, *in other words*, that it subscribes completely to an "authorial intention", or is it even more pristine than that²⁶:

In the poetic image narrowly conceived (in the image-as-trope), all activity--the dynamics of the image-as-word--is completely exhausted by the play between the word (with all its aspects) and the object (in all its aspects). The word plunges into the inexhaustible wealth and contradictory multiplicity of the object itself, with its "virginal", still "unuttered" nature; therefore it presumes nothing beyond the borders of its own context (except of course what can be found in the treasure-house of language itself). The word forgets that its object has its own history of contradictory acts of verbal recognition, as well as that of heteroglossia that is always present in such acts of recognition.²⁷

"The word forgets": it excludes: it represses other "contradictory acts of verbal recognition" as consciousness represses the traumatic experience. It is completely authoritarian, conceiving itself singular and self-sufficient. The repression of exception and contradiction, of an other word directed toward the same object (a relationship that finally devastates any direct connection between word and object and thus destroys "representation"--although Bakhtin balks at taking it this far), is precisely the repression that constitutes "genre", or literary distinction in general. In other words, there has never been a purely

representational word: there has only always been repression of other words, of heteroglossia.

It is this repression, this hypocrisy of ascendancy and self-sufficiency, that the novel addresses itself to. The novel, for Bakhtin, is a *liberating* force, a revolution of the contemporary and commonplace against the autocratic rule of established genre. (Although Bakhtin's work does not necessarily subscribe to Hegelian dialectics, it is often marked by "Marxist" metaphors of class struggle and revolution.) The novel's *modus operandi* is primarily one of contextual shifts: it recontextualizes the poetic word by reifying it and challenging it in heteroglossial play. (As Bakhtin notes, a poem can appear *in a novel*, but a novel can never appear *as itself* in a poem.) But--and this is a significant "but"--the "novelistic" or prose word does not change the poetic word: it broaches it as an "other"; it enforces dialogue; it interrogates the poetic word *while at the same time parodying it*, exposing as hypocritical its *self-limitations and degrading it*. The prose word is always an "intentional" (in-tension-al) dialogue with that which represses dialogue--a disrupting dialogue made possible by the operation of laughter (the only complex which "never underwent sublimation of any sort--neither religious, mystical nor philosophical [...] never took on an official character") on the word constituted by repression.²⁸ We might say that the "dialogue" of the direct, poetic, authoritative word and the interrogating, novelistic, prose word is essentially "Socratic":

SOCRATES: Good, my worthy friend, *just continue as you began*, and mind you do not falter through shame. And I too, it seems, *must throw all shame aside*. First of all then, tell me whether one who suffers from the itch and longs to scratch himself, if he can scratch himself to his heart's content and continue scratching all his life, can be said to live happily.

CALLICLES: How *absurd* you are Socrates, a *regular mob orator*.

SOCRATES: That Callicles, is *why I frightened Polus and Gorgias and put them to shame*, but you surely will not be dismayed or abashed, for you have courage. *Only give me your answer*.

CALLICLES: Well then, I say even one who scratches himself would live pleasantly.

SOCRATES: And if pleasantly, happily?

CALLICLES: Certainly.

SOCRATES: If it was only his head that he wanted to scratch--or *can I push the question further?* Think what you will answer, Callicles, if anyone should ask *all the questions that naturally follow*. And as a climax of all such cases, the life of a catamite--is not that *shameful and shocking and miserable?* Will you dare to say that such people are happy, if they have what they desire in abundance?

CALLICLES: Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to *drag our discussion into such topics*.

SOCRATES: Is it I who do this, my noble friend, or the man *who says so unequivocally* that pleasure, whatever its nature, is the key to happiness, and does not distinguish between pleasures good and evil? But enlighten me further as to whether you say that the pleasant and good are identical, or that there are some pleasures which are not good.

CALLICLES: *To avoid inconsistency* if I say they are different, I assert they are the same.

SOCRATES: Then *you ruin your earlier statement*, Callicles, and *you can no longer properly investigate the truth* with me, if you speak contrary to your opinions.

CALLICLES: You are doing just the same, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then I am *not acting rightly*, if I am so doing, *nor are you*. But my good sire, consider whether pleasures so indiscriminate can after all be the good. For if it is so,

then the many shocking things we just now hinted at must evidently result, and many others too.

CALLICLES: So *you* think, Socrates.

SOCRATES: But do you really maintain this, Callicles?

CALLICLES: I do.

SOCRATES: Then we are to take up the argument *in the belief that you are serious?*

CALLICLES: Most assuredly.²⁹ (*emphasis added*)

The "absurd" *eirōn* interrogates the unequivocally "serious", pushing each "answer" into the indeterminacy of another question and yet another context. Ambivalence (here in the form of irony) engages the monological, the (self-contradicting) avoidance of "inconsistency", in an argument that is a debasement of *proper* "discussion".

Socratic laughter (reduced to irony) and Socratic degradations (an entire system of metaphors and comparisons borrowed from the lower spheres of life--from tradespeople, from everyday life, etc.) bring the world closer and familiarize it in order to investigate it fearlessly and freely.³⁰

Thus, the Socratic Dialogue, in its simple "novelness", is a convenient model for the complex-ridden dialogues between "old" and "new", the mythical past and contemporaneity, between authoritative discourse and the discourse of the individual, between poetic repression and investigative prose, between the insulation of the monoglot and the relativity of the polyglot, between the monoglossia and heteroglossia of language itself. These dialogues are always and already within language, composing languages. And, more than this, the Socratic Dialogues, in the "novelistic" activity of reifying, making an image of,

Socratic discourse as the intentional words of a speaking subject--the words of Socrates--demonstrate "one of the primary distinguishing features of the novel", the "*auto-criticism of discourse*".³¹ In the series of questions and answers comprising the dialogues, do we not find discourse testing, interrogating, itself by imaging its differences as characters?

Bakhtin frequently and fondly introduces the Socratic Dialogues as a model of "novelness": it is perhaps ironic, then, that our brief examination of a short passage from Plato's text should bring us to a crisis (already intimated) in the Bakhtinian text. On the one hand, which is the hand preparing the schematization toward a "stylistics" of the novel, we cannot assume the auto-critical tendency of discourse--which, according to Bakhtin, only began more or less with *Don Quixote*--in a pre-novel "genre". (Bakhtin specifically cites the Dialogues as a genre.)³² In the schematization of the coming-to-consciousness of language as occurring in "actual historical sequence"--as a materialist, evolutionary, and progressive development--our conjecture that the Dialogues are autocritical fits like a square peg in a round hole.³³ On the other hand, which is Bakhtin's free hand, can we not assume an auto-critical facility in discourse that has always already had "its own comic-ironic *contre-partie*"? If the "direct" or "poetic" word has always been constituted by the repression of heteroglossia, can we not suppose that this repression has already been countered by interrogative "novelness", by at least the possibility of heteroglossial

auto-criticism? Perhaps it is this crisis--this collision between the formalism of history, of "actual historical sequence", and the forces of "novelness"--that Bakhtin seeks to redress when he writes:

For the novelist working in prose, the object is always entangled in someone else's discourse about it, it is already present with qualifications, an object of dispute that is conceptualized and evaluated variously, inseparable from the heteroglot apperception of it. The novelist speaks of this "already qualified world" in a language that is heteroglot and internally dialogized. Thus both object and language are revealed to the novelist in their historical dimension, in the process of social and heteroglot becoming [...]. In the novel, the "already bespoke quality" [*ogovorennost'*] of the world is woven together with the "already uttered" quality [*peregovorennost'*] of language, into the unitary event of the world's heteroglot becoming, in both social consciousness and language.²⁴

On the one hand, we have "the historical dimension" of the materiality of "object and language", a "process of social and heteroglot becoming" that is evolutionarily progressive, being "revealed to the novelist". What is "the novelist", in this reading, but a fixed point of consciousness, a transcendental, fully self-present, subject capable of perceiving the "world's heteroglot becoming"--despite the immanence of its "struggles"--as a "unitary event"? The novelist, like the theorist himself, assumes a position above and outside of the "historical dimension" of "object and language" that enables a detached recognition of "actual historical sequence[s]", "heteroglot becoming[s]", and the schematics of a "coming-to-consciousness". In this sense, by

being "outside of" that which is revealed to him, the novelist/theorist is capable of the authoritative, originary (as originating from a determinable "fixed point" of being), imposition of "unity" on heteroglossia. Bakhtin considers the novelist (and perhaps the theorist?) as an "author-creator" who is not quite the "human being living his own biographical life". This "author-creator" is a sort of organizing and unifying point-of-view, responsible for "the composition of the work", the order and relatedness of its beginning, middle and end, the divisions of it into chapters, etc. We "sense his activity" in the composition although he, himself, is "outside" of the elements that he organizes and unifies. He is "as it were tangential to them". Thus, this novelist/"author-creator" would appear to be a sort of tangential "system" or filter through which the diverse elements constituting the "historical dimension" of "object and language" are gathered and re-organized in the creation of a new and unified work.³⁵ On the other hand, "the object is already entangled in someone else's discourse about it"; the world is "already bespoke"; language is "already uttered". Thus, the novelist/theorist is only capable of *repetition* or *reiteration* (as repetition with difference): he or she cannot step outside of or become detached from history, from the "already bespoke" and the "already uttered", for these are what comprise his or her speech, language, text.³⁶ (As Bakhtin usefully notes elsewhere, the novelist "does his observing from his own unresolved and still evolving contemporaneity [...] in so far as he himself is located as it were tangentially to the reality he describes".)³⁷ The authoritative,

originary, self-present, position that makes possible the perception or imposition of a "unitary event" is inherently untenable in the face of this reiteration that denies the immediacy of full presence. Some absent *other* is always already mediating this one.

Bakhtin's theory is marked, or scored, by this tension between his recognition of the impossibility of full-presence, self-identity, in the reiterative play of language and his attempt, as a theorist, to assume a position outside of this play, a position of unmediated consciousness which can perceive "the unitary event of the world's heteroglot becoming". We might say that Bakhtin is caught between his recognition of heteroglossia and the monoglossia of his cognition. We might also say that his centripetal intention to arrive at a "stylistics" of the novel is being operated on by the centrifugal forces of "novelness" inherent in "living discourse".

Here, in "living discourse", we have come to perhaps the most "productive" crisis of Bakhtinian theory--at least in terms of that theory itself. To expose this crisis, to examine its rupturing, we must now pay attention to aspects of Bakhtin's discourse that we have previously elided: the predominance of organic metaphors for language and the linguistic sleight-of-hand by which the indirect, novelistic, word becomes the "prose word".

Whatever else it might be, whichever side of the monological-heterological barrier it chooses as its significant site, the word is a "living word". It acts, "plunges", "acknowledges", "presumes", "forgets": it is conscious and capable of self-consciousness: it "speaks". Language is "living" (or "dead"), "coming-to-consciousness" (or unconscious), involved in "the historical process of becoming". And, of course, it must be so for it re-presents the "speaking person", its originator, and the speaking person's world. The persistency of organic metaphors in the Bakhtinian discourse makes it impossible to perceive language as anything but the reiteration--the fundamental mimesis--of the being that speaks.³⁸ Plato's being that speaks--Socrates--also talks of "persuasive" speech, "living speech", the "imitation of the essence [...] made by syllables and letters", and the mimetic nature of language's origination. Socrates, too, talks about language "befitting [the] profession" or status or state of soul of the being that speaks--the very stratification of language that enables heteroglossia.³⁹ At the very heart (to employ an appropriate metaphor) of Bakhtin's theory lies not the "Galilean perception of language [...] that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language" that he claims for it, but the Platonic perception of language as speech, as the representation of the speaking person confirming the absolutism of full presence and "unitary" being.⁴⁰

The Platonism of Bakhtin becomes even more obvious in those few passages where he discusses the specifically written nature--or, more properly, inscribed nature--of the novel:

BAKHTIN

[...] the text is always imprisoned in dead material of some sort [...] in inscriptions (on stone, brick, leather, papyrus, paper)[...] the form of a book (scrolls, codices). But inscriptions and books in any form already lie on the boundary line between culture and a dead nature; if we approach these items as carriers of the [living] text, then they enter into the realms of culture and (in our example) into the realm of literature [....] where we find the inscription or the book, we find as well a real person--one who originates spoken speech as well as the inscription and the book.⁴¹

As is well known, the printing of books played an extremely important role in the history of the chivalric romance, for it served to shift and displace its audience. It served to shift discourse into a mute mode of perception, a shift decisive for the novel as a genre. This societal disorientation

PLATO

SOCRATES: But now tell me, is there another sort of discourse, that is the brother to the written speech, but of unquestioned legitimacy? Can we see how it originates and how much better and more effective it is than the other?

PHAEDRUS: What sort of discourse have you now in mind, and what is its origin?

SOCRATES: The sort that goes together with knowledge, and is written in the soul of the learner, that can defend itself and knows to whom it should speak and to whom it should say nothing.

PHAEDRUS: You mean no dead discourse, but the living speech, the original of which the written may fairly be called a kind of image.⁴²

SOCRATES: [...] And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not

becomes deeper and more pervasive as the novel continues its development, and the chivalric romance, a product of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, begins a period of wandering between social classes, a wandering that ends only when it is absorbed into the "folk literature" of a reading public made up of lower social groups: from this low level it is brought back up into the light of a literarily sophisticated consciousness by the Romantics⁴³

address the wrong. And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parents to come to its help, being unable to defend or help itself.⁴⁴

The incarceration of speech in "dead material of some sort", in "dead discourse", in inscription, is an act (of cruelty, perhaps) that severs the intentional ties linking the (living) text to its authentic meaning. It "begins a period of wandering" and "drifts all over the place", wandering and drifting in an involuntary *fall* (from proper meaning, from grace) to the "low level" of the "wrong people". But the text is not unredeemable: its "parents"--that is, "living speech" and the originator of "spoken speech as well as the inscription", those progenitors that it always carries within it, its inheritance and salvation--can come to its rescue, bring it "back up into the light of [...] consciousness" and presence, and restore it to proper meaning. In *Dissemination*, Jacques Derrida has performed an extensive analysis of Plato's perception of speech and writing (inscription)--of speech (presence, logos) as privileged over writing (absence, mere dead repetition), and of writing as death, as poisonous and patricidal (the illegitimate son killing "the father of speech", disposing with

authority)--and has identified this oppositional and hierarchical binary relationship as a dominant principle of the Western metaphysical tradition and its discourse.⁴⁵ On the basis of the evidence of this particular binary relationship in the Bakhtinian text, we could say that it is, in one way at least, a "phallogocentric" text. I don't think it necessary to pursue this particular question any further than this for it would only be going over already well-covered ground. It is enough, at this point, to recognize the significantly Platonic and logocentric structure of Bakhtin's view of inscription as a fall from full presence and the validity of meaning into the "death" that is unmotivated repetition, and that this view is the homozygous sister of the monological view of language.

Yet, there is this crucial slippage in Bakhtin's discourse:

All these genres, or in any case, their defining features, are considerably older than written language and the book, and to the present day they retain their ancient oral and auditory characteristics. Of all the major genres only the novel is younger than writing and the book: it alone is organically receptive to new forms of mute perception, that is, to reading [....] It is the only genre that was born and nourished in a new era of world history and therefore it is deeply akin to that era, whereas the other major genres entered that era as already fixed forms, as an inheritance, and only now are they adapting themselves--some better, some worse--to the new conditions of their existence.⁴⁶

The "defining features" of the novel, then, are conditioned by the novel's birth in a new "era of world history", the era of writing and reading, of inscription and its reiteration. The novel is, characteristically, *inscribed discourse*. Its definitive vanguard is the "prose word"—the only word that is divorced from poetic dependency on orality and aurality (rhyme and metre). The "prose word" does not need the human voice: it is "organically" conditioned to the silence of inscription and its "mute perception". What we cannot avoid here is the recognition that Bakhtin posits the birth of the novel in the death of spoken speech. The genre that he privileges springs from the loins of a practice that he disparages.

Birth in death: the ambivalent "pregnant death" is the primary informing "image of the carnival", according to Bakhtin, and we can say, with reasonable certainty, that it is toward this image that his entire theory of the novel is orientated.⁴⁷ The "carnival performance"—the profanation and familiarization of the sacred; the uncrowning of the king and the crowning of the jester; the ambivalent establishment of profane sacredness, uncrowning crowning, kingly fool; the insistence on doubling, on the one-that-is-two—is precisely the novelistic performance of dialogical interrogation, which is why Bakhtin's concept of "carnivalization" is generally considered the paradigm of his theory of the novel. But is it not more than a paradigm? Can we not see, in the "pregnant death" that carnivalizes the Platonic binary opposition of speech and writing, the carnivalization of Bakhtin's theory based on the

presence of the speaking person? In a very exciting sense, the Bakhtinian text "carnivalizes itself": the force of "novelness" that it detects and investigates--the force that turns established formalisms upside down and inside out, doubling them, rendering them ambivalent--is at work as the problematic in so-called "direct" Bakhtinian discourse itself.

II.

Carnivalization carnivalized: the formal concept of carnivalization solicited in its engagement to the primacy of speech signifying full presence continually yields an excess of carnival production. It is as though the carnivalesque always, at the critical moment, at the threshold of meaning, escapes or defers definition in the production of yet another self-reflective (seriously parodic) turn. Part and parcel of a general system of significations, the carnivalesque, in its excess, yet seems to be always at the limits of that system, challenging those limits and so enabling their perpetual redefinition.

And lo and behold! Apollo found it impossible to live without Dionysus. The elements of titanism and barbarism turned out to be quite as fundamental as the Apollonian element.

NIETZSCHE⁴⁰

After long doubts and vacillations we have decided to assume the existence of only two

basic instincts, *Eros* and *the destructive instinct* [...] The aim of the first of these basic instincts is to establish ever greater unities and to preserve them thus--in short, to bind together; the aim of the second, on the contrary, is to undo connections and so to destroy things [...] In biological functions the two basic instincts work against each other or combine with each other. Thus, the act of eating is a destruction of the object with the final aim of incorporating it, and the sexual act is an act of aggression having as its purpose the most intimate union. This interaction of the two basic instincts with and against each other gives rise to the whole variegation of the phenomena of life.

FREUD⁴⁹

"My voice cracked on the word 'difference,'
soaring up divinely [...]"

BARNES (*Nightwood*, p. 92)

The carnivalesque "forces" thus appear to assume a universal propensity: they appear to be--just possibly--operating everywhere, as a sort of "*différance*", in theoretical, political, philosophical, and psychoanalytical as well as novelistic discourse, giving "rise to the whole variegation of the phenomena" of inscription.⁵⁰ In a way, the "carnavalesque", as a sort of *différance*, might be seen as an "origin" which Western phallogocentric discourse has attempted to repress in its effort to found itself on a singular absolute. (Recall Bakhtin's "conviction that there *never* was a single strictly straightforward genre [...] that did not have [...] its own comic-ironic *contre-partie*" [emphasis added].) *Différance* is "the non-full, nonsimple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus the name 'origin' no longer suits it."⁵¹ This origin that is not an origin, that would seem

to be repressed by phallogocentrism, is, according to Derrida, the "very opening of the space in which ontotheology--philosophy--produces its system and its history, it includes ontotheology, inscribing it and exceeding it without return", not least of all because this system and history are specifically linguistic and, if we follow Saussure, "in the *system* of language, there are only differences".⁵²

As Derrida demonstrates, this "repressed" origin-that-is-not-an-origin "returns", or "appears" (while always disappearing) at certain times, in certain texts: "*Différance* appears almost by name in [the texts of Nietzsche and Freud], and in those places where everything is at stake [...]"⁵³

Différance is the name we might give to the "active", moving discord of different forces, and of differences of forces, that Nietzsche sets up against the entire system of metaphysical grammar, wherever this system governs culture, philosophy and science.⁵⁴

Différance, the preopening [...] of all the differences which furrow Freudian conceptuality, such that they may be organized, and this is only an example, around the difference between "pleasure" and "reality", or may be derived from this difference. The difference between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, for example, is not uniquely, nor primarily, a distinction, an exteriority, but rather the original possibility, within life, of the detour, of deferral [of death] [...]⁵⁵

Does *différance* not appear "almost by name" in Bakhtin's concept of the differential "forces" of "unitary language" (the authoritative word) and "heteroglossia"?

Alongside the centripetal forces [unitary language], the centrifugal forces of language [heteroglossia] carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward.⁵⁶

Any "utterance" is a "contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language", and it is this "moving discord of different forces" that Bakhtin "sets up against the entire system" of "linguistics, stylistics, and the philosophy of language" "wherever this system governs".⁵⁷ The differential play of forces defers the "end" of the "uninterrupted processes"--which would be the death of "living language" either through (centripetal) implosion or (centrifugal) explosion--by simultaneously "insur[ing] its dynamics", keeping language "alive" and evolving, and "guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding", or meaning.⁵⁸ The same apprehension of a differential play of forces informs the concept of the "carnavalesque", which, for Bakhtin, is the non-exclusive oppositional relationship of monoglossial authority and the heteroglossial people. We might consider, too, the play of forces in that "image of the carnival", "pregnant death". This "image", which is not structured upon an "exterior" distinction between oppositions but upon the concept of an originary difference within the same, also suggests the possibility,

within life, of the deferral of death (through procreation, for example). Through this image, *différance* is inscribed within the "carnavalesque".

If the carnivalesque forces are everywhere in "society", as it were, how are we to reduce the scope of the "carnavalesque" and render it useful to the more specific aims of literary analysis (while always being aware that such reduction is not complete and will never be fully adequate)? Bakhtin attempts to simulate such a reduction by stating, "We shall give the name *carnivalized literature* to those genres which have come under the influence--either directly or indirectly, through a series of intermediary links--of one or another variant of carnivalistic folklore (ancient or medieval). The whole realm of the serio-comical is the first example of such literature."⁵⁹ "[C]arnival, its forms and symbols, and above all the carnival attitude itself over many centuries seeped into numerous literary genres, merged with their characteristics, formed them, and became inseparable from them. Carnival, as it were, was reincarnated in literature, in a definite and vigorous line of its development."⁶⁰ He posits a genealogy of "*carnivalized literature*" that runs from the Socratic Dialogues and the Menippea, through the picaresque and the literature of the Renaissance (Boccaccio, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Cervantes), to the novel forms of Voltaire, Diderot, Sue, Dumas fils, Paul de Kock, Balzac, George Sand, Hugo, Sterne and Dickens, Poe, Pushkin, Gogol, and Dostoevsky. "Having once penetrated and, to a degree, defined the structure of a genre, carnivalization can be

employed by various movements and creative methods [...] Every movement and creative method interprets and renews it in its own way."⁶¹

The carnivalesque, then, has a history—a family history of the successive, generational, impregnations of "literature" (authoritative, monological, logocentric, historical) by the perpetually resurrected "carnival". Bakhtin offers a list of generic traits by which we might recognize the inherited "carnival attitude" in literature:

1. "The carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its *usual* rut, it is to a degree 'life turned inside out', 'life the wrong way round' (*'monde à l'envers'*) [...] the hierarchical system and all connected forms of fear, awe, piety, etiquette, etc. are suspended [...] All *distance* between people is suspended and a special category goes into effect—the *free, familiar contact among people*."

2. "*Eccentricity* is a special category of the carnival attitude which is organically connected with the category of familiar contact; it permits the latent sides of human nature to be revealed and developed in a concretely sensuous form."

3. "[...] *carnivalistic mésalliances*. The unfettered familiar attitude encompasses everything [...] All the things that were closed off, isolated, and separated from one another [...] enter into carnivalistic contacts and combinations [...] the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low."

4. "[...] *profanation*: the carnivalistic blasphemies, a whole

carnivalistic system of lowering status and bringing down to earth, the carnivalistic obscenities connected with the reproductive power of the earth and the body, the carnivalistic parodies of sacred texts and apothegms [...] *not abstract thought* on equality and freedom, on the interrelatedness of all things, or on the unity of opposites, etc.[...] [but] concretely sensuous ritual-pageant 'thoughts', experienced and played out in life itself."⁶²

In the essay "Word, Dialogue, and Novel", Julia Kristeva--who extends Bakhtin's genealogy well into the twentieth century by appending the names of Kafka, Joyce, Beckett, and Bataille--offers an addendum to the above list in her delineation of the characteristics of the predominant carnivalesque strain in the "novel", the menippean discourse:⁶³

1. "It frees speech from historical constraints, and this entails a thorough boldness in philosophical and imaginative inventiveness [....] The word has no fear of incriminating itself. It becomes free from presupposed 'values'; without distinguishing between virtue and vice, and without distinguishing itself from them, the word considers them its private domain, as one of its creations."

2. "Academic problems are pushed aside in favour of the 'ultimate' problems of existence: this discourse orients liberated language towards philosophical universalism. Without distinguishing ontology from cosmology, it unites them into a practical philosophy of life."

3. "Pathological states of the soul, such as madness, split personalities, daydreams, dreams, and death, become part of the narrative [...] they destroy man's epic and tragic unity as well as his belief in identity and causality; they indicate that he has lost his totality and no longer coincides with himself."

4. "[...] they often appear as an exploration of language and writing."

5. "Menippean discourse tends toward the scandalous and eccentric in language."

6. "Its language seems fascinated with the 'double' (with its own activity as graphic *trace*, doubling an 'outside') [...]"

7. "It is an all-inclusive genre, put together as a pavement of citations."

8. "Put together as an exploration of the body, dreams, and language, this writing grafts onto the topical: it is a kind of political journalism of its time. Its discourse exteriorizes political and ideological conflicts of the moment. The dialogism of its words is practical philosophy doing battle against idealism and religious metaphysics, against the epic."⁶⁴

At this level, the level on which the carnivalesque is reduced to specific thematic and narrative characteristics, can we not already place *Nightwood* within the host of carnivalized literature? The novel itself is most specific about its own narrative arena: all the central characters meet at or through that remnant of the great Renaissance

carnivals, the circus; and, for many of these characters, the circus functions as the very limits of their experience. From within the "splendid and reeking falsification" (p. 11) of that "monstrous" arena, the narrative "take[s] its flight from the immense disqualification of the public" (p. 12), from "historical constraints" and the constraints of "idealism and religious metaphysics". If there can be said to be a "theme" of this work, it must be that "'ultimate' problem[] of existence", the problem of the "human condition", the problem of *being* human. And this problem is not treated--to use for a moment, on condition, Bakhtin's classical distinction between the "abstract" and "concrete"--as an academic conundrum by the characters, but "experienced and played out in life itself". Here, the hierarchies are turned upside-down (and not only with the "ladies of the *haute sewer*" [p. 130] and "love" being brought "down to a level" [p. 75]). And the characters themselves--who, we might suppose, would never have come into contact with each other but for the circus--are eccentric, seemingly mad, pathologically afflicted, somnolent, somnambulistic, hysteric or neurasthenic, "dead", "resurrected". At the level of narrative discourse, the language used, the text involves itself in the eccentric and scandalous (odd diction, the use of words in their archaic or rare senses, ungrammatical syntax), with citation (the re-citation of Donne, de Sade, Montaigne, Rimbaud; the insinuation of Webster, Shakespeare, the Bible; the allusions to Madame de Staël, Madame de Sévigné, Goethe, Loyola, "Anna Karenina", and "Catherine Heathcliffe"), and with inscription, the graphic ("Nikka [...] tattooed from head to heel

with all the *ameublement* of depravity [....] hackwork of the devil" [p. 16]; "Is there such extraordinary need of misery to make beauty? [....] Why not put the pen away?" [p. 124]). Dreams, too, function as part of the narrative, as equivalent, without being "contextualized" by interpretation or augury. I shall go into all of this in greater detail in the following chapters: for the moment, it is enough to recognize that *Nightwood*--on this primary categorical level--is as definitively carnivalesque as, say, *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake*, *Metamorphosis*, *The Trial*, or the Beckettian trilogies. On this level, the only difference between *Nightwood* and the latter texts is that *Nightwood* was written by a woman: I will be considering the effect of this difference in the later stages of this thesis.

Before going on to the "deeper" levels of the carnivalesque, I must take a little detour through some crucial questions. There have been some pertinent criticisms of Bakhtin's concept of "carnival", and these need to be attended to. For the most part, they arise from objections to Bakhtin's view of carnival as revolutionary, as forcing ongoing change in dominant social and linguistic structures. Umberto Eco frames this common objection thus:

If [Bakhtin's contention] were true, it would be impossible to explain why power (any social and political power throughout the centuries) has used *circenses* to keep the crowds quiet; why the most repressive dictatorships have always censured parodies and satires but not clowneries; why humour is suspect but circus is innocent; why today's mass media, undoubtedly instruments of social

control (even when not depending upon an explicit plot) are based mainly upon the funny, the ludicrous, that is, upon a continuous carnivalization of life. To support the universe of business, there is no business like show business.⁶⁵

For some reason, Eco has chosen to overlook or ignore the essential function of the parodic in Bakhtin's carnivalism, but his argument that carnival (or *circenses*, or the circus) has a stake in the maintenance of power structures is paradigmatic of the objections raised against the Bakhtinian theory. Carnival is condoned because of its cathartic properties, and catharsis, particularly in the social sense, is the institutional safety-valve inhibiting explosion. Juliet Mitchell, in criticizing Julia Kristeva's derivative theory of the carnivalesque (which encompasses her theories of the "imaginary" and the "semiotic"), points out that "the very notion of heterogeneity", of the carnivalesque, "is, in fact, provided by the law, by the symbolic law itself". "You cannot choose the imaginary, the semiotic, the carnival, as an alternative to the law. It is set up by the law precisely as its own ludic space, its own area of imaginative alternative [...]"⁶⁶ In other words, the law is prior to (both temporally and evaluatively) its transgression: the church is prior to the carnival.

There is an impeccable logic to these historically validated objections which makes them difficult to refute. Within the context of the historical, refutation is, indeed, impossible. Our history texts, our anthropology, sociology, and psychology texts, all inform us that Eco

and Mitchell are "right". However, we must be wary of the systematic prioritization implicit in these dissenting discourses, a discursive movement that foregrounds "priority" itself as the validating principle (thereby short-circuiting a "chicken-and-egg" type of enquiry). For both Eco and Mitchell, in this instance, there is *exclusive* opposition between the paired terms "power" and "*circenses*", "law" and "carnival", "symbolic" and "semiotic", and this absolute distinction between the opposing terms (and concepts) enables the prioritization, or presupposition of priority, of one term over the other. Thus, the church is prior to the carnival both chronologically and evaluatively. Its priority is so dominant, in fact, that it assumes a parental role (chicken before egg) in relation to its opposite: the church (business) encloses the carnival (show business), limits it, imposes meaning and causality upon it. It assumes the carnival as "its own area of imaginative alternative". The short-circuit built into this powerful model of valorized and exclusive opposition is apparent.⁶⁷

What is being evaded, or repressed, by both Eco and Mitchell is the possibility of a *non-exclusive* opposition, an opposition in which neither priority nor absolute distinction can gain a foothold, and which is more than the sum of its parts. This possibility--which, after Nietzsche and after Freud, cannot ever be discounted--once acknowledged should leave us suspicious of the "authoritative" arguments posed by Eco and Mitchell. Such a suspicion exposes the determining drive of prioritization, delimits the exclusiveness of the opposition, and finds

its *niche* in the crux of Bakhtin's consideration of the relationship between church and carnival or, more precisely, between the Christian narrative tradition and a specifically carnivalesque discourse, the Menippea:

The basic narrative genres of ancient Christian literature--the "gospels", the "acts of the apostles", the "apocalypse" and the "lives of the saints and martyrs"--are connected with ancient aretology which, in the first centuries after Christ, developed within the order of the menippea [....] In these genres, especially in the numerous "gospels" and "acts", classical Christian dialogical synchyses are developed: the synchyses of the tempted (Christ or the righteous man) with the tempter, the believer with the non-believer, the righteous man with the sinner [...] etc. [...] As in the menippea, rulers, rich men, thieves, beggars, hetaera, etc., meet on equal terms in a single, fundamentally dialogized plane. As in the menippea, dream visions, insanity and obsessions of all sorts have a certain significance here [....] Christian narrative also underwent direct carnivalization (independently of the influence of the carnivalized menippea). It is sufficient to recall the scene of the crowning and dicing of the "King of the Jews" in the canonical Gospels.⁶⁸

Thus, the "church", it might be said, is founded on an already carnivalized canon. The "gospel" is always already carnivalized, which suggests that the relationship between "church" and "carnival" is *something more* than opposition.

Bakhtin does not, at any point in *The Dialogic Imagination* or *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Rabelais and His World*, suggest

that the carnivalesque force within language will lead to a complete, final, overturning of monologism. Furthermore, there is no postulation of resolution, synthesis, or any other foreclosure of the dialectic between the "authoritative word" and the relative word, between the monological and the dialogical. He does not invest in the anarchic (and naive) utopianism that would do away with conventional systems of signification simply because they "appear" to be dominated by phallic, paternalistic, authoritarian monologism. Rather, he has attempted to chart, or "explain", by and through a "history" of the "novel", the continuous transformations of language and languages, "the coming and dying of meaning".⁶⁹ This explanation is modelled as a dialectic *between* non-exclusive oppositions, *between* the interdependent centripetal forces that hold language together and centrifugal forces that tear language apart. For Bakhtin (or, perhaps, even more than Bakhtin realizes), language is both sustained and transformed, at once and continuously, by the incestuous dialectic of "church" and "world" that is "carnival".

We should also re-cite, here at the detour's "end", following the evocation of "incest", Kristeva's insistence on the carnivalesque as a "transgression"—not "*law anticipating its own transgression*", but "*transgression giving itself a law*".⁷⁰ Neither precisely law nor lawlessness, neither precisely "culture" nor "nature", the carnivalesque lies (in both senses of the word) between these "opposites" as a threshold, as a bridge and a breach, as something extra and something

missing. As something extra, it makes possible the relationship between law (culture, order) and lawlessness (nature, chaos): as something missing, it subverts the possibility of a synthesis of opposites. It should already be possible to discern what is lurking just beneath this con-struction, this (con)-fusion of opposites. Earlier on, I referred to the "carnavalesque" as a sort of "*différance*", and I suggested that the carnivalesque might be one of those "nonsynonymous" terms that "inscribe *différance* within themselves, as Derrida says, according to context".⁷¹ Like Rousseau's "supplement" ("the missing piece and the extra piece"), Plato's "*pharmakon*" (poison and remedy), and Mallarmé's "hymen" (virginity and consummation in marriage)—those terms that Derrida investigates in the course of a trans-gression through *différance*--the carnivalesque is a doubling-up of opposites "that makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible".⁷² And, like the "supplement" (Rousseau's term for writing), the "*pharmakon*" (Plato's term for writing), and the "hymen" (Mallarmé's term for writing), Bakhtin's (birth and death) carnivalesque is pre-occupied with/in the "problem" of inscription. (For, we should remember that the fall of hierarchically privileged "living speech" to the "low level" of inscription in "dead material" is the carnivalesque movement *par excellence*.)

One might well ask, "if the carnivalesque is *only* a type of *différance*, why not simply use Derrida's terms and circumvent the, perhaps, *extraneous* Bakhtinian consideration?" I can answer that by

pointing out that (a) as we have seen, the concept of the carnivalesque, not least in its proffered contexts, suggests certain strategies of reading that appear, at once, most amenable to this text which (b) offers itself, almost explicitly, as the (circus) arena of inscription in which the beast and the human (nature and culture, "good" and "evil") meet eye to eye, "the face of the one telling] the face of the other the half of the story that both forgot (138)".

In the next chapter, I will be examining *Nightwood's* carnivalesque performance in relation to the paradigms governing orthodox conceptions of history, narrative, and writing in general, before going on to an analysis, in Chapter Four, of the text's engagement with particular theological orthodoxies. The question of the relevance of the writer's gender will not really come into play until Chapters Four and Five, because I think it necessary to establish just how "carnavalesque" *Nightwood* is before demonstrating its difference within the carnivalesque.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORY DEFLOWERED

[Modern fiction--using modern in its qualitative, as well as its merely chronological, significance--is fiction displaying some or all of the following features. First, it is experimental or innovatory in form, exhibiting marked deviations from existing modes of discourse, literary and nonliterary. Next, it is much concerned with consciousness, and also with the subconscious or unconscious workings of the human mind. Hence the structure of external 'objective' events essential to narrative art in traditional poetics is diminished in scope and scale, or presented selectively and obliquely, in order to make room for introspection, analysis, reflection and reverie. Frequently, therefore, a modern novel has no real "beginning", since it plunges us into a flowing stream with which we gradually familiarize ourselves by a process of inference and association; its ending is usually "open" or ambiguous, leaving the reader in doubt as to the characters' final destiny. By way of compensation for the weakening of narrative structure and unity, other modes of aesthetic ordering become more prominent--such as allusion to or imitation of literary motifs, images, symbols, a technique often called "rhythm", "*leitmotif*", or "spatial form". Lastly, modern fiction eschews the straight chronological ordering of its material, and the use of a reliable, omniscient and intrusive narrator. It employs, instead, either a single, limited point of view, or multiple viewpoints, all more or less limited and fallible; and it tends toward a complex or fluid handling of time, involving much cross-reference back and forward across the temporal span of the action.]

In the passage above, David Lodge has done an admirable job of distilling a series of features or characteristics of modernist fiction from the great nebula of critical and authoritative opinion on the matter. Of course, this series, as general as it is, is still quite open to the argument of the exception--one can, conceivably, argue that so-called "modernist" texts like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Well's *The*

History of Mr. Polly, or Forster's *Passage to India*, exhibit fewer of these features than Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, for example. Yet, Lodge's definition does represent a general consensus on the lineaments of the modernist novel.

Such an apprehension certainly lies behind many critics's recognition of *Nightwood* as distinctly "modernist". Joseph Frank, in his much-cited essay "Spatial Form in Modern Literature", contends that *Nightwood* is the "culmination" of a "tendency" to spatial form (as opposed to conventional chronological narrative form) toward which "such writers as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marcel Proust and James Joyce [were] moving".² Thus, for Frank, Barnes's text is a sort of epitome of a modernist movement. For Charles Baxter, in his "A Self-Consuming Light: *Nightwood* and the Crisis of Modernism", the "crisis of Modernism", a crisis of autotelic discourse detached from its author and the historical conventions of discursive creation, is "embodied within" *Nightwood*, most specifically "within" the "condition" of Matthew O'Connor.³ Albert Cook finds that, in *Nightwood*, "the nostalgia of transient details becomes transmuted to an anguish in whose crepuscular heaving objects lose their literal, narrative base of reference to become pure metaphors", while Elizabeth Pochoda finds the text "an experiment to dismantle narrative", "assault[ing] the very notion of history and with it narrative progression and memory, those staples of plot and characterization".⁴ On the other hand, Shari Benstock questions the assignment of *Nightwood* as a "Modernist masterpiece", on the grounds that "modernism", as usually

rendered, is a patriarchal construct in the light of which Barnes's text must be seen as "a singular undertaking that addresses woman's place" in that construct. Yet Benstock, too, acknowledges *Nightwood's* experimental condition and its questioning of "the notions of 'forms' and definitive categories": Benstock's principal thesis is that if women's texts, like *Nightwood*, are to be considered "modernist", then "modernism" must be seen as other or more than what is generally assumed by that term.⁵

I do not intend to take issue with any of this. Although I may want to query certain points of Lodge's, Frank's, etc., definitions of or insinuations about "modernism" *per se*--if only on the grounds that modernist literature, taken in sum, is too ungainly a hybrid to yield to precise delineation--such contestation would be quite beside the point here.⁶ Certainly, *Nightwood* can be a modernist text: as the critics mentioned above have demonstrated, it follows most of the criteria noted by Lodge. However, the deliberation of *Nightwood's* position in a modernist landscape or landscapes would be quite beside the point. I am not insisting that this text is, in any way, absolutely disengaged from its contemporary context, if, indeed, any text can be so singular. As I have already noted, *Nightwood* can be, if we choose, a modernist novel, both similar to (in general) and different from (in particular) other texts written within the same very general (and perhaps uncompleted) period of Western history. However, I also suspect that careful analysis of the "experimental" strategies employed by a so-called modernist text like Barnes's may lead us to place in question the historically

determined "'forms' and definitive categories" of modernism itself. We might well ask ourselves what sort of paradox we are engaging with when we attempt to historicize texts which, as we well recognize, "assault the very notion of history". The following analysis will, I hope, remain under the perversely illuminating shadow of that paradox.

I.

The central image in *Nightwood* is that of the circus, where the levelling of all distinctions and the ultimate containment of all aspiration can be shown with some wit. History is an amusement; the circus is a version of history which cancels history out.⁷

In stating that "the circus is a version of history which cancels history out", Pochoda has delineated one of the operative strategies of *Nightwood's* writing, although she may have overstated the result. History, at least in its general sense, is not cancelled out in this text. An historical framework pertains: Felix is born in 1880 (p. 1); Nora meets Robin "in the fall of 1923" (p. 53); etc.. The term "history" itself appears with some persistence throughout the text--a numerical accounting would show that it appears more frequently than the term "circus". Whatever else happens to history in *Nightwood*, it is neither completely cancelled out nor placed under erasure.

