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DARKNESS IN THE WORK OF DJUNA BARNES

by

Anne E. Linttell, B.A.

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

Department of English

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

November 1994

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"Darkness in the Work of Djuna Barnes"

submitted by Anne Linttell, B.A.
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

Chairperson, Department of English

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Abstract

This thesis explores the darkness in Djuna Barnes' Ryder, Nightwood, and The Antiphon. Though Barnes' techniques reflect an eclectic study of past literary traditions, her themes express the pain and anguish of the modern world. Again and again, what she calls a "universal malady" pervades her fiction. In Ryder, it is articulated through the unjust patriarchal structure of the world; in Nightwood, it is expressed by the sexual suffering of lesbian women, a homosexual doctor, and a "wandering" Jew; in The Antiphon, against a background of war, it becomes Barnes' final response to a world filled to capacity with human misery. Recapitulating themes of patriarchal cruelty and destructive sexuality, her "antiphon" foregrounds a dying world that precludes redemption. Her dark view of existence is rooted not only in twentieth-century disillusionment and spiritual lassitude but in the historical past. While Barnes has no remedy for such a universal malady, she has left a legacy of exceptional wit and brilliant characterization.

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Dedication

For my husband Garry and our four children

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For his advice, encouragement, and patience, I am indebted to Professor J. R. Morrison, my thesis supervisor. His optimism and humour helped to lighten my exploration into Djuna Barnes' darkness. Special thanks to my daughter Jennifer for her computer assistance.

Legend

<u>A</u>	<u>The Antiphon, in The Selected Works of Djuna Barnes</u>
<u>AB</u>	<u>A Book</u>
<u>CA</u>	<u>Creatures in an Alphabet</u>
<u>LA</u>	<u>Ladies Almanack</u>
<u>N</u>	<u>Nightwood</u>
<u>PP</u>	<u>"A Passion Play"</u>
<u>R</u>	<u>Ryder</u>
<u>RW</u>	<u>The Book of Repulsive Women</u>
<u>SW</u>	<u>Spillway in The Selected Works of Djuna Barnes</u>

Chapter One

Exploring the Dark Side

The darkness is the closet in which your lover roasts her heart, and that night-fowl that caws against her spirit and yours, dropping between you and her the awful estrangement of his bowels. The drip of your tears is his implacable pulse. Night people do not bury their dead, but on the neck of their beloved and waking, sling the creature, husked of its gestures. And where you go, it goes, the two of you, your living and her dead, that will not die; to daylight, to life, to grief until both are carrion. (N 89)

"A leaf of darkness" (N 85) is symbolic of the world of Djuna Barnes. When it falls, its nightshade turns the universe even darker. Sombre images emerge which haunt, excite, and cause one to shudder. Barnes' journey into the night world is a non-redemptive odyssey in which there is neither consolation nor regeneration for her characters. Many of her short stories and poems, written in the twenties, express a pervasive obsession with death. What better place for the seeds of hopelessness to germinate than in "Illa nuit effroyable!" (N 82). Entering Barnes' twilight zone is a painful experience, like opening a door on the abyss of despair. If one dares enter, however, and explores the difficult and morbid terrain, a reward comes through Barnes' brilliant characterization and exceptional wit. A writer of great complexity, her brightness captivates, her darkness consumes.

For many critics, the two decades 1910-1930 "can be seen as a breaking-up...of the nineteenth-century consensus" (Faulkner 14). Owing to the effects of technology, Barnes writes at a time when the world is more complex and disordered, a time of "the complete demise of the positive, optimistic expectation projected into our culture by the exuberant prophets of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment" (Kolenda 124). Expressing a world in decline, she writes, "We are adhering to life now with our last muscle--the heart" (N 40). Bowed under the weight of a spiritual malaise, a sense of confusion and helplessness besets the modern individual, who "has nothing left to hold to, or...to hold with" (N 40). As early as 1916, Barnes' pessimism is reflected in a poem, "To An Idol," published in the All-Story Weekly. Its closing lines offer little affirmation:

Throbbing faintly out of space
That shadows drown--
We hear God's grim machinery
Run down.

Equally disturbing, a poem, ironically called "Transfiguration," appearing in the London Bulletin in 1938, and later entitled "Fall-out Over Heaven," mirrors an angst-ridden universe in which the persona says, "Lucifer roars up from earth/Down falls Christ into his death...." As a result, devouring darkness overtakes the spiritual light in Barnes' fiction.

Writing out of disillusionment and anger with her world, Barnes' work reflects what she terms a "universal malady" (N 32). While some

writers view the universe with some kind of religion, Barnes' vision of life offers no such comfort. She seems to hold God accountable for the unjust way He has structured the world. She writes, "We are full to the gorge with our own names for misery...Life [is] the permission to know death" (N 83). For Barnes, this debilitating "malady" is rooted in our sexual nature and patriarchal oppression--the very core of her darkness.

Another major concern for Barnes, and equally devastating, is sexual oppression, which constitutes the suffering and injustices imposed upon women by patriarchy, whose origins stem from Genesis. An excremental vision is evoked in Ryder, as the heterosexual Kate laments, "To man is the vision, to his wife the droppings!" (R 145). Likewise, in The Antiphon, it is said that Augusta treated her sons fairly but on her daughter she cast "the privy look of dogs/who turn to quiz their droppings" (A 87). Augusta too is a victim, for her marriage to Titus Hobbs "pupped truncated grief" (A 87). Barnes comments in "Aller et Retour," an early short story, that "[l]ife...is filthy; it is also frightful. There is everything in it: murder, pain, beauty, disease--death" (SW 9).