I am not precisely certain what Pochoda means by "history", but I assume that her history is history in the general sense of a dominant chronological, narrative ordering of past events. As I have already noted, *Nightwood* does make use of history in precisely this sense, and in the same sense, in Felix Volkbein's sense, this history is privileged, ennobled. For Felix, history is the "great past", "'Old Europe': aristocracy, nobility, royalty" (p. 9). Dr. O'Connor acknowledges this definition, but, returning the repressed as it were, he also recognises that which an ennobled history omits:

"We may all be nature's noblemen [...] but think of the stories that do not amount to much! That is, that are forgotten in spite of all man remembers (unless he remembers himself) merely because they befell him without distinction of office or title--that's what we call legend and it's the best a poor man may do with his fate; the other [...] we call history, the best the high and mighty can do with theirs. Legend is unexpurgated, but history, because of its actors, is deflowered [...]" (p. 15)

The reference to "actors" signals other significations of the term "history", for history is also a "drama" and a "narrative, tale, story" (OED). In other words, as Dr. O'Connor reminds us, history (unlike "nature") is a fiction (fr. L. *ingere*, "To fashion, form, shape" [OED; see "Feign" and "Fiction"]), "the best the high and mighty can do with" their fate. And this ennobled history is, paradoxically, "deflowered"--unintact, impure, incomplete, "[un]expurgated". Dr. O'Connor's "history" is a carnivalized version of a history contaminated by other "stories that do

not amount to much" which reveal history's inadequacy and impurity. History has not been cancelled out: it has been forced to give its protected and privileged self (as a "relation of incidents...professedly true" [OED]) up to fiction. Again, we might ask ourselves with what assurance we attempt to historicize a fiction like *Nightwood* when history itself can be shown to be a fiction.

History, in its general sense, is patently carnivalized in *Nightwood*, but that is not the end of the story. History, whether a record, drama or story, implies some rational ordering of events and people. It makes sense of what otherwise might be seen as random occurrences, and, in doing so, it depends upon certain well-established conventions of order and distinction. It depends upon chronology, a linear tabling of "time", and upon a concept of causality: in other words, it has a plot, a temporal series of distinct events that are related by cause-and-effect. It also depends upon a concept of mimesis as imitation: history is a narrative reflection of "professedly true" incidents or situations. That this narrative reflection is mediated (fashioned, formed and shaped) by the strategies of fiction has more influence on the operative concept of fiction than on the indubitability of mimesis, for this fiction is "realist" in that it reflects so-called real circumstances, people (characters), and settings. And, realism is defined according to convention or to a dominant system of perception or ideology. The conventional expectations placed upon the narrative of history are precisely those placed upon realist fiction: the story must be mimetic

(in the orthodox, Aristotelian sense); it must have a believable plot and realistic (recognisable) characters, etc.; and it must not betray its fictiveness--its style must be unobtrusive and/or subservient to the other elements. It is precisely these expectations placed upon the narratives of history and realist fiction that *Nightwood* defies while, simultaneously, revealing the paradox underlying all such expectation--that the reflection of reality has been entrusted to the suspect medium of writing. This chapter of the thesis will be an analysis of *Nightwood's* carnivalesque response to conventional expectations and a consideration of what, in the light of this response, "writing" might be in this text.

I will begin with a brief examination of *Nightwood's* subversion, or carnivalization, of those definitive categories of both fiction and history--plot, character, and style. I do so because I don't believe that we can afford to assume that, as *Nightwood* is a modernist text, its subversions of these categories are simply generic. This text addresses tradition in a particular way, from a particular perspective, that is far more complex and intellectual than generally has been assumed. (I hope that this much will be demonstrated through the course of this chapter.) Nor do I believe that we can afford to assume that, after the advent of modernism, "plot", "character", "style", etc. have lost their force as formative tyrannies. As Peter Ackroyd has noted:

There has still been no significant change [...]
Our writing has acquiesced in that orthodoxy
which has already been described, resting as

it does upon a false aesthetic of subjectivity and a false context of realism. And it is this conventional aesthetic which has been reified into the English "tradition" [....]²

We are not yet done with the tyrannical spectres of plots and characters. Thus, an analysis of *Nightwood's* subversion, or carnivalization, of these definitive categories cannot be merely an exercise in redundancy. The matter has not been resolved yet.

II.

For Miss Barnes, as for more recent novelists who appreciate her work, the experiment with fictional forms is a moral necessity. This is not mere faddishness; her idea is that the conventions of realistic fiction are the familiar clothes which too easily conceal violence, horror, and impertinence.³

Of course, the novel *Nightwood* does don these "familiar clothes", as Pochoda puts it. It has a "plot", although decidedly minimalist, which Kenneth Burke has wittily, and perhaps reductively, outlined as follows:

A "tall girl with the body of a boy" leaves her husband after she has borne him a son. She becomes involved in a love relationship with two women--and it serves as a point of departure for lamentations by one of the women, seconded by a perverted doctor (who calls himself an "old worn out lioness", and who amplifies the theme by contributing many thoughts on human decay in general). Finally, after much promiscuity, and special interest

in a child, the girl falls into a state of
enigmatic communion with a dog.¹⁰

It may not be the mystery reader's dream, but it is indeed a plot. And there can be no doubt that the novel has "characters": as T.S. Eliot has written in his Introduction, "[s]ometimes in a phrase the characters spring to life so suddenly that one is taken aback, as if one had touched a wax-work figure and discovered that it was a live policeman."¹¹ (I would like to mark Eliot's significant "in a phrase", for that is precisely where in *Nightwood* a "character" springs "to life".) One might also say that some of these characters "develop" through the course of the novel. Felix and Nora come to some understanding of both their particular and the more universal human predicaments, while Matthew O'Connor eventually succumbs to hopelessness. (However, the nature of this development will also come into play later.) The "narrator", too, should be mentioned: this is a fault-ridden "omniscient narrator", one who can transcend the temporal and spatial (realist) problems of describing (as if having seen) Felix's parents, his birth, and the adult Felix himself, but somehow consent to the mystery of Felix's thirty year absence from "the world" (p. 7). Yet, despite such inconsistencies, it can be called a narrator, at a stretch. Undeniably, *Nightwood* does exhibit all of these familiar fictive constructs.

It is when we come to this other predominant facet of the novel, style, or, as Lodge puts it, "modes of aesthetic ordering", that the categorical distinctions that I have just noted begin to collapse, which

is probably one of the reasons why, as early as 1945, Joseph Frank chose this text to illustrate his theory of modern literature. In Chapter I of this thesis, I have outlined the series of stylistic readings of *Nightwood* that followed the publication of Frank's essay and have suggested why these readings have proved insufficient to the rhetorical strategies of this enigmatic text. What remains, at this point, is to demonstrate how *Nightwood* confounds, or carnivalizes, the theoretical organization of the exclusive fictive categories, "plot", "character", and "style", by "leveling [...] all distinctions", as Pochoda puts it.

One rather dramatic leveller in *Nightwood's* discourse, a stylistic tendency that many critics have noted (usually in connection with Barnes's Emersonian or Wildean precedents), is the aphorism. *Nightwood* offers a plethora of aphorisms, some of them appearing as condensed homilies ("The unendurable is the beginning of the curve of joy" [p. 117]), some as deliberate contradictions of traditional clichés ("We do not 'climb' to heights, we are eaten away to them" [p. 118]), and some seemingly incurably enigmatic ("When a Jew dies on a Christian breast he dies impaled" [p. 3]). However, whatever their *apparent* direction, whether seemingly outward to a common world of experience outside of the text or inward to certain symbolic or figurative structures particular to this text, these "principle[s] or precept[s] expressed shortly and pithily", these "maxim[s]" (OED) or proverbs, do not necessarily perform the unifying function that we expect of this genre. The aphorism is an expression of truth, the "truth of common or

universal experience". This is how we recognize it, and, as such it is a significant genre of that body of literature known as "wisdom literature". We should also note, as a matter of interest, the aphorism's etymological origin, the Greek ἀφ-ορίζω, "to mark off by boundaries: to part off, determine, define.--Med. to mark off for oneself, appropriate. II. to set apart, ordain: also to reject, banish" (*Liddell and Scott*). As reference to an assumed general knowledge and as a demarcation, definition, or appropriation (even as a banishment of the false or inappropriate) of the "truth", the aphorism *could* be seen as a sort of microcosm of the predominant (phallogocentric) organization of literary architecture. Yet, *Nightwood's* aphorisms seem to invert the very structure of that organization, to turn it all upside down in the manner of William Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*¹² Like Blake's "Proverbs", the aphorisms of *Nightwood* threaten the very conceptions of "truth" upon which generic categories and critical distinctions are founded.

And how does Barnesian aphorism perform this feat? I commence this consideration with a list of aphorisms chosen at random from the text but arranged, somewhat loosely if logocentrically, according to "theme":

1. A Jew's undoing is never his own, it is God's; his rehabilitation is never his own, it is a Christian's. (p. 3)
2. [...] eternity is only just long enough for a Jew. (p. 165)
3. Man [...] conditioning himself to fear, made God; as the prehistoric, conditioning itself to hope, made man [...] (p. 136)

4. God laughs at me, but his laughter is my love. (p. 143)
5. Laughter is the pauper's money. (p. 32)
6. Legend is unexpurgated, but history, because of its actors, is deflowered--every nation with a sense of humour is a lost nation, and every woman with a sense of humour is a lost woman. (p. 15)
7. To pay homage to our past is the only gesture that also includes the future. (p. 39)
8. Time is a great conference planning our end, and youth is only the past putting a leg forward. (p. 130)
9. Youth is cause, age is effect; so with the thickening of the neck we get data. (p. 17)
10. Only the impossible lasts forever; with time it is made accessible. (p. 139)
11. In time everything is possible and in space everything forgiveable; life is but the intermediary vice. (pp. 126-7)
12. An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties. (p. 111)
13. Life, the permission to know death. (p. 83)
14. Love is death come upon with passion [...] that is why love is wisdom. (p. 137)
15. Love is the first lie; wisdom the last. (p. 138)
16. A strong sense of identity gives man an idea he can do no wrong; too little accomplishes the same thing. (p. 135)
17. Man has no foothold that is not also a bargain. (p. 32)
18. [...] those who cannot conceive a bargain cannot be saved or damned. (p. 47)
19. Those who love everything are despised by everything, as those who love a city in its profoundest sense, become the shame of that city, the *détraqués*, the paupers; their good is incommunicable, outwitted, being the rudiment of a life that has developed, as in man's body are found evidences of lost needs. (p. 52)
20. Suffering is the decay of the heart; all that we have loved becomes the "forbidden" when we have not understood it all, as the pauper is the rudiment of the city, which the city, for its own destiny, wants to forget. (p. 156)

Reading over this list, I notice two things almost immediately. First--and this refers directly back to the instigating problem of "character" in *Nightwood*--I note little distinction between the "voices" of those four maxim-making entities: the narrator, O'Connor, Nora, and Felix. (One might recognize in no. 7's concern with the "past", "future", and "homage" a Felix-maxim, but the surety of that association might be abridged by another Felix-maxim, "One's life is peculiarly one's own when one has invented it" [p. 118], which shifts the monolithic solidity of "past" and "future" into the relativizing organizations of fiction.) For the most part, there is little in the way of contextual markers by which to distinguish character "voices", and much in the diction to confuse them. For example, nos. 17 (O'Connor) and 18 (narrator) might be read, although they are pages apart in the text, as one single, orthodox, proverb (a synonymous parallelism, see below). Similarly, nos. 19 (narrator) and 20 (Nora) are capable of con-fusion (though not a total confusion), collapsing into each other at "pauper[s]", "rudiment", "city", and the coincidence of "the shame" and "the 'forbidden'". Rather than "marking] off by boundaries", *Nightwood's* aphorisms tend to erode, at certain sites, the formal distinctions between characters or "voices".

This confusion of voices also divests the definitive concept of plot development, as distinct from other formal components of the novel, of much of its power, for if anything can be said to happen in *Nightwood*, if there is any sort of narrative progression, it is the assumption, post-Robin, by Nora and Felix of O'Connor's discourse. Most

of what occurs after Robin's desertion is the relation, by O'Connor, Felix and Nora, of what occurred after Robin's desertion, and in the course of this tri-partite relation the voices of Felix and Nora gradually assume, by expansion of their half of the dialogue with O'Connor, by the employment of aphorism, by an increased O'Connor-like collusion with the narrative voice (for example, the coincidence of nos. 19 and 20 reflects the more typical coincidence of O'Connor and narrator in nos. 17 and 18),¹³ a dominant, or at least equal, status to the proportionately depleted O'Connor voice. In other words, plot and character development are only a matter of contrasting discourses coming to the same "ends", becoming less distinctive in a collective "lamentation" or carnivalesque polyphony.

This is not the sum of the aphorism's contribution to *Nightwood's* challenge to conventional critical paradigms. The second thing that I notice in reading over the above list is that practically all of these aphorisms mimic the generic forms of the biblical Proverbs: there are declarative statements (nos. 2, 5, 12, 17 and 18, for example); oppositional "doublets" (nos. 1 and 16); "synonymous parallelisms" (no. 3 and the first clause of no. 11); contrasting comparisons (the first clauses of nos. 6 and 9, no. 10 and no. 15); and various combinations of all these forms.¹⁴ Thus, *Nightwood's* aphorisms present themselves as a type of conventional wisdom literature--a type, but not a "true" type, for underlying *Nightwood's* proverbs is a challenge to the very notion of wisdom by which the genre has been distinguished. In the *Book of*

Proverbs, Wisdom is the penultimate divine gift, after life itself, by which man might know the truth, secure material wealth, and shield himself against the seductions of the "adulteress", against carnal sin. In *Nightwood*, "wisdom" is "the last [lie]"--in both senses of the verb 'to lie'--and, if we follow the staggered syllogistic logic of no. 14, it is also the "love" that is "death", carnal sin. (There is more of that renegade book *Ecclesiastes's* "vanity, vanity, all is vanity" than proverbial "understanding" in *Nightwood*) The "wisdom" on which the Barnesian aphorisms are premised is an anti-wisdom--an invert playing the part of Judeo-Christian rectitude in a carnival production. It is a "wisdom" that declaims itself as lie as it sets itself up as truth, betraying the presuppositions upon which its distinction relies.

The Barnesian aphorism, then, may be (if we pay attention to the vagaries of its wisdom) situated on an *aporia*, the Cretan paradox, a certain "derangement in [...] equilibrium" (p. 51) that inhibits certitude, definition, banishment, by being the "impossible" everything-and-nothing-at-once. "There is no truth, and you have set it between you", says the "liar" Dr. O'Connor (p. 136), stating the condition of this text in which the divisions evidently sustaining the narrative structure are either "no truth", if we appropriate the liar's phrase, or "truth", if we ignore the text's insistence on a "derangement in [...] equilibrium". We will not get around this easily: we may not get around it at all, thanks to the doubts introduced by consideration of certain aphorisms. To say that there are no characters in *Nightwood* is as questionable as to say that

it is populated by living beings, which brings us to a certain formidable question, "what, then, is (can be) a character in this text?" To which the text might reply:

[...] the singular fall[ing] continually and forever; a body falling in observable space, deprived of the privacy of disappearance; as if privacy, moving relentlessly away, by the very sustaining power of its withdrawal kept the body eternally moving downward, but in one place, and perpetually before the eye.
(p. 51)

A "body falling [moving downward] in observable space [the page], deprived of the privacy of disappearance [apparent, not removed from public view]; as if privacy [presence-to-self, of "author"], moving relentlessly away, by the very sustaining power of its withdrawal [absence] kept the body eternally moving downward [from top to bottom], but in one place [the sheet of paper, the page], and perpetually before the eye [generic eye, any eye reading, re-reading]": what is this "body" but writing, inscription? (We might recall, as well, the Platonic-Bakhtinian conception of writing as a fall of speech.)

If the character is (in) writing--leaving aside for the moment the many other questions that the above raises--and, so, without the criteria of a representative verisimilitude, can we assume, with Lodge, that "other modes of aesthetic ordering" compensate for "the weakening of [orthodox] structure and unity"? Does the "unity" of the text (on which depends its value or status as an artform) rely on "allusion to or

imitation of literary motifs, images, symbols, a technique often called 'rhythm', '*leitmotif*', or 'spatial form"', as so many critics (Eliot, Frank, Burke, etc.) have claimed? Alan Singer has paid particular attention to this question and found, in his close reading of the text, that it flouts the sort of synchronized co-ordination of images (or "forms" or "tableaux") that would yield a metanarrative pattern from which meaning might be derived. He examines the following passage:

The woman who presents herself to the spectator as a "picture" forever arranged is, for the contemplative mind, the chiefest danger. Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human. Such a person's every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience; a mirage of an eternal wedding cast on the racial memory; as insupportable a joy as would be the vision of an eland coming down an aisle of trees, chapleted with orange blossoms and bridal veil, a hoof raised in the economy of fear, stepping in the trepidation of flesh that will become myth; as the unicorn is neither man nor beast deprived, but human hunger pressing its breast to its prey. (p. 37)

In reference to this passage, Singer notes that whereas "[t]he image is traditionally meaningful in dramatic literature as it expresses the 'inner necessity' of the plot teleology", "the image of the eland presents a contextual impertinence because it seems unnecessary in these terms".¹⁵ Within its particular descriptive context, it is excessive, too much figuration. And, although Singer traces "contextual links" (rhythm, *leitmotif*) between this passage and Dr. O'Connor's disquisitions on "young beasts" and "horns", he finds that

[...] this is not the simple crystallization of an image pattern across the threshold of different contexts that we find in more conventional novels. The 'pattern' denoted by the recurrent imagery of the horn and the human beast is above all indicative of a 'practice' of narrative digression and supplementation whereby the expressiveness of the image comes to depend on its proliferation of new relational possibilities.¹⁶

The image is thus "a point of departure rather than a reservoir of accumulated meanings",¹⁷ a "point of departure" out of the formal integrity, or closure, of a coherent work. What happens by way of this "point" is an inversion of the hierarchical relation of the "literal" (unmediated and undeformed by metaphor, etc.) narrative systems of plot, character, etc. and the "figurative" systems (image, metaphor, etc.) which *should* be subserving the former. It's a very carnivalesque gesture, this inversion of the literal/figurative binary opposition--particularly if we re-cite, with Singer, Aristotle's consideration, in the *Rhetoric* of "figure" as "quixote, ephemeral, nonessential and *supplementary*" in comparison with "the standard of verisimilitude" privileging plot, character, etc.¹⁸; *emphasis added*.

I have used, here, the term "inversion" perhaps rather precipitately, for although the term does suggest the sort of catastrophe that overtakes (or turns around) this orthodox valorization of the literal (as "without metaphor, exaggeration, or inaccuracy" [OED]) and attendant suspicion of the figurative, there is much more going on here. Burke's "version, con-, per-, in-" might be the more pertinent

term to describe or designate the extra turn (or trope or figure) *Nightwood* shuttles with, through, against, and into the space between woof (literal, direct, truthful) and warp (figurative, rhetorical, fictive), between meaning and inaccuracy, between the (prior fact of the) human body and the (subsequent) body of writing.

The literal human body and the figurative body of writing: the body of writing as literally a book and the human body literally "expressed by letters" (*OED*). The relationship of the literal and the figurative in *Nightwood* is, in a certain sense, chiasmic, as though literal and figurative were mirror images of each other. (Chiasmus [a. Gr., fr. $\chi\acute{\iota}\alpha\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu$ to mark with or like a *chi* (X, χ)] [*OED*].) There is a great deal of mirror-imaging in this text in general--in the mirror images of broken halves converging; men seeking their own shadows, lovers seen half in the dark and half in the light, etc.--, and this chiasmic arrangement, in which neither side (or clause) is privileged over the other (see aphorism no. 10) and in which the binary parts are nonexclusive, being inverted images of each other, appears instead of the hierarchically arranged and mutually exclusive binary opposition organizing Aristotelian mimesis (the real/the reflection). Note this similitic, figurative, description of Robin:

[...] as if this girl were the converging halves of a broken fate, setting face, in sleep, toward itself in time, as an image and its reflection in a lake seem parted only by the hesitation in the hour. (p. 38)

This doubled simile is very much a figuration to the second power, and it emphasises the figurative nature of the literal narrative system. It follows upon and *supplements* a metaphoric description of Robin as a "figurehead in a museum", and, as a figurative supplement to a metaphor, it is twice removed from what might be called verisimilitude. Yet, it is also in the service of the literal narrative system because it is a description of a character. (It is, as well, quite "literal" in that it follows "the ordinary rules of grammar" [OED].) In this literal X figurative passage, there are two primary chiasmic arrangements: the two "converging halves of a broken fate, setting face"; and the "image and its reflection". Each chiasma seems one thing composed of two halves which are mirror images of each other: the broken fate sets face toward *itself*; and the image faces its image (*itself*). But, this one thing is also always two because of a difference in "time", a deferral, that prohibits a simultaneous at-one-ment. The halves of the broken fate converge, but they are also held apart by the difference between "sleep" (eternity) and "time" (chronology). The image and its reflection "seem parted only by the hesitation in the hour". Thus, within sameness--which is the principal informing concept of "phallogocentrism" and the basis of the mutual exclusiveness of binary opposition¹⁹--*Nightwood* posits a difference that is a deferral of sameness. What is more, the text, in the final figure of this passage, subverts the notion of "origin" upon which the concept of sameness rests: what is reflected in the verisimilar lake (for this figure seems to depend on verisimilitude) is not a thing or an object but a reflection--"an image".

There is no original object which would serve as a singular origin of all this imaging, and the back and forth play of mirroring and inversion cannot be stopped at some prior source of first image. The result of this "image" placed where an object should be is the indefinite deferral of literal meaning, for where there is no origin there can be no singular and absolute signification. This suggested *différance* is *Nightwood's* per-version (a turning *through* and *against*) of the orthodox distinctions between the literal and the figurative, between verisimilitude and the "ephemeral and supplementary", and it might be said that this passage is emblematic of *Nightwood's* challenge to the concept of mimesis supporting the orthodox expectations of narrative, for mimesis *should* always constitute a reflection of reality. It might also be said that this passage can function as a trope for the text itself.

Yet another possible trope for the text is the following passage in which the figure of "Nikka", the illustrated man, is de-scribed. In this passage, too, the concept of origin is problematic:

"Now I am thinking of Nikka, the nigger who used to fight the bear in the *Cirque de Paris*. There he was, crouching all over the arena without a stitch on, [...] tattooed from head to heel with all the *ameublement* of depravity! Garlanded with rosebuds and hackwork of the devil--was he a sight to see! Though he couldn't have done a thing (and I know what I'm talking about in spite of all that has been said about black boys) if you stood him in a gigmill for a week, though (it's said) at a stretch it spelled Desdemona. Well then, over his belly was an angel from Chartres; on

each buttock, half public, half private, a quotation from the book of magic, a confirmation of the Jansenist theory, I'm sorry to say and here to say it. Across his knees, I give you my word, 'I' on one and on the other, 'can' [...] Across his chest, beneath a beautiful caravel in full sail, two clasped hands, the wrist bones fretted with point lace. On each bosom an arrow-speared heart, each with different initials but with equal drops of blood; and running into the armpit, all down one side, the word said by Prince Arthur Tudor, son of King Henry the Seventh, when on his bridal night he called for a goblet of water (or was it water?) [...] The legs [...] were devoted entirely to vine work, topped by the swart Rambler rose copied from the coping of the Hamburg house of Rothschild. Over his *dos*, believe it or not and I shouldn't, a terse account in early monkish script--called by some people indecent, by others Gothic--of the really deplorable condition of Paris before hygiene was introduced and nature had its way up to the knees. And just above what you mustn't mention, a bird flew carrying a streamer on which was incised, 'Garde tout!' I asked him why all this barbarity; he answered he loved beauty and would have it about him." (pp. 16-17)

"Nikka, the nigger who used to fight the bear in the *Cirque de Paris*", brought to mind via a discourse wending its way through the differences between "legend" and "history", "Jew" and "Christian", youth and age, straddles the difference between the veritable body and the fictional text. "Nikka" is not a character: "he" is a rhetorical figure in one of the Doctor's hyperbolic dissertations, and it is as a rhetorical figure that "Nikka" should be read.²⁰ This rhetorical body (is) text: on Nikka's dark skin are incised not only legend (the story of "Arthur Tudor") and history ("the really deplorable condition of Paris before hygiene was introduced"), Christianity (signified by "an angel from

Chartres") and heresy ("a quotation from the book of magic, a confirmation of the Jansenist theory"), love ("an arrow-speared heart") and murder ("at a stretch it spelled Desdemona")--all those contraries in which the discourse of *Nightwood* is embroiled--but also some of the predominant recurring fixtures of the text, the rose and the bleeding heart, the quotation and the copy, the indecent and the Gothic. It is as though Nikka the circus performer (the dark human body in its engagement with the beast) is a body held up to the text, the self-reflection of the text as an inscribed body (darkly seen).

However, we must be careful to avoid assigning referential priority to either the body or the text in this text/body reflective relationship. Certainly, the body appears to be the bearer and composite principle of the text. In this passage, formal unity, as such, is entirely dependent upon the composite body of Nikka. What brings together all the disparate bits of tattooed text is their inscription on correlative sites--belly, buttocks, knees, chest, bosoms, armpit, legs, etc.--of one body, one skin, one page. In a reading that would locate, in this passage, some intimation of source or prior sameness, Nikka's body would seem to be the singular origin--as page and as referent of the various symbols--of text. And yet, the tattoos themselves, while bearing their own symbolic and/or carnivalesque (ribald) signification of the body parts on which they are inscribed, bear no classificatory, thematic resemblance to each other and often fail to meet mimetic expectation--there are hearts on both sides of the breast, for example. The body may

hold the text together, as it were, but the text, simultaneously, tears the body apart, rendering it un-verisimilar. The human body, the material referent *par excellence*, is also only an articulation of disparate and contradictory parts. Even specific parts are broken up and confused: between "Desdemona", "the swart rambler rose", and the bird with its "Garde tout!", how does one find or identify the penis? (And the penis, of course, as the biological artifact of the phallus organizing western systems of signification, is the one organ about which there should be no confusion.)

The body cannot properly be said to be the origin of the image of Nikka any more than the inscribed text can, for the same problem of priority posed by the previous passage is obviously at work here. Note that, in addition to the con-fusion of signification, specific denominations of certain parts of the body--"what you mustn't mention"--are elided as well. The antecedent of "it" in "at a stretch it spelled Desdemona" is absent, as well as what "it" spelled when it wasn't "at a stretch" (De...mon., Des.....a?) Note, too, all the elisions, or deferrals, of what would be the original texts copied on Nikka's body. There is the uncited "quotation from the book of magic" (which book?), the unspecified "different initials", the unrecorded "word said by Prince Arthur Tudor", and the uncited "terse account in early monkish script". In other words, both possible origins of this reflection--the original text or the original object-body which would be the antecedent of all "it"s--are absent in this passage that is already marked by an improper confusion

and is given by an already questionable source-- "believe it or not and I shouldn't"--even though O'Connor gives us his "word". We might consider, too, the difficulty of reading a tattoo on black skin. At what point does the blue/black or dark red ink end and the black skin begin? Given the persistent darkness, there is always the likelihood of confusing skin and tattoo, paper and ink.

Thus, through this absence of singular origins or of the original referents for its figurative language, *Nightwood* overturns "the standard of verisimilitude" governing the relationship of literal narrative systems and figurative systems. The text offers another (carnavalesque and non-exclusive) relationship in its "version, con-, per-, in-" of the binary terms literal/figurative, tenor/vehicle, and body/text. This solicitation of the conventional distinctions between these binary terms has the effect of foregrounding writing as something more than the mere transmission of a preconceived plot with attendant figuration. *Nightwood's* chiastic con-fusion of the text-as-body-of-writing and body-as-text-of-life suggests that far more is at stake here than rhetorical categorization.

"We wash away our sense of sin, and what does that bath secure us? Sin, shining bright and hard. In what does the Latin bathe? True dust. We have made the literal error. We have used water, we are thus too sharply reminded. A European gets out of bed with a disorder that holds the balance. The layers of his deed can be traced back to the last leaf and the good slug be found creeping. *L'Echo de Paris* and his bedsheets were run off the same press. One may read in both

the travail life has had with him [...] The French are dishevelled and wise; the American tries to approximate it with drink. It is his only clue to himself. He takes it when his soap has washed him too clean for identification. The Anglo-Saxon has made the literal error; using water, he has washed away his page." (pp. 89-90)

This writing (on the page, the bedsheets, the body), which is "our sense of sin", the record of "the travail life has had", the traces of the dirty "deed", is both personal history and identity. In other words, the "subject", the "I", is a *printed/written* page. If the subject makes the "literal error" of washing off the dust/ink/marks/traces in the attempt to do away with "our sense of sin" and recapture a prior and singular state of cleanliness or purity (order), he loses his identification and gains only a sort of universal sin "shining bright and hard". In this case, original innocence (purity, cleanliness) is also a sort of original sin. The perfectness of origin is already, at its source, complicated by the notion of trespass. It is worth noting, too, that in this written passage, the antecedent of "it"--"It is his only clue [...]"; "He takes it [...]"--is again indeterminate. (Is "it" dishevelment and wisdom, or is "it" drink?) The primary English signifier of object-ness, the "it", does not accurately refer to a specific antecedent that would guarantee its meaning. Thus, in this text, it would appear that identity and history are very much a matter of printing (or writing) without the specific antecedence of an object/referent, whether inter- or extra-textual, that would finally determine meaning accurately, literally.

This relationship between writing and identity and/or history recurs, as a fundamental question, later in the text where, in certain small incisions in O'Connor's demand that Nora stop writing to Robin, can be seen what might be a (peculiarly Beckettian) textual "I" pleading for writing (identity and history) itself to stop:

"Can't you be done now, can't you give up?
Now be still, now that you know what the world
is about, knowing it's about nothing? [....] And
me who seem curious because no one has seen
me for a million years, and now I'm seen! Is
there such extraordinary need of misery to
make beauty? [....] Why not rest? Why not put
the pen away? [....] Can't you let any of us
loose? [....] So, I say, was Robin purposely
unspun? Was Jenny a sitting bitch for fun?
[....] Can't you rest now, lay down the pen?
Oh *papelero*, have I not summed up my time?"
(pp. 124-26)

This passage can be read on several levels: as a question directed by one character to another; as a character questioning (in search of) an author; as a text querying its own necessity. All of these are quite valid readings and could be used to make any number of theoretical points regarding characters aware of their own fictive status, implied authors, and/or self-reflective texts, but what is perhaps most striking in this passage is the simple posing (does it matter by whom?) of a very fundamental question. Why writing? Why the constraint: "Can't you let any of us [author, characters, reader?] loose?" Why the labour (as opposed to "still"ness), the making visible ("seen"), when motivation--the principal instigating force of speech, rhetoric, writing, according to Aristotelian tradition--is itself indeterminate? "Was Robin purposely

unspun? Was Jenny a sitting bitch for fun?" "Is there such extraordinary need of misery to make beauty?" Why write? The question is particularly provocative when posed (cited, situated) in a novel, that literary form defined as the progeny of writing and the book, if we recall Bakhtin's (written) history. (We might also recall, here, Beckett's provocative "expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.")²¹

That *Nightwood* is a text within which the matter of writing takes some precedence over character, plot development, etc. is a proposition well recognized by literary critics, as I have already noted. That the *matter* of writing may be posed as the *question* of writing, however, has occurred to few. Mairéad Hanrahan does note that, for Barnes, writing seems to be an attempt to halt the confusion that being human entails, but that writing "can only fix 'dismay'; the 'end' it attains is indecent". And, Hanrahan finishes by questioning if the "end" "would be better off unattained". However, for Hanrahan, writing is apparently palliative and predicated on a notion of "fixity" not unlike Plato's and Bakhtin's notions of an encrypted speech, and so her interesting suggestion is not particularly useful here, although it does intimate a direction that I will be taking by the end of this chapter—following the notion that writing is peculiarly involved with "the confusion that being human entails".²² And, almost alone among the critical crowd, Elizabeth Pochoda pays considerable attention to "the writer's suspicion of the

morality of writing itself." In the course of her argument for a negative teleology (the novel paradoxically striving for wordlessness) as an organizing principle of the text, she makes the interesting suggestion that the "goal for [the] characters in *Nightwood* is impersonality--to become anonymous and deprive the novelist of her material".²³ But, unfortunately, Pochoda pays little attention to the con-fusion of body and writing that we have already seen at work in the text, and her suggestion is predicated on a distinction between text and "material". I think that we need to pay particularly *close* attention to this con-fusion. Around about the con-junction of body and writing posited by this text, there is more at stake than the "morality of writing itself". Epistemological, and even ontological, orthodoxies are challenged, carnivalized, in *Nightwood's* solicitation of the relationship between writing and being.

I offer the following passage as an exemplary bridge between this section on *Nightwood's* carnivalization of the orthodox structures of novelistic discourse and the next section on the text's foregrounding of "writing":

In the tones of this girl's voice was the pitch of one enchanted with the gift of postponed abandon: the low drawling "aside" voice of the actor who, in the soft usury of his speech, withholds a vocabulary until the profitable moment when he shall be facing his audience --in her case a guarded extempore to the body of what would be said at some later period when she would be able to "see" them. (p. 38)

Here we have a "speech" which is marked by a withheld vocabulary, the deferred presentation of an explanation or meaning that is an already extant text, as the actor's speech is already the "text" of the play. The economy of this deferral is evident--payment (meaning) will be withheld until the "profitable moment" of full presence "when she would be able to 'see' them". In the meantime, the listener will be given an interest payment, a "guarded" (careful, protected) "extempore" (out of time, immediate) to what will be paid when the listener can be seen. This is the "soft usury of [...] speech", the withholding of capital (the sum of meaning) for the sake of a profitable accrual of interest. However, when this full meaning might be payed is indeterminate; after all, at this point Robin is already in the presence of her auditors--she has woken up and "recognized the doctor" (p. 36)--, and she *can* "see" them. What will be, then, the "profitable moment" of seeing and saying "the body of what would be said" if it is not the moment of being in the presence of auditors? And what about this other intimation of deferral within speech: "In the tones of this girl's voice was the pitch of one enchanted with the gift of postponed abandon"? Between the "gift" of postponed abandon and the "usury" of a withheld vocabulary, is there not some derangement in this economy? It might be said, in reply to these questions, that what is suggested here, by this passage, is that the "profitable moment" of seeing and saying it all is the future moment of a fatal investment in which the promised meaning will turn out to be, also, the relinquishing of the constraints and conventions of meaning and of identity. It might also be said that the "profitable moment" will

turn out to be Robin's ultimate orgiastic *salterello* with Nora's dog, another delivery of the *body* of what would be said.

III.

To make another beginning, on this side of the bridge, we might start with the matter of "speech", because it is supposed to have come before "writing", because it is supposed to signify the full presence (of the author) that writing lacks, because it is supposed to be involved with the truth, and because there is a great deal of speech, and speech-making, in the writing of *Nightwood*.

"Are you both really saying what you mean, or are you just talking?" (p. 18)

"Why talk?" (p. 49)

"I am deceiving you!" And he wondered what he meant, and why she did not hear. (p. 45)

Is speech in *Nightwood* motivated? This may seem merely a rhetorical question. Certainly, rhetoricians and those philosophers concerned with rhetoric, from Plato and Aristotle to Kenneth Burke and Wayne Booth, have treated of speech as essentially, fundamentally, motivated. It is purposive, emanating from an intention and bent toward an accomplishment. Although it may appear an achievement in itself, as

in the great classical orations, its proper (and good) function is to achieve some other end. Speech is never unmotivated: after Freud, even babble and the nonsensical are seen to have their motivations, for even unconscious intentions count in this scheme. Therefore, without intention or motivation, *there is no speech*. What is more, speech is distinctly human. The ability to speak is what distinguishes the human from the animal; and if speech is distinctly human, and if there is no speech without motivation, then motivation, intention, purposiveness, desire, must be the essential enabling characteristics of human "being". Because we speak, we must be capable of motivation: because we are capable of motivation, we are human and *more than* mere animals.

This *more than* is important; by this increment, humankind exceeds its animality: by this increment, humankind perceives itself as divided (being both mind and body, eternal and mortal, strong and weak) and yet unified (by the mastery, or ascendancy, of mind or spirit). And because humankind can "perceive itself", is capable of that sort of speech-enabled speculation, it can assume its own presence, its presence-to-itself. Thus speech is so much more than a tool of communication: it is significant of thought, intention, motivation and thus definitive of the human being as that living being capable of thought, self-awareness, of being beyond the body.

Of course, I am introducing nothing new here, simply reiterating the well-worn pattern organizing Western perceptions of humankind at

least since Plato. But I do think that such reiteration is necessary in a discussion of speech in *Nightwood*, for Barnes has situated the fundamental dilemma of the human condition precisely on this speech-enabled presupposition of a division between man and beast, between the mind and its body. In this text, speech is itself a "predicament".

One more point, before proceeding with this reading of speech in *Nightwood*: we should recall, once more, Bakhtin's emphasis on speech, the utterance of the speaking subject, within the definitive context of the novel. According to Bakhtin, the novel possesses this singular specificity: it is the only genre in which the inherent dialogism of the "word" is exposed or exteriorized. And this exposition occurs in, primarily, the speech of characters, motivated (by the necessity of plot teleology) speech relativized, made ambivalent, by an other superseding motivation, that of the "author" or "narrator". Thus, speech in the novel may be said to be literally poised on cross-purposes, and it is this speech-enabled conception of a dialogism of purposes that permits the very concept of the carnivalesque in language.

In the light of these considerations, the question posed above--"Is speech in *Nightwood* motivated?"--takes on a new hue. What is speech in the nightwood? "Why talk?" What is the strange necessity of this speech that marks off the human from the beast? Why, indeed, talk? As an intermediary answer, or suggestion of the possibility of an answer, I

recite the following passage, the first paragraph of "Chapter One: Jesus Mundane" ("By Way of Introduction") of Barnes's *Ryder*:

Go not with fanatics who see beyond thee and thine, and beyond the coming and going of thee and thine, and yet beyond the ending thereof,—thy life and the lives that thou begettest, and the lives that shall spring from them, world without end,—for such need thee not, nor see thee, nor know thy lamenting, so confounded are they with thy damnation and the damnation of thy offspring, and the multiple damnation of thy offspring, and the multiple damnation of those multitudes that shall be of thy race begotten, unto the numbers of fishes in thin waters, and unto the number of fishes in great waters. Alike are they distracted with thy salvation and the salvation of thy people. Go thou, then, to lesser men, who have for all things unfinished and uncertain, a great capacity, for these shall not repulse thee, thy physical body and thy temporal agony, thy weeping and thy laughing and thy lamenting. Thy rendezvous is not with the Last Station, but with small comforts, like to apples in the hand, and small cups quenching, and words that go neither here nor there, but traffic with the outer ear, and gossip at the gates of thy insufficient agony.²⁴

We should note, here in this carnivalesque parody of biblical language, a fundamental juxtaposition—which runs throughout Barnes's work—of the "fanatics" "confounded" and "distracted" by the transcendental abstractions of eternal damnation and salvation and the teleological function of the "Last Station", the cross (and crux of damnation and salvation) which gives form and meaning to the apparent vicissitudes of human history, and the "lesser men, who have for all things unfinished and uncertain [the temporal, the quotidian, the

physical a great capacity", who have no truck with the making of history or religious metaphysics, but a "rendezvous" with "words that go neither here nor there" toward any kind of meaning. In this passage, the biblical insistence on the priority of the religious and metahistorical transcendental is countered and contradicted by a quasi-biblical insistence on the priority and propriety of the mortal. The one way lies Truth and belief in the Word; the other way lies physical experience and palliative chatter.

By temperament Nora was an early Christian; she believed the word [...] The world and its history were to [her] like a ship in a bottle; she herself was outside and unidentified, endlessly embroiled in a preoccupation without a problem. (pp. 51-53)

"Look here", said the doctor. "Do you know what has made me the greatest liar this side of the moon, telling my stories to people like you, to take the mortal agony out of their guts, and to stop them from rolling about, and drawing up their feet, and screaming, with their eyes staring over their knuckles with misery which they are trying to keep off, saying, 'Say something, Doctor, for the love of God!' And me talking away like mad."
(p. 135)

In both directions, there is a confounding and a distraction, some attempt to extricate the human being from its (physical) self, its "mortal agony". On the one hand, there is belief in the "word", the Christian *logos* or Christ, that which was with God, and was God, from the beginning and through "whom all things were made".²⁵ In the first chapter of his gospel, John goes on to explain that this *logos* became a

"light" revealing God to mankind immured in the darkness of the world. Light and dark: perhaps the fundamental binary opposition organizing Western thought,²⁶ and within this "opposition", the "word", which should be read here as "speech" because of its involvement with the Holy Spirit or "breath" of God, is definitely on the absolutely good side, along with truth, understanding, right reason, pure spirituality, all those clarities made possible by the purposive shedding of a metaphorical light. The opposing "world", dark sphere of physicality, bestiality, and mortality, the vast speechless material otherwise known as "flesh", does not stand a chance in Christian teleology. Word becomes flesh, in Christ, that flesh (death) might be destroyed and existence (being) become eternal. To believe in the *Iogos*, as that "early Christian" (and Platonist) John did, is to believe in the eventual ascendancy of "light" (immaterial, spiritual, contemplative, eternal) over "dark" (material, physical, unconscious, mortal). Thus the world, which is both secondary and doomed, might be detached from contemplative "reality" and contained "like a ship in a bottle", having been formed, identified and, therefore, rendered sensible as a referent within a system of meaning. In this context, the suffering of the body may be diminished, or confounded, considered either insignificant (because temporal) or instrumental to a higher purpose (which is the ideal function of martyrdom). Herein lies the endless "preoccupation without a problem", the contemplative speech-enabled detachment—or perhaps more properly, distraction—from the material body.

On the other hand, there is Dr. O'Connor's insistence that speech is simply, and insufficiently, palliative. (We should recite, here, O'Connor's admonishment that "the contemplative life is only an effort [...] to hide the body so that feet won't stick out" [p. 134], the "feet" being the most unbearable sight (or site) of death, much more sorry than the head, for "[t]hey are most awfully tipped up from the earth" [p. 154].) Speech is only the doctor's altruistic lying, the telling of stories to distract the agonized patient: it cannot cure: it cannot totally obliterate, even for a time, "mortal agony". Neither light nor truth, neither understanding nor victory over flesh, speech is only motivated by a purpose that can never be realized, by impossibility. It is redundant from the very start, being only a trafficking with the "outer ear" of an informal, ineluctable, physicality that is the condition of human being. (Herein lies the "preoccupation that [is] its own predicament" [p. 47]?) The speech-enabled contemplation that *cannot* detach from the material body because the "predicament" [pre-*dica*-ment, before speaking, before consecrating, as well as saying before, premising] of human being lies obstinately in the breach?) This is speech pushed to the periphery of being: no longer the essential centre of a hierarchically organized system of life, it is simply the rider to an amorphous, "unfinished and uncertain", materiality that exceeds the boundaries, or closures, of a system of logocentric binary opposition.

This peculiar decentering of that system privileging speech, as *logos*, marks, in one way or another, practically all of the doctor's speeches. In his earliest conversation with Nora, he remarks:

"I, as a medical man, know in what pocket a man keeps his heart and soul, and in what jostle of the liver, kidneys and genitalia these pockets are pilfered. There is no pure sorrow. Why? It is bedfellow to lungs, lights, bones, guts and gall! There are only confusions; about that you are quite right, Nora my child, confusions and defeated anxieties--there you have us, one and all."
(p. 22)

"There is no pure sorrow [...] There are only confusions." In such speech, the ideality enabled by the categorical distinction between light and dark, soul or mind and body, is disrupted or disorganized, jostled as it were, in a carnivalesque movement that solicits the rigid foundations of hierarchical or entelechial organization from the *genitalia* up. In such speech, light becomes "lights", organs, offal.

"I, as good a Catholic as they make, have embraced every confection of hope, and yet I know well, for all our outcry and struggle, we shall be for the next generation not the massive dung fallen from the dinosaur, but the little speck left of a humming-bird; so as well sing our *Chi vuol la Zingarella* (how women love it!) while I warble my *Sonate au Crépuscule*, throwing in *der Erlkonig* for good measure, not to mention *Who is Sylvia?* Who is anybody! (p. 154)

Since we are bound, for all our noise, to insignificance, to indiscernable dust or dung, why not simply "sing" of the twilight and the

mystery of love? This subversive argument for the "lesser", for the quotidian ("anybody") and unenlightened, runs like a coloured thread through the doctor's speeches, whether addressed to the form-loving Felix or the high-minded Nora or to no-one in particular. (We should recall, here, O'Connor's earlier disquisition on "legend" and "history".) But are we justified in positing such a clear-cut comparison: is this a literal case of characters representing a "norm" (the narrated idealisms of Nora and Felix) and its ameliorization or subversion (in the speech of O'Connor)? I would suggest that things are not quite that simple, that there are resistances in the text--instigated, perhaps, or exposed, by the doctoral speeches challenging the logocentric privileging of speech--inhibiting the sort of foreclosure of meaning that such allegorization conventionally entails. In other words, the tremors set to work by the challenging of the concept of the centrality of speech in a particular ontological system reverberate throughout the text in such a way that it is impossible to reduce any aspect of the text to a specific, extractible, meaning or "idea".

One more small example: if we return to, or recite, the passage describing Nora's belief in the "word", which has already been discussed as an effect of logocentric organization, we might note certain crucial inconsistencies. "By temperament Nora was an early Christian; she believed the word." In the predicating analysis, I made the, perhaps forgiveable, assumption of association between "early Christian" and "the word". Within the contextual specificity of Christianity, "the Word"

means Jesus Christ; that is what the *Logos* is. But, here, in this passage from *Nightwood*, we have "the word", small 'w'. If we continue to assume a Christian association, we are faced with the possibility of "the Word" having been decapitalized, decapitated, dismissed from office, divested of funds. And if "the Word" itself is usurped and/or bankrupt, what might we say for that entire logocentric system of meaning which it sustains? Is it not shaken, decentred (con-, per-, in-, verted) by ambivalence, if not ambiguity? What is more, if we continue with the recited passage, past its ellipses, we come to Nora's contemplative detachment from the "world and its history" and yet another peculiarity. Here, Nora is described (or de-scribed) as "outside" of world and history which, in the either/or terms of orthodox Christianity, would signify being in a "state of grace", or eternity, or in the presence of God. To be in the presence of God, in the full presence (that presence which privileges speech as unmediated) of the Absolute "I Am"--is this not also to be identified, to be made one, with Presence Itself? Yet, Nora is "unidentified", "outside and unidentified". Of course, it might be suggested that "the world and its history" functions as a definitive antecedent for "unidentified" as it does, perhaps, for "outside", but such a grammatical relationship is not *made clear* by the syntax. Under the shadow of ambivalence, that "unidentified" can be read either way: the important thing to note is that, under a word divested of its authority, both identity (along with history) and full presence are impossibly remote.

What, then, *can* we make of speech in this text, of those numerous *passages* (crossings, *portages*) set apart by *doubled inverted commas* or *quotation marks* signifying the thought-intention-presence of this or that speaking-character, when the text itself seems to disrupt such systematic distinction? Is it not possible that these set apart passages, in the *absence* of thought-intention-presence, along with their (grappling, lifting) *quotation marks*, are writing too—writing masquerading as speech, carrying speech along, projecting the illusion of a separate speech, pretending to quote (the price of) pre-texts that do not exist?

I am following two connecting threads in moving from speech to writing. First, of course, I am being complicit with the predominant either/or insistence of binary opposition in viewing writing as the (deprivileged, duplicitous, denigrated) other or opposite of speech. If speech is not "speech", if the presence that guarantees speech turns out to be an absence, then speech *must* be writing. Secondly, and more pertinently, I am taking a lead from a particular sort of metaphor, the general metaphor of writing, as it makes its many and varied appearances in the text. I have already noted the complicity of body and writing in *Nightwood*, a complicity that might be reinforced in logocentric, Christian, terms by the formula "as writing is to speech, so body is to soul". The alignment might be seen as quite conventional, were we not already aware of the incipient decentering of *logocentrism* in the text.

What, then, of this complicity of the metaphor of writing and the body in this particular body of writing that is the text? Dr. O'Connor tells Nora that "The scalpel and the Scriptures have taught me the little I did not already know" (p. 153), and it may prove useful to dwell, for a space, on the conjunctive coupling of scalpel and Scripture (putting aside, for a later chapter, the provoking question of O'Connor's preknowledge). On the one hand, we have an alliterative, poetic, coupling of two opposing series of connotations, these being the series instigated by "scalpel" (body, anatomy, physicality, mortality, etc.) and the series instigated by "Scriptures" (language, ontotheology, transcendental signification, immortality, etc.). On the other hand, we have a certain etymological connivance between "scalpel" (< L. *scalpellum*: "a small knife, scalpel, lancet", sharing its root with L. vb. *scalpere*: "to scratch, to cut, carve, engrave [of surface work]" [*Lewis and Short*]) and "Scriptures" (< L. *scriptura*: "a writing, written characters" [*Lewis and Short*]), facilitated by the etymological history of the verb 'to write' (< OE *writan* < ON *rita*: "to score, write"; "To form [letters, symbols, words, etc.] by carving, graving, or incision, OE"; "To impress or stamp marks indicating [some condition or quality] *on, in, or over* a person, etc. ME"; "To inscribe letters *in, on, or upon* a hard or plastic surface by scoring, tracing, engraving, OE" [*OED*]). Thus, *Nightwood* might be seen to proffer, under the general aegis of pedagogy ("taught me") or epistemology, a "writing" that is--as well as "penning"--surgery, incision, scratching, cutting, carving, engraving, impressing, stamping marks, tattooing, scoring, tracing, any process of leaving a

trace or mark or scar on both animate and inanimate matter. Recall the exemplary case of the tattooed "Nikka". Writing, then, in the event of a fallen or decapitalized speech, radically exceeds its conventional designation as the mere skeletal remains of an absent full presence. It *might be seen* to usurp (or cut into or add marks to) the general terrain of speech proper, as I noted earlier in those passages where experience imprints (writes) both history and identity on the skin of the body. In a sense, writing, in this text, seems to pervade all those areas and human arenas in relation to which it has traditionally been marginalized. Certainly, this writing has cast its shadow (recall Nikka's dark skin) over that which has been defined by "light".

Take, for instance, the following complication of that "spiritual" emotion "Love" with the metaphor of writing:

Love becomes the deposit of the heart, analogous in all degrees to the "findings" in a tomb. As in one will be charted the taken place of the body, the raiment, the utensils necessary to its other life, so in the heart of the lover will be traced, as an indelible shadow, that which he loves. In Nora's heart lay the fossil of Robin, intaglio of her identity, and about it for its maintenance ran Nora's blood. Thus the body of Robin could never be unloved, corrupt or put away. Robin was now beyond timely changes, except in the blood that animated her. That she could be spilled of this fixed the walking image of Robin in appalling apprehension on Nora's mind--Robin alone, crossing streets, in danger. Her mind became so transfixed that, by the agency of her fear, Robin seemed enormous and polarized, all catastrophes ran toward her, the magnetized predicament; and crying out, Nora would wake from sleep, going back

through the tide of dreams into which her anxiety had thrown her, taking the body of Robin down with her into it, as the ground things take the corpse, with minute persistence, down into the earth, leaving a pattern of it on the grass, as if they stitched as they descended. (pp. 56-57)

There are two "writings", or two developments of the trope (simile) of writing, in this paragraph, one opening it and one closing it (opening and closing the grave's [graph's] door). The first posits an analogy between the precipitates of love and death, precipitates that are legible traces of what might have once been, or seems to have been, but is not now. The second posits an analogy between burial and patterning (tracing or weaving). In both tropes, the marking (charting, tracing), the very possibility of marking, *depends upon* absence (of the body or present lover) for it is the processes of absenting, or making absent, that render the precipitates or castings constituting the marks. Of course, this is precisely the point that Plato and Bakhtin (and, between them, almost everyone else who has considered the point) make: writing, as such, is the (dead) remainder of an absent presence. Note, however, in the first trope, the "taken place" of the body which is a scene of the usurpation of the body by its metonymic remainders ("the raiment", etc.). This is a scene of replacement or substitution, rather than of abdication or loss. But, is writing simply a sort of metonymic substitution for speech? What about this writing on the heart? Certainly, there is nothing new in this metaphor ("in the heart of the lover will be traced"): God has been writing his laws on men's hearts since time immemorial. Yet this last consideration suggests another possible

direction, for surely God's laws are more than mere remainders, being valued *dicta*, just as a "deposit" is more than a chemical precipitate (the alchemy of the word?), being, also, funds or goods stored (in a bank) for safekeeping and geomorphic stores of valuable ores and minerals. In the course of the cited passage, "deposit" becomes "fossil of Robin" becomes "intaglio of her identity", the engraving of Robin's identity (both genitive and objective?), becomes "the body of Robin", now in safe-keeping space, enwombed/entombed in Nora's heart and, so, "beyond timely changes" (infinitely recurring like the writing that inhabits space, independent of the time of the voice's passing). Two things are worth noting here: first, the identity of Robin (who is elsewhere, consistently, defined as being without identity or self-awareness) is (in) writing rather than in speech-signifying-presence; secondly, the usurpation of a bankrupt presence by inscription yields a certain extra value rather than a depletion of funds, even though the actual principal has disintegrated. Obviously, this dream-writing, in which we find the identity and body of Robin perpetuated, does not depend on any actual presence of Robin. Rather, the identity and the body of Robin are like fetishes, overdetermined and over-valued inscribed images standing in the place of an irrecoverable lost object. (Note the polarization of the image of Robin, the assignment of positive and negative [attractive] values.)

Yet, the dream ends--and it is important that this little *salterello* by the trope of writing takes place in the dream, for the dream is the

site of the carnivalizing of personal history and identity where formal expectations are played with or thwarted in the operations of an other sort of logic. Here, the "real" narrative determinants of chronology, cause-and-effect, mimesis, are shaken loose, fragmented and re-ordered, as constituents of form rather than determinants, according to another sort of necessity, which I will turn to in a moment. As the dream ends, the dreamer awakes to consciousness, the "ground things" take the "corpse" "down into the earth, leaving a pattern of it on the grass, as if they stitched [a text-ile?] as they descended". Here endeth Nora's first dream, with a burial and a pattern, a memory-tracing, of the dreamed event on the surface of the grave. Her third dream also involves the opening of a grave (her grandmother's) and its closing with a staged return to consciousness: "And I woke up and still it was going on: it went down into the dark earth of my waking as if I were burying them with the earth of my lost sleep" (p. 149). 'To wake' is to bury, cover-up, hide (the ambivalence of "wake" is played on here--to come to consciousness, the funereal celebration, the draught left of an object moving through water): 'to sleep' is (perchance) to dream, to dig (cut, incise), to enter the grave (en-grave). And in dreaming, in the grave, is writing.

Her second dream (pp. 62-63) sets itself in a house, on the "last floor but one" of which is Nora's "grandmother's room", "saturated with the lost presence of her grandmother" although it is "the absolute opposite of any known room her grandmother had ever moved or lived in".

The room is "set with all the belongings of her grandmother", which are listed as "portraits" of a great-uncle who had died, time-faded carpets and curtains, "a plume and an ink well--the ink faded into the quill". It is a portrait of absence and the mark (of time, paint, ink). Once again, the dream is in a crypt, a house of the dead. Nora, from her grandmother's room, looks down "into the body of the house [...] where now Robin had entered the dream". She calls to Robin to "Come up", "knowing it was impossible because the room was taboo". Her (censorious, taboo-making?) grandmother is also in the dream, in two figures: the one "flowing away in a long gown of soft folds and chin laces", seeming "in the continual process of leaving" the room; the other "dressed as a man, wearing a billycock and a corked moustache, [...] in tight trousers and a red waistcoat, [...] greeting Nora] with a leer of love". The former is "not entirely her recalled grandmother": the latter is a recollection "of her childhood" (the grandmother in wolf's clothing?). The "architecture of dream had rebuilt" a doubled grandmother who seems the aged counterpart of Robin (who "is incest too" [p. 156]), the "invert" who also wears both "gowns" "that made her seem newly ancient" (p. 42) and "white flannel trousers" (p. 34). The dream itself is interesting, for it *seems to offer*, quite obviously, certain insights into Nora's condition and her love for Robin. Yet, are these insights, these proffered possibilities of analysis, trustworthy or well-based references when the dream-figures of Nora's grandmother are:

[...] her grandmother "drawn upon" as a prehistoric ruin is drawn upon, symbolizing her life out of her life, and which now appeared to

Nora as something being done to Robin, Robin
disfigured and eternalized by the hieroglyphics
of sleep and pain. (p. 63)

Again, we are faced with the "writing" of the dream, a non-phonetic "hieroglyphics of sleep and pain", that at once draws upon life as a source of figure and draws upon life as the Egyptian scribe marked the crypt walls and the modern graffiti artist marks the "ruin", disfiguring (by condensation, substitution, displacement) as it eternalizes (makes "perpetual, incessant, always recurring" and, also, "infernal, damned" [OED; see "Eternal"]),²⁷ making a symbol of life as it symbolizes life. And, we should note the *non-phonetic* nature of the hieroglyph, which does not presuppose the priority of the *phone* of the voice. The hieroglyph is scarcely a proper substitute for a logocentric speech-presence-totalizing intention: if this writing is a substitute for presence, then it is a substitute with interest, with a certain accrual that exceeds the loss of principle. It is both loss of meaning and proliferation, an eternal proliferation, of meanings—a defence against, or deferral of, the expenditure *without reserve* that is climax and "death". Freud, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which is always an interpretation of a writing (analogous to the "hieroglyphics" of "the ancient writers"), describes the same sort of economy:²⁸

Wherever a wish-fulfillment is unrecognizable and disguised there must be a tendency to defend oneself against this wish, and in consequence of this defense the wish is unable to express itself save in a distorted form [....] The political writer who has unpleasant truths to tell to those in power finds himself in a like position. If he tells everything without

reserve, the Government will suppress them
[....]²⁹

Thus the loss of desire that is "wish-fulfillment", the dangerous telling "everything without reserve", is deferred by *masking* and *distortion*, the proliferation of faces, veils, and images. Later in the text, in reference to a certain sort of masking, or substitution, Freud notes:

The process of shifting and rearrangement which replaces material of psychic significance by material which is indifferent [...] has already taken place in those earlier periods of life and has since become fixed in the memory. [Recall Nora's first and second dreams in which there are the fixing of an image, the leaving of a memory-trace, and the recollection of a "figure" from childhood.] Those elements which were originally indifferent are in fact no longer so, since they have acquired the value of psychologically significant material. That which has actually remained indifferent [never been written?] can never be reproduced in the dream.

From the foregoing exposition the reader may rightly conclude that I assert that there are no indifferent dream-stimuli; and therefore no guileless dreams [...] Dreams which are apparently guileless turn out to be the reverse of innocent if one takes the trouble to interpret them; if I may be permitted the expression, they all show "the mark of the beast".³⁰

Thus, we have dreams "show[ing] 'the mark of the beast'", the added value that is an effect of this economy of substitution and reversal, and that is also a deferral of, or detour around, a fatal investment without reserve. Of the "French", who have not made the "literal error" of washing away their "page", Dr. O'Connor remarks:

"The French have made a detour of filthiness—Oh, the good dirt! Whereas [Americans] are of a clean race, of a too eagerly washing people, and this leaves no road for you. The brawl of the Beast leaves a path for the Beast."
(p. 84)

Perhaps, this is why the "American" Nora must dream, to accomplish that writing which her washing prohibits. But, to recite that question already quoted, "Why write?": is it not to trace the "mark of the beast" as "a path for the Beast" (a "road for you"), "a roadway for it", to avoid it becoming "an engine stalling itself upon your chest, halting its wheels against your heart" (p. 84)? This pathmaking "for the beast" bears a certain similarity to Freud's *Bahnung* (lit. "pathbreaking", though frequently translated as "facilitation" or "breaching"), a "natural science" model of the repetitious furrowing or engraving of the neurones that occurs in the reception of stimuli and results in the constitution of memory.³¹ As Jacques Derrida points out in his reading of Freud, this (painful) repeated tracing of paths which is memory is also a deferral of pain "beyond a certain quantity" which would destroy psychic structure:

In accordance with a motif which will continue to dominate Freud's thinking, this movement is described as the effort of life to protect itself by *deferring* a dangerous cathexis, that is, by constituting a reserve (*Vorrat*). The threatening expenditure or presence are deferred with the help of breaching or repetition [....] Is it not already death at the origin of a life which can defend itself against death only through an *economy* of death, through deferment, repetition, reserve?

This life-preserving "movement" of breaching and repetition, of course, "conform[s] to a metaphoric of the written trace", for what other *supplement* both preserves (records) an event and permits its repetition (reading), though not beyond a certain dangerous quantity of pain, as well as writing does?³² Perhaps the writing, the barbarous inscription, of *Nightwood*--in its speech, its characters, and its dreams as well--is just such a tracing, and just such a deferral. Perhaps the text is the inscribed body in a necessarily staged "fight [with] the bear in the *Cirque de Paris*".

Writing--metaphors frequently appear at critical turns in the text--when Nora works at the knots of her dreams or when Dr. O'Connor confronts her with her obsessional behaviour, for example. It is as if writing itself is somehow precedent to history or narrative, as though it were a fundamental activity of the human psyche before it became the crypt of living speech or the static medium of a story, message, or history. Writing in this text is not, as Hanrahan would have it, the making of an image out of confusion; rather, it is an integral part of the con-fusion that is psychical activity (conscious and unconscious). Writing is not a tool: it is a compulsive "effort of life to protect itself" against the end, against closure. History, and written narrative in general, are but reflexes of a real drive against closure and not unadulterated relations or re-presentations of a prior "reality". By faking closures (chronologies; beginnings, middles and ends; identifications) that can be traced over and over again, writing defers

what we fear--the threatening presence of death. As O'Connor points out, unexpurgated "[i]destiny and history are untidy; we fear memory of that disorder" (p. 118). So, "we" make a path for that untidy, fearful beast to stop it "halting its wheels upon [our] heart". Why write? Because it is the only way to hold on to one's heart.

Obviously, then, writing is in essence a (primary and necessary) subterfuge and not an innocent or lifeless carrier of truth. Writing, like crime, is a way to go back, "unspin fate" (p. 125), and "lay hands on the shudder of a past that is still vibrating" (p.119) in a perpetual repetition that is also a deferment. In this text, writing is a crime, a prolongation of (Robin's, Nora's, the doctor's) suffering. "But", as the doctor points out, "all dreadful events are of profit". The criminal and the profitable are con-fused in a writing that is an "economy of death" rather than an orderly relation of external (to writing) events. This criminal and carnivalesque con-, per-, in-version of orthodox conceptions of writing itself informs all of *Nightwood's* responses to the conventional expectations of history and so-called realist fiction.

At this point, the question of *Nightwood's* relationship to Freudian psychoanalytic theory arises, and along with it the question of writing and gender: to what degree does the barbarous inscription (the "path for the Beast") of *Nightwood* rely on what might be called a non-phallic pen? I will be addressing this question specifically in Chapter Five. First, however, I want to bring the text face to face with the very

paradigm of Western phallogocentric onto-theology (which also
underwrites the Freudian text as it underwrites western history)—
Pauline Christian discourse.

CHAPTER FOUR

NIGHTWOOD: GOD'S LITTLE BAG OF TRICKS

The carnival is always involved with the Church: it is, properly, the Church's "other", an other simultaneously inside the church, as the inherent possibility of the system's inversion, and outside, as an operation without the limits of the church's dicta but incorporating, if perversely, the system's structures. The two cannot be disjoined. In a certain, terministic sense, then, the carnivalesque text is always involved with/in the "Church", with/in the predominant Western system of significations ordered under the sign of the One God. The text organizes itself, produces itself, both within and against the Church (as discourse): it adopts and exploits--as it is composed of--Pauline Christian doctrines, inverting and perverting them, turning them back on their grand progenitor (the first speaker and *omnipotent sire*) *so that* the progenitor might be laughed (with a very "serious" laughter) out of countenance.¹

Nightwood is pre-occupied with the "religious": theological and ontotheological questions of origin, belief, faith, hope, and doubt riddle the narrative; characters are defined, define themselves, in terms of varying religious (spiritual) proclivities; "God" is invoked, evoked, questioned and examined, but never revoked--at least, not properly. In this (largely definitive) sense, *Nightwood* could be--and has been--called a religious text. But, in its engagement with the religious, *Nightwood* is most overtly "carnivalesque", and if its critics, with the notable exception of Jane Marcus, have not employed this particular adjective--and its attendant theoretical complex--they have certainly noted the

text's carnivalesque inversion, perversion or corruption of Pauline Christian paradigms.² Kenneth Burke remarks upon *Nightwood's* secularization of religious passion, its development of the concept of a "transcendence downward", and its secular rewriting of the conventional (Christian) reading of the New Testament as fulfillment of the Old.³ Donna Gerstenberger suggests that the first chapter of *Nightwood* presents a "mock-creation narrative" which is a (perverse) rewriting of *Genesis*.⁴ Ulrich Weisstein, writing in the Catholic journal *Renascence*, examines *Nightwood's* institution of "sham categories" in the place of conventional typological distinctions, so that "theatre" replaces "history", "museum" replaces "church", "acrobat" replaces "priest", and "liar" replaces "prophet", and he closes his article with the intriguing suggestion that *Nightwood* is a sort of nighttime *Divine Comedy*, the "confused dream" of Dante's "clear vision of the beyond".⁵ Elizabeth Pochoda suggests that the text has "found a way for satire and the apocalypse to merge", and quotes Hawkes's statement that, in writing *Nightwood*, Barnes assumed "a prophetic role in reverse".⁶ And so on. Even F.R. Leavis, in *The Common Pursuit*, recognizes the text's (immoral) inversion of Christian desire: "Then there is Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* it deals, of course, with Evil".⁷ As this is all he writes about the text, we might be forgiven for assuming that this is all he noticed, but he must be given credit for having hit the nail, more or less, on the head. Certainly, to secularize the divine, laicize properly clerical discourse, introduce "sham categories" in the place of proper types, is,

from the point of view of a certain dominant morality, to deal with "Evil", to divert the gaze from the Good, to participate in carnival.

The sort of simple in(per)version intimated by Leavis--the focussing on the inverse or negative terms of binary oppositions--is projected overtly by *Nightwood*. "[....] we do not "climb" to heights, we are eaten away to them", says Dr. O'Connor (p. 118), replacing the conventional connotations of ascension with those of diminution or deprivation and offering an exemplar of the perverted condition of progressive movement in the text (Burke's "transcendence downward"). Of course, if we attribute an overriding general significance to the title itself, this text *is* "nightwood", an unilluminated shadowy place where things may not be known (seen) in what is proper to them, their truth in the Aristotelean/Platonic sense, but speculated upon--if we can *speculate* in these conditions--in the unlight of their impropriety. Thus, we should expect to find that inversion is the text's informing discursive principle. Is this much not obvious in the titular turning away from the Light? It might be said that *Nightwood* flowers (like the carnival) at the point of inversion, at the point where the eye reverts to seeing "through a glass darkly", which is also to say that inversion itself cannot be the aim of the text.⁸ In a sense, inversion is already assumed as the condition of being: the text makes no pretence at discovering or unveiling or introducing the (negative) dark backside of a seemingly absolute term. "Evil" has always "here": "the night has been going on for a long time". (p. 82)

Of course, this is going to complicate things considerably. If we were able to state quite simply, with Leavis, that the text "deals with Evil", that it turns "Good" on its head to expose the opposite term inscribed on its bottom, then our analysis could proceed in a clear, straightforward, demonstrative fashion. However, we are not going to get off so lightly. On the one hand, in the carnivalesque text, the distinctions between, or the polarization of, the terms Good and Evil--and all other seemingly exclusive, absolute terms--are problematized, even rendered impossible. On the other hand, the very system of prioritization that informs Pauline distinctions between Good and Evil--the system that posits God the Father as the First Cause, the source or origin, and Evil as the absence or withdrawal of the Good that is God--is put into question by this text that offers the invert (Robin) as a pre-historic "first position" (p. 134)--"the only position" (p. 146) "that we have forgotten and would give our life to recall" (p. 118)--and suggests a genesis that is as much the projected dying of the mother (Hedvig Volkbein) as the procreative mimesis of the Father. In other words, it might be said that the nightwood is constituted by and upon that which Pauline Christianity, in particular, and Platonism, in general, have forgotten or repressed, that to which their eyes are blind--to whit, the mortal/fleshly source and the (always unsuccessful if necessary) murder of the (maternal) source in the name of the Father, for the sake of identity. Beyond the penetrating rays of the sun, carnival masks and shadowing branches both supplement and obscure distinctive features in

such a way that recognition is nothing more than a guess, a shot in the dark, a fumble through "God's bag of tricks".

As I noted earlier, in her article "The Radical Narrative of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*", Donna Gerstenberger suggests that *Nightwood* begins with a "mock-creation narrative", an other genesis.⁹ The novel opens with the birth of Felix Volkbein who is the text's emblem of "that race which has the sanction of the Lord and the disapproval of the people", the race of the Chosen People, the Jews. As Gerstenberger notes, it takes Hedvig Volkbein seven days to give birth to her "only son", and on the seventh day of her labour, she "named him Felix, thrust him from her and died" (p. 1). Felix's father, whose distinguishing physical feature had been his stomach, "protruding slightly" and emphasized by the buttons of his waistcoat which marked "the exact centre of his body with the obstetric line seen on fruits", had died six months previously. Between the dead, pregnant-looking father, marked by "the obstetric line", and the naming, thrusting, dying mother, Felix's origin, this genesis of the Jew, is a con-fusion of the Judeo-Christian narrative of creation by a (naming, speaking) Father (without antecedents) and the (antecedent) matter which that myth forgot or rendered inert (though malleable), the matrical, material body. Certain distinctive characteristics are exchanged: the already dead father bears the distinctive mark of maternity; the dying mother names, gives her name to, the "only son". The immediate result of this is, of course, that the maternal aspect which has been almost completely obliterated in the

engendering-Father creation narrative is brought into the play, and a certain dominant binary opposition is, at least partly, inverted.

But this is only the *beginning*. Felix's father turns out to have been a fake--a false baron with "a coat of arms that he had no right to and a list of progenitors (including their Christian names) who had never existed" (p. 3). Felix's mother, though "genuine", was a Gentile (martial, Valkyrian), very much an "other" and inaccessible in her racial difference. ("Her body at that moment became the barrier and Guido died against that wall, troubled and alone" [p. 3].) At the point of Hedvig's death and Felix's naming, "exact history stopped for Felix who, thirty years later, turned up in the world [...] what had formed Felix from the date of his birth to his coming to thirty was unknown to the world, for the step of the wandering Jew is in every son" (p. 7). Between the adult and his (false, fictive, alien and dead) source is a diaspora, a wandering and scattering, that cannot be recouped, through an unmapped unknown wilderness, and this diaspora bears a certain universality--it is stepped by "every son". The diaspora, the dispersion, is a severance, a cutting-off of "every son" from an origin which is already fake or inaccessible and is already a fiction. (It is worth noting that the conjunction "for", in the cited passage, which should signal a causal relationship between preceding and succeeding clauses, actually conjoins clauses that have no logical relationship. Thus, the syntax of the passage enacts a severance [no logical relationship] under the guise of a [causal] conjunction.) The only traces of Felix's origin are two

ancestral portraits which have turned out to be "reproductions of two intrepid and ancient actors" (p. 7). Thus, there is a double exposure of the narrative of "origin": the Judeo-Christian paradigm appears in inverted form to reveal the involvement of that which has been repressed; then, *via* the detour of "thirty years" (a Christly span of time) in the wilderness, the entire concept of origin is rendered irrecoverable and in-valid, a matter of a necessary fiction or theatre (Felix's ancestors are actors) or false conjunction. The umbilicus is severed.

This complication, at the beginning of the novel, of the Judeo-Christian creation narrative, is indicative of a strategy that realizes the inherent (or parturating) elements, etc., concealed (or forgotten) by a phallogocentric theological discourse and brings these elements to term, as it were, brings them out to the light and to the world, severing, as it does so, the line between the origin and the product. This strategy might be called taking "the obstetric line"--that line which bisects and articulates the father's pregnant-looking belly--a significantly other line to that phallic line that determines patronymics, patrimony, patrilinear descent, and assures the privilege of the all-engendering Father over that too material, matrilineal origin, that dangerous body that must be idealized out of materiality or refuted before "every son" realizes that he has been "thrust" out of it into the world and into an eternal homelessness, that the umbilicus has been severed and that there is no way back but, perhaps, death--for this

origin is death too. Taking "the obstetric line" through the Pauline Christian structure of conversion--for it is through this particular structure that this chapter is headed--*Nightwood* cuts through, while following the arc of, the ideal of Christian desire, the ideal of atonement or at-one-ment. Taking "the obstetric line", *Nightwood* performs a (Bloomian--for is this not a matter of "anxiety of influence"?) *clinamen* (taking the "lina" in the "c...men") within a Pauline and Platonic tradition of conversion toward the articulation of that which the tradition would (seem to) obscure--the possibility of conversion to an other that is not One.¹⁰

Believe me, Phaedrus, I am myself a lover of these divisions and collections, that I may gain the power to speak and to think, and whenever I deem another man able to discern an objective unity and plurality, I "follow in his footsteps where he leadeth as a god".

PLATO¹¹

This chapter will be both a division and collection, an articulation as it were, of Pauline Christian intertexts of or for Barnes's writing of *Nightwood*. I am not attempting to suggest, or prove, that Barnes was actually familiar with the works that I will be discussing in this chapter--although it is certainly possible that she was.¹² Such bio-bibliographic considerations are almost beside the point here, for what I am trying to establish is *Nightwood's* "obstetric" *clinamen* through a general Pauline structure of conversion (the predominant structure of Christian conversion) that is hinged on the figurative death of the convert and a re-turn to a Source. (As I will demonstrate below, this

is a very Platonic structure.) The carnivalesque text, because of its specific involvement in the Church as such, does not depend on particular allusions to or influences of theological texts for its intertextuality to be at work. It is necessarily already engaged with the discursive structures informing theological discourses.

The conversive structure, following the model of St. Paul's conversion, is composed of three stages conjoined by two crises or crucial points: the proto-convert begins in the depths of sin or error; he is then, while on a "journey" (the road to Damascus, life's roadway to death, the path to God, etc.), overwhelmed by a light that is an unbearable revelation of Truth; having seen (and heard) the presently unbearable truth, he falls (back) into blindness until he accepts God's truth and is properly converted. The crucial points are "being overcome by light", which awakens the soul to God's truth, and "accepting that truth", in which the convert is "born again". The second, intermediate, stage would seem to be a period of death (blindness) or entombment during which the convert dies to his "old self". St. Paul, himself, spent three days in blindness (recalling the three days between the crucifixion and the resurrection) between being struck by the light and being "filled with the Holy Ghost". The intermediate stage of death is essential to the Pauline concept of conversion:

Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized
into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?
Therefore we are buried with him by baptism
into death: that like as Christ was raised
up from the dead by the glory of the Father,

even so we also should walk in newness of life.
For if we have been planted together in the
likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the*
likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this,
that our old man is crucified with *him*, that
the body of sin might be destroyed, that
henceforth we should not serve sin.
For he that is dead is freed from sin.¹³

The Confessions of St. Augustine, as a confessional narrative of conversion, and *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*, as a system for converting to the will of God, offer, perhaps, the most extensive delineations of the Pauline process of conversion. After St. Paul, Augustine is the principal shaper of the Christian concept of conversion, and Loyola's *Exercises* represent perhaps the first practical application of that concept as method. But I have other reasons, as well, for lighting upon these two. First of all, both Augustine and Loyola articulate a "desire" that is specifically mortal, allied with the flesh, and intellectually apprehensible in a way that separates them from the mystics or ecstasies who, it might be said, "do away with" both the intellect and the body right from the beginning and, thus, with signification (for the ecstatic experience is ineffable). Whereas the writings of the mystics are taken to be secondary, insufficient reductions of the ecstatic experience, both the Augustinian and Ignatian practices produce an articulate, examining text that is intended to be educative, to stimulate reproduction of text (in reading/convertng/exercising) and signification. Both texts present themselves as "texts" in the educative sense, and this insistent textuality indicates the nature of the discursive tradition that

Nightwood turns or swerves within. There is indeed, I would argue, an "anxiety of influence" driving the writing of *Nightwood*--although not quite the oedipal anxiety of Bloom's poetic system, which intimates, I hope, the problem of gender unexamined by Bloom. (The male poet may be driven by the influence of a particular poetic progenitor, but where does the female writer stand in this patrilinear system? Certainly, one stance for her is that which places her in an anxious, influenced, relation to the entire tradition marked out by "fathers and sons".) Again, this is not to suggest that Barnes was reacting to the Ignatian and Augustinian texts *per se*, but that these two texts can be used as emphatic paradigms of a discursive influence by/against which *Nightwood* is written. (Of course, the figure of Dante will appear, from time to time, in this chapter. Dante is, after all, the principal poetic inheritor of Augustinian and Pauline theology, and *The Divine Comedy* has certainly left its marks on *Nightwood*, and not only on Dr. Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor. However, an examination of Barnes's debt to Dante, in this context, would only lead us right back to Augustine [and Plato], and so I am, with some regret, stepping around the complicated system of loans, bursaries and embezzlements--evident in O'Connor's name--that constitute that specific debt.)¹⁴

There is, too, a second reason for choosing these two texts, and that is that, despite the lack of certain proof that Barnes read either, there are certain similarities between Barnes's writing and the writings of Augustine and Loyola. As Burke has pointed out, both Augustine and

Barnes emphasize (by repetition) the same rhetorical figure for conversion, the "turn". Both Loyola and Barnes use a practice of composition (making a picture) as a function of the desiring (converting) subject.¹⁶

I.

How then do I seek Thee, O Lord? For when I seek Thee, my God, I seek the blessed life [....] How then do I seek the blessed life? [....] Is it by remembrance as though I had forgotten it, yet still retained that I had forgotten it? Is not the blessed life that which all desire, so that there is absolutely none that does not desire it? Where have they known it that they so desire it? where seen it that they so love it? Truly we have it, how, I know not.

AUGUSTINE¹⁶

What then takes place in the soul, when it is more delighted at finding or recovering the things it loves, than if it had ever had them?

AUGUSTINE¹⁷

The doctrine of return or conversion is the meaning of Plato's doctrine of Reminiscence, i.e. that all knowledge is a recalling to mind of what one once knew (in a previous existence) but had forgotten. This doctrine the Neoplatonists, and Augustine after them, largely replaced by the notion of divine illumination directly shining within the soul.

HENRY CHADWICK¹⁸

As regards Augustine's *Confessions*, the most notable use of the verb-family is in the

contrast between Book II, concerned with what he calls his adolescent *perversity* in stealing pears [...], and Book VIII that describes his *conversion*. Nora's *turning* to Robin in this moment of their first meeting at the circus is indeed a romantic passion analogous to the religious passion [....] Dell Hymes, a former student of mine [...] offered an excellent suggestion when, in his paper on *Nightwood*, he characterized Robin as a kind of "unmoved mover" (the term that Aristotle applies to God). It is the *eromenon*, the *Loved*, a God that moves us not by paternal or paternalistic participation in our affairs, but purely as an impassive destination for us to aim at, like a target or beacon.

[...] the idea of Robin as the "unmoved mover" in connection with Nora's conversion to perversion or inversion does help bring out the sense in which Nora's passion is a secular variant of the religious passion [....] And, it all has to do with *turning*, turning towards or turning away (conversion, perversion, aversion).

True, the transforming of the religious passion into the romantic passion makes for quite paradoxical kinds of devotion and martyrdom. But I believe that once you get the pattern in its simplicity, you can understand how it can lead to alembications.

KENNETH BURKE^{1e}

Shall we try to "get the pattern in its simplicity"--at least to start off with? Obviously, the specific concept of conversion that underpins the above citations (each to each) is a particular version of the concept of re-turning to an origin. (We should recall, here, that for Nora, Robin is the "self" and "like a relative found in another generation" [p. 157].) And, that origin is the primary object of desire, the eternal *eromenon* that precedes, is prior to in every sense, the individuation of the lover/subject. Our desire is to re-turn to that "bliss", that "blessed life", that we had once known (and still recall in

the "extremity of memory" (p. 158)) before our mortal present. This is the structure at its simplest. We must add, though, to define more clearly this structure, the concept of Free Will, for the condition of our mortality is that we must choose to re-turn--God will not turn us. We must also add the realization that conversion involves death, at least a figurative death like Augustine's death of the "old self" or Dante's entry into Hell, and that it thus involves a great risk to the individual, to the subject (or seems to). Conversion may be as simple and natural as the heliotrope's turn toward the sun, but it is neither easy nor painless nor quickly accomplished. It involves a great deal of work. (A great deal of writing? Augustine's conversion takes, at least, two books, VII and VIII.) What should be noted at this particular point, though, is that conversion is a turn--not a linear or progressive movement from point A to point B (remember Dante's turn-around at the centre of Hell)--, that the turn is motivated by desire--however enabled by Free Will--, and that the desire is for a primary beloved or beloved state that is also source or origin.