Her work mirrors some aspects of the spirit of the European fin de siècle movement, particularly its preoccupation with disenchantment, ennui, and world-weariness. The movement's nineteenth-century disillusionment surfaced in Greenwich Village's Bohemianism in the early years of this century, where it seems to have

cast its spell on writers like Barnes. "[A]ll our life is but a going out to the place of execution and death" (N 97), she writes. In an interview with Barnes by Guido Bruno, which appeared in Pearson's Magazine in 1919, she captures the heartbeat of the nation after World War I, when she tells him: "This life I write and draw and portray is life as it is, and therefore you call it morbid. Look at my life. Look at the life around me...Is not everything morbid? I mean the life of people stripped of their masks" (Barry 386).

The passion underlying Barnes' prose counteracts some of its disturbing qualities. Sexuality, a recurring theme for Barnes, is often destructive, causing pain, confusion, alienation, and despair; yet she courageously explores these experiences. Nightwood's all-consuming homosexual love story in which sexual passion and betrayal "destroy [the] heart" (N 87) becomes a microcosm of a "botched civilization," to use Ezra Pound's words. The heart, often considered the centre of the self and of love, for Barnes, is a place of suffering. For this reason, her characters are like lost souls adrift in a dark, materialistic universe. No doubt some of the darkness arises out of her childhood experiences.

Born on June 12, 1892, on Storm-King Mountain at Cornwall-on-Hudson, New York, Barnes' formative years were spent in an unconventional household on her father's farm on Long Island. Her eccentric father, Wald Barnes, was an author, painter, musician and poet. As well as a confrontation with authorities for not sending his

children to school, Andrew Field notes that Wald Barnes ran into trouble over his marital status (Field 185). It seems he lived with two women, but no record of his marriage to Elizabeth Chappell, Djuna's mother, has been found. The many references to polygamy in Barnes' fiction are possibly rooted in her father's notion of an "anarchic spiritual union rather than church or government sanction" (185) of marriage. He inherited a distrust of the public school system from his mother, Zadel Barnes, an early feminist. Between them they shared the tutoring of the young Djuna. Except for the period when she studied art at Pratt Institute in New York City, Barnes never attended school. Her grandmother Zadel, a major figure in her life, was a devotee of the fin de siècle movement. Before Zadel's return to America, legend has it that she had been the hostess of "a literary salon in Grosvenor Square in London around the time of the Pre-Raphaelites. Among the diverse group she entertained was Oscar Wilde" (Kannenstine 174).

Barnes' most productive years as a writer were spent in exile from her family and country. While Bohemianism was thought to have ended by the early twenties, the American exiles gave "a powerful stimulus to the myth of Paris as a center of Bohemia" (Seigel 367). The cafés and streets were crowded with writers who had left their cultural baggage behind in America. In Paris, they could enjoy sexual freedom and devote their lives to their own self-development. For the most part, like other women expatriates, Barnes escaped the

traditional expectations of marriage and child-bearing, though Field mentions a brief marriage to Courtenay Lemon, and a pregnancy, the result of an affair with a French painter, which was terminated by an abortion (15-18). She associated with a group of artists and writers, many of whom were homosexual, that frequented the Paris salon of the wealthy American Natalie Clifford Barney. Writing of Paris in the twenties, William Wiser notes: "If the spirit of Lesbos pervaded the important salons of the 1920s, the lesbian aura was never more evident than at 20 rue Jacob..." (111). Barney's salon, called the Temple à l'Amitié, was not only home to sexual rebels but a place for literary discussions, poetry readings and pageants.

Barnes' desire for privacy made interviews a rarity, nor was she very helpful in explaining herself; hence, it becomes difficult to track her movements amongst the expatriates. Though she lived with Thelma Wood, a young silverpoint artist from Missouri, for nine years in the twenties, decades later she told a friend, "I'm not a lesbian. I just loved Thelma" (Field 37). Nevertheless, she dedicated Ryder to Thelma and made her the model for Robin Vote in Nightwood. After their relationship ended, life in Paris, according to Andrew Field, was extremely unsatisfactory for Barnes, "from both an emotional and a financial point of view" (195). Thus in the early thirties she spent considerable time with Peggy Guggenheim at Hayford Hall in Devonshire, England. In Guggenheim's informal memoirs, Out of This Century, she says that one bedroom in the Hall was "rather dressed up in rococo

style, and it looked so much like Djuna that we gave it to her. It was in this room...that she wrote most of Nightwood" (138). When World War II broke out, Guggenheim remarks that Barnes "was in a complete state of collapse" (237) when she put her on the boat to New York City. For the rest of her life, Barnes lived in seclusion in Greenwich Village's Patchin Place, where she died on Friday, June 18, 1982, at the age of ninety.

Barnes' literary career began with poems and short stories which appeared in American magazines and newspapers after her move to New York City in 1912; but journalism was her primary means of support. She began writing for the Brooklyn Eagle in 1913 and eventually wrote for most of the major New York newspapers. In order to experience fully what the suffragettes had to put up with, she underwent force-feeding for an article she wrote for The New York World Magazine in 1914 called "How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed." Barnes reported that if she, "play acting, felt [her] being burning with revolt at this brutal usurpation of [her] own functions, how they who actually suffered...must have flamed at the violation of the sanctuaries of their spirit..." (Field 54). As well, her association with the Provincetown Playhouse from 1916-1921 added another dimension to her literary pursuits. Their plays "depicted the problem of woman in the modern world" (Sochen 4). As a result, many of her one-act plays explore sexual desire, repression, and oppression. While other women dramatists explored ways of renewing troubled monogamous heterosexual

relationships, Barnes' approach to theatre was radical and raw.