Before broaching the specific "turns" of Augustine's and Barnes's con-versions, I would like to dabble a bit in etymology in order to elicit the lineaments of a term that I have been/will be employing compositely and variably without any concession to the possible vagaries of translation. "Turn", of course, does not share the etymological root of the *-vert* family of terms--although *vertere* is usually translated as 'to turn'--but has its origin in the designation of a particular

instrument--the lathe or *tornus*, the latter term descended from the Greek *τορνος*, compasses. (*Vertere* emerges in English in terms like "writhe", "wrist", "wreathe", "wrest", etc.) It might be said that 'to turn' is, in a certain sense, laden with a specificity that seems foreign to *vertere*: 'to turn', as well as being the action of changing course or direction, or of simply altering, is *also* "to move round on an axis or about a centre" (OED), revolving or rotating on a fixed support, in the process of making something or--harking back to the compasses--signifying or measuring something. To translate *vertere*, then, as 'to turn' is to contaminate the prior term, to involve *vertere* with *revolvere* and, perhaps, *fingerere*. This contamination may be unavoidable, particularly in the context of this thesis which, as it is written in English, only comes to *vertere* through 'to turn', but it is not necessarily detrimental. (We might note that it doesn't seem to bother Burke in the least.) It might, even, be seen as a fortuitous, if somewhat accidental, foregrounding of an already latent complicity between *vertere* and *revolvere* in the "turning" of the individual soul or mind or eye (the "orbit of [...] light" or of sight, as *Nightwood* has it [p. 54]). Fortuitous or not, this composition is exploited in *Nightwood* as characters turn in relation to a seemingly fixed object of desire, much as Augustine turns in relation to a fixity, a centre or sun, that is the One (or Three in One) of a Christianity informed by Platonism.

We need to make one more *detour* through this not-quite-determinate substantive/verb 'turn'. We need to note that within the workings of

theological discourse, the turn is properly a metaphor in itself. Not only is it a translation of the generic term "trope", it is also already a trope as metaphor, or even as catachresis, in that it is a natural word, in the Aristotelian sense, substituting for a word (if there is one) signifying an analogous spiritual movement. The soul makes a metaphoric turn toward or away from God, toward or away from a metaphoric Light. This realization of the complicity of metaphor in the designation of a spiritual movement provokes a question of priority (which came first, the concept or the metaphor?) that so far exceeds the scope of this thesis that it cannot be addressed here.²⁰ The possibility of that question, however, is in a particular way pertinent to this study because such a possibility, such a realization of metaphor's possible responsibility in the development of seemingly natural theological concepts, problematizes the notion of a transparency of language that would prohibit a discussion of theological and fictional discourses on the same ground (that of rhetoric?). In other words, we can consider the theological and the fictional discourses within the same context if we annul the privilege assigned to the theological discourse (as revelation, as a window through which Truth may be seen) over the fictional (as the not-real, the made-up, and thus inherently metaphorical) by seeing both discourses grounded or dependent upon metaphor, upon the turn of language. (Again, I am indicating the same adjustment of a distinction between the literal and the figurative that I indicated in Chapter Three.) At this point, we are less concerned with

the Truth than with a certain tropaic structure. And, at *this* point, we turn to that structure.

In *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Burke pays considerable attention to Augustine's use, in *The Confessions*, of the "'-vert family' of terms", of the (playful?) contrast between perversion and conversion.²¹ This use is so extensive that Burke is later led to remark, in his essay on *Nightwood*, that "I sometimes wonder whether the good Bishop of Hippo could have ever written that work were it not for the many Latin words that grow from this root, meaning 'turn'".²² Certainly, the Augustinian text is replete with -versions and turnings: it might even be said that the entire text hinges on the prefixed breach between *perversion* and *conversion*.

Why then art thou *perverted* to follow thy
flesh? Let it be *converted* and follow
thee.²³ *emphasis added.*

This bi-partite -version, this turn, between a perverted following of the flesh (which takes life only from the spirit) and a converted following of the spirit (which takes life from God), functions as a paradigm of the text's general narrative movement. *The Confessions* follows Augustine's perverted course, then turns to follow his conversion (Books VII and VIII) through to a summation (Books X - XIII) that is, essentially, an analysis of that progress and the purpose of the text. Of course, we should not be surprised by either the precise turn of the narrative or the playful use of the -vert family of terms in

establishing essential comparisons. After all, Augustine was a rhetorician before he was a Christian. (It is interesting that Augustine resigned from the profession of rhetoric as he was baptized into the church.) And it should not be surprising to find at the end of Book IV, just before the ultimate Book of the first (perverse) half of the text in which he describes his discovery of the "fallacy" of Manichaeism and his attendance at the lectures of St. Ambrose (following which he "began to return to his right mind"), this *nova* of -verts:

Our good ever lives with Thee; but when we
turn away from thence we are *perverted*. Let
us now, O Lord, *return*, that we may not be
overturned, because with Thee our good lives
without decay, which good art Thou alone; nor
need we fear, lest there be no place whither
to *return*, because we fell from it: for
through our absence, our mansion fell not--
Thy eternity.²⁴; *emphasis added*.

Here, we have the kernel of what is already a neoplatonic Christian doctrine. "Our good ever lives with [God]" "which good [is God] alone": as God is good, and as God is the creator (the source, the fountainhead), everything that springs from God (which is every thing) is, in its essence, good--and evil is no more than the turning away from or withdrawal of good. This is, of course, Augustine's answer to the theoretical problem of continuing evil in God's creation, and it is also his refutation of the Manichean heresy of an essential and infinite struggle between the two antipodal principles. Augustine could not finally reconcile his experience of a loving God with the concept of a God who could create evil; thus he adopted, principally from the works of

Plotinus, and elaborated this doctrine of good and the absence of good (which is not properly absence because good is always "there" to be returned to) that is, at once, the doctrinal annulment of evil as an active (threatening) principle and the rhetorical suppression of the problematic term in that seemingly prehistoric binary opposition Good/Evil. As Burke notes, "it all has to do with *turning*": we cannot escape the realization of the metaphor's complicity in this masterful, repressive system. (Could there, indeed, be a concept of good and the absence of good were it not for this metaphor? What, if not the turn, would make the entire structure of the concept possible?) Augustine unfolds his theology through a substitutive series of prefixes for the root *-vert*: in other words, the root of his doctrine (as written text, as writing) is the *-vert*, the turn, the trope. This initiating metaphor enables the suppression of, or mastery over, evil by providing a detour (a substitute route) or turn-about that circumvents and annuls the necessity of dealing with Evil as an obstacle. It supplies (supplements) another more direct or amenable way of "getting to the truth".²⁵

This particular Neoplatonic (supplemental) route around the problem of persistent evil has proved tenacious. Ten centuries after *The Confessions* were made, Dante described "the simple soul" as born "pure in ignorance" but with a propensity for "turn[ing] to anything it likes" unless properly guided by "Free Will". To "turn[] toward evil or pursue[] some good with not enough or too much zeal" is to "turn[] on [the] Creator", to not be "fixed on the eternal Good".²⁶ (Note the

equilibration of "turning to evil" and "pursuing good improperly".) Six centuries later, Cardinal Newman wrote, with assurance: "If evil is not from God, as assuredly it is not, this is because evil has no substance of its own, but is only the defect, excess, perversion, or corruption of that which has."²⁷ It might well be said that for the past seventeen hundred years (at least), a certain influential branch of Christianity has been busily (incessantly) writing the concept of an active, autonomous Evil out of the system, literally writing it into an absence, turning it into a void.

Of course, on one level of this binary system, what is also being written into absence is that which, in the Platonic consideration, has never had any "substance of its own", at least not a formed and therefore visible substance, in the solar projection that guarantees truth and existence.

Therefore, if they shall be deprived of all good, they will entirely cease to be.²⁸

For both Augustine and Plato, perception of truth begins with the bodily senses, especially with sight. According to Plato,

[...] the true analogy of this indwelling power in the soul and the instrument whereby each of us apprehends is that of an eye that could not be converted to the light from the darkness except by turning the whole body. Even so this organ of knowledge must be turned around from the world of becoming together with the entire soul [...] until the soul is able to endure the contemplation of essence

and the brightest region of being [....]

[...] there might be an art, the art of the speediest and most effective shifting or conversion of the soul [...] on the assumption that it possesses vision but does not rightly direct it.²⁹

The journey from Plato's cave is marked by a progressive series of "sightings" enabled by turning the body and by, first, the fire in the cave, then the more revelatory light of day--in which, first, shadows, then reflections in water, then objects themselves are seen in order that the eye not be blinded too suddenly by too much light--, then the reflected light in the moon and the stars (note the persistent ascension) before the sun itself may be seen. This ultimate sight, too great for physical eyes which would be destroyed in the sighting, can only take place metaphorically, in the meta-physical, in the Ideal. It marks the *telos* of the Platonic conversion from error (insufficient sight) to truth (the unreflected light of the metaphorical solar origin), a truth which is only apprehended briefly before the convert returns to his new (enlightened) place in the cave from whence he shall desire only the truth as he has seen it. For Augustine, not surprisingly, the journey (that is always a return journey) begins with the bodily senses and rises to a sighting beyond the bearing of physical sight:

Yet there dwelt with me a remembrance of Thee;
nor did I in anyway doubt that there was One
to whom I might cleave [....] thus by degrees,
I passed from bodies to the soul, which per-
ceives through the senses of the body; and
thence to its inward faculty, to which the
bodily senses communicate external things [...]
and thence further to the reasoning faculty
[...] And when this found itself in me also

to be a changeable thing, it raised itself up to its own understanding...that so it might discover what that light was, by which it was bedewed [...] And thus with the flash of one trembling glance it arrived at THAT WHICH IS. And then I saw Thy "invisible things understood by the things which are made" (Rom. i., 20). But I lacked strength to fix my gaze thereon; and my weakness being struck back, I returned to my accustomed ways bearing with me [...] longing for that, the scent of which I had perceived.³⁰

Although the other senses are, at certain points, involved in these processes of conversion, it is sight that is complicit with truth. Sight is enabled by light, the light that is truth and God and sun and Father and Good. In the solar light, in the lightning "flash of one trembling glance", THAT WHICH IS is apprehended. In turning toward that light, for an instant, the convert sees *everything*. Or does he? In the singular focus of that gaze, is not some thing left out, that which is left behind, the shadow stretched behind the sun-turned convert, the back of the head, the night? What is more, in this beginning of conversion that is a re-turn to a solar origin, is not some thing eclipsed: that other origin of mortal being, that which beyond the orbit of light remains-- peripheral, obtuse and formless--in the dark? Of course, we cannot speak for God, but for the mortal being, the totality of the Father as All can only be thought in the obliteration of the matrical, in the erasing of the memory of the matrical origin which will henceforth be temporal, corrupt, and "Evil" or sublated into an ideal form--the woman when she is most, for Plato, like a man; the immaculate Virgin; Augustine's mother.³¹ Conversion, then, at least in Plato, Augustine,

and--naturally enough--Dante, is also a (figurative) dying to/of the material origin, a tropaic aversion--the tropaic aversion that creates "Mary", "Monica", and "Beatrice"--from that truly deathly chaos that must be rendered null and void lest man recall his brutal thrusting-out from that (semiotic) bliss to which there can be no return.

(I interpolate, here at the point of no re-turn, the illicit obstetrician Dr. Matthew Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor's inverted speculation on this "grave mistake of nature":

"How more tidy had it been to have been born old and have aged into a child, brought finally to the brink, not of the grave, but of the womb; in our age bred up into infants searching for a womb to crawl into, not be made to walk loth the gingerly dust of death, but to find a moist gillflirted way. And a funny sight it would be to see us going to our separate lairs at the end of the day, women wincing with terror, not daring to set foot to the street for fear of it."(p. 98-99)

But then, this is a speculation made in the dead of night, and it is a laughing matter.)

Seriously though, for the sake of the solar system, this other origin must be absent. But, how is this absence written? Recall Dante's "turn[] toward evil or pursue[]/some good with not enough or too much zeal" and Newman's "evil [...] is only the defect, excess, perversion, or corruption of that which has" substance. In other words, this absence is written as both the "not enough" (the less than, defect, corruption) and

the "too much" (the more than, excess, the supplement) of the Good (substance, presence, meaning), which brings us to a curious (possible) complication of the Christian tale for if there is anything that is both "not enough" and "too much" in the Platonic system of propriety, it is writing itself, the "not enough" of presence and the "too much" of possible meaning that obscure the Proper. If writing is that which enables the subordination of evil to an autonomous principle of good, it is also, at the same time, evil itself. Here, we have stumbled, perhaps, on a systemic blind spot of the predominantly Neoplatonic Christianity that would treat of writing as a transparent medium of the truth in one instant and as the perversion of meaning through "inscription in dead material" in the next. Of course, there is good writing (God's writing on the wall, on the heart, on tablets of stone) and bad writing (too much rhetoric, style)--it all depends on what that writing is turned to or turned by--; but what of the writing of the turn itself, of writing as con-, per-, in-version? If the turn has been used (literally and metaphorically) in a certain writing that, although it declares itself transparent, is yet materially inscribed, is it not possible to read it as writing (to read it in its so-called "evil" or criminal sense), thus shaking it at the point of its fixture in the divinely inspired hegemony of signification?

It is, I would argue, just this sort of "reading" that *Nightwood* gives to the turn, by foregrounding it in an excessive use, making it

"too much", while rendering it, often, "not enough", a verb without a proper object.

At that moment Nora *turned*. (p. 54; emphasis added)

"[...] the Great Enigma can't be thought of unless you turn the head the other way, and come upon thinking with the eye that you fear, which is called the back of the head; it's the one we use when looking at the beloved in a dark place, and she is a long time coming from a great way." (p. 83)

And it all has to do with turning, turning towards or turning away (conversion, perversion, aversion).

Once alerted to this term and its "flaring forth" in crucial passages, we can begin to see it as a trigger, a term which appears to be setting the text in motion. It is everywhere, in its various grammatical and etymologically related forms, from the first "Turning" on the opening page,

Turning upon this field, which shook to the clatter of morning horses in the street beyond, with the gross splendour of a general saluting the flag, she named him Felix, thrust him from her, and died. (p. 1; emphasis added)

to the "turned" of the last paragraph,

The dog, quivering in every muscle, sprang back [...] moved backward, back, as she came on, whimpering too, coming forward, her head *turned* completely sideways, grinning and whimpering [...]. He ran this way and that, low

down in his throat crying, and she grinning
and crying with him; crying in shorter and
shorter spaces, moving head to head, until
she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her,
her face *turned* and weeping [....]
(p. 170; emphasis added)

Turning towards, turning away from, turning into, and being turned:
these turns constitute, perhaps, the principal narrative action. The
paradigmatic *nova* of turns that Burke, in his essay, wishes to cite but
can't--"since permission to quote was not obtainable from Miss Barnes," a
refusal that turned a citation into a blank space, an enigma--is as
follows:³²

A girl sitting beside Nora took out a cig-
arette and lit it; her hands shook and Nora
turned to look at her; she looked at her sud-
denly because the animals going around and
around the ring, all but climbed over at that
point. They did not seem to see the girl,
but as their dusty eyes moved past, the orbit
of their light seemed to *turn* on her. At that
moment Nora *turned*.

[....] Then as one powerful lioness came
to the *turn* of the bars, exactly opposite the
girl, she *turned* her furious great head with
its yellow eyes afire and went down, her paws
thrust through the bars and [...] she regarded
the girl [....] (p. 54; emphasis added)

As Burke notes, this *nova* appears "just at the point where Nora first
meets Robin", the point at which Nora's "conversion to perversion" begins.
(We should note that this point is set in a "circus", a carnivalesque
site.) Certainly, all the tropes of Platonic/Augustinian conversion are
here: the turn (in abundance), light, the eye(s) and the gaze, the
suddenness of the glance. But is there not, also, a different reading, a

different writing, of these conversion tropes here in the circus *ring*? Look at the light-ing. For Augustine, as for Plato, there is only one Light--all other lights are but shadows of that Light. Here, though, in *Nightwood*, there is no singular Light, but rather a variety of different lights: the lighting of the cigarette that first catches Nora's attention; the orbital (solar?) "light" of the animals' "dusty eyes"; and the "yellow eyes afire" (again, solar?) of the lioness. And these (lesser?) lights are not reflections--they may be shadowy, the lights of "dusty eyes", but they originate in those eyes, in the lighting of the cigarette, in the fire-in-the-eyes of the lioness, suggesting no other, singular origin. We should also note that these lights spring from the girl (the girl's action), the beasts, and the female beast--a variety of origins that seem to exclude, specifically, the male and the spiritual. There are many original lights in this round arena, but no sun, no Father. And, as there is an excessive number of lights in this absence of One Light, so is there an excessive number of gazes in the absence of the "one trembling glance". Here, the gazes are, at the very least, doubled and come from, at least, two directions: the woman gazes upon the girl from without the ring, the centre; the beasts gaze upon the girl from within the ring/centre. Unlike the singular gaze of the subject/convert (St. Paul, Augustine) that marks or constitutes the initial crisis of Pauline/Augustinian conversion (the subject gazing at the overwhelming light), the gaze here is doubled, a doubling which simultaneously subverts the distinctions between the beast and the

spirit and between exterior and interior that support the Pauline structure (remember Augustine's movement inward to find the Light).

The end of Nora's affair with Robin is marked by a similar *nova* when Nora, following a dream in which "Robin and she, in their extremity, were [like] a pair of opera glasses turned to the wrong end" (a significant mis-reflection)(p. 62; emphasis added), awakes to look out of her window and see Robin and Jenny caught in an embrace:

Waking, she began to walk again, and looking out into the garden in the *faint light of dawn*, she saw a *double shadow* falling from the statue, *as if it were multiplying*, and thinking perhaps this was Robin, she called and was not answered. Standing motionless, *straining her eyes*, she saw emerge from the darkness the *light of Robin's eyes*, the fear in them *developing their luminosity* until, by the *intensity of their double regard*, *Robin's eyes and hers met*. So they gazed at each other. *As if that light had the power to bring what was dreaded into the zone of their catastrophe*, Nora saw the body of another woman swim up into the statue's obscurity, with head hung down, that the added eyes might not augment the *illumination*; her arms about Robin's neck, her body pressed to Robin's, her legs slackened in the hang of the embrace.

Unable to turn her eyes away, incapable of speech, *experiencing a sensation of evil, complete and dismembering*, Nora fell to her knees, so that her eyes were not withdrawn by her *volition*, but dropped from their orbit by the *falling of her body*. Her chin on the sill she knelt, thinking, "Now they will not hold together", feeling that if she turned away from what Robin was doing, the design would break and melt back into Robin alone. *She closed her eyes, and at that moment she knew an awful happiness*. Robin, like something dormant, was protected, moved out of death's way by the successive arms of women; but as *she closed*

her eyes, Nora said "Ah!" with the intolerable automatism of the last "Ah!" in a body struck at the moment of its final breath. (p. 64)

Like St. Paul and St. Augustine, Nora "wakes to see" "THAT WHICH IS" in "one trembling glance". Then, unable to bear the sight (of so much light, of so much evil), her "weakness being struck back", she falls back, and "at that moment she knew an awful happiness"--the terrible happiness that will sustain her desire through another 106 pages of text until she finds Robin again. Here, in this dark "garden" (paradisial?, primordial?), in this "zone of [...] catastrophe" (the turn of crisis, the subversive turn), where everything is, at least, doubled--lights, shadows, gazes, bodies--, Nora (No Ra [no god], Nor a [neither this nor that]) sees THAT WHICH IS, and THAT WHICH IS is dreadful, "awful", "evil, complete and dismembering". But then, this is a mother's garden, signified by the obscuring "statue" that is "a fountain figure, a tall granite woman bending forward with lifted head; one hand [...] held over the pelvic round as if to warn a child who goes incautiously" (p. 55), and we should remember that, according to Platonic phallogentrism, the natural realm of the matrical is the realm of the flesh, of corruption and decay. In the "pelvic round" of this "garden" there is no significant phallus (of the Father, the Origin) but an other sort of "fountain figure", a "tall granite" figure that is definitely material, matrical and obscuring. This matrical scene is not the scene of wholeness, of at-one-ment, for it is both "complete and dismembering", entire and fragmenting (a very dangerous, catastrophic scene indeed): it is, in short, "evil", the evil

about which Pauline doctrine has made a detour which is not followed by this text.²³

Nightwood does follow the conversive turn of *The Confessions*, and of Pauline (Platonic) doctrine in general, but executes, at a critical moment, before the detour sign, a certain swerve. It takes an "obstetric line" that suggests an other, "evil", route, a route that traces the severing (dismembering) of the umbilicus. To re-turn on the catastrophic "obstetric line" is not to follow completely the helio-tropic version. Dante begins his conversion in the "selva oscura", the dark wood. Augustine begins his conversion in the darkness of error, of ignorance. Plato's cavedweller begins his conversion in the cave. But Nora Flood (swelling flux, destructive flow) begins her conversion on a hill: "the only woman of the last century who could go up a hill with the Seventh Day Adventists and confound the seventh day--with a muscle in her heart so passionate that she made the seventh day immediate" (p. 52). And, her conversive course takes her from this height, from belief in the word, through a figurative death--through an "Ah!" that signifies simultaneously recognition, the final exhalation, and orgasm (that little death)--, and through the night wherein her beloved lies (in both senses of the word) hidden, the unsublated beloved who "carried the quality of the 'way back' as animals do" (p. 40), before she finds Robin again in the candlelit garden chapel. (This inverted movement is Burke's paradoxical concept of a "transcendence downward".) However, "the obstetric line" is not a simple inversion of the Augustinian turn, nor is

it a re-turn to the womb predicated by Dr. O'Connor. For Augustine, the Father waits eternally: "nor need we fear, lest there be no place whither to return [...] for through our absence, our mansion fell not". In other words, this source does not, in itself, disappear. However, in *Nightwood*, there are two sources, real mothers (Hedvig and Robin), and both "thrust from" them their children. Nora's conversion cannot culminate in a re-subsumption in a one, for the "prehistoric" and childbearing original--Robin--has withdrawn and obscured itself, cut itself off from its offspring and from its lover.

Yet, despite this severing, *something* goes on, continues. In the absence (or not enough) of Origin, the mother is doubled (made too much). Caught in the half-light of the garden, Nora sees at least two mothers in the "double shadow"--the rejecting mother (Robin) and the figure (image/ trope) of a nurturing, enwombing mother (the statue with its "pelvic round" and its [notably figurative--"as if"] warning to "a child who goes incautiously"). The (refusing) mother is supplemented by an imaging of matriarchal space that is substitutive and repetitive (the "pelvic round", "the successive arms of women"), of which Nora is a part. Although the mother (as Robin) is "dismembering", she can be made complete in her imaging (as Nora, as the statue), can substitute for herself an image of herself which can be repeated (as a primal scene) forever. Which is, perhaps, why Nora imagines herself as Robin's mother ("my lover and my child" [p. 156]) while acknowledging that Robin is her "self" too (p. 143, for example). This would account for the repeated

foetal image of Robin as "something dormant", as a "fossil [...] intaglio of her identity" maintained by "Nora's blood" (p. 56). In this doubled reflection, the image of the (original, childbearing) mother is borne as a fossil foetus (dormant, perpetually deferred) in the imagining of motherhood. In this doubled imaging, the con-version to the Origin is rewritten in its "evil" sense, a sense that recuperates that which Pauline doctrine has blinded itself to, that which can be seen only by "the back of the head", the impossibility of recapturing the origin, and the necessity of creating images (of troping) in the face of that impossibility. All that is left is the reading/writing of umbilical traces:

"She sees her everywhere", [the doctor] added, glancing at Nora as she passed into the dark. "Out looking for what she's afraid to find-- Robin. There goes mother of mischief, running about, trying to get the world home." (p. 61)

In *The Confessions*, the turn, the *-vert*, is meant to be subservient to and in the service of a Truth that is beyond language (written or spoken). It is a mere verb of a divine syntax imitating the ideal relationship of ideal subject and object, of the proper nouns--Man and God, Son and Father. No matter that the writing of this transcendental relationship emerges from a rhetorician's play with the root *-vert* or that the emphasis on subject or predicate is also a repression of the verb (one can't see the copula for the pillars), the turn has been understood throughout the history of Platonic/Pauline metaphysics as a useful metaphor on the syntactic path to unity. In the carnival play of

Nightwood, however, this slave of divine syntax has broken its chains and made a nuisance of itself by re-calling that bodily turning or turning of the body (remember Plato's "except by turning the whole body") from which the metaphor of the converting soul ascends and by re-calling the possibility of an other turning (the generation of images/tropes), an articulation, in the absence of Origin.

"The true good who meets the true evil (Holy Mother of Mercy! are there any such?) learns for the first time how to accept neither; the face of the one tells the face of the other the half of the story that both forgot."
(p. 173)

"Corruption is the Age of Time. It is the body and blood of ecstasy, religion and love."
(p. 147)

"*C'est le plaisir qui me bouleverse.*" (p.132)

And, now, we turn from the verb to the subject.

II.

A simple operation which myth attributes to the Creator of the world, separating day, night, man, woman, elements and species, forms the continuing basis of Ignatian discourse: *articulation*.

BARTHES³⁴

In his search for the particular *Comédie humaine* Felix had come upon the odd. Conversant with edicts and laws, folk story and heresy, taster of rare wines, thumber of rarer books and old wives' tales--tales of men who became holy and of beasts that became damned--read in all plans for fortifications and bridges, given pause by all graveyards on all roads, a pedant of many churches and castles, his mind dimly reverberated to Madame de Sévigné, Goethe, Loyola and Brantôme. *But Loyola sounded the deepest note; he was alone, apart and single.* A race that has fled its generations from city to city has not found the necessary time for the accumulation of that toughness which produces ribaldry, nor, after the crucifixion of its ideas, enough forgetfulness in twenty centuries to create legend. It takes a Christian, standing eternally in the Jew's salvation, to blame himself and to bring up from that depth charming and fantastic superstitions through which the slowly and tirelessly milling Jew once more becomes the "collector" of his own past. His undoing is never profitable until some *goy* has put it back into such shape that it can again be offered as a "sign". A Jew's undoing is never his own, it is God's; his rehabilitation is never his own, it is a Christian's. The Christian traffic in retribution has made the Jew's history a commodity; it is the medium through which he receives, at the necessary moment, the serum of his own past that he may offer it again as his blood. In this manner the Jew participates in the two conditions; and in like manner Felix took the breast of this wet nurse whose milk was his being but which could never be his birthright. (pp. 9-10; emphasis added)

The above paragraph lies between and connects the descriptions of Felix Volkbein's obsession with the "noble past" and of his fascination with the ignoble circus. An articulation between descriptions, it is itself articulated: the first part is a list of the "oddments" (mostly literary and historical) that Felix has "collected" in his search for the

Comédie humaine; the second part is an ironic, carnivalesque, dissertation on "the Jew's history" (a "particular *Comédie humaine*") and the Christian's usurpation (fulfillment) of that history; and the two parts are joined (and separated) by "Loyola". "But Loyola sounded the deepest note; he was alone, apart and single." This is a crucial sentence not only because it stands at the crux of at least two articulations (between the past and the circus, between the Jew's history and Felix's odd collection), but also because its separate halves sound two themes that reverberate throughout *Nightwood*--depth (the depths of dreams, of the earth, of the body, of the unknown) and the singular or solitary (adjectives describing, at some point, every character in the text). Furthermore, not only does the sentence sound these themes, it intensifies them superlatively. "Loyola" sounds the *deepest* note and is trebly (most) solitary ("alone, apart and single"). But why this emphasis on "Loyola", who only appears in this paragraph? Why is "Loyola" being "offered as a 'sign'" of two of the text's critical themes, only to disappear again into the more general term "Christian" before vanishing from the narrative altogether?

It is worthwhile, I think, to focus on Loyola and his function in this paragraph before going on to examine, on another level, Barnes's assumption of St. Ignatius's "method of composition", because not only will such a focus justify my interest in the conjunction of Barnes and Loyola, it will also bring to light a particular scepticism that marks all of *Nightwood's* perverse dealings with Christianity (the Church) and

the Truth. In focussing on Loyola, I would like to suggest that one historical "fact" not be forgotten: this passage was written in Europe (perhaps in Paris, perhaps in Berlin), in the thirties, as Fascism was fattening itself on the fodder of a common anti-Semitism. That *Nightwood* suggests that the predominant and privileged religion, Christianity, is no more than a usurpation of a divinely sanctioned Judaic privilege ("undoing" and "salvation") is, in itself, a subversive gesture. The Christian (who is, perhaps, no more than a surrogate of the Chosen People) is being held accountable for the sacrifice of (the "offer[ing] [...] of [...] blood")--and, indeed, for the creation of--the scapegoat Jew. In the light of the contemporary political, social and religious prejudices, this was a damning and daring assignment of accountability. It was also notice of an horrific irony: "traffic in retribution", or the accountancy of retributive justice, is a cornerstone of the Mosaic Law which Christ came to supplant with Faith. That the eye-for-an-eye, pound-of-flesh-for-pound-of-flesh, code was adopted as part of the enabling code of anti-semitism (the Jews being the "murderers" of Christ) remains one of the shining examples of orthodox Christian perversity. The Jew suffers retribution not only on account of his own disobedience, but on account of a peculiarly displaced Christian guilt as well. *Nightwood* is pointedly anti-fascist, if we read fascism as an ideology of sameness (one race, one social order, one Church, one Signifier, one meaning) bent on the elimination of difference (Jews/gypsies, homosexuals, heretics, women, the dialogical). Barnes blatantly foregrounds everything that fascism cannot admit and

carnivalizes the so-called norm by revealing it as perverse, tainted or "deflowered".

But what, then, of Felix's participation in this Christian "superstition"? Why should the Wandering Jew be so intent on seeking "his own disqualification", on establishing "an alibi for the blood"? Partly, perhaps, because he is half-Jew, half-Christian, half-damned and half-saved, and being neither completely one nor the other desires the "privileged" state, the privileged half of his history (the idealized and lost perfect parent, the Gentile mother) as the perfect state of wholeness. We should note these operations of desire: substitutions, images, representations or projections of an always unattainable primary object of desire, the origin, the *mother before identification, before the splitting and articulation*. Certainly, the (half-Jewish) son of a dead mother is in need of a "wet nurse": that he should fix his desire, his lips, upon the partially attainable but *not rightful "breast" (of Mother Church, of Robin Vote, of the noble past), fixing misapprehensions in the place of the impossible primary object*, is not, however, a peculiarity of this character Felix. It is, rather, a fundamental peculiarity of desire itself, for desire (which can never be satisfied and yet remain "desire") instigates representations that can only ever be misapprehensions (the object itself, primary or substitutive, necessarily being wholly or partially absent, a gap or hole to be covered by a projection, an image).

"Strange, I had never seen the Baronin in this light before", the Baron was saying, and he crossed his knees. "If I should try to put

it into words, I mean how I did see her, it would be incomprehensible, for the simple reason that I find that I never did have a really clear idea of her at the time. I had an image of her, but that is not the same thing. An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties." (p. 111)

Between "uncertainties" (between primary and substitutive objects, between subject and object of desire?) is a "stop" (a stop-gap?): the "image"; the "intaglio" of the beloved's "identity" (p. 56); the "word" but not its "alchemy" (p. 83), the signifier ("pet name" [p. 127]) *sans* signified. (It seems rather convenient that a *Viennese non-orthodox Jew* should make this primary distinction between the "image" and the "idea" of the object of desire.) And, this "image" or "intaglio" or "pet name" is a production of desire—the making of a "target" by the "fearful eye", as O'Connor "puts" it (p. 148)—by which it negates the absence of the beloved. Desire, then, and its image-making faculty are the properties of the displaced, the solitary, those who must "dazzle [their] own estrangement" (p. 11). The "estranged" are often the most bewitched. Desire perpetuates itself by illusion: Felix's (Christian) desire is perpetuated by the trickery and illusions of the theatre and the circus ring.

The people of the theatre and the ring were for [Felix] as dramatic and as monstrous as a consignment on which he could never bid. That he haunted them as persistently as he did was *evidence of something in his nature that was turning Christian*. (p. 12; emphasis added)

At this point, we should return to Loyola and ask what Loyola has to do with "estrangement" and dazzlement. There never was, perhaps, a lover (unless it was Augustine) more intent than Loyola on maintaining his estrangement, by continually reminding himself of his inadequacy, by methodically composing "images" or "signs" to mediate that estrangement between the inadequate and his God. As Roland Barthes points out, "the area of the *Exercises* is essentially that of the exchanged sign" between God and Man.³⁵ This area, this gap wherein the exchange of signs takes place, is never bridged in the *Exercises*: there is no mystic or ecstatic union with the divinity, no transcending of the exercitant's identity. And the "articulation current" of this exchange of signs "is that of a question and an answer", or at least a question on the presumption of a possible answer that perhaps never comes. (Loyola, in his *Journal*, as Barthes notes, comes to "the final and difficult fruit of ascesis [...] the reverential acceptance of God's silence".)³⁶ The interrogative structure presupposes a distance (separation) between the subject and object of interrogation; it also presupposes uncertainties (the lack of pre-knowledge of the answer or of God's will in the matter of election-- "which way should I choose?" or "which way would God have me choose?"). The Ignatian interrogative structure is also definitively subjective: the exercitant must be "in retreat"; he must be minimally instructed so that he may "through his own reasoning" enjoy "greater spiritual relish and fruit, than if he who gives the Exercises had fully explained and developed the meaning";³⁷ he must, in composing an image for contemplation, "see with the eye of the imagination", the inward eye;³⁸

he must "ask for an interior sense" of that upon which he would meditate (the pain of the suffering in hell, etc.) For the proper questions to be posed, the Ignatian subject must be "alone, apart and single": alone among men; apart from God; and singularly within his own imagination.²⁹

Certainly, the separations marking out the Ignatian subject also mark out, albeit profanely, this character Felix--"the accumulated and single [...] hunt[ing] down his own disqualification, rearticulating the bones of Imperial Courts long forgotten" (p. 9) much as Loyola hunts down his own sins and rearticulates the scenes of the Christian narrative in order to place himself, as image, on the periphery of each scene and thus stop the gap forced by time (history) and sin. (Can we not see, in each of these instances, an analogue to the active nostalgia for a primal whole, an origin before/above the separation and articulation?) Felix asks questions--of Robin, the press, the Pope--and receives no answers. "He expected none. He wrote to clear some doubt in his mind" (p. 109). Writing "to clear some doubt", to stop somewhere between the uncertainties, about his son's election--and we should note that one of the aims of the *Exercises* is to clear the mind of doubts that inhibit the making of an election--, Felix proceeds in the Ignatian manner, "indifferently" comparing (from the separate, objective position) "Franciscan monks and French priests" (p. 108) and "the very different confessional states" of Italy and France (p. 109). There is a great deal of Ignatius in Felix, however inappropriate a vessel this accumulated

character might be (and here we might detect a carnivalesque play in the misalignment of Jesuit theory and Jewish pseudo-aristocracy).

But we must (recalling the carnivalesque ambiguity of *Nightwood*) be careful not to confine the constellation of Ignatian themes and practices to Felix. As I noted before, singularity or solitariness marks every character in the text: O'Connor is "pathetic and alone", "the single and beholden bird" at "the holy water stoup" (p. 29); Robin is "alone and engrossed" (p. 45), "alone, lost and conspicuous" (p. 46); Nora is the "singular" "body falling" (p. 51); Jenny, who "could never be part of" her time, is the "one person [...] missing the importance of the moment" (p. 67). All are "lost", in all that that adjective connotes, separated, dismembered; all, in some fashion, ask questions that will not or cannot be answered and accommodate their expectations to those possible "zeroes" of signification, the echo and the silence ("she called and was not answered", for example [p. 64]); all compose, or attempt to compose, "pictures", either as figures or as image-makers or as both simultaneously.⁴⁰ It might be said that each character (with the notable exception of O'Connor?) is a carnivalized composition of a proper Ignatian subject. This subject, who is simultaneously observing and observed (for the exercitant is still always observed by the "director", who attunes the exercises to the exercitant's needs), seeks to make an election (Vote-ing, as it were). He seeks to become (Christian, human, animal) *something* in relation to that which is desired, to become *that* which is desired, and thus obliterate the separation that marks out the

arena of desire. And, why is O'Connor--he who is closest to Loyola in relative status and in religion--a possible exception? Perhaps because O'Connor, the "man with a prehistoric memory" (p. 164) who was "dead in the beginning" (p. 152), is on the other side of election and desire, where separation is simultaneously acknowledged and mourned as necessity, where the nostalgia for an original or primal wholeness is repudiated ("now *nothing, but wrath and weeping!*" [p. 166]), where rhetoric, narrative, is but the trace of an absent desire/origin.

"Oh, for God's sweet sake, couldn't you stand not learning your lesson? Because the lesson we learn is always by giving death and a sword to our lover. You are full to the brim with pride, but I am an empty pot going forward, saying my prayers in a dark place; because I know no one loves, I, least of all, and that no one loves me, that's what makes most people so passionate and bright, because they want to love and be loved, when there is only a bit of lying in the ear to make the ear forget what time is compiling [....]"
(pp. 146-147)

Is it not possible to read this *indifferent* "empty pot [...] saying [his] prayers in a dark place" as some sort of inverse realization of an Ignatian ideal? His soul, having been exercised, having "rid itself of all inordinate affections",⁴¹ is a perfect Ignatian cypher, the indifferent void between question and answer.

There is, then, on one level, a certain perverse propriety in the citing of Loyola as an epitome of the aloneness marking the characters of this text. Loyola, however, strikes yet deeper than that: on an

other, less obvious, level, the Ignatian system of composition seems to be informing the composition in/of *Nightwood* itself in at least two ways: the concept of "making a picture" and the manner of picture-making.

One of the principal methods (the "first prelude") of "contemplation" in *The Spiritual Exercises* is the "composition" of scenes with "the eye of the imagination". Loyola gives precise instructions for this process of composition in the Fifth Exercise of the First Week:

The first point will be to see with the eyes of the imagination those great fires, and the souls as it were in bodies of fire.

The second, to hear with the ears the wailings, the groans, the cries, the blasphemies against Christ our Lord, and against all His saints.

The third, to smell with the sense of smell the smoke, the brimstone, the filth and the corruption.

The fourth, to taste with the sense of taste bitter things, such as tears, sadness and the worm of conscience.

The fifth, to feel with the sense of touch how those fires touch and burn the souls.⁴²

This "composition of place", this first prelude making way for a second which is always "to ask for that which I desire" (a desire which is specific to the theme of the composition), depends upon a distinction of the senses, a virtual dividing up (dismembering?) of the subject into its five senses, five body parts. The images that such a process evokes are themselves concrete, substantial. The body, it seems, always marks

the limits of Ignatian composition, even when the theme to be meditated on is abstract:

In a meditation on an invisible thing, such as the present meditation on sins, the composition will be to see with the eyes of the imagination and to consider that my soul is imprisoned in this corruptible body, and my whole compound self in this vale [of misery] as in exile among brute beasts; I say my whole self, composed of soul and body.⁴³

The body is the limit of, the wall around, the soul as the realm of "brute beasts", of corporeality and mortality, marks the borders of the "whole self" (a notably split self), which is why the *body*, as exterior, must be chastised or caused "sensible pain" "in satisfaction for past sins" (of both body and soul) and why the *position* of the body (thus determining the position of the soul in its humility) in contemplation is crucial:

[...] one or two paces from the place in which I am about to contemplate or meditate I will stand for the space of an Our Father, with my mind raised on high, considering how God our Lord sees me, etc [.....]

[...] to enter upon the contemplation, at one time kneeling, at another prostrate on the ground, or lying face upwards, or seated, or standing, always intent on seeking that which I desire [...] if kneeling I find that which I desire, I will not change to another position; if prostrate, in like manner, etc [.....].⁴⁴

Not only is the (articulated) subject bound by an insistent corporeality, the objects of contemplation, whether animate or inanimate, mortal or divine, are pictured or composed as bodily images:

The first point is to see the persons on either side: first, those on the face of the earth, so varied in dress and bearing, some white and other black; some in peace, and others at war [....] some being born, others dying, etc.

Secondly, to see and consider the three divine Persons as on the royal seat or throne of the divine Majesty, how they behold the whole face and circuit of the earth [....]

It will be here to see with the eyes of the imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem, considering its length or breadth, and whether it be level or goes through valleys [....] to see our Lady, and S. Joseph, and the maid-servant, and the Infant Jesus after He is born, behaving myself as a poor and unworthy little servant [...] ministering to them in their necessities as though I were present there [...] then to reflect on myself in order to derive some profit.⁴⁵

The material or body--its articulations, faculties and positions--forms the precise arena of Ignatian contemplation and composition. (And, as Barthes notes, the human body is "of course" "the basis, the force of the materiality, the immediate total of desire", being both the guarantee of separation and the focus of acquisition.)⁴⁶ Is this not also the arena of *Nightwood's* composition?

Every character in this text is de-scribed in fragments: eyes, mouths, heads, necks, bellies, legs, hands and feet, skin, postures, gestures, clothes are run through in description, as though each character is, first and foremost, a body of articulated parts. From Nora to Jenny ("Only severed could any part of her have been called 'right'" [p. 65]), from Frau Mann to the image of "Nikka", not a single character is pictured without this articulation (and every character and almost every figure are pictured). It might prove profitable to adopt, if somewhat out of context, Scott's term "tableau" and suggest that each character is, in a particular sense, a tableau or a composite and material scene of articulated parts--a visible space (a photograph, a paragraph, a page?). It might also prove profitable to reconsider the initial tableau of Robin, that common object of desire:

On a bed, surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly over-sung by the notes of unseen birds, which seemed to have been forgotten--left without the usual silencing cover, which, like cloaks on funeral urns, are cast over their cages at night by good housewives--half flung off the support of the cushions from which, in a moment of threatened consciousness she had turned her head, lay the young woman, heavy and dishevelled. Her legs, in white flannel trousers, were spread as in a dance, the thick-lacquered pumps looking too lively for the arrested step. Her hands, long and beautiful, lay on either side of her face.

The perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the odour of oil of amber, which is an inner malady of the sea, making her seem as if she had invaded a sleep incautious and entire. Her flesh was the texture of plant life, and beneath it one sensed a frame, broad,

porous and sleep-worn, as if sleep were a decay
fishing her beneath the visible surface. About
her head there was an effulgence as of phos-
phorus glowing about the circumference of a
body of water--as if her life lay through her
in ungainly luminous deteriorations--the troub-
ling structure of the born somnambule, who
lives in two worlds--meet of child and desperado.
(pp. 34-35)

Practically the entire Ignatian system of composition operates in this description of the "troubling structure of the born somnambule". First, the place is composed--the bed, the plants, palms and flowers (note this *excessive* practice of trebling, the trebly floral which later becomes "a jungle" and "the wilderness" [p. 35]), and the birdsong, and the "unseen birds" (the invisible presence which later becomes the owner of the "set", an "unseen *dompteur*, half lord, half promoter" [p. 35]) are given substance metonymically by reference to "cover" and "cages". Then, the body is pictured--its position in the place, the head (most notably "turned"), the legs, trousers, shoes, hands, "perfume", flesh, its visible "effulgence" or aura. Finally, there is what might be called a "profitable reflection", an intermediate interpretation of the specific tableau ("the structure of the born somnambule") that asserts or assigns its value and meaning in the larger context (this exercise of *Nightwood*). Throughout the composition, four of the five senses are utilized: the place and the body, with its visible "effulgence", are "seen"; the "unseen birds" are "heard"; the "perfume" is "smelt"; and the "texture" of the "flesh" is simultaneously "felt" and "seen". (The fifth, omitted, sense--taste--is carried over to the paragraph concluding a digression on the "woman who presents herself [...] as a 'picture'" [p. 37]. I will be

turning to this crucial digression and the deferred sense in a moment.) The images are, for the most part, precise and concrete: even the "effulgence" is figuratively rendered in concrete terms, "as of phosphorous glowing about the circumference of a body of water" (and we should make note of this "circumference of a body"). It might even be suggested that this image of Robin is informed by the Ignatian theme of the "corruptible body" which both imprisons the soul or life and is imprisoned in the realm of "brute beasts" (the "jungle," the "set" of a "half lord, half promoter" "over which one expects to hear the strains of an orchestra of wood-winds render a serenade which will popularize the wilderness"[p. 35]).⁴⁷

Of course, the oppositional pairs soul/body, spirituality/corporeality, and heaven/vale of brutes are among the principal binary oppositions informing Christian theology (as Pauline theology), and the assignment of the theme of the corruptible body, etc., to the text of the *Exercises* alone could be made to seem most unforgiveably reductive. However, there is this difference in the discourse of the *Exercises* that distinguishes it from the general body of Christian writings on these matters, and this difference is constituted by what Barthes calls an "upward movement toward matter [...] conducted in the manner of a conscious fantasy". The body, the material proper, may be cast among "brute beasts", but it is still the "real referent" that Ignatian discourse moves *up* to, the corporeality of Christ, the materiality of the cross.

Semiologically, the image always sweeps on beyond the signified toward the pure materiality of the referent. Ignatius always follows this flow, which attempts to found meaning on matter and not on concept; placing himself before the Cross (placing that body before the Cross), he attempts to go beyond the signified of the image (the Christian, universally mediated meaning) to its referent, the material Cross, this crossed wood whose circumstantial attributes he attempts, through the imagining senses, to perceive.⁴⁸

Can we not see in Felix's "[...] how I did see her [...] I never did have a really clear idea of her [...] I had an image of her", some sense of a gap between a signifier ("the image") and a real referent where a signified ("clear idea of her") should be? In Felix's case, the image seems to be a substitute for an absent or impossible signified and, for Felix, the referent is indeterminable. However, in one of Nora's revelations to O'Connor, there is an attempt at sweeping past the signified, or the gap where the signified should be, to a "real" site:

"Looking from [the girl seen through an open door] to the Madonna behind the candles, I knew that the image, to her, was what I had been to Robin, not a saint at all, but a fixed dismay, the space between the human and the holy head, the arena of the "indecent" eternal. At that moment I stood in the centre of eroticism and death." (pp. 157-58)

Nora moves the "image" from "the Madonna behind the candles" to "what I had been for Robin" (a signified) to what might be a "real" referent-- "the centre of eroticism and death". The image would go beyond the (mistaken) signified, beyond the saint (the sublated/imaginary mother) or

more correct signified, to the "centre of eroticism and death" which is simultaneously the (matrical, Marian) body (that "real" locale of eroticism and death) and the (imagining) "space" articulating the human and the holy, the space of the "'indecent' eternal" which suggests an other origin or source, a sort of material/eternal source (referent) of/for the Marian image, like Ignatius's Cross. We might note, as well, what is placed *in* this "space", "arena", "centre"--the "I". The "I" takes the place of the "image", or is displaced into the image, becomes a substitute image in the image of the "Madonna". (We should recall, here, the imaginary nature of Nora's motherhood.) This, too, is broaching on Ignatian practice, this positing of an "I" that "is not a person" properly but an imaged subjectivity (a sort of Lacanian "mirroring") in the biblical scene of contemplation.⁴⁹ This would appear to be, perhaps, another attempt at shortcircuiting a signifier--signified--referent path: an attempt to place an "I" in the proximity of a real referent. However, *Nightwood* also, in this "evil" writing of the Marian image, appears to be sweeping that image beyond even a real referent to a "real", in the Lacanian sense, lying beyond representation itself. At this point, I return to the deferred sense, the "taste" that doesn't appear in the initial description of Robin Vote.

The woman who presents herself to the spectator as a "picture" forever arranged is, for the contemplative mind, the chiefest danger. Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human. Such a person's every movement will reduce to *an image* of a forgotten experience; *a mirage* of an eternal wedding cast on the racial memory; as insupportable a joy as would be the vision of an eland coming down an aisle

of trees, chapleted with orange blossoms and
bridal veil, a hoof raised in the economy of
fear, stepping in the trepidation of flesh
that will become myth; as the unicorn is neither
man nor beast deprived, but *human hunger pres-*
sing its breast to its prey.

Such a woman is the infected carrier of the
past: before her the structure of our head and
jaws ache--we feel that we could eat her, she
who is eaten death returning, for only then do
we put our face close to the blood on the lips
of our forefathers. (p. 37; emphasis added)

The image, in reduction, is being swept toward what appears a
"real" referent--a prehistoric, presymbolic "real"--in the possibility of
the taste of "blood". This is an "image of a *forgotten* experience", an
impossible image without a concept, as it were, without a signified or a
meaning in the rational, intelligible sense which is a function of re-
membering. It would seem to indicate a referent that is prior to the
Oedipal organization of the sexual instinct which, according to Freud,
informs the marriage alliances, etc., upon which human societies are
founded.⁵⁰ Just beyond this hymeneal image, this obscuring "mirage of
an eternal wedding"--articulating (marrying, copulating) the beast and
the human, flesh and myth--lies an infectious past, "eaten death", the
"body" and "blood" eaten by our fore-fathers, those (phallic) uni-corns
which are but (sexual, infant) "human hunger". Just beyond the reach of
this hymeneal image that the dangerous woman reduces for herself, to
stand for herself, is a "real" (original, female?) that "we feel we could
eat": the material, matrical body, "a sort of earth on which love feeds"
(p. 118). (We might profitably contrast this feeding with that posited
by Augustine, "[...] as if I heard this Thy voice from on high: 'I am the

food of them that be full grown; grow and thou shalt feed upon me", and by St. Paul, "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it [....]", both of which suggest that eating of the body or of meat is only for the adult.⁵¹ And, we might note, too, that children are forbidden the communion--the eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood--until they have reached an age of reason or can rationally profit from instruction and confirmation. *Nightwood's* feeding is a precise inversion of the Pauline metaphor.)

This (impossible) attempt to touch the "real" *via* the reduction to an image implies the reduction of signifiers but this implication seems to be a mirage itself. In this passage, the image that purports to be a reduction, that would reduce that distance between signifier and referent, is, in the proliferation of wedding significations, anything but reduced. Instead of the strict reduction that is implied by the movement of the image (bearing a subject) toward a "real" or referent, there is a virtual explosion of signification, an excess of writing--in effect, a "Metaphysical conceit" (in both senses of the phrase). This is, apparently, "the chiefest danger" "for the contemplative mind" that would reduce superfluity to a truth or to reach the truth: the attempt to place the image with the "real" or true referent (an attempt always in the imagination or in fantasy, for it is only there that "I" can "taste" the "real") results in a conceit or a text or a highly structured contemplative system--a writing. In short, the driving desire to recoup the "real" or referent makes for a writing beyond which the real world

recedes. As Dr. O'Connor says: "Even the contemplative life is only an effort [...] to hide the body so the feet won't stick out" (p. 134).

I have mentioned before, in this thesis, the repetitive (excessive) nature of *Nightwood's* writing--the recurrence and/or clustering of particular terms ("turn", "sleep", "decay", etc.). And, in Chapter Three, I considered the necessary economy of writing in which repetition (along with deferment and reserve) plays its part. The Ignatian system is also structured on repetition: each contemplation or composition repeats both the prescribed order and a biblical or doctrinal scene; each exercise is, in itself, infinitely repeatable. Such repetition is symptomatic of the drive of desire toward the "real"--toward that which is "hidden" beyond representation--and, in its consistent replaying of the image of a primal or primary scene, it weaves "text". It is by such textual repetition/composition that the Ignatian conversion of will is enabled. And, Ignatian conversion is, indeed, a conversion of the will to the Will of God, a conversion that passes through a death of the subject of Free Will which will henceforth be "indifferent", "as disposable as a corpse", its will having become (the space of) God's Will.⁵² This "indifference", whether it be sensible and/or intelligible, is, according to Loyola, "desiring and choosing only that which leads us directly to the end for which we were created". And, the "end for which we were created" is, of course, "to praise, reverence, and serve God" who, in the perfectly circular orbit of Pauline Christianity, is the origin.⁵³

[...] consider how God dwells in the creatures; in the elements, giving them being; in the plants, giving them growth; in the animals, giving them sensation; in men, giving them understanding; and so in me, giving me being, life, sensation, and causing me to understand; likewise making of me a temple, seeing that I am created in the likeness and image of His divine Majesty.⁵⁴

The persistent materiality of the Ignatian discourse is bent toward an ultimate origin that, in its ideality, precludes both the matrical (material) and difference. It is this ideal in-difference that Loyola seeks beyond, or in spite of, the primal scene: to be one with God, to be lost (as identity possessing Free Will) in the joyousness of the divine Will. Only God's in-dwelling gives matter being: without that in-dwelling, there is no *being* of matter. In a certain sense, Loyola would reach God through matter (this is Loyola's delightful practicality), but that matter has no being, no "real"-ity, without God. There is, even in Loyola, no other origin and no other end than the Father, and that Father creates in His "likeness".

For all its likeness to the Ignatian system of composition, *Nightwood* takes, here at the point of origin, as we have seen already, "the obstetric line". "'We were created'", reports Dr. O'Connor, "'that the earth might be made sensible of her inhuman taste; and love that the body might be so dear that even the earth should roar with it'" (p. 106), thus offering a perverse causality of creation and love--we were created that the material might be made conscious (of its materiality), and to this end, we "love" (praise, reverence) the "dear" body. *Nightwood*,

taking "the obstetric line", in a certain sense, extends the swerve upwards toward matter that Loyola initiates, taking it further toward that other end which Loyola must cut off at the crucial point of difference--the corruption and difference that is "the body and blood of ecstasy, religion and love". In that end (which is no real end) is presupposed a material origin, a primal scene that can only ever be repeated in its image, never realized--except, perhaps (but then, who knows?), in death, for "death" is but "intimacy walking backward" (p. 161). This is, perhaps, why, in *Nightwood*, "resurrection" is neither a culmination nor a sublation but "the second duel", yet one more bout in the ring.

Yet sometimes, going about the house, in passing each other, they would fall into an agonized embrace, looking into each other's face, their two heads in their four hands, so strained together that the space that divided them seemed to be thrusting them apart. Sometimes in these moments of insurmountable grief Robin would make some movement, use a peculiar turn of phrase not habitual to her, innocent of betrayal, by which Nora was informed that Robin had come from a world to which she would return. To keep her (in Robin there was this tragic longing to be kept, knowing herself astray) Nora knew now that there was no way but death. In death Robin would belong to her. Death went with them, together and alone; and with the torment and catastrophe, thoughts of resurrection, the second duel.

[...] Nora spoke to herself: "In the resurrection, when we come up looking backward at each other, I shall know you only of all that company. My ear shall turn in the socket of my head; my eyeballs loosened where I am the whirlwind about that cashed expense, my foot stubborn on the cast of your grave." In the doorway Robin stood. "Don't wait for me," she said. (pp. 58-59)

This apocalyptic passage bears almost all the traces noted, in this chapter, of *Nightwood's* carnivalesque engagement with Pauline Christian discourse in its Augustinian and Ignatian guises: the turn, which is also only a "turn of phrase"; the unbridgeable "space between" and the impossibility of at-one-ment; the doubled glance from the back of the head ("looking backward at each other"); the composition of a picture (Nora's resurrection scenario) as a function of so-called profane desire; and the persistent materiality of images ("My ear [...] my eyeballs [...] my foot") aimed toward an other end. At the very crucial point of resurrection, upon the central tenet of Christian doctrine, the traces of *Nightwood's* "obstretic line" converge to bisect the Father's pregnant-looking belly in an other economy of death (of "cashed expense") that does not offer re-subsumption in one origin/end but an acknowledgement of irreparable severance. Nora imagines a perverse or carnivalesque version of at-one-ment, but this version is itself subverted, doubly-carnivalized, by the other's supplemental and uncontextual response: "Don't wait for me [...]" And, the Christian Nora is left--with her "foot" on the "cast" (remainder, excess grave dirt, mark, image) of the other's "grave" (marking irreplaceable loss)--to cover the "insurmountable grief" of separation and unresolvable difference with the writing of letters, epistles.

III.

In order to open up both a conclusion to this chapter and an introduction to the next, I would like to posit a little speculation brought to mind by Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman*.⁵⁵ One of the matters that Irigaray analyzes in this text is the reflective nature of Platonic metaphysics: in the section, "Plato's *Hysterá*", beginning with "the myth of the cave" ("Ground, dwelling, cave, and even, in a different way, form--all these terms can be read more or less as equivalents of the *hysterá*") and with the reflections on the "back of the cave, which will serve as the *backcloth* for all the representations to come", Irigaray uncovers the Platonic obliteration of the essential inversion (the mirror imaging) underlying the concept of likeness.⁵⁶ Such an inversion, acknowledgement of which would upset everything, would necessarily be the first thing to be eclipsed, forgotten, repressed by Pauline theology. In the light of Irigaray's *speculum*, it is possible, perhaps, to see *Nightwood*, in which inversion appears to be the precondition of being, as re-activating that which has been suppressed at the heart of Pauline Christianity--the primary inversion of that image which is Man made in the likeness of God. Consider this theodescription of Matthew O'Connor, "the other woman that God forgot", made upon his return to the place from which his rhetoric set out:

"So we come back to the place from which I set out; pray to the good God; she will keep you. Personally I call her 'she' because of the way

she made me; it somehow balances the mistake."
(p. 150)

The Father has made a mistake in the creation of likeness: it is better, then, that the Father be called "she". That will balance (correct, ameliorate) the apparent unlikeness of this invert O'Connor. It will also unsettle, humourously, the Pauline Christian expectation of a source or origin that is infallible, beyond trickery, and definitely male.

I will be discussing the theme of homosexuality in the following chapter, but I would like to point out here that in predicating (carnavalesque, sexual) inversion as its (already constituted) ground, *Nightwood* has brought out of the closet the essentially inverted nature of a theology of likeness, of the ("masculine") Christian desire for a Same, the Father, in whose likeness we (men) are made--or who we (men) made in our likeness:

"Man," [Nora] said, her eyelids quivering, "conditioning himself to fear, made God; as the prehistoric, conditioning itself to hope, made man--the cooling of the earth, the receding of the sea. And I, who want power, chose a girl who resembles a boy." (p. 136)

Perhaps we should also recall, here, Bakhtin's suggestion that "ancient Christian narrative literature (including the canonical) [...] was permeated by elements of the menippea and carnivalization". "It is sufficient to recall the crowning and discrowning of the 'King of the Jews' in the canonical Gospels."⁵⁷

Nightwood, following the "obstetric line", has not only re-called the material, matrilineal origin repressed by Pauline Christian discourse, but also demonstrated that the entire western concept of source as sameness has always already been contaminated by difference. Cherished distinctions between good and evil, soul and body, light and dark, paternal and maternal, etc., can no longer hold under the perverse possibility of O'Connor's (bisexual?) carnivalized God or Nora's man-made God. And Christian teleology can no longer hold alone when, in a carnivalesque double-play, the spiritual "end" is revealed as also an unrecoverable (though we may call it as loud as we like) and different, material "origin".

CHAPTER FIVE

EROTICISM AND DEATH

"There's nothing to go by, Matthew", she said. "You do not know which way to go. A man is another person--a woman is yourself, caught as you turn in panic; on her mouth you kiss your own. If she is taken you cry that you have been robbed of yourself. God laughs at me, but his laughter is my love." (p. 143)

"At that moment I stood in the centre of eroticism and death, death that makes the dead smaller, as a lover we are beginning to forget dwindles and wastes [...] I knew in that bed Robin should have put me down. In that bed we would have forgotten our lives in the extremity of memory, moulted our parts, as figures in the waxworks are moulted down to their story, so we would have broken down to our love." (pp. 157-58)

"For Robin is incest too; that is one of her powers." (p. 156)

Nightwood is not essentially a "lesbian novel". Nor is it primarily, as Monique Wittig would have it, the work of a "minority writer", or a writer belonging to a minority determined by sexual preference.¹ Of course, homosexuality is one of its themes, but not, I would argue, the determinate theme. *Nightwood* does not "tell" of the hidden (unspoken, unillustrated) experience of a certain minority--"Life is not to be told, call it as loud as you like, it will not tell itself" (p. 129). If we were to read it as such a telling, we would probably be forced to place it in the "pathological" school of accountancy instituted by Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing, for there appears to be nothing redemptive or constructive in the loves of Robin, Nora and Matthew.² But then, as we have seen, *Nightwood* is not the sort of text

in which conventional categories (majority/minority, for example) are preserved.

It is interesting to note the words that do *not* appear in this novel, adjective/substantives like "homosexual", "sapphic", and "lesbian". The dis-appearance of such words in certain minority texts could be, and has been, explained as a necessary subterfuge, an evasion of censorship, on the premise that the public considers such words so dangerous that their concepts can only be rendered euphemistically.³ While such an explanation may justify, say, Gertrude Stein's euphemistic style (and I don't think that it does), it is quite beside the point in a discussion of *Nightwood* where there can be no mistaking the connotations of the words that do appear, and appear emphatically,-- "invert" and "third sex".⁴ The fact that Barnes, in writing *Nightwood*, has chosen these particular terms, and the attendant "uninhabited angel", over "homosexual", etc., suggests that an other sort of emphasis is being placed on the theme of homosexuality. "Homosexual", "sapphic", and "lesbian" each bear a certain, specific, and closed singularity of reference and/or condition: the *homo* of "homosexual" is a taxonomic reference to a "genus of which Man is the single species" (OED); and "sapphic" and "lesbian" both have singular, specific etymological referents--Sappho and Lesbos. All three terms connote a love that is uni-sexual, between samenesses, and a set that is closed, exclusive. The terms of *Nightwood*, by comparison and despite the contexts of their origins, are at least bivalent and ambiguous: "invert", while containing

the trace of its obverse--the "proper"--, also opens up to the entire contiguous series of "the -vert family of terms"; the "third sex" suggests, at once, something more than or in excess of duality and the mingling (indiscriminately) of what had been mutually exclusive sets-- male and female; and the "uninhabited angel" con-joins two other parallel and exclusive sets-- (divinity, presence, eternity, etc.) and (void, absence, nothingness, etc.). The use of such open or opening terms obviates the designation of *Nightwood* as belonging to the closed set "lesbian novel". It is the difference in purported sameness, not sameness itself, on which the vision of *Nightwood* is focussed: "'My voice cracked on the word "difference", soaring up divinely"', says Dr. O'Connor, emphasizing that difference between homosexual loves (p. 92).

I would also like to put to rest, at the outset, the notion (frequently expressed) that *Nightwood* is somehow about androgyny. In the much cited passage delineating "the invert" as androgyne, O'Connor suggests that the androgyne--the reversible boy/girl that overcomes difference by subsuming two in one and is generically a Platonic figure--is a utopian sort of "myth" and "'the sweetest lie of all'" (p. 137). The "invert" as "'the pretty lad who is a girl [...], the prince-princess in point lace" is but "the painting on the fan"' (p. 136), a covering signification that would ameliorate the painful recognition of difference. To be "unsexed", and so above difference, like the androgynous Frau Mann (p. 14) is to have absorbed the covering signification, to have become what a "miscalculated longing has

created" (p. 137), a "doll", or a "painting on a fan". For Frau Mann "exact difference" is the difference between disparate substances ("meat and liquid" [p. 15]). When it comes to a sameness, the same family, Frau Mann is half-blind "with one eye closed": "'I've an album of my own [...] and everyone in it looks like a soldier'" (p. 27). The sublation of difference in androgyny is not, I think, accredited in *Nightwood* which reaches for the "troubling structure"--"meet of child and desperado"--beneath the covering signification of apparent sameness. After all, the bi-sexual Robin is not a doll: she plays with dolls--and smashes their heads.

Rather than having arisen from the realm of the homosexual (or androgynous?) minority (which is distinguished by its sameness to itself), *Nightwood* is situated at that carnivalesque point where the so-called minority opens up and reveals its difference--there where the "heat of [...] suppuration" mingles "core" with "core" (p. 153)--in a practice that explodes distinctions, samenesses, categorizations. Wittig states that a "text by a minority writer is effective only if it succeeds in making the minority point of view universal".⁵ To a certain extent this is what *Nightwood* does, by breaking down the barriers between the minority and the universal, by assuming inversion at the outset, although the wholistic notion of a "universal view" is oppressive in this context. It might be more to the point to say that *Nightwood*, by cracking the mirror of sameness into a myriad

differences, radically alters the distinction between minority and universal.

Any *fictional theme* is, by definition, a challenge to the single signified since it is a polyvalent signified, a "blasting of the self-hood" (Georges Bataille). This is no doubt so because the fantasies that nourish such a theme converge on that impossible focus, that unthinkable "origin" constituted by the scene of scenes, the so-called primal scene.⁶

In examining the homosexual theme--or, to follow the text's instruction, the "invert" theme--in *Nightwood*, I will be reading it as the sort of "challenge to the single signified" suggested by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*. The "fictional theme", in *Nightwood*, goes far beyond the "single signified" of homo-sexuality (as sexual/social preference and practice) to the verge of that "impossible focus", "the centre of eroticism and death", where "incest" (transgression) itself is power (rather than the power of law prohibiting incest). Going backward, it might be said, through object-choice and fantasy to the place, the (parental) "bed" at "the extremity of memory", where lovers are "moulted down to their story", *Nightwood* approaches what *might* be called the universal, if we recall that "universal" is only another member of "the -vert family". Beyond homo-sexuality and the separation of minority and majority, through in-version and through "writing", the text addresses a "so-called primal scene" which is not quite, perhaps, a Freudian primal scene, although its Freudian lineaments are evident.

Seemingly following Freud, Barnes focuses on a "so-called primal scene" through the agency of dis-ease--the unidentical twin diseases of inversion and hysteria.⁷ (It is because of this apparent *agency* of homosexuality that I refused to call *Nightwood* a "lesbian novel" as agency implies emphasis on another object which the agent is to affect.) However, Barnes's "hysteric", Robin, is not quite what Freud might have had her be, although Freud's fascination with elusive hysterics might be seen to be in some ways analogous to Nora's (and the text's) passion for Robin.⁸ *Nightwood* presents quite an other reading of hysteria and, through hysteria, the primal scene to that of properly Freudian analysis: this reading is actually a carnivalizing of certain Freudian theories. Disengaging the hysteric from her cause (Robin has no family), taking her out of the protective (patriarchal) house and setting her loose to wander the night streets and circuses, *Nightwood* re-writes the pathology of hysteria and, in doing so, reconstitutes "the other woman that God [Freud?] forgot" (p. 143).

In this chapter, I will attempt to follow through *Nightwood* the course of the hysteric and the marks of "abjection" (which enables the writing of hysteria) in order to broach the text's re-presentation of the "prehistoric" "primal scene" on which its other themes of history, religion and memory seem to depend. I will, in due course, be delineating more closely my use of each of these two seminal terms-- "hysteria" and "abjection"--, but I think it necessary to explain here

why I have connected these two seemingly disparate conditions.

Kristeva points out that:

Contrary to hysteria, which brings about, ignores, or seduces the symbolic but does not produce it, the subject of abjection is eminently productive of culture. Its symptom is the rejection and reconstruction of languages.⁹

Barnes is, I will argue, a "writer of abjection", as Kristeva has defined that being in *Powers of Horror*. And, Barnes writes, also, about hysteria. Of course, hysteria (although it wreaks all sorts of signification on the body) cannot produce the symbolic--it is mute, a-lingual as such. It cannot be written properly, except, perhaps, in a text like *Nightwood* where the hysteric is made the "abject", the non-object as it were. All of Kristeva's writers of abjection, as might be expected, are men--Dostoevsky, Proust, Joyce, Borges, Artaud, Céline-- (whether hetero- or homo-sexual doesn't matter at this point).¹⁰ According to the Kristevan scheme, it shouldn't matter that the writer of *Nightwood* is a woman; but I suggest that, in a certain sense, it does matter for only a woman (perhaps) could find the hysteric (ad. L. *hystericus*, ad. Gr. ὑστερικὸς [f. ὑστέρα womb] [OED]) abject, as something (or no-thing) to be sublimated in writing. This may be a forced intrusion of biologism into Kristeva's system (which seems always to be trying to evade the exigencies of biological determinism), but I think that *Nightwood*, with its emphasis on the biological and on the "beast", justifies such an intrusion.

I.

*Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences.*¹¹

Speaking as a whole, hysterical attacks, like hysteria in general, revive a piece of sexual activity in women which existed during their childhood and at that time revealed an essentially masculine character. It can often be observed that girls who have shown a boyish nature and inclinations up to the years before puberty are precisely those who become hysterical from puberty onwards.¹²

The bisexual nature of hysterical symptoms, which can in any event be demonstrated in numerous cases, is an interesting confirmation of my view that the postulated existence of an innate bisexual disposition in man is especially clearly visible in the analysis of psychoneurotics.¹³

Taking its prehistory as a starting point, I will only emphasize here that the development of femininity remains exposed to disturbance by the residual phenomena of the early masculine period. Regressions to the fixations of the pre-Oedipus phases very frequently occur; in the course of some women's lives there is a repeated alternation between periods in which masculinity or femininity gains the upper hand. Some portion of what we men call the 'enigma of women' may perhaps be derived from this expression of bisexuality in women's lives.¹⁴

In the following months [Felix] put his faith in the fact that Robin had Christian proclivities, and his hope in the discovery that she was an enigma. He said to himself that possibly she had greatness hidden in the non-committal. He felt that her attention [...] had already been taken by something not yet in history. Always she seemed to be listening to the echo of some foray in the blood that had known no setting [...] (p. 44)

Hysteria would seem to be the *cause celebre* of the Freudian psychoanalytic project. It was the subject of hysteria (and Charcot's treatment of it) that first turned Freud's head from cerebral anatomy to psychopathology. (We might note, as well, that this sea-change of Freud began during his courtship of Marthe Bernays and at a time when he suspected himself of suffering from hysteria.)¹⁵ And, his fascination with this subject, the hysterical subject, never waned. Of course, over the years, his view of hysteria changed. In his, and Breuer's, first major analysis of the condition, *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), hysteria is a particular form of neurosis, distinct from neurasthenia and the anxiety neuroses, to which either gender may be subject and which is identified by ("its basis and *sine qua non*") "the existence of hypnoid states".¹⁶ By the time of his writing of *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, hysteria appears to have become the *female condition par excellence*, so intimately bound to woman's psychology that all of Freud's postulations about that psychology--penis envy, the oedipal phase succeeding the castration complex, the lack of a female libido and the fact that "the little girl is a little man", the "innate bisexual nature disposition of [woman? and] man"--can be traced back to his treatment of *his* hysterics.¹⁷ It might be said that hysteria was, for Freud, the threshold of the "other": through the rupture that hysteria made in normal feminine behaviour, Freud sought to identify the essential structures of the other sex's psyche.¹⁸ However, he does not appear to have stepped over that threshold. Despite his many essential discoveries (observations),

Freud could not undo the "enigma of women"--women's psychology remained for him a "dark continent", its earliest phases "so difficult to grasp in analysis--so grey with age and shadowy and almost impossible to revivify [...]" that its proper history was ultimately ineluctable.¹⁹ Peering through the rupture of hysteria, he seems to have found everything but what he was really looking for--the essential "other".

Part of Freud's problem with the "woman question" could be his attempt to identify femininity within a specifically phallic system of signification. If *the* object of desire is the phallus--and Jacques Lacan has demonstrated that, for Freud, the object of desire is always the phallus²⁰--, and if woman's psychology is constituted by the lack of the prototypical phallus (penis envy), then Freud's object of investigation (his object of investigative desire, the unknown, the "other") is literally a no-thing, nothing that can be grasped. This gap and other similar gaps around the "enigma of women" in the comprehensive Freudian text have been the subject of much critical comment and debate in recent years.²¹ Yet, despite Freud's problem with a good 50% of the human race, the Freudian text has exerted an irradicable influence on the Western conception of human psychology: the split subject, the structured unconscious, the psychological efficacy of dreams, the libido, etc., are all (inordinately useful) "givens". We are, as Joyce puts it, all "jung and easily freudened".²² But, as the Freudian project is an investigation into the psycho-

universals of the distinctly Pauline and Platonic (logocentric, phallogocentric) western civilization, we should not be surprised that here, too, woman is mis-apprehended, if "she" is apprehended at all. The Freudian view of women (the view taken through the hysterical rupture) is, whether or not it is always acknowledged, a predominant 20th century re-view of traditional metaphysical and theological presuppositions about women, and we cannot afford to ignore it.

Barnes did not ignore Freud. *Nightwood*, like her other works, bears the marks of an engagement with the Freudian text. As Robert Nadeau suggests, the "understanding of the structure of man's interior life revealed in the narrative [of *Nightwood*] is remarkably close to that advanced by Sigmund Freud only a few years before Barnes began work on the novel". In "*Nightwood* and the Freudian Unconscious", Nadeau demonstrates this similarity by reading the characters as "representatives of the interior workings of the human mind at different points along the continuum of psychic experience". (Thus, Robin represents the id; Felix, and to a lesser extent Nora and Jenny, represent the superego; and O'Connor, the mediator between Robin and her lovers, is like the ego. However, as Nadeau points out, in Freud's wake, the id, ego, and superego are "not completely disparate and distinct from one another", and the characters should not be read as "allegorical figures" of the three "mental provinces".)²³ Although Nadeau's article has little to do ostensibly with the immediate subject of hysteria, his argument that *Nightwood* bears important similarities

to the Freudian text lends support to my argument that Barnes was more familiar with that text than Barnes criticism, in general, would seem to indicate.

Jane Marcus's "Laughing at Leviticus: *Nightwood* as Woman's Circus Epic" is another supportive exception to the general rule. (Marcus also sees Barnes as a "writer of abjection".) However, rather than seeing *Nightwood* as collaborative with Freudian theory as Nadeau does, Marcus states that "*Nightwood*'s project is to expose Freudian psychoanalysis's collaboration with fascism in its desire to 'civilize' and make 'normal' what it considers to be the sexually aberrant misfit".²⁴

In this reading Nora is the archetypal Dora or female hysteric, and Dr. Freud is brilliantly parodied in the figure of Dr. Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor. The lesbian patient chooses as doctor a trans-vestite whose most passionate desire is to be a woman, whose womb-envy is so strong that it parodies Freudian penis-envy mercilessly. The psychoanalyst's office is a filthy bedroom with a reeking chamber pot. [...] The psychoanalytic structure is ruptured as the patient asks the question and the doctor answers [...] The patient is rational, puritanical, and analytical; the doctor is mad.²⁵

Thus, *Nightwood* parodies (or carnivalizes, for Marcus holds that *Nightwood* is a carnivalesque novel) Freudianism as it "challenges not only Freud, but the whole history of the treatment of female hysteria".²⁶ My argument is very close to Marcus's, although, as will become apparent, it differs radically from hers on a number of seminal

points. However, it is enough to note, at this point, that, as far as Marcus is concerned, Barnes--although "we" "are not accustomed to thinking of [her] as a learned woman, a scholar as well as a writer"²⁷--had far more than a passing knowledge of Freudian psychoanalytic theory.

In her 1922 interview with James Joyce for *Vanity Fair*, Barnes records Joyce addressing her as one of "you Freudians".²⁸ As Barnes did not take notes during interviews, preferring to reconstruct the conversation after the fact, we might suppose that "you Freudians" was as much a self-designation as a Joycean accusation. (According to Joyce [or Barnes's Joyce, at least], psychoanalysis is "neither more nor less than blackmail".)²⁹ However, such blatant instances are rare in Barnes's published work, and we must look for other sorts of traces of Freud. Nadeau has uncovered many thematic traces in his alignment of characters and "mental provinces", in his recognition of how the power of the superego is diminished in this novel as it is in sleep, and in his diagnosis of O'Connor's "neurotic anxiety", for example. Marcus demonstrates Barnes's thematic exposé of Freudian theories on hysteria and lesbianism. But there are, I would argue, more explicitly textual traces of "Freud" in *Nightwood*, traces that would, perhaps, indicate more than a familiarity, on Barnes's part, with Freudian themes and/or theories.

In Chapter Four of this thesis, I mentioned briefly, in passing, a dream-passage in which Nora and Robin are like "a pair of opera glasses turned to the wrong end". The sentence, in its entirety, reads as:

The louder she cried out the farther away went the floor below, as if Robin and she, in their extremity, were a pair of opera glasses turned to the wrong end, diminishing in their painful love; a speed that ran away with the two ends of the building, stretching her apart. (pp. 62-63)

Compare this dream passage to a passage from James Strachey's 1933 translation of Freud's "Revision of Dream-Theory" in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*

In general, indeed, where it is possible, the dreamwork changes temporal relations into spatial ones and represents them as such. In a dream, for instance, one may see a scene between two people who look very small and *a long way off*, as though one were seeing them *through the wrong end of a pair of opera-glasses*. Here, both the smallness and the remoteness in space have the same significance: what is meant is remoteness in *time* [Freud's italics] and we are to understand that the scene is from the remote past.³⁰*emphasis added*

As well as noting the complementary references to opera glasses, we should also consider *Nightwood's* frequent "references" to Robin's prehistorical-ness and Nora's claims that Robin was "like a relative found in another generation" (p. 157) and that "she was a long way off and waiting to begin" (p. 155). Of course, the image of the wrong end of a pair of opera glasses is not peculiar to Freudian discourse, and

the phrase "a long way off" is even less so, but given the specific contexts (the dream, the contraction and spatialization of time), it is quite possible to see in Nora's dream(s) and reflections the recitation of the Freudian *text*—or, at least, Strachey's Freudian text.

The first part of the chapter "Watchman, What of the Night" can also be read as a recitation, with a difference, of a Freudian passage. In the *Studies on Hysteria*, also translated by Strachey, Freud recounts one early success of his "pressure of the hand" therapy. The female patient, in this case, was suffering from obsessive neurosis, but as Freud points out, "the psychological mechanism of obsessions has a very great deal of internal kinship with hysterical symptoms and [...] the technique of analysis is the same for both of them". His account of this case reads as follows:

When I asked this lady whether she had seen anything or had any recollection under the pressure of my hand, she replied: 'Neither one nor the other, but a word has suddenly occurred to me.' 'A single word?' 'Yes, but it sounds too silly.' 'Say it all the same.' 'Concierge.' 'Nothing else?' 'No.' I pressed a second time and once more an isolated word shot through her mind: '*Night-gown*' [....] by pressing repeatedly, I brought out what seemed to be a meaningless series of words: '*Concierge*'--'*night-gown*'--'*bed*'--'*town*'--'*farm-cart*'. 'What does all this mean?' I asked. She reflected for a moment and the following thought occurred to her: '*It must be the story that has just come into my head. When I was ten years old and my next elder sister was twelve, she went raving mad one night and had to be tied down and taken into town on a farm-cart. I remember perfectly that it was the concierge who overpowered*

her and afterwards went with her to the asylum as well.' [...] Soon [...] the meaning of this reminiscence became clear. Her sister's illness made such a deep impression on her because the two of them shared a secret; they slept in one room and on a particular night they had both been subjected to sexual assaults by a certain man [...]. The peculiarity of this case lay only in the emergence of isolated key-words which we had to work into sentences; for the appearance of disconnectedness and irrelevance which characterized the words emitted in this oracular fashion applies equally to the complete ideas and scenes which are normally produced under my pressure.³¹ *emphasis added*

Barnes, taking over from the analyst, has worked these precise "key-words" into other "sentences" on night-time "madness" in "Watchman, What of the Night". The chapter starts with the concierge who, in "the anger of broken sleep", directs--like the concierge who directs the mad girl to the asylum--Nora to the doctor's room. Once she is in the doctor's room, it *suddenly occurs* to Nora that "'children know something they can't tell; they like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed'" (p. 79), which is another recounting of the secret ("something they can't tell") of the girl(s) assaulted by a "certain man", a "wolf". Nora's next thought is a disquisition on the gown, "the natural raiment of extremity": "'What nation, what religion, what ghost, what dream, has not worn it--infants, angels, priests, the dead [...].'" Dr. O'Connor completes this thought by connecting *night* with *gown*, while establishing the fundamental distinction upon which the rest of his (sometimes disconnected and seemingly irrelevant) discourse hinges: "'The Bible lies the one way, but the night-gown the other. The night, 'Beware of that dark door!'" (p. 80). From the "night-gown", O'Connor's

gospel moves to the "bed" and the "town", emphasizing by capitalizing these latter "key-words":

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor. "Let a man lay himself down in the *Great Bed* and his 'identity' is no longer his own, his 'trust' is not with him, and his 'willingness' is turned over and is of another permission. His distress is wild and anonymous. He sleeps in a *Town of Darkness*, member of a secret brotherhood. He neither knows himself nor his out-riders: he *berserks* a fearful dimension and dismounts, miraculously, in *bed*!" (p. 81; emphasis added)

Thus, the "doctor" "describes" the unconscious--the "Great Bed" of sleep and the "Town of Darkness", the night in which one goes "raving mad" or "berserks a fearful dimension". Following, for the most part and in precisely the same order, the chain of "isolated key-words" recounted by Freud, working them "into sentences", O'Connor delivers an almost Freudian "unconscious", beyond "identity", "trust", and "willingness" (the constituents of the ego). The "farm-cart" that ends Freud's series does not appear as such in Barnes's text, but there is the "Cart" in O'Connor's recitation of Donne's Sermon Number 2 (*Psalms* 90.14):

"But what of our own death--permit us to reproach the night, wherein we die manifold alone. Donne says: 'We are all conceived in close prison, in our mothers' wombs we are close prisoners all. When we are born, we are but born to the liberty of the house--all our life is but a going out to the place of execution and death. Now was there ever any man seen to sleep in the Cart, between Newgate and Tyburn? Between the prison and the place of execution, does any man sleep?' Yet he says, 'Men sleep all the way.' How much more, there-

fore, is there upon him a close sleep when he is mounted on darkness." (p. 97)

The phrase "mounted on darkness" recalls the "outriders" and "dismounts" of the earlier paragraph and thus links, indirectly, the two passages. It is quite possible to see Donne's "Cart" (the executioner's cart being a symbolically humble vehicle) carrying us all to our deaths as Barnes's version of Freud's "farm-cart" carrying the mad girl (still in her "night-gown"?) through the night to the asylum. Again, the "key-word" is capitalized (although the capital is borrowed from Donne) as though to isolate and emphasize it, and Barnes's capitalized and alembicated version of Freud's series is taken one step beyond the unconscious to death--or to the "death drives".