Her search for a style reflects many of these influences; however, in keeping with her temperament--bold, vibrant, aloof, and often unfathomable--she objected to any attempt to label her work with "isms." Like certain other novelists of the period, she possessed a high degree of signature. Nor is her work specifically political, for surely her fierce individualism, coupled with the lack of middle-class security, kept her apart from any movements. In The Book of Repulsive Women, which appeared in 1915, Barnes criticizes the spirit of Bohemianism in Greenwich Village where, as Susan Glaspell has noted, "You could not go out to buy a bun without hearing of someone's complex" (Parry 278). Barnes' early association with Guido Bruno, "the supreme pretender in a garret" (310), who labelled her "the American Beardsley" (Kannenstine 23), provided a market for this early work. Wholly committed to the fin de siècle, Bruno was an ardent activist in the struggle against censorship. According to Andrew Field, he introduced the work of Beardsley to America (70). Certainly the fragmented figures in Barnes' "rhythms" are reminiscent of the Beardsley style, where sexual darkness flows through her black-and-white drawings into libidinous lines, destroying romantic images of the female body. Barnes' repulsive women have what J. Hillis Miller might call "an inner nothingness" (8); they exist, but barely. In some ways, these morbid images anticipate Robin Vote of Nightwood. Neither animal nor fully human, she exhales a perfume of

"earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness...her flesh...the texture of plant life" (N 34).

Though three book-length critical studies have been written on Barnes by James Scott, Louis Kannenstine, and Cheryl J. Plumb, Andrew Field's Djuna is the only biography, even if it is an unauthorized one. As a result, his sources are rarely documented. Louis Kannenstine bases his study of Barnes upon the concept of duality, "a middle condition" (xv) in which man is born damned from the start. Presupposing a heaven and a hell, Kannenstine distorts Barnes, pulling her back into such old realities as those of Christian redemption. Barnes, however, was an agnostic who believed in "her own ignorance" (O'Neal 44). Kannenstine's 1977-work stops short in exploring fully Barnes' dark insight into the depths of the human character. The darkness in her fiction is mainly derived from antagonism toward the world and the way it has been organized. In conversations with Hank O'Neal, she stated several times that her "pride, independence, solitude, and anger at a world she neither understood nor wished to be part of were all that kept her going at the end of her life" (15).

Recently there has been a reevaluation of Barnes in Silence And Power, a collection of feminist essays that examine the sexual, ideological and textual dimensions of her work. Though not a self-proclaimed feminist, Barnes discloses a substratum of feminism in her fiction. While a pervasive concern for the plight of women is always present, her texts are devoid of any comforting survival

strategies. She writes about women's consciousness in Nightwood, certain forms of male tyranny, subtly and ironically in Ryder, and flagrantly in The Antiphon. As a result, this thesis examines the darkness in these books, drawing on feminist critical ideas like those found in the writings of Diana Fuss, Monique Wittig, and Luce Irigaray in order to discuss patriarchy and sexuality.

The first novel looked at in this study is Ryder, a family chronicle with Wendell Ryder as its patriarchal protagonist. As Barnes often said to Hank O'Neal, "If there was anything [he] wanted to know about her family, [he] should read her books" (127). Somewhat autobiographical, Ryder focuses on the painful experience of women and children in the house of a father/husband who paints "a rosy picture...of polygamy" (R 49). Despite Ryder's ribald humour, there is a sense of suffering and despair beneath its surface. Besides Wendell's destructive libidinous nature, "crepuscular gloom" (R 132) hangs over his young daughter's bedroom. In the chapter, "Julie Becomes What She Had Read," there are subtle suggestions of physical abuse as well as incestuous overtones. The reader, however, is rescued somewhat from the weight of Ryder's darkness by the creation of one of the oddest characters in twentieth-century fiction--Dr. Matthew O'Connor. In Ryder, he is the family physician; in Nightwood, he is the great philosopher of the night.

Considered the apex of Barnes' literary achievement, Nightwood expresses suffering to such a degree that there will be "no comfort

until the night melts away; until the fury of the night rots out its fire" (N 85). Barnes reaches into the inner lives of her characters--that dark side of the soul--exposing the painful experience of failed love. Deeply disturbing, Nightwood plunges into a dark abyss where its characters spiral downwards into more and more suffering. For Dr. O'Connor, there is nothing left but "wrath and weeping" (N 166); for Nora Flood, there is frightening bewilderment as she watches Robin Vote drop down on the floor of a chapel in a bizarre ritual with a terrified dog. The writing is so rich and absorbing in this novel that, to a certain extent, its epigrammatic style and humour lessen the painful fragility of life.

Darkness comes down with even more alarming force on Barnes' last major work, The Antiphon. Her verse drama is so complex that Barnes thought she might have to write another play to explain it. In a macabre setting of decay and horror, family disintegration parallels a dying world that is "cracked--and in the breach" (A 83). During the first year of World War II, the Burley family gathers at one of the strangest and most violent homecomings in a literary text. "As in a glass darkly" (A 185), destructive sexuality explodes with brutal intensity in a recurring network of polygamy, family violence, betrayal and murder, with overtones of rape and incest. Darkness shrouds the soul of the victimized Miranda as she looks back in anger at the power of the patriarch--"Bull Titus," who has been the cause of her suffering. As disturbing as a Greek tragedy, the drama pulls the

reader towards a great abyss: there "[l]ove is death" (A 196), and Barnes closes the door.