The textual similarities between *Nightwood* and Strachey's translations of Freud demonstrate not only the likelihood that Barnes had read and was reading (Strachey's) Freud, but also that *Nightwood* is, in part, an active re-working (re-writing, making into other sentences, re-emphasizing, filling up) of certain parts of the Freudian text. The assumption (in both senses of the word) of the series "concierge", "night-gown", "bed", "town", "farm-cart" is a case in point: from Freud's proprietorial recounting of a single woman's fragmented reminiscence of sexual assault and a mad sister, Barnes has drawn, *via* the mediation of Donne's text and by a process very like allegorization ("lifting" simple signifiers into symbols), the "life" of the unconscious *per se*. This practice of lifting fragments of discourse into significant units and

working them into sentences, often with the mediation of literary texts, is, of course, Freud's *modus operandi*. However, Barnes's apparent employment of Freudian text and method does not signal a lateral adoption of Freudian theory any more than it signals a parody of that theory. What happens in *Nightwood* to the Freudian text is much more serious (in the Bakhtinian sense of a serious, deathly laughter) than parody (in which the object-text is still recognizable): in *Nightwood* the Freudian text is re-volutionized, rather than conserved. Freud, after all, is never cited, although Loyola, Donne, Montaigne, etc., are. The old economy collapses, and the "scientific" psychoanalytic text is un-authorized and mingled with an authorized poetic/sermonic text ("mingling them both with the Holy Spoon, which is that story" [p. 21]) in a fantastic "*fictional theme*" focussed on a primal scene at "the extremity of memory" (the scene of birth, death, holiness and eroticism, of which the "gown" is the "natural raiment"). In other words, *Nightwood* makes capital of fragments of the Freudian text and invests them in an other fictional and polyvalent economy.

There is another way of looking at all of this, and that is, what will amount to, a reading of *Nightwood's* characters in the light of the text's engagement with Freudian theory. This reading will take us from hysteria to abjection (the writing of abjection), traversing Kristeva's distinction between the two conditions and, hopefully, bringing us to a re-vision of the (male?) "writer of abjection".

II.

In *Nightwood*, Robin is the hysteric *par excellence* and not Nora, as Marcus has maintained. It is Robin, the bisexual somnambule whose movements recall a "prehistory" veiled by the webs of time and whose expressions are the "poses of her annihilation" (p. 35), who bears all the stigmata of hysteria. She suffers definitive hysterical attacks of "cataleptic rigidity"—for example, "a cataleptic frozen gesture" (p. 69)—and "*attaque de sommeil*", "sleep worn, as if sleep were a decay fishing her beneath the visible surface" (p. 34).³² She is suggestible, her life having "no volition for refusal" (p. 43), and she is often inarticulate, unable to say where she has been or where she wants to be. She suffers from fright and from unconscious "reminiscences". And she is bisexual.

However, these symptoms are about all we know of Robin. The text offers no etiology of her neurosis. She has no specific background—no mother, father, sibling, class—other than her Americanness, which signifies a newness or infancy in historical terms and an illimitable (malleable?) future possibility: "'With an American anything can be done'" (p. 39). She has no vocation, no visible means of support, no "home". In a certain sense, this "incurable yet to be stricken with its malady" (p. 41)—and we should pay attention to the impersonal pronoun—is a neurosis without a history, a pastiche of symptoms without an etiology. Robin has no motivation: her only powers are "a stubborn

cataleptic calm" (p. 45) and "incest". Rather than designating her the hysteric *par excellence*, it might be more to the point to say that "she" is hysteria *per se*, and that this hysteria exceeds (because it is enigmatic) the economy of dis-ease.

The only other thing that we know about Robin is that she is *the* "object of desire" in/for this text. In more properly Freudian terms, she would be the "phallus"; but *Nightwood*, as we have seen, is not quite the arena of propriety.³³ Of course, it is possible to detect in *Nightwood* traces of the phallic organization of Freudian desire--we need only recall the doll substituting for the child/phallus that Robin and Nora "cannot have" (p. 142) and Felix's desire for Robin as the mother of his son/self³⁴--, but *Nightwood* undoes the Freudian family knot while (seemingly) mimicking it, and the first loose thread in this knot is the generalized hysteria placed in the position of the object of desire.

In *Nightwood*, hysteria--as Robin--takes on all the weight of that (pre-oedipal) prehistory of women's psychology that so fascinated and so continually eluded Freud. In the fourth chapter of this thesis, I discussed in some detail the figure of Robin as matrilineal origin and so will not detail these particular lineaments of Robin. But, I will reiterate that Robin (hysteria) is a figuration of the matrilineal source (*hystera*) that thrusts the child out of and away from itself and toward individuation and the symbolic. No matter how continually one "goes

back" to "find" "Robin", she cannot/will not be found, at least not by the subject, for the umbilicus has been severed, once and for all. Robin's "past" has nothing to do with the oedipal organizations of the individual or of society: it is preoedipal, prehistorical, presymbolic, prephallic, almost prehuman, yet anachronistically ongoing. She "yet carried the quality of the 'way back' as animals do" (p. 40). "She was gracious and yet fading, like an old statue in a garden, that symbolizes the weather through which it has endured, and is not so much the work of man as the work of wind and rain and the herd of the seasons [...]" (p. 41). She seemed "newly ancient" (p. 42) and "to be listening to the echo of some foray in the blood that had known no setting" (p. 44). She thought "unpeopled thoughts" and "she laughed, out of some hidden capacity, some lost subterranean humour" (pp. 46-7). She had, according to Felix, "the quality of one sole condition, [...] a condition of being that she had not, at that time, even chosen, but a fluid sort of possession [...]" (p. 112), and she had made for herself "a fearful sort of primitive innocence" (p. 117). She had "an undefinable disorder, a sort of 'odour of memory', like a person who has come from a place that we have forgotten and would give our life to recall" (p. 118). Robin has the "rigour" of the murderer whose "crime" is "a way to lay hands on the shudder of a past that is still vibrating" (pp. 118-19). In a sense, Robin is a remainder (reminder) of the natural, bloody, "primitive", "fluid sort of possession" that once held us all and will forever be our (unconscious) primary object of desire: she is the enigmatic clue to the puzzle of material origin.

However, we must be careful not to make an archetypal or mythical figure of Robin: like any hysteric, she is a trace-bearer, a body upon which are inscribed hieroglyphic traces of what might be described as "archetypes" or "mythical figures"--Mother, Nature, the Id, Diana of Ephesus (a favourite figure of an American feminist criticism that would heroicize "Robin")³⁵--if this text sustained such categories. However, *Nightwood* states the agency of that inscription as "something being done to Robin, Robin disfigured and eternalized by the hieroglyphics of sleep and pain" (p. 63). What is made evident in Nora's dream-identification of this agency of inscription is that the hieroglyphs are not the mark of some pre-existing certainty or system, some actual First Cause, but the work of the unconscious, the dream-work (writing) of individual desire. Thus, Nora's Robin is not Felix's or Jenny's or the narrator's: Nora comes to see Robin as her own "self"; Felix finally realizes her as "the most formless loss" (p. 113); Jenny comes to the conclusion that Robin was "possessed" (p. 168); and the narrator, if we can speak of such an entity, finally portrays Robin as a sort of dog. In *Nightwood*, the "universal" is "circumscribed to the individual heart" (p. 12) where the ideal object is "disfigured and eternalized" in any number of re-presentations. The ideal and the universal are, according to the text, unknowable: we all die but, as Dr. O'Connor points out, "'We do not know death'" for "'we die manifold alone'". "'To our friends [...] we die every day, but to ourselves we die only at the end'" (pp. 96-7). Given the priority of the in-scriptions and circum-scriptions of the "individual heart" or the unconscious over

the certainties of history and epistemology in *Nightwood*, we should also be careful to acknowledge the "manifold" appearance of the primary and unknowable object(s) of desire perpetually "disfigured and eternalized by the hieroglyphics of sleep and pain".

The "Lacanian algebra" offers a useful (though only partial) analogy for the figure of Robin: the *objet petit a*, "a privileged object, which has emerged from some primal separation, from some self-mutilation induced by the very approach of the real".³⁶

The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, firstly, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack [...]. At the oral level, it is the nothing, in so far as that from which the subject is weaned is no longer anything for him. In anorexia nervosa, what the child eats is the nothing.³⁷

Certainly, Robin (a homophone of "robbing"?), in terms of signifiatory systems--history, conscious memory, developed psychology, motivated characterization--, is a "symbol" of the lack of the place or condition that has been lost in the stratifying developments of consciousness. As I demonstrated in Chapter Four of this thesis, she does serve (albeit in a complicated fashion) as "a symbol of lack" of the matrilineal origin lost in the severing of the umbilicus. However, the *objet a* is only a partial analogy for the figure of Robin, largely because of a

gap in the "Lacanian algebra" itself. Luce Irigaray, in questioning the Freudian/Lacanian postulate that "the cause of desire is lack", describes the *objet a* as "that bodily remainder" and considers the ramifications of that remaindering in Freudian/Lacanian discourse:

The being that is sexualized female in and through discourse is also the place for the deposit of the remainders produced by the operations of language. For this to be the case, woman has to remain a body without organs.

This being so, nothing that has to do with women's erogenous zones is of the slightest interest to the psycho-analyst.³⁸

The *objet a*, which is necessarily "feminine" as the symbol of the missing phallus (in a Lacanian reading), must, then, be empty. Rather than remaining related to a material/matrical origin, it is symbolic of nothing because the phallus (which has usurped the place of the womb in the organization of the symbolic) is not "there". In this structure, there can be no properly feminine organs--no womb, vagina, clitoris: it's the phallus or nothing. Yet, Robin, with her "fluid possession", does seem to have organs. She is "'a wild thing caught in a woman's skin'" (p.146); there is a "'sort of fluid blue under her skin'" (p.134); her temples are "'like those of young beasts cutting horns'" (p. 134); the "sensuality in her hands frightened" Felix (p. 42). Inside this hysteric's body, which should only be a sexual vacuum, are the organic beast (sexuality) and fluid (life). In other words, this female body holds a (frightening) libido, and not, I will argue, the always masculine libido insisted upon by Freud. I will return to this matter of the

libininal hysterical body when I discuss abjection: what I wished to demonstrate here, with the introduction of the *objet a* (and its limitations), is that Robin is written more as an object or (manifold and relative) other of the individual psyche than as a character in her own right. In some senses, she is the *objet a*--particularly for Felix--but, as the text demonstrates, this particular sort of objectification of the female body is, like the monocled Felix, one-eyed (one-horned?) and incapable of apprehension.

Baron Felix Volkbein is the first of the characters to be fascinated by Robin. Felix is, in many ways, rather like Freud: he is Viennese, nominally Jewish, and cultivated; he has an enquiring mind somewhat countermanded by a strong sense of propriety; and he has an abiding interest in the past. Given these parallels, it is rather intriguing to note that Felix, himself, is marked by a "humble hysteria" (p. 11) and suffers an (apparently hysterical) attack of "uncontrollable laughter" (p. 18) in which he experiences the sort of subjective "split" that Freud describes as characteristic of hypnosis and hysteria.³⁹ There is also a nominal coincidence (?) in the names "Felix" (L. "happy") and "Freud" (G. "joy"). (Marcus suggests that Felix "reminds one of Djuna Barnes's sketch of Joyce" and that O'Connor may be read as a parody of Freud: however, I would argue that *if* these characters can be read as drawn upon historical personages, there is more of "Freud" in Felix and "Joyce" in O'Connor than *vice versa*.)⁴⁰

Felix first meets Robin when she is suffering an hysterical attack--an *attaque de sommeil*. Her condition does not "put him off", anymore than her subsequent attacks will repel him. Rather, although he is "racially incapable of abandon", he becomes fascinated with this girl who seems "enchanted with the gift of postponed abandon" (p. 38). In other words, he is fascinated by her retention of, her ability to postpone, what he lacks--in this instance, "abandon", the ability to surrender oneself to "natural impulses", to be free "from constraint or convention" (OED). Felix will later come to recognize this gift as nothing, as "the most formless loss", but initially this gift signifies, for him, an infinitude of possibility:

He had thought of making a destiny for himself, through laborious and untiring travail. Then with Robin it seemed to stand before him without effort. (p.42)

Almost from the beginning, Felix sees Robin as the mother of a "son who would feel as he felt about the 'great past'" (p. 38). To produce such a son (such a body of writing, such a tradition) would be his patriarchal destiny and Robin appears to be the suggestible, material vehicle of that destiny. "'With an American anything can be done'": thus, Felix (Freud?) sets about moulding this prehistoric and hysteric material to his end. He teaches her--about history, art and himself--and he "shows her the world". He doesn't abandon his idea of her, of this object of his, even when he becomes puzzled by her resistances, even though he "wreck[s] himself and his peace of mind in

an effort to acquaint her with the destiny for which he had chosen her" (p. 45). Seemingly unaware of his own "humble hysteria" and of the operations of his own desire in creating this symbol for his destiny, Felix only seems to mis-apprehend Robin by objectifying her.

And then, of course, his object of desire--his *objet a*--does the unthinkable. Like the problematic Dora before her, this object, on the impetus of some other volition that he has not obviously recognized or accounted for, rejects the gift/child/phallus that he *knows* she must want and walks out on him. And, what had seemed to him "security" (the security on destiny's loan to him?) turns out to be "in reality, the most formless loss". This experience has "placed [him] in the dark for the rest of [his] life" (p. 113). As we have seen, for the Freudian man, the *objet a*, if it is fashioned on the female figure, as it must be for the proper heterosexual, must symbolize the "central lack of desire". Thus the female must be emptied of organs, of active impulses or a libido specific to the female but not in service of the maternal function, that cannot be accounted for in a phallic organization. The *hystera* that actively rejects the phallus is thus unthinkable--or nothing, a blank, a hole, a total loss.

But then, the desire of the Freudian man does not stop simply because the symbol which covers the lack gets up and walks out for some unfathomable reason. The desire-system is far more durable than that. Deprived of Robin, Felix, following the "normal" course of spurned

lovers, transfers his desire on to a new object.⁴¹ However, there is a poignant irony in Felix's choice of a new object, for his desire settles upon the deformed, "mentally deficient and emotionally excessive", phallus/child that should have been the object of its mother's desire.

"I have become entangled in the shadow of a vast apprehension which is my son; he is the central point toward which life and death are spinning, the meeting of which my final design will be composed."

"And Robin?" the doctor asked.

"She is with me in Guido; they are inseparable, and this time," the Baron said, catching his monocle, "with her full consent." (p. 117)

Felix, by assuming what *should have been* the mother's desire, at last "has Robin". In "catching his monocle", he recuperates the one-eyed phallic organization, but in the place of the maternal. This usurpation of a mother's desire is, in fact, a complete inversion of the Freudian scheme that sees the girl wanting to bear the child-product-of-incest that is inseparable from her own father. He who should want to re-create himself in the belly of his wife-who-is-really-his-mother ends up mothering his father-son (Felix's father and son are both named Guido). Is it any wonder, then, that the phallus/child is deformed, as if "born to holy decay" (p. 107)? *Nightwood*, through the agency of hysteria, thus begins to undo the Freudian family knot.

Jenny Petherbridge, who is "the personification of the 'thief'" (pp. 97-98), according to Dr. O'Connor, and who is the target of the text's unremitting derision, can be read as a realization of Freud's programme

of feminine psychology as presented throughout the Freudian text, particularly in the essays "Female Sexuality" and "Femininity". At least, a case could be made for such a reading. Jenny is "jealous"—her "continual rapacity for other people's facts" (p. 67) and possessions (phalli) is insatiable—, yet her aggressivity is restrained: "her head moved perceptibly with the broken arc of two instincts, recoil and advance, so that the head rocked timidly and aggressively at the same moment" (p. 65). She has no intellect and little capacity for sublimation, but she is a good mimic:

She had the fluency of tongue and action meted out by divine providence to those who cannot think for themselves. (p. 68)

The words that fell from her mouth seemed to have been lent to her; had she been forced to invent a vocabulary for herself, it would have been a vocabulary of two words, "ah" and "oh". (p. 66)

She spends most of her time thinking of love. O'Connor says that "'for her, the sole destiny is love'" (p. 98) and that, for Jenny, love is "'the passion that [is] all renunciation and lung trouble, with flowers at the bosom'" (p. 102). And, she is empty: "No one could intrude upon her because there was no place for intrusion" (p. 68). In her behaviour and sentiments, Jenny fulfills the general Freudian programme for "femininity", although we should be careful to note that Freud, in practice, made a distinction between *his* hysterics (who are usually

attractive and, notably, intelligent) and the general run of the female population:

I cannot imagine bringing myself to delve into the psychical mechanism of a hysteria in anyone who struck me as low-minded and repellent, and who, on closer acquaintance, would not be capable of arousing human sympathy; whereas I can keep the treatment of a tabetic or rheumatic patient apart from personal approval of this kind [...]. The procedure is not applicable at all below a certain level of intelligence [...]⁴²

But do not forget that I have only been describing women in so far as their nature is determined by their sexual function. It is true that that influence extends very far; but we do not overlook the fact that an individual woman may be a human being in other respects as well.⁴³

Jenny is "low-minded and repellent". Her hysteria, which is acute and commonplace and bears none of the attractiveness of Robin's enigmatic condition, is quite literally "repellent":

Then Jenny struck Robin, scratching and tearing in hysteria, striking, clutching and crying.
(p. 76)

Because Robin's engagements were with something unseen, because in her speech and in her gestures there was a desperate anonymity, Jenny became hysterical. She accused Robin of a "sensuous communion with unclean spirits." And in putting her wickedness into words she struck herself down. (p. 168)

This acute, aggressive, accusatory and "wicked" hysteria appears to be another of Jenny's "secondhand dealings with life" (p. 66). Having "struck herself down", she begins to walk "up and down her darkened hotel room, crying and stumbling", mimicking both Nora's earlier pacing (p. 61) and Robin's somnambulism. And, of course, Jenny's "secondhand dealings" are the sign of her utter inadequacy, her inauthenticity: "It takes a bold and authentic robber to get first-hand plunder" (p. 66). Her great sin is that she "was a 'squatter' by instinct" (p. 68).

The derisive term "squatter" signifies not only an illegitimacy or impropriety of possession, but also lowness (the position assumed in squatting) and women in general, for women squat to urinate as well as to defecate. And this squatter, positioned "below a certain level of intelligence", propriety, attractiveness, authenticity, and cleanliness, is "not [...] capable of arousing human sympathy". The sympathetic Dr. O'Connor--who is himself anonymously designated the "Squatting Beast" (p. 163)--declares: "I wouldn't piss on her if she were on fire! I said, Jenny is so greedy that she wouldn't give her shit to the crows" (p. 106). O'Connor makes several scatological references to Jenny--"snatching the oats out of love's droppings" (p. 101); "one of those who nip like a bird and void like an ox" (p. 138); etc.--which are significantly contributory to Jenny's repellent condition. These scatological references, if read through the Freudian text, not only trigger a humourous disgust but mingle disgust with the concept of the secondhand. In a renowned footnote to "Infantile Sexuality", Freud

notes the infantile tendency to confuse the anal and genital processes, and he states: "the genital apparatus remains the neighbour of the cloaca, and actually [to quote Lou Andreas-Salomé] 'in the case of women is only taken from it on lease'".⁴⁴ Thus, women's "genital apparatus" is a borrowed, or secondhand, anus, as her libido, if she is to have one, is a secondhand libido, for the libido is only ever masculine.⁴⁵

This squatter, this secondhand Jenny, is a figuration of the Freudian feminine that, on the accidental grounds of its anatomy, remains unsalvageable, beyond the analyst's aid because the analyst finds her repellent. As we have seen, there is no amelioration of this figure in *Nightwood*, which seems only to find this woman laughable. Barnes undoes this figure of feminine psychology by ridiculing it--"She defiled the very meaning of personality in her passion to be a person [...]" (p. 67)--and by demonstrating its inadequacy in relationship to the text's version of hysteria, or of the *hystera*. Jenny does not desire Robin, as such; she desires the love that cannot, because of her incapacity to be a person, be hers:

When she fell in love it was with a perfect fury of accumulated dishonesty; she became instantly a dealer in second-hand and therefore incalculable emotions. As, from the solid archives of usage, she had stolen or appropriated the dignity of speech, so she appropriated the most passionate love that she knew, Nora's for Robin. (p. 68)

In other words, this woman's desire is for a "female desire" that is no more her own than the logocentric "solid archives of usage". Cut off from the original and originary *hystera*--because she is structured by an other, phallic organization--, Jenny can only borrow the *objet a*, the "intaglio" of the object of female desire and, in borrowing, miss the significance (or "alchemy") of this *objet a*. It is interesting that, in her secondhand hysteria, Jenny accuses Robin of "sensuous communion with unclean spirits", thus echoing a traditional diagnosis of hysteria as a form of "possession".⁴⁶ (In the final chapter of *Nightwood*, it might be argued, Barnes rewrites this apprehension of hysteria as possession.) For this Freudian woman, the *hystera* is both incomprehensible and beyond acquisition. But then, the Freudian woman is always constituted by lack: her organ is nothing, unless it is borrowed from the phallus (or anus). Here again, Barnes is undoing the Freudian knot: in *Nightwood*, the Freudian woman's desire for the phallus is a laughable, misdirected, and unsuccessful, attempt at a misappropriation of impossible funds.

Nora Flood, it might be said, comes (obliquely) to this realization: "I can't live without my heart" (p. 156); "She is myself" (p. 127); "A man is another person--a woman is yourself, caught as you turn in panic; on her mouth you kiss your own" (p. 143). Nora's realization can, of course, be read as a recognition of narcissism. A narcissistic love would certainly correspond with Nora's "homosexuality"; however, narcissism, as Freud delineates it, is an attempt to re-install the pre-

oedipal "primary narcissism" which is an harmonious state untroubled by the vicissitudes of object-choice, and there is no suggestion or hint of such an harmonious state in *Nightwood*. Nora's relationship with Robin is always a struggle--"I struggled with her as with the coils of my own most obvious heart" (p. 151)-- and always precludes the safety that narcissism can offer the Freudian ego.⁴⁷ Also, it is difficult to read Robin as some sort of narcissistic ego-ideal in this relationship as Robin is not only Nora's "self" but also "everything [Nora] can't bear in the world" (p. 135), "evil and degradation" (p. 135), and a "monstrosity" (p. 142). If narcissism is some sort of guarantor of the "pleasure principle" in action, then either Nora's narcissism is mutilated or Nora's love for Robin has little, or nothing, to do with narcissism.

We should bear in mind that, as far as Freud is concerned, woman's narcissism is always mutilated: her narcissism is "wounded" by her recognition of the "fact of castration".⁴⁸ This is why Freud's exemplary "female homosexual" finally chooses a woman who bears a physical resemblance to her brother (a proper heterosexual choice, or a manifestation of an assumed masculine narcissism?).⁴⁹ As far as *Nightwood* is concerned, there may be something to this concept of a "wounded narcissism" for Nora admits: "I, who want power, chose a girl who resembles a boy" (p. 136). And, in this reading, the power is, of course, the phallus. But, we are still left with the problem of Robin's unbearableness--her attractive repulsiveness, as it were--which is a

feature not worn by a Freudian narcissistic object-choice. Robin may be Nora's "self", but she is also the other. O'Connor says that, for Nora, Robin "'was always the second person singular'" (p. 127), the "You" to Nora's "I".

Nora's narcissism is, then, most problematic and appears to go beyond the narcissistic limits prescribed by the Freudian text. It is a sort of Freudian narcissism in crisis, or a "*narcissistic crisis*" that Julia Kristeva has identified as "abjection".⁵⁰ For Kristeva, the "abject" is the "inseparable obverse" of "being", that which the "I" must (violently) repudiate in its struggle toward identity.⁵¹ At the primary level, of course, the abject is the maternal body from which every "I" must become disengaged and which, for the safety of the "I", must henceforth be considered disgusting, repulsive and/or taboo. In general, though, the abject is the "not-I" that threatens the integrity of the "I": it can be a corpse, faeces, menstrual blood, blood *per se*, or any bodily remainders or dejecta that bring the "I" face to face with its "not-I" (that ex-"I" that is now dead, lifeless) or point "toward the non-separation of subject/object".⁵² The abject is the target of all taboos and religious prohibitions. It is what must be repulsed, forbidden, as evil or defilement, if a person or a people are to maintain the propriety and integrity of identity. Abjection, the "*narcissistic crisis*", is, according to Georges Bataille, as cited in *Powers of Horror*, "merely the inability to assume with sufficient

strength the imperative act of excluding abject things (and that act establishes the foundations of collective existence)".⁵³

It is essential to remember that, although the "act of excluding abject things" is "imperative", the abject is always the "inseparable obverse". Always excluded, it is yet always inseparable, always there. Thus, abjection constitutes a crisis in narcissism, particularly in its reiteration of primary narcissism. In narcissism, there is no external object--the subject itself (the image of the subject) is the object. This inseparability of subject and object--"the non-constitution of the (outside) object"--both "renders unstable the ego's identity, which could not be precisely established without having been differentiated from an other, from its object" and recalls the indifferentiation of the primal "mother-child dyad".⁵⁴ Although narcissism would appear to be a preservation of the ego, it is actually threatening to the ego for it brings the ego face to face with its own demise, its non-being as it were. Narcissism in its crisis, in its turn back upon the self, is abjection.

Reading Nora's love for Robin as narcissism, we should also read Nora's condition, finally, as abjection:

"Once I was remorseless, but this is another love--it goes everywhere; there is no place for it to stop--*it rots me away.*" (p. 152; emphasis added)

This love "goes everywhere", having "no place" where it might "stop". It is a love without a proper external object and without the boundary between inside and outside that would prevent the "me" being rotted away. In trespassing the boundary between inside and outside, this love is also an incestuous, taboo-breaking love: "'Robin is incest, too [...]'" . This is Nora's penultimate recognition of Robin, and it has taken her a long time to come to it. After the initial fascination with Robin, after the dreadful betrayal, after Nora's journey through the night of the unconscious (guided by the abject metaphors of the perverse poet/doctor O'Connor) in search of understanding, Nora comes face to face with the "terrible" realization of abjection:

"And then that day I'll remember all my life, when I said: 'It is over now'; she was asleep and I struck her awake. I saw her come awake and turn befouled before me, she who had managed in that sleep to keep whole. Matthew, for God's sake, say something, you are awful enough to say it, say something! I didn't know, I didn't know that it was to be me who was to do the terrible thing! No rot had touched her until then, and there before my eyes I saw her corrupt all at once and withering because I had struck her sleep away, and I went mad and I've been mad ever since [...]" (p. 145)

In bringing Robin to consciousness, in reaching down into the "deep-shocked realm" (p.35) of the unconscious and fishing up that which consciousness has excluded, Nora has committed the "terrible" deed. She has transgressed the proper separation of subject ("I", consciousness) and object ("other", unconscious) and come face to face with corruption. The corrupt, rotting, abject thing that Nora faces is

not, of course, "Robin Vote in her own right", but Robin as Nora's narcissistic object, that "inseparable obverse" of Nora's self, the corruptible body. And, having "struck" her untouchable self, having broken that taboo, Nora goes "mad" and refuses to "put the pen away" (p. 124):

"If I don't write to her, what am I to do?
I can't sit here for ever--thinking [...]
I've got to write to her," Nora said. "I've
got to." (pp. 125-26)

This brings us right to the point of the relationship between abjection and writing that is the thesis of Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*. Before turning properly to the subject of the writing of abjection, however, I want to emphasize the preponderance of the abjection delineated in *Nightwood*. The discourses of Dr. O'Connor, which are not unlike "hysterical ravings", are laden with the poetics of abjection. Corpses, dismemberment, decay, excrement, offal, rotten apples, executioners, and the instruments of murder (scalpels, swords, hatchets, knives, meataxes) form the fund of his metaphors for life, knowledge, love. Society's freaks--the tattooed man, the narcissistic paralytic, the legless woman, the "Tuppenny Uprights", drug addicts, male and female prostitutes--are his exemplars. Before Nora has come to understand the lineaments of her love, O'Connor forecasts her future knowledge in his citation of a curse that is, in a way, an incantation of the female abject:

"Look for the girls also in the toilets at night, and you will find them kneeling in that great secret confessional crying between tongues, the terrible excommunication:

"May you be damned to hell! May you die standing upright! May you be damned upward! May this be damned, terrible and damned spot! May it wither into the grin of the dead, may this draw back, low riding mouth in an empty snarl of the groin! May this be your torment, may this be your damnation! God damned me before you, and after me you shall be damned, kneeling and standing away till we vanish! For what do you know of me, man's meat? I'm an angel on all fours, with a child's feet behind me, seeking my people that have never been made, going down face foremost, drinking the waters of night at the water hole of the damned, and I go into the waters, up to my heart, the terrible waters! What do you know of me? May you pass from me, damned girl! Damned and betraying!"

"There's a curse for you," he said, "and I have heard it."

"Oh!" Nora said, "Don't--don't!" (p. 95)

It is worth pausing, for a moment, before this passage. It is a difficult passage to follow, and not only because of the ambiguities that certain parts of the syntax give rise to, but also because of the borders that are trespassed in its twisting progression. The trespass is, first of all, a carnivalesque inversion--the confessional, here, is a public toilet; the kneeling position is that assumed in a one-sided cunnilingus; and the "confession" is an "excommunication", a curse, uttered by prostitutes. However, this is not a simple inversion of the relationship of priest and profligate, for this curse is a doubled, self-reflective, address. Not only is the penis damned--"May you die standing upright"--, but the vagina--"low riding mouth"--is damned as well. "May you pass from me, damned girl" can be read both as a

repudiation of the female self (or body) and as a demand that the male "pass from me, [the] damned girl". "Man's meat" can be read, variously, as the penis, the female body (the sustenance of masculine desire), or the human body *per se*. The "you" is at one moment the second person singular and, in the next, the "self". Damnation, then, is all-encompassing, but priority is claimed for the "girls" (who, in Dr. O'Connor's gay discourse could be either female or male): "God damned me before you, and after me you shall be damned".

In a certain sense, the precepts of this curse are very conventional. Eve was damned before Adam; Adam was damned through Eve; the prostituted body is, conventionally, defiled, damned; and those who have consorted with prostitutes have, conventionally, been contaminated by the prostitutes' "damnation". The phrase "terrible and damned spot" draws upon the image of Lady Macbeth and her bloodstained hands, which is another portrait of the abject as feminine--the murderous mother, madness, and taboo blood. On the one hand, then, we have a conventional delineation of the female body as abject--damned, tormenting, contaminating. This is the absolute (revolting) other of the "clean and proper": it is what has always been excluded and prohibited--at least, repressed--by the Law that maintains the integrity of the individual, society and of language. On the other hand, however, what we also have here is the unthinkable in conventional terms, for in this passage, it is the abject thing itself that speaks, that presumes the laws of signification and the voice of

denunciation. Moreover, it speaks from the margin of a place that cannot be measured or circumscribed, the "terrible" "waters of night", and what it seeks is an identity *outside* of any structure of signification, "my people who have never been made". This voice doesn't respect proper boundaries: it refers to itself as "an angel on all fours, with a child's feet behind", collapsing the distinctions between the divine being and the beast and between innocence and bestiality as it has collapsed the distinction between inside (identity) and outside (non-identity). Although this curse has borrowed from phallic discourse, its ambivalence and ambivalent use of abject metaphor undoes a properly phallic organisation. We should also recall that this curse of the abject has been re-cited by the "Old Woman who lives in the closet" (p. 138) whose own little phallus, "Tiny O'Toole", is "lying in a swoon" (p. 132) and is "like a ruined bird" (p. 133).

On her first visit with Dr. O'Connor, Nora--the upright Seventh Day Adventist--cannot bear this voice of the kneeling abject: "'Oh!' Nora said. 'Don't--don't!'" By her second visit, however, after she has passed through an identification with Robin⁵⁵--"'I will do what she has done, I will love what she has loved'" (p. 156)--and with the night, Nora comes to an apprehension of abjection:

"Suffering is the decay of the heart; all that we have loved becomes the 'forbidden' when we have not understood it all, as the pauper is the rudiment of a city, knowing something of the city, which the city, for its own destiny, wants to forget." (p. 156)

It is this apprehension of abjection and the abject that underlies all of *Nightwood*: the abject is simply that which we once loved but which now is "forbidden", taboo, because we have not "understood it all", because it exceeds the enclosure of epistemology; abjection is the unavoidable "suffering" of those who persist in loving, or find themselves loving, the "forbidden". As Kristeva points out, abjection is a "borderline" state, and not only because so-called borderline patients suffer it: abjection, while unable to exclude the abject, yet retains that border between the proper and the abject. It commits incest at the same time as it acknowledges the incest taboo. The person suffering abjection stands at a very uncertain threshold between identity and non-identity, literally between life and death, and this is why abjection is full of "fear":

"Well, I, Dr. Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor, will tell you how the day and the night are related by their division. The very constitution of twilight is a fabulous reconstruction of fear, fear bottom-out and wrong side up. Every day is thought upon and calculated, but the night is not premeditated. The Bible lies the one way, but the night-gown the other. The night, 'Beware of that dark door!'" (p.80)

Thus, the doctor pre-scribes, at the outset of his symptomology of the night, the threshold that constitutes the space of abjection: between day and night, between calculation and unpremeditation, and between a moral/religious code and unconscious/sexuality. This between is constituted by a "fabulous reconstruction of fear". Given O'Connor's

frequent references to fables and myths, we can read this "fabulous" as not only "astonishing" but "mythical, legendary, unhistorical" (OED) as well. The "fabulous reconstruction of fear", then, would be a matter of turning an elemental prehistoric or primary fear into a story, myth or fable--dressing "the unknowable in the garments of the known" (p. 136), as it were. "Twilight" could also be fear's own reconstruction, a rehabilitation of abjection under the impetus of fear. Whatever the motivation, on the threshold between day and night, fear must be reconstructed, turned inside out and inverted, as a fable. It is only through this process of symbolic organization that the fear that is abjection can be put away, that one can recover from abjection. Kristeva suggests that the writer "is a phobic who succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened to death; instead he comes to life again in signs".⁵⁶; ~~emphasis added~~ "At that level of downfall in subject and object, the abject is the equivalent of death. And writing, which allows one to recover, is equal to a resurrection."⁵⁷

But, this resurrection may not be the end of the story. Nora says that the resurrection is a "second duel" (p. 58), another bi-partite conflict that may also be fatal. *Nightwood* gives clear indication that writing is compulsive and not a one-off catharsis or ameliorization of abjection--Nora keeps on writing to Robin and, by writing, keeps bringing Robin up to consciousness:

"*Terra damnata et maledicta!*" exclaimed the doctor, banging his fist down. "My uncle Octavius, the trout-tickler of Itchen, was

better; he ate his fish when he caught it!
But you, you must unspin fate, go back to
find Robin! [...] you are always writing to
Robin. Nothing will curb it. You've made
her a legend and set before her head the Eter-
nal Light, and you'll keep to it [...] How
do you know what sleep you raise her from?"
(p. 125)

"The trouble with you is you are not just a
myth-maker, you are also a destroyer, you made
a beautiful fable, then put Voltaire to bed
with it [...]" (p. 140)

Thus, this writing is both compulsive and compulsively marked by
the (absent) object. It simultaneously creates and destroys. The
writer of abjection, although continuously resurrected, is still always
on that threshold, fascinated by the abject. Like Dr. O'Connor, the
writer of abjection has "got heart failure for the rest of [his or her]
life" (p.24). Kristeva explicates the relationship of the writer and the
abject as follows:

[Contemporary literature] seems to be written
out of the untenable aspects of perverse or
superego positions. It acknowledges the impos-
sibility of Religion, Morality, and Law--their
power play, their necessary and absurd seeming.
Like perversion, it takes advantage of them,
gets around them, and makes sport of them.
Nevertheless, it maintains a distance where
the abject is concerned. The writer, fascin-
ated by the abject, imagines its logic, pro-
jects *himself* into it, introjects it, and as
a consequence perverts language--style and
content. But on the other hand, as the sense
of abjection is both the abject's judge and
accomplice, this is also true of the litera-
ture that confronts it. One might thus say
that with such a literature there takes place
a crossing over of the dichotomous categories
of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Moral-

ity and Immortality.

For the subject firmly settled in its superego, a writing of this sort is necessarily implicated in the interspace that characterizes perversion; and for that reason, it gives rise in turn to abjection. And yet, such texts call for a softening of the superego. Writing them implies an ability to imagine the abject, that is, to see oneself in its place and to thrust it aside only by means of the displacements of verbal play. It is only after *his* death, eventually, that the writer of abjection will escape his condition of waste, reject, abject.⁵⁸ *emphasis added*

Certainly, Nora, as the prototypical writer of *Nightwood*, has this sort of relationship with her abject, Robin. Nora is (perversely) "fascinated" by Robin: she "imagines" Robin's logic, puts herself in Robin's place, projects herself onto Robin ("she is my heart"), and introjects Robin (or, at least, the "intaglio" of Robin's "identity"). And, she realizes that only death will end this entanglement: "it is always with her in my arms--for ever it will be that way until we die" (p. 150). Nora also, according to Dr. O'Connor, "perverts [...] style and content": "you made a beautiful fable, then put Voltaire to bed with it". (And, Voltaire may qualify as another writer of abjection, if we take into account works like *Candide*.) But, we might well ask, are Nora's myth-making and letter-writing the significant paradigms of the production of the text? Is her abjection the "intaglio" of the abjection of the writer of *Nightwood*?

III.

Before attempting to answer these questions and addressing *Nightwood's* writing of the abject, I want to bring up a problem with the use of Kristeva's theory of the abject in an analysis like this. Kristeva always maintains the essential structures of the Oedipal family. For her, writing is always primarily a phallic activity, the "speaking being" is always "masculine" (the symbolic being the phallic), and the non-speaking "other" (the semiotic) is always marked by the maternal.

If "something maternal" happens to bear upon the uncertainty that I call abjection, it illuminates the literary scription of the essential struggle that a writer (man or woman) has to engage in with what *he* calls demonic only to call attention to it as the inseparable obverse of *his* very being, of the other (sex) that torments and possesses *him* [...] Leaving aside adherents of a feminism that is jealous of conserving its power--the last of the power-seeking ideologies--none will accuse of being a usurper the artist who, even if *he* does not know it, is an undoer of narcissism and of all imaginary identity as well, sexual included.
SS; emphasis added

The "writer (man or woman)" is always "he", and the "inseparable obverse of his very being", the abject, will always have "something maternal" about it. This concept of the writer as masculine (the symbolic system being the father's arena) is something that Kristeva has inherited from Lacan and, in the specific structure of the Freudian/Lacanian symbolic system, is a perfectly valid concept. But, if

we take into account the strict biologism underlying the oedipal structure, we must realize that the woman writer can only ever mimic "his very being" and that her attempts to write are always motivated by an envy that *he* doesn't share. Writing is proper to *him*. This is made very clear at certain points in *Powers of Horror*; for example, in writing about the eroticization of abjection--an event which follows the "collapse of the Oedipal triangulation that supports" the sign and thus allows the writer of abjection to "pervert[] language"--Kristeva adds:

When a woman ventures out in those regions [in which abjection takes the place of the other, object of desire] it is usually to gratify, in very maternal fashion, the desire for the abject that insures the life (that is, the sexual life) of the man whose symbolic authority she accepts. Very logically, this is an abjection from which she is frequently absent; she does not think about it, preoccupied as she is with settling accounts (obviously anal) with her own mother. Rarely does a woman tie her desire and her sexual life to that abjection, which coming to her from the other, anchors her interiorly in the Other. When that happens, one notes that it is through the expedient of writing that she gets there, and on that account she still has quite a way to go within the Oedipal mosaic before identifying with the owner of the penis.⁶⁰

Even on those *rare occasions* when a woman does eroticize abjection--which necessarily makes her a "writer", as "writing" seems to be the only "expedient" available to her in her "maternal fashion"--"she still has quite a way to go" before she can catch up with *him*. It is little wonder, then, that Kristeva's "writers of abjection" are all men--

Dostoevsky, Proust, Joyce, Borges, Artaud, Bataille, Lautréamont, Kafka, Baudelaire, Sartre, Céline--for whom the abject is, finally, the "something maternal" which is properly "the other (sex) that torments and possesses" them.

I would not presume to challenge Kristeva's thesis on abjection, but I would suggest that something, perhaps, has been left over. This suggestion has arisen entirely from my reading of *Nightwood* as a text of abjection written by a *woman*. (Given Kristeva's apparent adherence to Freudian biological determinism, I feel justified in emphasizing Barnes's gender.) If Barnes is going through the "Oedipal mosaic", it is not, I would argue, in order to identify with "the owner of the penis". Rather, it seems that Barnes is continually chipping away at the "Oedipal mosaic" in order to clear a space for her "people who have never been made", for that which has resisted phallic organization, particularly the relationship of woman to her material origin (the organed female body).

Nora's recitation of her third dream demonstrates this chipping away. Two principal images of this dream are Nora's dead grandmother and her living father "struggling with that death [of the father's mother] as if they were struggling with the sea and my life", and these images mark out the father's abjection: he is "low going and into the grave beside her, his head thrown back [...], struggling with her death terribly" (p. 149). Yet, Nora says that this "I have done to

my father's mother, dreaming through my father, and have tormented them with my tears". Dreaming through her father, Nora has identified (effortlessly?) with the owner of the penis in order to create or re-create the mother's death, the father's abjection. And, this identification is only one possible movement in the re-creation of the unbearable: "this, I have done to Robin: it is only through me that she will die over and over, and it is only through me, of all my family, that my grandfather dies, over and over". In the dreaming that brings her face to face with the abject (as the death of the object and the collapse of the subject/object distinction), the identification with or detour through the father and the father's abjection is but one possibility. The dead paternal grandmother is but one possible figure of the abject object. The dream throws up other images of the abject-- Robin, the (maternal?, paternal?) grandfather--that elude the strictures of the "oedipal mosaic", for whatever relationship Nora may have with these figures, it need not be a relationship taken over from "the owner of the penis". Obviously, the oedipal account--as the account of distinction, demarcation, and the sign--is merely one account of abjection, and it is not the account that Nora settles. Nora, who is, at first, almost the paradigmatic subscriber to the Name of the Father, may have wanted "power", but Barnes has her pay an exorbitant price for that desire--the knowledge that the abject/object of her desire is also her self before or outside of the "oedipal mosaic", at "the centre of eroticism and death"--a dissolving and destabilized centre--in which

the phallogocentric dialectics of power are irrelevant. There can be, it seems, no recuperation from this knowledge of abjection.

Kristeva writes of Joyce and his writing of Molly Bloom that:

[...] *from afar*, the writer approaches the hysterical body so that it might speak, so that he might speak, using it as a springboard, of what eludes speech and turns out to be the hand to hand struggle of one woman with another, her mother of course, the absolute because primeval seat of the impossible--of the excluded, the outside-of-meaning, the abject. Atopia.⁶¹

If we replace "*from afar*" with "from within" and "he" with "she"--from within, the writer approaches the hysterical body so that it might speak, so that she might speak--, we will come closer, I think, to a formulation of Barnes's textual abjection than a strict adherence to Kristeva's theory of abjection will permit. Nora's "mistake" was in thinking that she was approaching Robin from the outside, when all the time she was already within the hysteric's dream: "'Robin is not in your life, you are in her dream, you'll never get out of it'" (p. 146); "'I was like a shadow in her dream that could never reach her in time, as the cry of a sleeper has no echo, myself echo struggling to answer'" (p. 145); "'What part of monstrosity am I that I am always crying at its side!'" (p. 142). Only the woman writer can make this sort of approach (and, finally, it is the only approach she can make.)

Take the case of Dr. O'Connor, who is as Joyce-like as a character could be. This Irish, catholic, expatriate, pseudo-obstetrician/gynecologist (we should recall, here, Joyce's study of obstetrics and gynecology during his writing of *Ulysses* and his early medical studies)⁶² with the "gift of the gab" comes as close to articulating the hysterical body in his "poetic" (in the Kristevan sense of language afflicted by eruptions of the semiotic) digressions. Like Kristeva's Joyce, O'Connor "causes [the abject] to break out in [...a] prototype of literary utterance" which is a female utterance--Molly's monologue or the curse of the prostitutes. His "voice" is "as irritable and possessive as a maddened woman's" (p.15). But then, unlike Joyce, we may assume, O'Connor is a character in a novel written by a woman, and in this novel he is confused and silenced by a woman's, Nora's, abjection (p. 158). Having been silenced, he "falls", assuming the position of the crucified, "his arms spread, his head between them" (p. 166), and he utters the prophecy: "'Now [...] the end--mark my words--now *nothing, but wrath and weeping!*'" (p. 166). According to *Nightwood*, then, the "end" of the man (however womanly) who would attempt to enable the hysterical body to speak, or, crossing over to the inside, attempt to speak from the place of the hysterical body, is annihilation of the self, of meaning. In other words, the approach to the abject hysterical body is, for a man, for phallic signification (no matter how abbreviated or perverse), fatal. "He" becomes, as Barnes wrote of Joyce, "crucified on his sensibilities".⁶³

For "her", however, the approach to the hysterical body produces not the end, but another chapter. O'Connor collapses: Nora and Robin carry on to another sort of climax. There has been little critical consensus on the last chapter of *Nightwood*, and with good reason, for it is "enigmatic", seemingly inconclusive, and, for some critics, almost pointless.⁶⁴ However, if we read this chapter as some sort of supplement to this text of abjection, recuperating and extending simultaneously the woman's approach to the hysterical body, it is not quite, perhaps, so problematic.⁶⁵ In such a reading, what happens in "Nora's part of the country" and in her "decaying chapel" (p. 168) is the reconstruction of a "primal scene" in which the triangulated oedipal structure has been displaced by another erotic triangulated structure: woman, woman, and beast.

There are only three characters in "The Possessed", the three women Robin, Jenny and Nora. The chapter opens with Robin and Jenny arriving in New York--"The doctor said: 'In America, that's where Nora lives. I brought her into the world and I should know'" (p. 49). Robin is incommunicative: she seems "distracted" and will "not listen to Jenny's suggestions"; Jenny can "do nothing with her"; it is "as if the motive power which had directed Robin's life [...] had been crippled". Robin begins "to haunt the terminals, taking trains into different parts of the country, wandering without design" (p. 167) as though she is looking for something but she doesn't know what. Silent, wandering, distracted, her motive power seemingly crippled, Robin seems at her

most hysterical. She wanders "into church as one renouncing something". Just what she is renouncing is not apparent, but she is moving "like a housewife, come to set straight disorder in an unknown house". This last descriptive phrase stands out because it would seem to contradict everything we know about Robin--there is something incongruous about the image of Robin as a "housewife" setting "straight disorder". (Especially if we recall that when Felix and O'Connor first set eyes on Robin, her "unseen birds" have been "left without the usual silencing cover, which, like cloaks on funeral urns, are cast over their cages at night by good housewives" [p. 34].) There are at least two readings of this image which imply a motivation that the text would appear, ostensibly, to deny. The first is that the woman, with her housewifely sense of where things should be, enters the unknown and unfamiliar bachelor residence of Father and Son in order to "set straight" the "disorder" of a masculine/patriarchal religion. The second reading, through the text of Freud's case histories, would engage the notion of the obsessive housewife, whose motivation or drive is unconsciously deflected into compulsive behaviour. There is little to choose between these two readings and, in the light of Robin's hysteria, they can overlap: the important thing to note is the implication of a motivation or drive toward rectifying something. Robin may be "wandering without design" or "fixed in an unthinking stop", but she is driven by something beyond, or beneath, thought or conscious design.

Leaving the strictures of the church, Robin "walk[s] the open country in the same manner"--"like a housewife come to set straight disorder"?--where she identifies with the unspecified animals (feral or domestic?) that come near enough to be "grasped": "Those that came near, she grasped, straining their fur back until their eyes were narrowed and their teeth bare, her own teeth showing as if her hand were upon her own neck" (p. 168). Could this be another form of projection, the equivalent of Nora's projection of the intaglio of Robin's identity? A narcissistic identification with the animal would explain, at least in part, the enigma of the silent hysteric, with her "unpeopled thoughts" (p. 46). To be hysterical, then, would be to be in some sort of "sensuous"--rather than articulated--"communion" with the animal/body (or the "unclean", as Jenny puts it).

Through all of this, Robin does not speak. Only Jenny speaks in this chapter, and her utterance is a venial sin: "in putting her wickedness into words she struck herself down". At this point, at the point of wicked utterance, Jenny ceases to be, and she drops out of the narrative. Robin now "head[s] up into Nora's part of the country"--from Jenny, she "head[s]" (no longer "wandering"?) "up" to Nora's place. The "up" of this phrase signals the beginning of an upward movement that will bring both Robin and Nora to their meeting in the "decaying chapel" at "the top of the hill" (p. 169). Robin begins to "circle[] closer and closer", like a stalking animal, as if to circumscribe "Nora's part of the country". "Sometimes she slept in the woods [....] Sometimes

she slept [...] in the decaying chapel [...], but she never went further." It is worth noting that, at this point, Robin is again described as sleeping, unconscious. Then Nora's dog barks.

The barking dog, of course, fulfills O'Connor's prophecy that "though those two [Nora and Robin] are buried at opposite ends of the earth, one dog will find them both" (p. 106). When the dog barks, Robin is awoken and "brought [...] up, rigid and still" and Nora, [h]alf an acre away [...] raised her head". The dog begins to run "about the house" and then outwards, "barking and whining [Nora] heard him farther and farther away" (p. 168-69). "After a moment she got up, unlocking the doors and windows" as though to invite, to open up her house to, danger. Unable to wait (for what?), Nora goes out of the house. "The night was well advanced. She could see nothing." She moves upward toward the "decaying chapel" on the hill where "a light ran the length of the door". In all the darkness, that which is lighted, that which can be seen, is the chapel door, the threshold between Nora and Robin, between the subject and its object. Nora doesn't go through the door, she collides with it: "cursing and crying, and blindly, without warning, [Nora] plunged into the jamb of the chapel door". Inside Nora's ruinous chapel, which Nora does not/cannot enter, Robin is standing before "a contrived altar" with a Madonna, two candles, flowers and toys on it. She is dressed in "boy's trousers", which signals, at once, her hysterical bisexuality and her childish lack of sexual definition. This signaling suggests that Robin represents the *hystera* not in its

singular maternal sense, in the terms of the maternal-sexual function insisted on by Freudian discourse, but in the sense of the female organ as the site of a libido which is only in part, if that, masculine, or is disguised as masculine, and which is prior to its maternal structuring in the phallic economy.

The Madonna, as we have seen before, is peculiarly, unconventionally, significant in this text. Earlier, Nora has told O'Connor of another Madonna that she has seen through an open door:

"In the narrow streets of Naples, ivies and flowers were growing over the broken-down walls. Under enormous staircases, rising open to the streets, beggars lay sleeping beside images of St. Gennaro; girls going into the churches to pray were calling out to boys in the squares. In open door-ways night-lights were burning all day before gaudy prints of the Virgin. In one room that lay open to the alley [...] in the semi-darkness, a young girl sat on a chair [...] as if half of her slept, and half of her suffered. When she saw me she laughed, as children do, in embarrassment. Looking from her to the Madonna behind the candles, I knew that the image, to her, was what I had been to Robin, not a saint at all, but a fixed dismay, the space between the human and the holy head, the arena of the 'indecent' eternal. At that moment I stood in the centre of eroticism and death [....]
(pp. 157-58)

The "open" doors, "night-lights", "broken-down walls", "flowers", the childlike before the "gaudy" Madonna, the "candles", generate the same sort of scene of the complication of innocence and experience, of life and death (like "ivies and flowers [...] growing over broken-down

walls"), as the scene in the chapel. The difference is that, in "The Possessed", the scene has come home to "Nora's part of the country". The open door of the "decaying chapel" is the threshold of Nora's abjection, of her specific "centre of eroticism and death" within which Nora and her Robin "would have broken down to [their] love" (p. 158). The Madonna marks out the space of the "'indecent' eternal", of the incestuous mother/child dyad, but without the patriarchal third party (father or god or holy spirit) or the symbol of the patriarch (the peaceful dove, messenger to Noah and Mary) that completes and gives reason and language to the Oedipal family. The third party in *Nightwood's* triangulation is the "barking and whining dog", Nora's inarticulate and carnivorous beast.

With Jenny's demise, speech has already been done away with. When Nora's body collides with the wood of the door, the subject, as such, disappears: "at the moment Nora's body struck wood, Robin began going down" (p. 169). To this point, everything has been going upward, now it begins to go down with the disappearance of the subject, Nora, who seems to vanish once her body strikes the wood (prime matter, the cross, the "rich and bloody wood" [pp. 5-6]) of the threshold. Nora's body trips: Robin's falls down. Has Nora's body become Robin in the disappearance of the subject? (We should recall, here, the subject O'Connor's demise, arms spread upon the [wooden?] table.) I would suggest that this is the critical moment, the most abject moment, of the text, when the "I" disintegrates and vacates the scene. From here

on, the scene *appears* to be solely that of the "not-I". Now, within *Nora's* chapel, "as if [...] in the belly of a great mother where there was yet room to play" (p. 54), Robin drops onto all fours (like the cursing prostitutes, like a dog) and begins to enact an erotic, at once touching and terrifying, dance with *Nora's* dog. The libidinal nature of this "obscene and touching" dance is unmistakable: what is also unmistakable is that the masculine libido of "him", the dog, is countered by and engaged with "her" feminine libido. The drive that initiates and sustains the dance is her, Robin's, drive. At the end of *Nightwood*, beyond its speeches and subjects, at the limit of its abjection, is a carnivalesque revolution of the Freudian libidinal economy, that primeval force that, sublimated, becomes "writing".

The dog, quivering in every muscle, sprang back, his tongue a stiff curving terror in his mouth; moved backward, back, as she came on, whimpering too, coming forward, her head turned completely sideways, grinning and whimpering. Backed into the farthest corner, the dog reared as if to avoid something that troubled him to such agony that he seemed to be rising from the floor; then he stopped, clawing sideways at the wall, his forepaws lifted and sliding. The head down, dragging her forelocks in the dust, she struck against his side. He let loose one howl of misery and bit at her, dashing about her, barking, and as he sprang on either side of her he always kept his head toward her, dashing his rump now this side, now that, of the wall.

Then she began to bark also, crawling after him--barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching. The dog began to cry then, running with her, head-on with her head, as if to circumvent her: soft and slow his feet went padding. He ran this way and that, low down in his throat crying, and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces,

moving head to head, until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees. (p. 170)

It is interesting to note how the writing of the last pages of "The Possessed" seems to contract into a smaller space the rhetorical circlings and terminological repetitions that characterize the text as a whole. The sentences are shorter and simpler; the vocabulary becomes limited and simple words--"down", "head", "turned", "crying", "side", etc.--are repeated over and over. And, repetition is the means by which we re-call (whether for pleasure or for catharsis) the "primal scene".⁶⁶ It is as if the writing, itself, is being "destroyed back to [its] structure as an old master disappears beneath the knife of the scientist who would know how it was painted" (pp. 129-30). Going back to its structure, what the text seems to offer is an illustration of a feminine libido and a feminine organ rather than or as well as the penis-pen of the Freudian text. As I have noted before at similar junctures, this is not a matter of simple inversion. Of course, there is some simple and necessary inversion--the father GOD becomes a male DOG. But, Barnes is not simply replacing Freud's masculine libido with a feminine libido or replacing the phallic system of signification with a non-phallic one. This text is not about replacing one sameness with another. It is more about "inbreeding", about the incestuous difference within sameness that is repressed, or obliterated, by the Freudian project, and is only faced at the extremity of abjection. It is that "inbreeding" which produces the supplement of abjection, that which both

sustains and overcomes abjection, the text which inscribes *différance* within itself.

As Dr. O'Connor says to Nora, who cannot stop "writing":

"You are," he said, testing the wine between his lower lip and teeth, "experiencing the inbreeding of pain. Most of us do not dare it. We wed a stranger, and so 'solve' our problem. But when you inbreed with suffering (which is merely to say that you have caught every disease and so pardoned your flesh) you are destroyed back to your structure as an old master disappears beneath the knife of the scientist who would know how it was painted. Death I imagine will be pardoned by the same identification [...] Ah, to be able to hold on to suffering, but to let the spirit loose!" (pp. 129-30)

The "mating" dance of Nora's lover and Nora's dog, with its combination of agony and attraction, its crying and barking, is a ritualistic (carnavalesque) enactment of the inbreeding of pain. It is also a certain anxious excavation of the valuable creation or image by the artist-scientist who would know how "love" was constructed. Such inbreeding (a term which inscribes difference [of gender] within sameness [of family]) is a de-struction, an agonizing ruination of fiction (as something made). But, it is also a pardon--a remission of sins, a restitution of the criminal (without purgation), a "document conveying a pardon" (OED). What are identified and pardoned by the document-text are the flesh and death, the abject. Only incest or the destructive inbreeding of pain/fear/desire can produce such an

offspring, or supplement, as a text pardoning (restituting, forgiving) the abject. And, perhaps, only the woman writer can inbreed in this way, for only she is both subject (as writer) and abject/object (as the *hystera*). Perhaps only she can destroy these distinctions of subject and object back to their structure and, so, identify and "pardon" the centre of eroticism and death which is only masked by the orthodox figure of the maternal, the Madonna, or the maternal phallus.

Julia Kristeva describes the anxious or anguished excavation that is the writing of abjection as follows:

On the trail of my fear I meet again with my desire, and I bind myself to it, thus leaving stranded the concatenation of discourse with which I have built my hallucination, my weakness and my strength, my investment and my ruin.

It is precisely at such a point that writing takes over, within the phobic child that we are, to the extent that we speak only of anguish [....] The mature writer, whether a failure or not (though perhaps never losing sight of those two alternatives), never stops harking back to symbolization mechanisms, within language itself, in order to find a *process* of eternal return, and not in the *object* that it names or produces, the hollowing out of anguish in the face of nothing.⁶⁷

Upon the meeting of the fearful "I" and its desire, at the conjunction of investment and ruin which is abjection, in the last two paragraphs of *Nightwood*, writing does take over: the subject disappears and terms and phrases circle about the centre of eroticism and death, as though marking out a circuitous "process of eternal

return". But, is this a "hollowing out [...] in the face of nothing"? Is there not something there, "her face turned and weeping", at the end of the tunnel, beyond the hole left by the impossible maternal phallus in the oedipal symbolization mechanism? In *Nightwood*, the excavation of the made (fiction, anguish, the object) is also, at the same time, inbreeding and the production of a difference within sameness. It is not an excavation in the face of nothing, but of a something that has not yet been made in the symbolic system--the *hystera*, the female organ, and a female libido. Nora, who always would go back to find Robin, writes in anguish, but in the end, she does re-turn to Robin, though at great cost to her "self". And Barnes, who seems always faced with "'my people who have never been made'", becomes the writer of a female abjection which forges, excavates, out of anguish a place, a text, for those "people".

I would suggest that Nora is, perhaps, the "intaglio" of Barnes's subjectivity, although I remain suspicious of bio-critical readings that simply assume that Nora = Djuna. I do not find it useful to align the characters of *Nightwood*, which are not mimetic or realistic in an orthodox sense, with historical personages. (However, I do suspect that those critics who suggest that Robin Vote is Thelma Wood are on to something, even if they don't always recognise just what it is that they are on to.) After all, history and (Aristotelian) mimesis are "deflowered" in this text. Yet, some sort of subjectivity persists in this writing of the disintegration of the "I". Nora vanishes, but

something, from within the symbolic, persists in articulating that abandonment, insists on speculating, evaluating, troping. Even in the arena of the "not-I", speculation and troping persist: the dog rears "as if to avoid something"; his tongue is a "stiff curving terror"; and Robin's barking laughter is "obscene and touching". Is this not evidence of the "mature writer [...] harking back to symbolization mechanisms" (the speculative and tropaic) "in order to find a *process* of return" to the primal, and abject, scene? But, the primal scene of *Nightwood*, Nora's "centre of eroticism and death," is scarcely a Freudian/Kristevan primal scene: rather, it is a specifically female primal scene, composed of the (non)maternal, female desire, and the female's (pet/male) beast, the dog as a possession of Nora.

In a reading of *Nightwood* as a writing of abjection, Nora is not Djuna and Robin is not Thelma; rather, Nora and Robin can be read as *figures*--or projections, for we are still in the sphere of narcissism--of the writer and the writer's abject. As if in anticipation of Lacan and Kristeva, Barnes has delineated the condition of abjection and, specifically, of a female abjection that Kristeva will later hold a virtual impossibility. But, then, Barnes has read the Freudian text *differently* to Kristeva, making up other sentences with the key signifiers of that text and suturing the gap that is the "enigma of women" with the thread of the female libido. In other words--again, as if in anticipation of Kristeva--, Barnes has carnivalized the Freudian project[ion] and delivered its repressed into an active participation

with the symbolic. Chipping away at the oedipal mosaic, Barnes makes room for the other, for the (not only maternal) female, in what would be a discourse of sameness. And, because she does so, her work solicits the privileged status of the phallus in the general economy of writing and signification. Whatever anxiety it is that spurs writing on, whatever it is that, sublimated, becomes writing, it need not be predicated on a specifically phallic organization of desire. It may, also, be the specifically female anguish of a woman brought face to face with her other/self.

CONCLUSION

"She who stands looking down upon her who lies sleeping knows the horizontal fear, the fear unbearable. For man only goes perpendicularly against his fate. He was neither formed to know that other nor compiled of its conspiracy."
(p. 87)

Occasionally, in *Nightwood*, masculine designators (nouns, pronouns) are used as generic forms—"he" refers to "Man" as humankind--, and a case might be made for reading the "he" of the above passage as a generic term. However, this passage is preceded and succeeded by exemplars of *apparently* heterosexual relationships: "He lies down with his Nelly and drops off into the arms of his Gretchen"; and "For the lover, it is the night into which his beloved goes [...] that destroys his heart: he wakes her suddenly, only to look the hyena in the face that is her smile". It is quite possible, then, to read the personal pronouns and nouns of the cited passage as gender-specific and the passage itself as a contrast between "she" and "he", between *she who "knows"* and *he who is not "formed to know"*. The ambiguity of the passage permits this much.

The contrast between "she" and "he" hinges upon "that other", the demonstrated ("that") and feminine ("her") object speculated (looked) upon by the standing and perpendicular subjects. And, only the subject "she" can *know* ("recognize [...] identify [...] distinguish"; "acknowledge the claims or authority of"; "have carnal acquaintance with" [OED]) the abjection-al "fear unbearable" because only she, it would seem, is "formed to know that other" and "compiled of its conspiracy". As Nora

says elsewhere, "A man is another person--a woman is yourself, caught as you turn in panic [....]" (p. 143).

What would be "that other", then? According to *Nightwood*, it is Robin, the hysteric with the leonine, beastly qualities, the rejecting and irretrievable mother, the prehistoric, the preoedipal libido that is also female, the feminine organ(s), evil, the irretrievable unconscious, the Great Enigma, the abject. In short, it is everything that has not been *known* by the phallic organizations of historical, theological and psychoanalytic discourses. Within those organizations, "that other" is designated as "death" or "evil" or "nothing": it is what must be negated so that it may be got round, so that its incestuous power may be annulled, so that one does not die.

Of course, it is precisely this "other" or death/evil/no-thing that the carnivalesque work and that epitome of carnivalesque works, the writing of abjection, bring into play. They make possible a relationship between phallic, authoritative organization and the non-phallic, heterological other at the same time as they subvert the possibility of a synthesis of these so-called opposites. They permit the return and reinstatement of the "repressed" while, at the same time, deferring the effect of that return and reinstatement which would be the death of the subject and/or of society. Certainly, this is what, in *Nightwood*, Barnes has done--like Bakhtin's carnivalesque writers and like Kristeva's writers of abjection. However, Barnes has also done so with an

additional difference--a difference not in evidence even in the fictional work of the only other *nominated* woman writer of the carnivalesque, George Sand--and this difference is the (inconceivable) difference within the other (the female) itself.

If there is always "something maternal" about the other of the male writer, there is also something maternal about "that other" of *Nightwood*. Yet, that other also exceeds the maternal which is rendered as something simultaneously irretrievable and imaginary. The other is both "something maternal", which is its phallic designation, and the organed female body that is prior to the maternal and so escapes phallic demarcation. And "that other", that split and differentiated other, Barnes seems to suggest, can only be written (to) by a woman, for only "she" can *know* the unbearable fear that is the death of the subject (the limit of abjection) as only she is formed to know that other and compiled of its conspiracy. It is, at once, her other and her self.

The carnivalesque and abjection's engagement with or to the other proceeds from the symbolic and the sollicitation of the symbolic toward the (impossible) recuperation (and, perhaps, colonization) of the other. It must be stressed that that other is always marked by a systemic femininity. The other is always that which does not have the antecedent of the "it", that which is a negativity, a hole, an abyss, an enigma, that which eludes phallic definition and articulation, that which stands over against identification. For the penis-owning writer (no matter how

"feminine" he might be) of the carnivalesque or abject text, the other can be always that which the "I" is not properly anymore.

For the female writer (as owner of the *hystera*), the relationship between the "I" and that other is more complex because the "other" is always her "self" as well. Seemingly sacrosanct and always dominant symbolic codes (sociocultural, theological, historical, literary, psychoanalytic) inform her that she (even as subject) is and always has been "that other" contaminated by other-ness. Of course, she can, as Woolf has done, attempt to articulate the other as the sphere of the emotive, non-rationalist, sensory consciousness. She can articulate the "I" of an "other". But if that woman writer (like Barnes, like Kristeva) has laid a claim on the "intellect"--on the sphere of the production of the metaphysical, theological, etc., discourses--and has an interest in the revolutionizing of the orthodox, she is faced with a peculiar dilemma. On the one hand, she may choose to accede to the conventional designations of the "symbolic" as masculine and the "semiotic" as feminine--if she also agrees that gender is a signifiatory acquisition transcending sexual difference--and read the carnivalesque and the "poetic" as productive eruptions of the (semiotic) other. On the other hand, she may, in recognizing sexual difference as that difference which can be neither transcended nor reduced, choose to rewrite the distinctions between, and the "inbreeding" of, subject and other. If she is *both* the subject *and* "that other", then both the subject and the other must differ from their orthodox delineations. Barnes, I think, has

chosen the latter route, plunging into the dark and abject other-world of the night-wood in order to bring the female subject and that other face to face, so that "the face of the one tells the face of the other the half of the story that both forgot".

NOTES

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INTRODUCTION

¹ Graham Greene, "Fiction Chronicle", *The Tablet*, CLVIII (November 14 1936), pp. 678-79. Ezra Pound, in a 1937 letter to T.S. Eliot as cited in Benstock, p. 232.

² Aside from the works of George Sand, Gertrude Stein and Barnes, there have been notably few "carnavalesque" writings produced by women until very recently. Of course, contemporary social and moral codes may have prohibited women from writing about the improper. It is interesting, though, that in the last several years--a generation after Barnes and Stein--many more women have entered the "carnavalesque" and made themselves at home there. (I would include amongst these women both "writers" [Hélène Cixous, Angela Carter, Fay Weldon, for example] and "theorists" [Luce Irigaray and, perhaps, Julia Kristeva].)

³ Alan Bass, trans., *Margins of Philosophy* by Jacques Derrida (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 12, trans. fn. 14.

⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Two Words for Joyce" in *Post-structuralist Joyce: Essays From the French*, eds. Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 149: "So, yes (I'm replying to your suggestion), every time I write, and even in the most academic pieces of work, Joyce's ghost is always coming on board."

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (London: The Athelone Press, 1987), p. 3.

⁶ Among those few critics who apparently acknowledge Barnes's intellect are Singer, Benstock, and Gerstenberger.

⁷ Jane Marcus, "Laughing at Leviticus: *Nightwood* as Woman's Circus Epic", *Cultural Critique* 15 (Fall 1989), pp. 143-190. This quotation, p. 163.

⁸ I will be dealing with certain feminist dismissals of *Nightwood* in Chapter One.

CHAPTER ONE: FROM CONFIDENCE TO DOUBT: A HISTORY OF READING NIGHTWOOD

¹ Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940* (London: Virago Press, 1987), p. 231.

² Andrew Field, *Djuna: The Formidable Miss Barnes* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), p. 194.

³ Benstock, p. 233.

⁴ Gayatri C. Spivak, "Unmaking and Making in *To The Lighthouse*" in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, eds. Sally McConnell-Ginet et al (New York: Praeger, 1980), p. 315.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 310. Spivak is less concerned with criticism that arrives at "truths" about texts than with readings that operate "as part of a much larger polemic" which is, essentially, the rethinking/rewriting of the Western metaphysical tradition and its ontological, epistemological, presuppositions. Spivak suggests that this polemic "'starts' with Martin Heidegger's approach to the tradition of philosophy" and achieves its "simplest articulation" in Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*.

⁶ Field, p. 185.

⁷ The following is gleaned from, for the most part, Field (the principal source for most critics) and Benstock.

⁸ Pseudonyms (or im-proper "names") are not uncommon among writers in general; however, it is interesting how certain writers who have been identified with the carnivalesque or who write "about the other" have chosen for themselves names that might suggest the involvement of the "other" in their writing. Barnes chose to retain the paternal grandmother's name; Céline's surname is his grandmother's first name; "Colette", the singular name under which Sidonie Gabrielle Colette wrote, is both a young girl's first name and her father's surname; and George Sand, whose given name was Aurore Dupin, is a compilation of an abbreviation of the surname of Dupin's lover and literary collaborator, Jules Sandeau, and a first name chosen for its echoes of "Georgics".

⁹ Cf. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, Vol. I (1882-1912) (London: Hogarth Press, 1972). Now considered a questionable source, this text is still useful for some biographical details.

¹⁰ Field recites Barnes's claim that her grandmother had read Shakespeare, the Bible, and Thackeray's *The Rose and the Ring* to her and that her father had read her Kipling's "tale about a beast that walked like a man". Zadel Barnes claimed acquaintance with Oscar Wilde--she is known to have attended a salon which also boasted Wilde's presence--and perhaps sewed the seeds of Barnes's own admiration of the playwright.

¹¹ Axel and Zadel Gustafson, *The Foundation of Death* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1888); Henry Aaron Budington, *Man Makes His Body, or the Ascent of the Ego Through Matter* (Springfield, Mass: Star Publishing Co., 1899); Thomas Cushman Buddington, *Dissolution or Physical Death, and How Spirit Chemists Produce Materialization, by M. Faraday*

(Springfield, Mass: Star Publishing Co., c. 1887) and *Historical Revelations of the Relation Existing Between Christianity and Paganism, Since the Disintegration of the Roman Empire, By the Roman Emperor Julian (Called the Apostate)* (Boston: Colby & Rich, 1886). Field includes a short list of Zadel's writings in his bibliography.

¹² Benstock, p. 238; Field, p. 248.

¹³ Benstock, *ibid*.

¹⁴ Field, p. 179.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 43.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 44 and 53.

¹⁷ Djuna Barnes, *The Book of Repulsive Women: 8 Rhythms and 5 Drawings*, one of *Bruno's Chapbooks*, V. 2, No. 6 (November 1915).

¹⁸ Robert McAlmon, *Being Geniuses Together*, rev. and suppl. by Kay Boyle (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 95 and 96.

¹⁹ Djuna Barnes, *Ryder* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1928); *Ladies Almanack* (Paris: Edward W. Titus, 1928); *Nightwood* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936); *The Antiphon* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958).

²⁰ Field, p. 127.

²¹ Ernest Sutherland Bates, "A Robust Tale", *Saturday Review*, V (November 17, 1928), 376; L. Calhoun, "A Woman's Hero", *The Argonaut*, CIV (September 1, 1928), 12; Frank J. Hynes, "The Bibliophile's Corner", the *Springfield Evening Union*, October 19, 1928; T.C. "Rabelaisian Is Story of Ryder's Loves", *Atlanta American*, September 2, 1928, Section D, p.7.

²² Eugene Jolas, "Glossary" in *transition*, nos. 16-17 (June 1929), p. 326.

²³ G.S.M., "Trying Hard to be Shady" in *Syracuse Post Standard*, September 11, 1928, p. 4.

²⁴ *Ladies Almanack*, hawked on the streets and in the cafes by Barnes and Mina Loy and sold in *Shakespeare & Co.* by Sylvia Beach, was a very popular book among those who knew or had heard of Natalie Barney (who was reputed to be the prototype for "Dame Mussett") and the company of lesbian expatriots in Paris.

²⁵ Dylan Thomas, "Night Wood", *Light and Dark* (March 1937), p.29.

²⁶ Graham Greene, "Fiction Chronicle", *The Tablet*, CLVIII (November 14, 1936), 678-679.

²⁷ Desmond Hawkins, "Views and Reviews: Miss Djuna Barnes", *New English Weekly*, XI (April 29, 1937), 51-52.

²⁸ Peter Quennell, "New Novels", *New Statesman and Nation*, XII (October 17, 1936), 592.

²⁹ Benstock, p. 428.

³⁰ Ivar Harrie, "The Victorious Antiphon" in the *Stockholm Expressen*, (February 19, 1961). Quoted in Field, p. 228.

³¹ "A Daughter for Inquisitor", *Times Literary Supplement*, April 4, 1958, p. 182; Norman Dorn, "Poetry Can Be Potent--or Disappointing--In The Theatre", the *San Francisco Chronicle, This World*, April 13, 1958, p. 25.

³² Kathleen Raine, "Lutes and Lobsters", *New Statesman*, LV (February 8, 1958), 174-175.

³³ Field, p. 35.

³⁴ James B. Scott, *Djuna Barnes* (Boston: Twayne Publishing, 1976). Louis F. Kannenstine, *The Art of Djuna Barnes: Duality and Damnation* (New York: New York University Press, 1977).

³⁵ Kannenstine, p. x.

³⁶ Field, p. 9.

³⁷ Kannenstine, pp. ix and xi; Scott, "Preface"; Field, p. 13.

³⁸ *Silence and Power: Djuna Barnes, a Reevaluation*, ed. Mary Lynn Broe (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U.P.) has been expected since 1986; however, it has not, to this date, reached the bookshop shelves.

³⁹ Scott, "Preface".

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 84, 103, 24, 32 and 24.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Scott argues that reading *Nightwood* as "surrealist fantasy", instead of "inverted naturalism", "tends to make it a 'safe' book, one which does not threaten in any way the security of the reader" (p. 119). I am merely using his own argument against him.

⁴⁶ Scott, p. 72.

⁴⁷ Kannerstine, p. xviii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. xv, 89 and 90.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. xv, 46, 34, 85 and 109.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

⁵⁸ Field, p. 189.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶⁰ I am referring to the "Phallus" in its Lacanian sense, as the key signifier of the symbolic system guaranteeing the "Law of the Father". See especially "The signification of the phallus" in Jacques Lacan's *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977), pp. 281-291.

⁶¹ Benstock, p. 242.

⁶² Sandra Gilbert, "Costumes of the Mind: Transvestism as Metaphor in Modern Literature" in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 216; Annette Kolodny, "Some Notes on Defining a 'Feminist Literary Criticism'" in *Feminist Criticism*, eds. Cheryl L. Brown and Karen Olsen (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1978), p. 44.

⁶³ Benstock, p. 427.

⁶⁴ Jane Marcus, "Laughing at Leviticus: *Nightwood* as Woman's Circus Epic", pp. 143-44.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153. Marcus reads *Nightwood* historically, that is as written as a contemporary response to the rise of European fascism in the 'thirties. She aligns Freud with fascism in "the madness for order in every denial of difference" (p. 164).

⁶⁷ Blanche Wiesen Cook, "Women Alone Stir My Imagination", *Signs*, 4 (1979), 718; Bertha Harris, "The More Profound Nationality of their Lesbianism" in *Amazon Expedition*, eds. Phyllis Birkby et al. (New York: Times Change Press, 1973), p. 81; Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (London: The Women's Press, 1985), p. 364.

⁶⁸ Faderman, pp. 365 & 369; Benstock, p. 429.

⁶⁹ Monique Wittig, "The Point of View: Universal or Particular?", *Feminist Issues* 3 (1983), pp. 62-69. This quotation, p. 66.

⁷⁰ Marilyn Reizbaum, "A 'Modernism of Marginality': The Link between James Joyce and Djuna Barnes" in *New Alliances in Joyce Studies*, ed. B.K. Scott (Newark, Delaware: Delaware U.P., 1989), pp. 179-89. This quotation, p. 188.

⁷¹ I must remark at this point that I very much admire Benstock's endeavour to "expose[] all that Modernism has repressed, put aside, or attempted to deny" by foregrounding the work of lesbian and heterosexual women Modernists. The redefinitions of Modernism that are emerging from studies like Benstock's are invaluable to any feminist consideration of twentieth-century literary texts, and I will be returning to Benstock's work frequently throughout this thesis. However, I must stress that even viewing Barnes's work within the ostensible historical context of Modernism can be problematic. Benstock herself acknowledges that:

Nightwood is distinctly different, then, from other works of the Paris period. It is not a minor Modernist masterpiece, a shadow to Joyce's *Ulysses*, but a singular undertaking that addresses woman's place in the patriarchal construct. (p. 266)

⁷² Barnes, *Ladies Almanack*. The contradictions concerning "woman" are rampant in this text.

⁷³ Benstock, pp. 244 & 245.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

⁷⁵ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1982), p. 33. I have twice compared Barnes to Blake, but I am not going to argue for a direct influence of the latter on the former. It is difficult, however, to avoid noticing the practical similarities

between the two: both seem to have produced "singular undertaking[s]", as Benstock suggests of Barnes's work (fn. 63), within the contexts of their respective periods; and both tended to emulate more earlier, pre-period, texts than contemporary texts produced under the aegis of specific contemporary concerns.

⁷⁶ Benstock, p. 245.

⁷⁷ "Phallogocentrism": phallus + logos + centrism; a neo-logism used (sometimes) by Jacques Derrida to signify one of the dominant organizing myths of Western metaphysics--the desire for primacy, origin, Truth, absolute presence.

⁷⁸ That is, at the level of the *written* narrative itself, and involving neither metanarrative or abstracted structures derived from "interpretations" of the narrative nor conceptions of the text as a "thing" (in the New Critical sense) of concrete form.

⁷⁹ James B. Scott, pp. 103 and 104 f.f.

⁸⁰ Field, p.146.

⁸¹ Kannenstine, p.100.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 100, 101, 96, 90, 94.

⁸³ Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature, Part II" in *Sewanee Review*, LIII (July-September 1945), 439. See also Part I, LIII (April-June 1945), 221-240.

⁸⁴ Walter Sutton, "The Literary Image and the Reader", *The Journal of Aesthetics*, XVI (September 1957), 120.

⁸⁵ Kenneth Burke, "Version, Con-, Per-, In-: Thoughts on Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*" in his *Language as Symbolic Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 240-253.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Barnes, *Nightwood* (New York: New Directions, 1961), pp. 166, 148, 119-20. All subsequent references will be to this text and page numbers will be given in brackets following the reference or citation.

⁹⁰ Burke, p. 253.

⁹¹ I am using the verb 'to solicit' (ad. OF. *sol-,solliciter*, or ad. L. *sollicitare* (*sol-*), f. *sollicitus*, f. *sollus* whole, entire + *citus*, *ciere*

to put in motion [OED]) in both its dominant senses: 1) "To entreat or petition"; and 2) "To disturb, disquiet, trouble".

⁹² Charles Baxter, "A Self-Consuming Light: *Nightwood* and the Crisis of Modernism", *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 3 (1974), 1182, 1187 and 1176.

⁹³ Elizabeth Pochoda, "Style's Hoax: A Reading of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*", *Twentieth-Century Literature*, Vol. 22 (1976), 188.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 181 and 190.

⁹⁵ Edward Gunn, "Myth and Style in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*", *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Winter 1973-74), 546 and 547.

⁹⁶ Robert Nadeau, "*Nightwood* and the Freudian Unconscious", *International Fiction Review*, Vol. 2 (1975), 159 and 160.

⁹⁷ Laurence Schehr, "Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*: Dismantling the Folds", *Style*, 19 (1985), 36-49.; and Alan Singer, *A Metaphorics of Fiction: Discontinuity and Discourse in the Modern Novel* (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 1983).

⁹⁸ In general, I am using *mythos* in the Aristotelian sense of "plot", but, following Singer, I am also including *ethos* (character/setting) under the same general heading.

⁹⁹ Samuel Beckett, "Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce" in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification For Incamination Of Work In Progress* (Shakespeare and Company, 1929), p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979).

¹⁰¹ A significant part of Derrida's "rhetoric" is a deconstruction of Aristotle's treatment of metaphor and the heliotrope. See "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" in his *Margins of Philosophy*.

¹⁰² de Man notes that this interest is "oriented towards the philosophical implications of Nietzsche's concerns with rhetoric rather than towards the techniques of oratory and persuasion that are obviously present in his style" (p. 104).

¹⁰³ de Man, p. 105.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, Jacques Derrida, in "White Mythology", examines the heliotropic metaphor (i.e. "light", "turning toward the light", of

reason, etc.) as a "founding" metaphor of philosophical discourse. See fn. 101 above.