Barnes' work is so generically pain-stricken that there is a tendency for critics to want to know more about Djuna Barnes, the woman, rather than Djuna Barnes, the author. As a writer, she has been praised, ignored, and misjudged. Reviewing Spillway in The Spectator, May, 1962, Olivia Manning dismisses its stories as "an elaboration of egoism and emptiness." On the other hand, her contribution to literature was honoured in A Festschrift for Djuna Barnes on her 80th birthday. Hayden Carruth writes, "If I were required to name one author who represents most completely the motives and goals of the literature of that time (Between-the-Two-Wars), I would name Djuna Barnes" (Gildzen n.p.). In fact, her genius for some rivals that of Joyce.

Chapter Two

Shadow-Boxing with the Past

I, my love, am to be Father of All Things. For this was I created, and to this will I cleave. Now this is the Race that shall be Ryder...(R 277). "How do you accomplish all this?" inquired Lady Bridesleep. "By bedding in all beds, and in bedding, sow no seed of doubt, and this, [Wendell] added, takes might and a will!" (R 279)

By "humorous" is meant ability to round out the inevitable ever-recurring meanness of life, to push the ridiculous into the very arms of the sublime. (R 10)

After Joyce's Ulysses appeared in 1922, Barnes is reported to have said, "I shall never write another line. Who has the nerve after this?" (Barry 288). Undaunted, however, she abandoned the more conventional narrative techniques of her earlier work A Book and wrote and illustrated Ryder, a novel with a range of styles traversing and parodying many literary forms. Originally published in a small edition of 3,000 copies in August, 1928, Ryder was praised by Ernest Bates in the Saturday Review as "the most amazing book ever written by a woman" (376). A review in the New York Evening Post called it "the very backlash of all Puritanism" (Kannenstine 40). The first edition sold out quickly; when the second edition appeared, the novelty of its "Rabelaisian nature" (R xi) had dwindled. A reissue in 1979 is sprinkled throughout with asterisks to indicate censored passages. As

well, two drawings have been added to the original nine, all of which were inspired by L'Imagerie Populaire. While helping the reader to understand the prose, the illustrations also cast a pall of darkness over the work.

In chronicling a half century of Ryder history, Barnes unmaskes the Bible as the book of patriarchy. "[N]ever has the family been so put to the test" (Barney 169) as in her family portrait. In examining Ryder with respect to darkness, this chapter considers patriarchy as one of its sources, a system of "power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men" (Weedon 2). As a second concern, history, originating from Biblical myth, is presented as excremental. Barnes subverts the Christian view that God is "love" and "light." Though she might like to believe in spirituality, she finds no means of overcoming the dark realities of life. She tells Guido Bruno, "What's the use? Today we are, tomorrow dead...We live and suffer and strive...We love, we hate...And we die, and no one will ever know that we have been born" (Barry 386). Barnes' excremental vision reduces the sublime to chamber pots and pigeon droppings. The third aspect that this chapter discusses is Barnes' dark, satirical illustrations that supplement the text and pick up the threads of patriarchy and scatology. In Ryder, human nature is stripped of its masks, exposing the heart of man as "an insulting shape [that is both] monstrous...[and] obscene" (R 317).

Barnes draws on a host of voices to narrate the fifty chapters of

the Ryder history. It becomes necessary, however, for a reader to know the whole story in order to distinguish its great talkers. Though Wendell Ryder is a central figure, the text follows Sophia, his mother, from her youth to her deathbed. The chronicle begins with the marriage of her parents, Cynthia and Jonathan Buxton, sometime in the first half of the nineteenth century. The text shifts abruptly to the death of Sophia's mother while giving birth to her fourteenth child. Sophia, the eldest, is introduced early to the painful experience of childbirth, which Barnes calls "a terrible suffering centre without extremities" (R 8). Already impregnated by John Peel, her Latin tutor, Sophia has two babies to nurture, her mother's and her own. Although John Peel marries Sophia three days after Wendell is born, Sophia prefers to think that Wendell was conceived during a dream of Beethoven. Barnes undercuts the myth of Sophia as "the All-Maternal Being, The Queen, Lady Wisdom" (Walker 951), by stripping away the mask of Sophia Ryder; for example, her granddaughter Julie can "taste a lie" (R 19) beneath Sophia's grand facade. As a means to an end, Sophia defined herself as "Mother," for she knew this was the way to "the heart of man" (R 17). Not until after her death was it discovered she had "lied and wept and played the sweet old woman to...every rich man in the country" (R 17). After her second marriage to Alex Alexson, a Swede, it is written that she travelled widely and for a certain period, like Zadel Barnes, kept a salon in London.

The portrait of Amelia de Grier tells of her move from Tittencote

to Shepherd's Bush, London, in 1886, after the death of her mother. She studied voice and violin, and shared an apartment with her sister, Ann, until she met Sophia and Wendell Ryder and emigrated with them to America. They settled in a small log cabin in the hills of "Storm-King" in New York State. Here Ann's fears and warnings about Wendell are realized, for Amelia's tiny inheritance becomes the family's sustenance after her marriage. The sole record of Wendell's employment was three weeks spent as a drug-clerk at Burroughs and Welcome. He was sacked because he delivered "prussic acid to a weaning lady...in place of bismuth" (R 22).

When Kate-Careless is invited by Sophia to Bulls'-Ease farm in 1897, she, like Amelia, calls Sophia "Mother." Domestic tension follows when Kate becomes Wendell's mistress and their three illegitimate children are housed under the same roof with Amelia's and Wendell's five. From this point, Wendell's relationship with his wife, his mistress, his mother, and his daughter Julie becomes the main focus of the novel. Julie suffers abuse from her father, Amelia endures humiliation and the burden of childbed, and Sophia is reduced to secretive begging to support Wendell's "extended" family.

For women in the history of the Ryder family, it has been "a long flight [down] paternal steps" (R 6); for Barnes, it is a journey back to the origin of things--to Genesis--the beginning of the spiritual history of patriarchy. Looking back to the wedding night of Sophia's parents, the narrator observes how Cynthia at sixteen was led trembling

to the altar and the nuptial bed, and laying herself down "to the unspoken in man" (R 7). Years later, while Jonathan "eased himself in his trap-door trousers with pride" (R 6), Cynthia, with madness upon her, is delivered of her fourteenth child and dies in the process. In "Reading Genesis," an essay in What Lesbians do in Books, Patricia Duncker states:

The Eden story in Genesis is crucial for any analysis of heterosexuality, because it is there that women's subordination to men within marriage as a sexual union and the very fact of heterosexual pairing, are mystified and justified, with all the spurious authority of Biblical myth.
(205)

This is the manner in which Barnes foregrounds her concern for women who must cope with unwanted pregnancies.

While many men and women would consider motherhood as a "natural" phenomenon, Barnes sees it as a patriarchal assumption that women are "naturally" equipped to fulfill this role. A contemporary essentialist definition of woman implies that "there will always remain some part of 'woman' which resists masculine imprinting and socialization" (Fuss 61). Since Barnes devotes a good portion of Ryder to Wendell's unharnessed virility and his proclivity to follow the footsteps of his grandfather Jonathan in expanding his race, it would seem that Barnes rebels against marriage, reproduction, and even sex itself. Wendell wants many children because he sees them as extensions of his own ego. Besides, he wants to be "Father of All Things." By making Wendell a paradigm of the Old Testament patriarch, Barnes ridicules the Biblical

myth that dictates: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over...every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28). She will not bow down to such received ideas that women should be kept barefoot and pregnant.

Darkness is generated through Barnes' belief that women have no choice but to endure. She portrays the Ryder women as victims of cruelty and injustice.

Though Sheryl Stevenson's essay in Silence And Power sees Ryder as a "feminist parody-novel" (Broe 82) in which male authority is undermined by consistent female mockery, one cannot overlook the dark side of the novel that captures the painful experiences of its female characters. History repeats itself, for Julie Ryder at ten, like her grandmother, Sophia, and her mother, Amelia, before her, must attend her mother in childbed. The young girl, weeping herself, suffers the screams of her mother, for this time Amelia fears she will die. Wendell, who is unsympathetic to his wife's labour, refuses to send for a doctor. "I am sufficient" (R 118), he proclaims. He orders Julie to go to her mother, "and Julie went trembling" (R 118). Traumatized by her mother's condition, Julie sends her brother for Dr. O'Connor, and assists him with the delivery. She endures; she is female. Amelia gives the same advice to Julie that her own mother had given her: "[D]on't let a man touch you, for their touching never ends" (R 117). Wendell, however, has had the pleasure of "touching" and experimenting. In the music-room his mistress Kate is giving birth to a girl at the

same time Amelia delivers a boy. Patriarchy, which moved through the lives of Wendell's and Amelia's ancestors, worms its way into the Ryder household. It leaves a stain on a ten-year-old girl. While Amelia is at the peak of her labour, Julie lies on her own bed of "playful maternity" crying, "Wendell! Wendell!" (R 118), echoing the cries both of her mother and Kate. She holds a rag doll to her breast, thrown to her by "the strong paternal arm of Timothy, [her brother], who was God and the Father" (R 118).

Barnes reveals her touchiness with traditional concepts of a woman's role in an article, entitled "Against Nature," which appeared in Vanity Fair in 1922. She asks, "Now what I want to know is why babies are considered such justifiers of a woman's existence?" (Plumb 26). Barnes sees what many women see, a history of male power, a social order in which women are merchandise used by men. "[S]creaming oneself into a mother" (R 117) is not Barnes' idea of pleasure. In Luce Irigaray's This Sex Which Is Not One, she states: "A long history has put all women in the same sexual, social, and cultural condition...they all undergo...the same oppression, the same exploitation of their body" (164). Though Ryder is written many years before Irigaray's text, there are similar concerns. Barnes' view of sexuality is one of anxiety because she sees marriage as a patriarchal construct. Women were not only burdened with many children but many died during labour. Looking back to the early Puritans, Barnes underscores the hardship of women when she writes of "deep breathing at

inevitable births...[and] groaning over the necessary deaths" (R 10). Hence, much of the darkness in her work has been marked by the fact that she is a woman.

Julie, like Djuna Barnes, is the oldest daughter in a household with two families. She is at the centre of the text and appears in twelve of Ryder's fifty chapters, of which "Julie Becomes What She Had Read" is the darkest. Insensitively, Wendell rejects the myth of the "birds and the bees" and tells Julie of her conception and birth, "[a] time of cries and blood" (R 131). Julie's nightmare that follows is entangled with the guilt-stricken voice of the five-year-old girl Arabella Lynn. Doubting the existence of God, Arabella dies "while yet in bud...before she had known [the] stain of a baser world!" (R 135). Clearly, Barnes' voice is heard when we are addressed directly: "But pause to think, dear reader. Is this, perhaps, not best?" (R 135). In any event, horror intensifies as Julie among the mourners at Arabella's burial imagines herself being "snatched up and flung down into the market place, where they are selling Jesus for a price" (R 136). Only a dream, it is narrated with such emotion and terror that it seems real to the reader. Darkness is everywhere: looming before us is "the glistening pack of night, a brightly brindled horde, hounding down the dawn" (R 134).