¹⁰⁶ Schehr, p. 38.

¹⁰⁷ Singer, p. 71.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ de Man, p. 15.

¹¹⁰ Donna Gerstenberger, "The Radical Narrative of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*" in *Breaking the Sequence*, eds. E.G. Friedman and M. Fuchs (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1989), pp. 129-139. This quotation, pp. 133 and 130.

¹¹¹ Mairéad Hanrahan, "Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*: where man is with wo(e)", *Writing Differences: Readings From the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, ed. Susan Sellers (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), pp. 81-94. These quotations, pp. 93-94 and 92.

¹¹² Singer, p. 97.

¹¹³ Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel" in her *Desire in Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 36-49.

CHAPTER TWO: THROUGH THE CARNIVALESQUE TO UNCERTAINTY

¹ Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: U. of Texan Press, 1981), p. xviii.

² *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

³ Julia Kristeva has, to a large extent, been responsible for the Western "discovery" of Bakhtin. (See esp. "Word, Dialogue, Novel" in *Desire in Language* and "The Ruin of a Poetics" in *Russian Formalism*, eds. Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt [Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973], pp. 102-119.) Since the initial burst into literary criticism of Bakhtin's work in the '70s (following years of suppression under Stalinism and Nazism), and the introduction of these texts to Anglo-American scholars (by Kristeva, Holquist, Bann and Bowlt, etc.), Bakhtian theory seems to have gained a secure foothold in contemporary critical scholarship.

⁴ I refer to Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1957), Kenneth Burke's *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), and *Language as Symbolic Action*, and Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958) as works that offer a spectacular overview of literature or, in Watt's case, the novel. I refer to them only as examples, however, of the type of work which claims for itself an all-encompassing venue which enables a systematic, historical, and categorical understanding of the development of literature or a type of literature.

⁵ "Phallogocentrism", as I have noted in Chapter One, fn. 77, is one of the terms that Derrida employs to describe the dominant organizing principle of "Western metaphysics" (we should recite Spivak's recognition that "Derrida uses the word 'metaphysics' very simply as shorthand for any science of presence". ["Translator's Preface", *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1976), p. xxi.]). In the Western "science of presence", then, "phallogocentrism" is the principle of full and absolute presence as the measure of meaning and truth. Unity, oneness, the primacy of "logos" and a singular "centre" of being are particularly dominating, phallic, concepts that have overruled, seek to overrule, the disruptive inclusion of the disunited, fragmented or decentred. Of course, this is merely a brief summation of a very complex concept; but I think that, particularly given Bakhtin's recognition of the utter relativity of the "word", I am justified in commenting on the metaphysical concepts informing both literature and literary theory. I should also note that Derrida's "phallogocentrism", or "logocentrism", bears a distinct relationship to Bakhtin's concept of the "monological" as language deaf to other "languages", considering itself absolute.

⁶ See Kenneth Burke, "Version, Con-, Per-, and In- : Thoughts on Djuna Barnes's Novel *Nightwood*". Burke attempts to situate *Nightwood* within the Judeo-Christian tradition of "Jeremiads" or "lamentations", and this could have been a very productive attempt at analysis had he been able to disengage himself from his own moral certainty. Barnes was infuriated by this essay and refused Burke permission to quote from *Nightwood* in it.

⁷ Caryl Emerson, trans., *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* by Mikhail Bakhtin (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1984), p. xxxii.

⁸ To a critical extent, *Nightwood* involves itself with the "monstrous", with the "beast turning human" and vice versa.

⁹ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, and *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, and *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968).

¹⁰ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 42.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 42-43.

¹² For Bakhtin, "living" language--the language of everyday speech that is constantly "becoming", constantly being mutated by its contextual affectivity, with no end in sight--is opposed to the set, rule-bound, even "dead", languages of "high" rhetoric, formal poetry (i.e. the epic), religion, etc. This opposition is distinctly political: it is the opposition between a stagnant aristocracy and a vibrant common-people.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 53.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 61.

¹⁵ Philosophy has, if we follow Bakhtin and Derrida, traditionally been "monological" or "phallogocentric"; however, from Nietzsche to Derrida, it has been forced open to a "heterological" consideration or questioning of its "givens". In a sense, the same thing happens in the *practice* of law when solicitors interrogate (solicit) the text of the law in the process of drawing up their cases.

¹⁶ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 23.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939), pp. 151.31 and 267.03.

¹⁹ Bakhtin deals with this historical inversion in the essay "Epic and Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination*. The epic projection of everything "good" into a distant and "walled-off" "absolute past" is a gesture, symptomatic of "monoglossia", by which the future is bled dry of all possibility, and this gesture effectively puts an end to undecideability, variability, and possible difference. It is an authoritative imposition of closure on truth and a means of securing authority's dominance for the future.

²⁰ We will deal with the problem of Bakhtin's "actual historical sequence" later on in this essay.

²¹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 22.

²² *Ibid*

²³ *Ibid*, p. 330.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 264.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 266.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 276.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 278.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 236.

²⁹ Plato, "Gorgias" in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1961), pp. 276-277, 494c-495b.

³⁰ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 25.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 412.

³² *Ibid*, p. 24.

³³ Bakhtin's developmental "history" of the novel is based on his recognition of the different perceptions of the formalistic time/space relationship (the "chronotope") as the defining formal characteristics of historically distinct novelistic types. The problems opened up by this spatialization of time, and the formalizing of the force of time, are too numerous to deal with here. It is helpful, however, to recognize the formal impulses in Bakhtin's "novel" theory.

³⁴ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 330-331.

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 254-256.

³⁶ Under the dialogical imperative, language, which exists prior to the speaking person, can only be repeated in its use by the individual. But this repetition is always slightly different: each utterance occurs in a different context (whether cultural, historical, social, purely subjective, or all of these) which affects the meaning of the words uttered. In this way, language is always involved in a differential relationship with its history. One cannot stand "outside of" either language or history (which we only know through the telling of language, to paraphrase Heidegger) and remain articulate.

³⁷ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 255.

³⁸ Here is Bakhtin's investment in "phallogocentrism": his insistence on the primacy of the actual, present, speaking person. Despite his recognition of the relativity of language, he is adamant about the full presence of this being as the foundation for his theory of language. His "dialogue" is always two people speaking to each other.

³⁹ Plato, "Cratylus", esp. pp 457-459, 422e-425a.

⁴⁰ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 366.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp. 252-253.

⁴² Plato, "Phaedrus", p. 521, 275e.

⁴³ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 379.

⁴⁴ Plato, "Phaedrus", p. 521, 276 a.

⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1981). See esp. "Plato's Pharmacy", pp. 61-172.

⁴⁶ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁷ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Rotsel trans., pp. 103 f.f.

⁴⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy" in *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 19-36.

⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), Vol. XVIII, pp. 36-42.

⁵⁰ "différance": Fr. *différer* < L. *differre* = to differ and to defer.

"Now, the word *différence* (with an e) can never refer either to *différer* as temporization or to *différends* as *polemos*. Thus the word *différance* (with an a) is to compensate--economically--this loss of meaning, for *différance* can refer simultaneously to the entire figuration of its meanings. It is immediately and irreducibly polysemic [...]. In its polysemia this word, of course, like any meaning must defer to the discourse in which it occurs, its interpretive context; but in a way it defers itself, or at least does so more readily than any other word, the *a* immediately deriving from the present participle (*différant*), thereby bringing us close to the very action of the verb *différer*, before it has even produced an effect constituted as something different or as *différence* (with an e). In a conceptuality adhering to classical strictures '*différance*' would be said to designate a constitutive, productive, and originary causality, the process of scission and division which would produce or constitute different things or differences. But, because it brings us close to the infinitive and active kernel of *différer*, *différance* (with an a) neutralizes what the infinitive denotes as simply active, just as *mouvance* in our language does not simply mean the fact of moving,

of moving oneself or of being moved. No more is resonance the act of resonating. We must consider that in the usage of our language the ending *-ance* remains undecided *between* the active and the passive. And we will see why that which lets itself be designated *différance* is neither simply active nor simply passive, announcing or rather recalling something like the middle voice, saying an operation that is not an operation, an operation that cannot be conceived either as passion or as the action of a subject on an object, or on the basis of the categories of agent or patient, neither on the basis of nor moving toward any of these *terms*. For the middle voice, a certain non-transitivity, may be what philosophy, at its outset, distributed into an active and a passive voice, thereby constituting itself by means of this repression (*Margins of Philosophy*, pp. 8-9)."

Thus, Jacques Derrida "explains" the spelling of this "movement" that is "neither a word nor a concept", that has "neither existence nor essence" (p. 3), a movement that "announces" an "order that resists the opposition, one of the founding oppositions of philosophy, between the sensible and the intelligible" (p. 5) (because the difference between the *a* and *e* of *différance* can be neither seen nor heard, and because intelligibility is "not fortuitously affiliated with the objectivity of *theorein* [= to look at, to see] or understanding [Derrida uses *entendement*] (p. 5)".

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 6 and 11.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 198.

⁵⁶ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 272.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 272 and 273.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 272 and 270.

⁵⁹ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Rotsel trans., p. 88.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.134.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁶³ Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" in *Desire in Language*, pp. 64-91. Both Bakhtin and Kristeva see the Menippean satire as a progenitor of more recent carnivalesque writings such as the works of Dostoevsky and Joyce.

⁶⁴ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, pp. 82-83.

⁶⁵ Umberto Eco, "The frames of comic 'freedom'" in *Carnival!*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton, 1984), p. 3.

⁶⁶ Juliet Mitchell, "'Femininity, Narrative, and Psychoanalysis', Women: The Longest Revolution" in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 101. For Kristeva's work on the "carnavalesque" see *Le Texte du roman* (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1970) and *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia U.P., 1984).

⁶⁷ I am circumventing Mitchell's argument that "politically speaking, it is only the symbolic, a new symbolism, a new law, that can challenge the dominant law" because I find it logically unsound. Any "law", any "symbolic", implies dominance and the imposition of meaning (i.e. Lacan's "Name of the Father"). A "new law" is simply a substitute or supplement to the "old law": its relationship to the "unlawful", or "lawlessness", is unchanged.

⁶⁸ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Rotsel trans., p. 111.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Kristeva, p. 71.

⁷¹ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 12, trans. fn. 14.

⁷² *Ibid.*, and Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 143.

CHAPTER THREE: HISTORY DEFLOWERED

¹ David Lodge, "The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy", in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane eds., *Modernism* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 481.

² Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature, Part I", p. 225.

³ Baxter, p. 1176.

⁴ Albert Cook, *The Meaning of Fiction* (Detroit: Wayne State U.P., 1960), p. 126; Pochoda, pp. 187 & 188.

⁵ Benstock, pp. 266 & 262.

⁶ The question of "modernism", of the definition of "modernism", has yet to be resolved, if it ever can be. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, in "The Name and Nature of Modernism", demonstrate the difficulties in describing this particular term:

Perhaps the oblique nature of Modernism explains why critics have found it so hard a movement to find a clear place or date for. For the potential of Modernism was long present in the development of literature; it is possible to discern its origins long before we see its fruition. If Modernism is movements, then movements had been coming in increasing waves right through the nineteenth century. If the movements have to be bohemian or *avant-garde*, then bohemia was active in Paris from the 1830s; and the theory of the artist as a futurist, an agent free and loose in the realm of dangerous knowledge, was active throughout romantic thought. If an explicit aesthetic of experimentalism is required, then Émile Zola published *Le Roman expérimental* in 1880 (though he used the word in a scientific or laboratory sense). The crucial idea of the modern as a special imperative and a special state of exposure exists in Nietzsche. If Modernism means the ruffling of the hard naturalistic surface by a state of multiplicity of consciousness, then Walter Pater in the 1870s in England and other thinkers in Europe were talking of 'quickened, multiplied consciousness'. If Modernism means a response of the imagination to an urbanized, *Gesellschaft* world, then Baudelaire spoke of the unreal city and the need for the imagination to produce 'the sensation of newness' [...] Indeed Modernism can look surprisingly different depending on where one finds the centre, in which capital (or province) one happens to stand. (*Modernism*, p. 30.)

⁷ Pochoda, p. 188.

⁸ Peter Ackroyd, *Notes for a New Culture* (London: Vision Press, 1976), pp. 119 & 147.

⁹ Pochoda, p. 187.

¹⁰ Burke, "Version, Con-, Per-, In-: Thoughts on Djuna Barnes's Novel *Nightwood*", p. 245.

¹¹ T.S. Eliot, "Introduction" to Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. xiv.

¹² William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, p. 37. Some of Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" are:

The road of excess leads to the palace of
wisdom.

Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by
incapacity.

Prisons are built with stones of Law, brothels
with bricks of Religion.

The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses
of instruction.

The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals
Beauty, the hands and feet Proportion.

Enough, or too much!

Blake and Barnes: both writers *and* painters/engravers; both largely self-educated and inordinately, if eclectically, well-read in obscure or unusual texts (Boehme, Swedenborg, the theosophists, for example) as well as the classical canons; both self-proclaimed creators, and defenders, of "works of imagination". The fundamental similarity between the two might be best illustrated by a comparison of Blake's "Preface" to *Milton*, which denounces the "ignorant Hirelings" "in the Camp, the Court, & the University", those "fashionable Fools" "who would if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War", and against whom those who "are but just & true to our own Imaginations, those Worlds of Eternity", must "Rouse up!" (*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, p. 95) with Barnes's "Forward" to the 1928 edition of *Ryder*:

This book, owing to censorship, which has a vogue in America as indiscriminate as all such enforcements of law must be, has been expurgated. Where such measures have been thought necessary, asterisks have been employed, thus making it matter for no speculation where

sense, continuity, and beauty have been damaged.

That the public may, in our time, see at least a part of the face of creation (which it is not allowed to view as a whole) it has been thought the better part of valour, by both author and publisher, to make this departure, showing plainly where the war, so blindly waged on the written word, has left its mark.

Hithertofore the public has been offered literature only after it was no longer literature. Or so murdered and so discreetly bound in linens that those regarding it have seldom, if ever, been aware, or discovered, that that which they took for an original was indeed a reconstruction.

In the case of Ryder they are permitted to see the havoc of this nicety, and what its effects are on the work of imagination.

DJUNA BARNES

Paris, August 8, 1927.

Taken from *Ryder* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1928), p. xi. There is not space in this thesis to further delineate the relationships between the texts of Barnes and Blake, but I offer the above as a justification of the occasional reference to Blake in the course of this analysis.

¹³ Alan Singer, in his *A Metaphorics of Fiction*, has also noticed a coincidence: "[...] what links the author's and character's voices here is a predilection for epigrammatic statement. *Miming the duplicitous* teleology of the lie, the pronouncements of the narrator and the doctor almost always arrange themselves paratactically as pairs of literal-discursive and figural-extrapolative complements" (p. 59) and "[O'Connor] becomes a vehicle for transcending the opposition narrator/character" (p. 60).

¹⁴ I am relying principally on the terms and definitions offered by "Literary Forms of the Bible", an article appended to the *New English Bible: Oxford Study Edition* (New York: Oxford U.P., 1976). My reference to biblical aphorisms, or proverbs--without mention of the rich history of aphoristic writings from Aristotle, through Augustine, Chaucer, Montaigne, La Bruyère, Blake, Coleridge, Proust, Wilde, etc., etc.--serves a specific purpose here. While I recognize that Barnes may well be writing within a tradition of aphoristic literature, I am, at this point, more interested in the carnivalizing of the paradigmatic Proverbs offered in the eponymous biblical Book.

¹⁵ Singer, p. 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 61. Singer refers to *Rhetoric*, Sec. 171.

¹⁹ Binary opposition depends upon a concept of one thing and its opposite, so that, although the member parts of the binary opposition are mutually exclusive, both depend for their definition on the dominant one thing. Thus, binary opposition rests upon the assurance of sameness.

²⁰ Jane Marcus, in "Laughing at Leviticus", spends a great deal of time on this figure of Nikka and develops the thesis that "his skin [is] a text on which the dominant culture writes him as other" (p. 156). "This figure is a projection of a 'phallic negro' and is the white man's archetypal erotic animalization of the black [...]. The black man's body is a text of Western culture's historical projections and myths about race. The angel from Chartres represents the myth of the black as angelic, innocent, and childlike during the early days of slavery; the book of magic refers to Europeans' fears of African religions" (p. 152). While there is much of interest in Marcus's reading of "Nikka", she does not seem to have noticed the specifically rhetorical nature of this "figure" in Dr. O'Connor's poetics. Instead, she appears to have lifted this figure out of its specific context, treating it as almost universally emblematic: "Modernism, then, if we take *Nightwood* as its most representative text, is a tattoo on the backside of a black homosexual circus performer" (p. 156). Aside from the fact that the text gives no specific indication that this figure is to be read as a homosexual figure, I also have some difficulty accepting Marcus's thesis that Nikka's tattoos are the invasive writings of a dominant culture. After all, according to the poet O'Connor, his figure chooses "barbarity" because he loves "beauty and would have it about him".

²¹ Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit, "Three Dialogues" in *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 17.

²² Hanrahan, pp. 92-94.

²³ Pochoda, pp. 179 & 190.

²⁴ *Ryder*, p. 1.

²⁵ *New English Bible: Oxford Study Edition*. John 1: 1-5.

²⁶ See esp. Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" in *Margins of Philosophy* where Derrida discusses in detail the metaphors of "light" and the "sun" as the "founding" metaphors of philosophy, of a *theorin* that is "seeing", perceiving, and clarity.

²⁷ These are all facets of the "dream-work" as Freud describes it in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. Dr. A.A. Brill (New York: The Modern Library [Random House], 1983), pp. 181-552.

²⁸ *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 362.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250-51.

³¹ Freud worked out his "natural science" model of memory in the early essay "A Project for a Scientific Psychology" in *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. I, pp. 175 ff.

³² Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing" in *Writing and Difference*, pp. 202 and 200. In this essay, Derrida examines how, from the "Project" to "Note on the Mystic Writing-Pad", Freud's models for psychic structure depended on the metaphor of writing.

CHAPTER FOUR: NIGHTWOOD: GOD'S LITTLE BAG OF TRICKS

¹ See Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" in *Desire in Language*, p. 80: "The laughter of the carnival is not simply parodic; it is no more comic than tragic; it is both at once, one might say that it is *serious*. This is the only way that it can avoid becoming either that scene of the law or the scene of its parody, in order to become the scene of its *other*."

We might, in considering the carnival as the scene of the other in the specific context of Pauline Christianity, also consider the etymology of "carnival" which is derived from the Latin *carnem levare*, "the putting away of flesh (as food)" (OED). There is a delightful ambiguity in this translation which can signify, at once, eating flesh (feasting/fornicating) and turning the flesh away (fasting/abstinence). The carnival may be, traditionally, a time of riotous feasting before Lent, but it is always marked by the inevitability of fasting which is variously its reason, result and excuse. With its obvious roots in *carnem*, the carnival is predicated on the seminal Platonic/Christian distinction between spirit and flesh, a distinction to which this analysis pays a great deal of attention.

² Marcus, "Laughing at Leviticus: *Nightwood* as Woman's Circus Epic".

³ Burke, "Version, Con-, Per-, and In-: Thoughts on Djuna Barnes's Novel *Nightwood*", p. 244.

⁴ Gerstenberger, pp. 132-33.

⁵ Ulrich Weisstein, "Beast, Doll, and Woman: Djuna Barnes' Human Bestiary", *Renascence*, XV (Fall 1962), pp. 3-11.

⁶ Pochoda, pp. 179-91.

⁷ F.R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952), p. 284.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

⁹ Gerstenberger is principally interested in how this "mock-creation narrative" disrupts "[t]rust in historical progression and in narrative as a means to a serviceable end" (p. 133), however her reading of the text is also most valuable to a discussion of *Nightwood's* disruption of Judeo-Christian concepts of "origin".

¹⁰ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973):

"Poetic history, in this book's argument, is held to be indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves" (p. 5).

I have no intention of employing Bloom's entire schemata for the reading of "poetic influence" in *Nightwood*—one would have to find a "Laius" for Barnes's "Oedipus" if one were to follow Bloom's centerings "upon intra-poetic relationships as parallels of family romance" (p. 8), and I am not at all certain that such a father-figure exists for Barnes. However, Bloom's notion of the "*clinamen*" as the initial stage of the successor poet's development in relation to the precursor can be very useful to an analysis of Barnes's relation to certain precedent traditions. Bloom offers this "synopsis" of the "*clinamen*":

1. *Clinamen*, which is poetic misreading or misprision proper; I take the word from Lucretius, where it means a "swerve" of atoms so as to make change possible in the universe. A poet swerves away from his precursor by so reading his precursor's poem as to execute a *clinamen* in relation to it. This appears as a corrective movement in his own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves. (p. 14)

¹¹ Plato, "Phaedrus", trans. R. Hackforth, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, 266b.

¹² It is this sort of inexactitude that renders a precise employment of Bloom's "method" of reading difficult. Barnes may well have read both Augustine and Loyola; she was, after all, a friend of Joyce and he *may* have passed on, or suggested, these texts to her. It *may* just be possible, too, that these texts were in her grandmother's "library". These are, of course, speculative ventures, and I only make them in order to establish that it is not impossible that Barnes had had access to either text. Barnes could have become familiar with the structures of Pauline doctrine that are discussed in this chapter through her reading of Dante, if not from the Seventh Day Adventist influence in her own family. I should also note, here, that the first suggestion of a relationship between *The Confessions* and *Nightwood* was Kenneth Burke's, and Burke was a long-standing acquaintance of Barnes.

¹³ Romans 6: 3-7 (KJV). Paul's conversion is described in Acts 9: 1-19.

¹⁴ See fn. 10. In suggesting that we would only be led back to Augustine, I am following John Freccero who, in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, argues for an Augustinian, and thus Platonic, influence on Dante's writing of *The Divine Comedy* rather than a predominantly Aristotelean influence.

¹⁵ In citing the reasons for my choice of "intertexts", I have made a series of generalisations that may well be questioned by anyone familiar with these texts and that, thus, need to be qualified. The generalizations will become more particular as the chapter proceeds, but to thread the loom, I introduce another series of con-texts that will attend the weaving of this discussion. My reading of the structures of "conversion" owes its patterns in part to John Freccero's *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 1986) and, in part, to Philippe Sollers's "Dante and the Traversal of Writing" in *Writing and the Experience of Limits*, trans. Philip Barnard and David Hayman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). The informing argument for a Platonic, rather than Aristotelian, influence in the works of Dante and Augustine is Freccero's, and this argument can be embossed by Derrida's reading of Plato in *Dissemination*. To the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan, and to Roland Barthes *Sade/Loyola/Fourier*, as well as Freccero and Sollers, I owe the reading of discursive structures of "desire". My reading of *Nightwood's* "desire" is also informed, in part, by Julia Kristeva's *Desire in Language and Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) and, more emphatically, by Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985) and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985). To Kenneth Burke, of course, goes all the credit for recognizing Barnes's adoption of Augustine's "turn".

¹⁶ *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, ed. and trans. unrecorded (London: Griffith, Farran, Browne and Co., Ltd., 1886), Book X, Chapter XX.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Book VIII, Chapter III.

¹⁸ Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 22.

¹⁹ Burke, "Version, Con-, Per-, and In-", p. 243. As will become apparent, I do not entirely agree with Burke's assessment of *Nightwood* as a "secular variant" of the "religious" text. Nor do I agree with Burke that this specific variation, which intimates a connection between, or paralleling of, religious and romantic passions, is (rhetorically) motivated by Barnes's need to persuade the reader that Nora's and Robin's love is *properly* lamentable in the religious sense. Of course, Burke's essay is somewhat more suggestive (and rather epigrammatic) than conclusively analytic, and it does little more than point out most usefully this one essential similarity/difference between *The Confessions* and *Nightwood*. I am using Burke's essay as a starting point only: my "alembications" follow quite an other line to that intimated by Burke's suggestions, particularly as regards "motivation" with its presuppositions of the originary intention, etc. A considerable part of the difference between my reading and Burke's is that a poststructuralist analysis remains suspicious of certain concepts (for example, intention) that neo-Aristotelean rhetoric takes for granted. As a consequence of this difference, my examination both goes back much further--to the Platonic roots of Augustine's "turn"--than Burke's and projects a more radical con-, per-, in- version of Augustine's "pattern" by Barnes's text than that projected by Burke.

²⁰ This "question of priority" is the question that Jacques Derrida posits in "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" in *Margins of Philosophy*.

²¹ Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

²² Burke, "Version, Con-, Per-, and In-", p. 242.

²³ Augustine, Book IV, Chapter XI.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Book IV, Chapter XVI.

²⁵ The route that this detour takes is, of course, the text of *The Confessions*, which insists that it is a guide (a trail, a track) through the process of conversion:

For the confessions of my past sins, which Thou
hast "forgiven and covered" (Ps. xxxii, 1),
that Thou mightest bless me in Thee [...] when
read and heard, stir up the heart, that it may

not slumber in despair, and say, "I can't" [...]
(Book X, Chapter III)

²⁶ Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol II *Purgatory*, trans. Mark Musa (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), Canto XVI, 88-90 and Canto XVII, 100-102.

²⁷ Cardinal Newman, *Idea of a University*, Dis. iii (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 64.

²⁸ Augustine, Book VII, Chapter XII.

²⁹ Plato, "Republic", Book VII, 518 c and d.

³⁰ Augustine, Book VII, Chapter XVII.

³¹ See Augustine, Book IX, in which he describes the exemplary life and death of his mother, "Monica, Thy handmaid".

³² Burke, "Version, Con-, Per-, and In-", p. 242. Burke concentrates on the *novae* of turns: he does not, however, remark on the proliferation of turns throughout the entire text, from beginning to end.

³³ This scene of the "pelvic round" has its analogue in *Nightwood's* description of the circus in which clowns "in red, white and yellow, with the traditional smears on their faces, were rolling over the sawdust as if they were in the belly of a great mother where there was yet room to play" (p. 54). In other words, it might be said that the "pelvic round" is a carnivalesque "space", the space of the circenses.

³⁴ Roland Barthes, *Sade/Loyola/Fourier*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977) pp. 52-53.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁷ *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. with comm. W.H. Longridge (London: A.R. Mowbray and Co., Ltd., 1955), Annotation II, p. 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, First Week, First Exercise, p. 53.

³⁹ This excision of anything "external" to the subject makes possible a purely projective and closed system of contemplation. There is no margin for chance or distraction. This movement inward is not unlike that followed by Augustine and bears a similar relationship to Plato's "Reminiscence"--that is, by moving inward the subject gains access to a prior (to the subject) truth.

⁴⁰ Of course, Robin, as "the woman who presents herself [...] as a picture" (p. 37), is the principal figure/image-maker of the text, but each of the others are marked, at one point or another, with the connotations of Altamonte's "living statues" (p. 13). (Weisstein suggests that "Altamonte should be regarded as a Christ figure; and here [p. 24] he has 'come upon his last erection', [...] *erection*, surely, is a Freudian lapsus, a subconscious distortion of *resurrection*" [Weisstein, p. 5]. If Altamonte ("high mountain") is a Christ figure, he is certainly a carnivalesque one, casting out his "guests" that he might enjoy "his last erection" with a young girl. The perverse "Christ figure" designation does seem appropriate as Altamonte "puts on" the "living statues", which suggests mastership/proprietaryship.) Certainly, Robin and Jenny are presented as like "living statues": "they presented the two halves of a movement that had, as in sculpture, the beauty and absurdity of a desire that is in flower but that can have no burgeoning [...] they were like Greek runners, with lifted feet but without the relief of the final command that would bring the foot down [...] in a cataleptic frozen gesture of abandon" (p. 69). Nora is presented as like a wood carving: "though her skin was the skin of a child, there could be seen coming, early in her life, the design that was to be the weatherbeaten grain of her face, that wood in the work [...]" (p. 50). Frau Mann also has this "carved", manufactured quality: "She seemed to have a skin that was the pattern of her costume: a bodice of lozenges, red and yellow [...] one somehow felt that they ran through her as the design runs through hard holiday candies, and the bulge in the groin where she took the bar [...] was a solid, specialized and as polished as oak" (p. 13). Neither Felix nor O'Connor are presented as "statues" (a condition which seems fundamentally "female" and wood-en), but both are described as "having been seen" by "many people" or by an anonymous observer/observers (pp. 7, 8, 29, for example). In other words, both men (who have feminine traits) have been "viewed" as "objects" to be seen, by anyone, by the "public at large".

⁴¹ Loyola, Annotation I, p. 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, First Week, First Exercise, pp. 53-54.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, First Week, Additions IV and X, pp. 71 and 73.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 89, and 91.

⁴⁶ Barthes, p. 62.

⁴⁷ See fn. 38. Could we, reading through Weisstein, see this orchestrating "half lord, half promoter" as another Altamonte figure, a carnivalesque Christ (half divine, half mortal)?

⁴⁸ Barthes, p. 62.

⁴⁹ Barthes, p. 63-65: "that evasive presence of the subject within the image which marks both fantasm and Ignatian contemplation" (p. 65).

⁵⁰ Jacques Lacan emphasizes the importance of "sexual relations" (as marriage, as the exchange of women) to Freud's understanding of the "foundations" of "societies":

in establishing, in 'The Interpretation of Dreams', the Oedipus Complex as the central motivation of the unconscious, he recognized this unconscious as the agency of the laws on which marriage alliance and kinship are based. This is why I can say to you now that the motives of the unconscious are limited--a point on which Freud was quite clear from the outset and never altered his view--to sexual desire. Indeed, it is essentially on sexual relations--by ordering them according to the law of preferential marriage alliances and forbidden relations--that the first combinatory for the exchanges of women between nominal lineages is based, in order to develop in an exchange of gifts and in an exchange of master-words the fundamental commerce and concrete discourse on which human societies are based. (*Écrits*, pp. 141-42.

⁵¹ Augustine, Book VII, Chapter X; and 1 Corinthians 3:2.

⁵² Barthes, p. 73.

⁵³ Loyola, p. 26.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 157-58.

⁵⁵ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 243 and 245.

⁵⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Rotsel trans., p. 111.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE CENTRE OF EROTICISM AND DEATH

¹ Monique Wittig, "The Point of View: Universal or Particular" in *Feminist Issues* 3 (1983), pp. 63-69.

² *Nightwood* has been criticized by critics like Lillian Faderman (*Surpassing the Love of Men*, pp. 364-365) for promoting a 19th century notion of lesbian angst that owes much to male portraits (from Louÿs to Krafft-Ebing) of lesbianism. I find this criticism a rather simple-, and single-, minded approach to a text that, it seems to me, is actually disemboweling such notions. Shari Benstock, in *Women of the Left Bank*, states:

If *Nightwood* has been read as an analysis of lesbianism that damns its practices and *Ladies Almanack* as a satire of lesbian communities, it is perhaps because Barnes is so successful in inverting expected values [...] (p. 248)

³ This notion that lesbian writers used euphemism, euphemistic style, or a lesbian "code" in order to write about the love between women without being censored has been a popular notion since Edmund Wilson suggested, in *The Shores of Light: A Literary Chronicle of the Twenties and Thirties* (New York: Farrar, 1952), that this was Gertrude Stein's "intent". However, as Benstock has demonstrated (p. 246), this notion depends on a conventional distinction between "style" and "content" which is, in itself, "phallic": the critic must "penetrate" the "style" to get at the "content", as it were.

⁴ It should also be noted that Barnes, in using these "scientific" terms, is not subscribing to the theories of Ellis and Krafft-Ebing. O'Connor explodes these terms by referring to the "invert" or "third sex" as "the sweetest lie of all" which "our miscalculated longing has created": "they the living lie of our centuries" (p. 139).

⁵ Wittig, p. 66.

⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia U.P., 1982), p. 138.

⁷ All of Freud's "discoveries" were made in the course of his treatments of patients, particularly hysterics, neurotics, and homosexuals. See Charles Bernheimer, "Introduction", *In Dora's Case: Freud--Hysteria--Feminism* (London: Virago Press, 1985):

Freud invented psychoanalysis between 1895 and 1900 on the basis of his clinical experience with hysterical patients, nearly all of them women, and of the self-analysis he performed to cure his own hysterical symptoms.

Hysteria thus is implicated in psycho-analysis in the sense that the science enfolds the disease within it and is constituted simultaneously with this pathological interiority.
(p. 1)

That the structure of the human psyche is only revealed in the ruptures in normalcy caused by "disease"--whether the disease of mental illness or perversion or the dis-ease motivating dreams--is a "given" of Freudian psychoanalytic theory. The idea of a "primal scene" or primary scene of psychic trauma that is then "repeated" in neurotic symptoms appears to have first come to Freud during his early work with hysterics. This discovery led to his investigations of the psychical constructs of childhood, abetted by the disease of "Little Hans", which culminated in the "discovery" of the oedipal complex. Thus, it could be said that through the agency of dis-ease, Freud was able to "go back" to the obscure beginnings of human development. *Nightwood*, with its emphasis on dis-ease and "going back", seems to be following a similar project.

⁸ Freud's descriptions of his hysterical patients, who are always "attractive" and frequently "intelligent", and his insistence that he could not treat an hysteric whom he disliked indicate more than a purely clinical interest in the hysteric. That his concept of "transference", which involves an engagement of patient and analyst, should have developed during his work with hysterics is particularly interesting.

⁹ Kristeva, p. 45.

¹⁰ Kristeva, following Lacan, insists that sexual identity is an "imaginary identity" and that the "writer of abjection" undoes such constructs (p. 208). However, Kristeva, even more than Lacan, still seems to give credence to the actual, biological determinants of sexual development (having/not having a penis) insisted on by Freud.

¹¹ Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria* in *The Pelican Freud Library* Vol. 3 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1986; rpt. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. II), p. 58.

¹² Sigmund Freud, "Some General Remarks on Hysterical Attacks" in *The Pelican Freud Library* Vol. 10 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1986; rpt. *The Standard Edition*, Vol. IX), p. 102.

¹³ Sigmund Freud, "Hysterical Phantasies and Their Relation to Bisexuality" in *The Pelican Freud Library* Vol. 10 (rpt. *The Standard Edition*, Vol. IX), p. 94.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, "Femininity" in *The Standard Edition* Vol. XXII, p. 131.

¹⁵ It was during the period 1885-1886, when Freud was studying under Charcot, that he became interested in hysteria. He married Martha Bernays in 1886, following several years of courtship.

¹⁶ Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, p. 63.

¹⁷ See the late essay "Female Sexuality" (1931) in *The Pelican Freud Library*, Vol. 7 (rpt. *The Standard Edition*, Vol. XXI):

[...] this [pre-oedipal] phase of attachment to the mother is especially intimately related to the aetiology of hysteria, which is not surprising when we reflect that both the phase and the neurosis are characteristically feminine [....](p. 373).

"Femininity" is largely based on "Female Sexuality".

¹⁸ For Freud, women were always the "other", on the other side of a (specifically biological) border that could never be crossed successfully:

Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity [....] Nor will you have escaped worrying over this problem--those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply--you are yourselves the problem. ("Femininity", p. 113).

¹⁹ Freud, "Female Sexuality", p. 373.

²⁰ See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, especially, for example, the chapter "The Signification of the Phallus".

²¹ I am thinking specifically of Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One*. However, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément in *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1987; trans. of *La Jeune née* [Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975]), and the various writers who have contributed to *In Dora's Case* have all demonstrated the difficulties in Freudian "readings" of female sexuality.

²² James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, p. 115.23.

²³ Nadeau, p. 159.

²⁴ Marcus, p. 164.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²⁸ Djuna Barnes, "James Joyce" in *Djuna Barnes: Interviews*, ed. Alyce Barry (Washington, D.C.: Sun and Moon Press, 1985), p. 293.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Sigmund Freud, "Revision of Dream-Theory" in *The Standard Edition* Vol. XXII, p. 26.

³¹ Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, pp. 360-361.

³² See Freud and Breuer's "On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena" in *Studies on Hysteria*, pp. 53-69.

³³ See, for example, "Femininity", p. 128, and "A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men" in *The Pelican Freud Library*, Vol. 7 (rpt. *The Standard Edition* Vol. II), pp. 231-42.

³⁴ See Hanrahan:

[...] Robin is the object of desire of men and women alike: in her apparent asexuality (she is like a prince and a monk, a boy, that is an unformed man), she represents a lost paradise of completeness, a paradise which nobody alive has ever enjoyed ('where what we never had stands waiting'); she represents death. (p. 88)

Robin is the object of desire for the characters of the text, with the possible exception of Dr. O'Connor who points out that in her invert or "uninhabited angel" guise, she is a "lie". However, Robin also seems to act as object of desire for the text itself. It is as if Robin's attraction as an image, as an object--which, according to Hanrahan, "has no desire of its own and on to which we can project [...] our desire for an unchangeable, unchanging world [...] (p. 87)--haunts and perplexes language itself.

³⁵ There is a tendency among some American feminist critics to read Robin as the virgin goddess of the hunt, and there is indeed a reference to "'Diane of Ephesus in the Greek Gardens, singing and shaken in every bosom'" (pp. 137-38). However, there seems no specific connection between Robin and Diane, and I find the designation of Robin as Diana reductive and, in some ways, misleading. Robin may be many things, but she is certainly not a virgin, nor does she, as Marcus suggests, "have control over her sexuality" (p. 177).

³⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (London & New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), p. 83.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 103. Hanrahan makes the interesting suggestion that "Robin's identity is predicated on having no identity" (Hanrahan, p. 88), which emphasizes her "lack" in terms of signifiatory systems.

³⁸ Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, p. 90.

³⁹ See *Studies on Hysteria*, "Preliminary Communication".

⁴⁰ Marcus, p. 159.

⁴¹ See Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" in *The Pelican Freud Library* Vol. 11 (rpt. *The Standard Edition* Vol. XIV:

An object-choice, an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed; then, owing to a *real slight or disappointment* coming from this loved person, the object-relationship was shattered. The result was not the normal one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one, but something different [....] (p. 257)

⁴² Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, pp. 348-49.

⁴³ Freud, "Femininity", p. 135.

⁴⁴ Freud, "Infantile Sexuality" in *The Pelican Freud Library* Vol. 7 (rpt. *The Standard Edition* Vol. VII), p. 104.

⁴⁵ See "Femininity", (p. 131):

It would not be surprising if it were to turn out that each sexuality had its own special libido appropriated to it, so that one sort of libido would pursue the aims of a masculine sexual life and another sort those of a feminine one. But nothing of the kind is true. There is only one libido, which serves both the masculine and the feminine sexual functions. To it itself we cannot assign any sex: if, following the conventional equation of activity and masculinity, we are inclined to describe it as masculine, we must not forget that it also covers trends with a passive aim. Nevertheless the juxtaposition 'feminine libido' is without any justification.

Thus, we may, following convention, and with one reservation, call the libido "masculine", but there is no justification for calling a libido "feminine".

⁴⁶ See Catherine Clément, "The Guilty One", in *The Newly Born Woman*.

⁴⁷ Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction" in *The Pelican Freud Library* Vol. 11 (rpt. *The Standard Edition* Vol. XIV), for example.

Narcissism in this sense would not be a perversion, but the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation, a measure of which may justifiably be attributed to every living creature. (p. 66)

⁴⁸ Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" in *The Pelican Freud Library* Vol. 7 (rpt. *The Standard Edition* Vol. XIX), p. 337.

⁴⁹ Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" in *The Pelican Freud Library* Vol. 9 (rpt. *The Standard Edition* Vol. XVIII), p. 382.

⁵⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁵⁵ See Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", (pp. 257-58):

The result was not the normal one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one, but something different, for whose coming-about various conditions seem to be necessary. The object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance and was brought to an end. But the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object.

⁵⁶ Kristeva, p. 38.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

62 See Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1982).

63 Djuna Barnes, "James Joyce", p. 292.

64 Critical appreciations of the last chapter range from Joseph Frank's reading of it as a musical "coda" to Elizabeth Pochoda's reading of it as the demise of language. I have discussed some of these views in the first chapter of this thesis.

65 I want to reiterate, briefly, the connection between my use of the term "carnavalesque" and the Derridean terms "*différance*", "supplement", etc., as that connection was delineated in the last pages of Chapter Two. I want to stress that the threshold at which the "writer of abjection" is positioned (or positions itself) is a sort of bridge-breach (making "possible the very thing that it makes impossible") like Rousseau's "supplement", Plato's "pharmakon", Mallarmé's "hymen", and Bakhtin's "carnavalesque". In other words, the writing of abjection, like these other terms, inscribes "*différance*" within itself. Between the "I" and the abject, abjection "writes", a movement that at once both makes possible the relationship between the "I" and the abject (or between "being" and "nothing") and subverts the possibility of a synthesis of opposites, a synthesis that could only produce death (of the "I" and of signification). I have drawn these threads together--these "non-synonymous terms"--again simply to emphasize that the term "writing", as I use it, is always informed by Derridean "writing" and the "carnavalesque".

66 See, for example, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" in *The Pelican Freud Library* Vol. 11 (rpt. *The Standard Edition* Vol. XVIII), where the "compulsion to repeat" is treated in detail.

67 Kristeva, pp. 42-43.

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