Did Djuna Barnes, like Julie Ryder, become what she had read? Hank O'Neal suggests she did. He believes she was influenced by books she had read in her formative years. Among her possessions, he found

the Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff, first published in 1890, and filled with dark ramblings; Barnes' copy was dated 1913. One of the several passages underlined and starred by Barnes reads, "Ah, the world is degenerating, we feel like sinking into the earth" (60-61). At the bottom of the page, Barnes has sketched a nude figure, presumably a woman, and titled it "Shame!?" (O'Neal 222). Recording in her journal an experience she had while looking at paintings in the Palazzo Pitti, Bashkirtseff fears that everyone will cry "shame" because she thinks Raphael's painting of the Holy Virgin resembles a "chamber-maid." Of course we have no way of knowing if Barnes' annotation was intended to cast shame on Bashkirtseff's remark or if she believes that "woman" is shameful. If we look to The Book of Repulsive Women, one of Barnes' Beardsleyesque illustrations is indeed shameful; it is a grotesque drawing of a female nude, whose animal-like appendices include long erect ears, a dotted upright tail, and a paw clutching dead flowers. There is nothing of the sublime in the drawing nor in the text that follows. In the final poem, "Suicide," two dead women are on display in the morgue. The body of "Corpse B" is "shock-abbreviated/As a city cat./She lay out listlessly like some small mug/Of beer gone flat" (RW n.p.). Though Barnes' personal vision creates images which the reader can never fully understand, it seems life itself is ridiculous as well as shameful for her.

In any case, some sort of shame possesses Julie. As her nightmare continues, "[t]he shadows of foreshortened destinies fall

down from about her" (R 136). Her fears of becoming a mother, "laden...and large" (R 137), are manifested in her dream of little girls in the womb, "silent and soft and docile, scourged and blasphemed; rising and drifting sideways and over, uncoiling their destiny in a close sleep" (R 137). Her dread becomes a reality as she awakens to find her father standing over her and hears her grandmother weeping and crying, "Do not strike her!" (R 138). One can only speculate why Wendell is in Julie's bedroom. Barnes draws the curtain; she reveals only Wendell's derision, when he charges Sophia to keep her, for "she is none of [his]" (R 138). Like so many Victorian fathers, Wendell has the power to dismiss his daughter as if she were a commodity or a bastard child.

Barnes' personal fears of sexuality and motherhood are mirrored in Julie's dreams. Field's biography tells us that Barnes "hated her father" (31), which may account to some degree for the dark passages concerning patriarchal oppression. It was there in the beginning, when Amelia's church-going father, who liked "his furniture better than his wife" (R 37), used a horse-whip on his seven-year-old daughter; it was there when Amelia's Aunt Nelly was whipped by her husband. Barnes' hatred, however, goes beyond the ego and the power of her father and settles on myths that are used to legitimate sexual suffering and injustice. For Barnes, Genesis gives power and domination to men, while demanding obedience and submission from women. She abhors the patriarchal framework of the world that ensures husbands, "by the

unwritten law" (R 12), access to women's bodies. In Julie's case, she resents that disobedience to the father means harsh punishment.

Wendell Ryder's poverty-stricken domain is engulfed in dark shadows. While his wife and mistress toil around the house and the farm, and his aging mother "goes a-begging," Wendell goes a-philandering. The task of providing for the family falls mainly on Amelia's shoulders, for she has to go out charring at Wendell's brother's mansion. In one chapter, Amelia and Kate interrupt their fighting to prepare dinner, for "the master...[Wendell] would be coming, tempered with rage at a slight to his stomach" (R 228). Referred to as "Barnes' red-haired surrogate" (Broe 1991 371) by Catharine Stimpson, Julie endures several painful situations, all because of her father. When Sophia first brings Kate-Careless to the little log cabin in the hills of Storm-King, Wendell appears naked, straddling the trap door of the loft. As Sophia introduces Kate as her "new daughter," Wendell looks down on his family and, laughingly, says, "That you may know your destiny!" (R 107). At the sight of his nudity, "the eyes of Julie came down" (R 107) in shame, not in phallic desire, as Freudian theory would have it, but in fear of her destiny. The penis, for Barnes, is a destructive organ, "a terrible anvil, whereon one beats out resurrection and death" (R 51). While Luce Irigaray writes of the "duality" of the life and death instincts of the penis (54), Barnes sees only its "death-dealing" side; but, like Irigaray, she too views the world as wholly phallocentric.

Later, at fourteen, Julie refuses to remain silent; she lashes out against injustice when violence erupts on the family farm. Witnessing the unprovoked attack on her younger brother, Hannel, by Kate's bastard son Elisha, and noticing her father siding with the instigator instead of the victim, Julie attacks Kate. Though she vents her anger on Kate for lying about the incident, she sees her not as the disease but as "the manifestation emanating directly from her father" (R 183). Again, Barnes roots her animus in Biblical myths. Once men realized they could beget children, they wanted many, "because that was the best and easiest way to become a god" (Walker 303). Barnes considers Wendell's polygamy and lust as a sickness rooted in patriarchy. Wanting to be "Father of All Things," Wendell subjects Amelia to the hazards of childbearing, time and time again, and forces her to share the house with the fecund Kate. Because Wendell takes macabre delight in watching "woman at woman" (R 182), he restrains Amelia when she tries to save Julie from his three-hundred-pound mistress. The narrator's voice describes family violence so venomously that there is little doubt that Wendell is largely responsible for the shadows that hang over the Ryder farm, appropriately named "Bulls'-Ease." In terms of sexuality, Wendell represents the masculine world; he exercises his "right" to fatherhood, aggressively and destructively, with little semblance of love.

If one links Wendell Ryder with Wald Barnes, it is not surprising that Julie Ryder has nightmares. Retelling a Barnes' story about her

father Wald Barnes, Janet Flanner writes that he had odd ideas of nourishment, deciding that "since chickens ate pebbles to aid their digestion, a few pebbles in the diet of his children might be equally salubrious" (xvii). In "The Occupations of Wendell," children are treated like cattle. Wendell thinks of how "bread from bran he might roll and bake,/That child and cattle fodder from one bin" (R 69). Like Wald Barnes, he is an eccentric who forges his own system. Lacking a devotion to spiritual things, the "free-thinking" Wendell opposes established social institutions. He keeps his children out of school; he thumbs his nose at the judicial system by practising polygamy; as well, he will have no truck with the church, even though he has modelled himself on patriarchal religion. Despite Amelia's half-hearted belief that an independent thinker like Wendell might happen to hit on a good church, her sister Ann compares his type with dogs that "nose out a dung-heap" (R 59) when looking for a home. Wendell's vanity leads him to believe he can stand without religion; however, wanting to be God and create a kind of immortality through his children, he falls, victimized by his own sexual nature. A victim herself, Barnes wrestles with religion throughout her novel, and fails. She cannot believe; she can only endure the darkness in her world.

On her deathbed, Sophia tells Wendell the reason for his failure: "[Y]ou lust openly...like...the beast of the field...you are nature...and nature is terrible when law hunts it down" (R 317). Though she is rather open-minded to the practice of sexuality, she

finds Wendell's passion for procreation "past comprehension" (R 226). Sardonicly, she tells him, "A humane man would occasionally give it respite" (R 226). With the law closing in on him, Wendell has to choose between his two families. Lacking the hardiness of his mother, he goes stumbling into the dark night like a frightened child, and lies down among the beasts of the field. In the proximity of "black" calves and "dark" cows, amid the cries of the "night" birds, Wendell "forebore to hide his face" (R 322). As the natural world closes in upon him, "he drowned, and arose while he yet might go" (R 323). Symbolically, it appears that he dies and is reborn; yet it is not a spiritual rebirth but a kind of transmogrification, a movement downward into his animal nature. Ambiguities abound. This final chapter, "Whom Should He Disappoint Now?", suggests that Wendell is likely to continue his phallic pursuits.

To get to the roots of what is wrong with the world, Ryder's parodic structure allows Barnes to re-work the Bible. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, Adam and Eve are the progenitors of the human race. In Ryder, though Wendell is a begetter like Adam, he is driven out into the animal world, not by woman but by his own actions. The merry music he has performed with his "spherical, timbersome pipe" (R 216) has reduced him to a Jesus Mundane, a Jesus so profane his spirituality is drowned by his rampant sexuality and animal nature. Jesus died to save others; Wendell can save no one, not even himself. In some ways, Barnes' treatment of history parallels that of Luce

Irigaray who holds history responsible for phallogentrism in language (102-103). By drawing on Biblical discourse, and mimicking Chaucerian verse and Renaissance prose, Barnes undermines everything pertaining to patriarchy. When "[t]he curtain goes up on injustice, [woman] is in the pit dressed for the scene" (R 298).

Barnes works through parody and irony to round out "the inevitable ever-recurring meanness of life" (R 10). Sophia pays tribute to her "hardy in life and hardy in death" (R 10) Puritan ancestry by purchasing five made-to-order chamber pots. Barnes' excremental vision is expressed in the pouring of the contents of one of the pots upon the "periwigged pate of some good father of the law" (R 11). "As nothing is eternal saving destruction" (R 12), the breakage of the chamber pots down through the years parallels the downward progression of the Ryder family, specifically, and civilization, in general. When only one pot remains, inscribed with "Amen," Sophia considers it a bad omen, for "Amen is the end of all good things" (R 13). Barnes debases the Christian promise of eternal life for "good people," and substitutes a piss pot for the Holy Grail. When she looks at the horror in the world, she finds God, creation, and all the rest of the Bible lacking. In the course of history, from the time of creation and the fall of Adam and Eve, the world has become a darker, crueller place: it regresses to a state where only the "fittest" survive. Explaining evolution to Kate, Amelia says, "And pray for us, said the great rush...the great trees...the short

grass...and down thudding came the supplication of the wild beast" (R 146) in the form of excreta.

Barnes articulates the darkness she finds in the world in her one-act "Passion Play" (1918). Bitterly, a Greek prostitute states: "Heaven has jelled and hell is rusty, and the doves of peace lie manged and moulting in the rain" (PP 13). While Christians adopted "the feminine dove as a symbol of the Holy Ghost" (Walker 253), Barnes reduces the dove to the "infinitesimal-lime-squirting" (R 144) pigeon. Nothing is sacred in Ryder, for in the chapter "Kate and Amelia Go A-Dunging" her scatology extends even to churches:

Owls would have hooted in St. Peter's choir
And foxes stunk and littered in St. Paul's. (R 144)

Believing that civilization itself is "a lie" (SW 18), Barnes attempts to strip away the masks to expose the crap.

When Amelia and Kate go to Wendell's dovecote to clean up the dirty mess of pigeon droppings, Amelia tells Kate: "In the beginning was the jungle, and there you had turds of some account, beasts paying back the earth in coin new minted" (R 145). Somewhat Darwinian, Barnes questions the literal truth of the Book of Genesis. Up to the middle of the eighteenth century most people believed that plants, animals, and men were all created at the beginning of the world. Barnes, however, has doubts. Wendell, for example, argues the similarity of human and animal nature regarding sexuality:

What is this swims like dregs within the truth
That animal and man be set apart?

I hear not much difference in the heart
 That beat's soft and constant under hide,
 And this same hammer ticking in my side! (R 77)

Barnes creates humour through parody, but she presents it with a sardonic smile. When life is stripped of its mask, men are granted "visions"; women get excretory "droppings." Guido Bruno notes that Barnes' "morbidity is not a pose. It is as sincere as she is herself" (Barry 388).

Throughout the novel women are associated with excrement. In fact, a bird of prey has shed its droppings on Sophia's "felicity, her memories, and her spirit, with implacable mutation" (R 15). The layers of pictures upon the walls of her salon, like the "telltale rings of the oak" (R 15), mirror the descent from the sublime to the ridiculous. During her lifetime, lithographs of great artists, whom Sophia admired, are pasted over with prints of things she abhorred--"the rack...the Extreme Agony...the electric chair" (R 15) until, finally, two inches deep, they are buried under numerous prints of her second husband, "the bandit with the bandolined moustaches and the passionate wet eye" (R 15). Barnes sifts through history for something to lighten the weight of the present; however, like the pictures, and Sophia herself, she finds "nothing erased but much submerged" (R 15). History in Ryder is "a going and a coming" and in its wake there is always a trail of suffering and excrement.

In "Fine Bitches All, and Molly Dance," the Adam and Eve myth is overturned and replaced with a preposterous tale of Jonah and a lady

from a lake. Out of the lake she comes "hee-hawing like an ass" (R 256). Between the two, "before you could say nip and tuck, the place was swarming with the human race" (R 256). Molly, who thinks "Henry James was a horse-thief, and Caesar the betrayer of Jesus" (R 254), believes that heaven and hell occupy the same space. In her inverted world, hell is "let down from heaven on a string, and you no sooner grab it, than it's snatched up again" (R 255). Reshaping the myth of original sin, Molly tells Wendell that the biographers are mistaken, for she has the truth of it from her friend Mary Flynn, a midwife, who is subject to "fits." During one of her attacks, she has a vision of

a calf's foot [coming] toward her, with wings on the shin bones...and a mouth speaking from the midst, saying: "Mary, tell your people, and the people of them begotten, that the original sin was not a woman's. (R 259)

For Barnes, it seems that Molly's vision is no more ridiculous than those from the Bible.

Like a female Wendell, Molly Dance is the only woman in Ryder who has sexual freedom. She too belongs to the animal world. A breeder of dogs, she treats her "fine bitches" better than her ten children. She will not stand at the window at night "watching for the thread of scarlet in both [her] girls and [her] dogs" (R 251). Scatologically, she reduces a child's prayer to "Now I lay me down to wet me, will the Lord for this forget me?" (R 253). There is humour, but all is reduced to smelly outhouses.

Ryder's illustrations mirror the same downward progression as its text. Barnes adopts the style of L'Imagerie Populaire, "an anthology of illustrations compiled and published in Paris by Pierre[-]Louis Duchart[r]e and Ren[é] Saulnier in 1926" (R xii). Their illustration of L'arbre d'amour (Plate 14, in Silence And Power 126), for example, shows a group of women sawing and pulling down a tree whose branches are occupied by males only. The tree on the frontispiece of Ryder represents Barnes' image of the Ryder family; it suggests a downward descent from light to dark. Perched at the top of the tree is an angel and, at its dark base, sits Wendell's mistress and another of his paramours. Traditionally, a family portrait excludes mistresses, bastard children, the family doctor, and an assortment of farm animals. In Biblical myth, the tree of life is reserved for those that keep God's commandments (Rev. 22:14). Ironically, Wendell, though a promiscuous polygamist, is situated on a prominent branch. As a result, Barnes' drawings are prime movers of darkness, reflecting a world twisted in its origins.

In "Midwives' Lament" (R 93), even the stars resist cosmic order. The drawing shows two women, dressed alike, mourning those who died "in pitched child bed...Impaled upon a death that crawls within" (R 93). Through the image of a tombstone, on which is written the lament, these two grieving women, with downcast eyes, support the burden of childbirth. In a few words this one-page chapter, complemented by its drawing, reinforces Barnes' concern for the untimely deaths of women.

"[M]en die otherwise, of man unsheathed/But women on a sword they scabbard to" (R 93). Barnes lived in Greenwich Village at the time Margaret Sanger, a trained nurse, was spreading a birth-control message. Witnessing women worn out by frequent childbearing, Sanger started a magazine, the Woman Rebel, in 1914 (Sochen 62), to educate women on the subject of birth control. Many feminists like Sanger were arrested and jailed for their efforts. As a writer for various newspapers and magazines, Barnes would have been aware of the revolt of women against sexual servitude. These concerns are reflected in her drawings of the midwives. Dark shadows and lines moving downward capture the "Horrid Outcome of Wendell's First Infidelity," as this chapter is subtitled.

"Rape and Repining!" is a further illustration of the suffering female. The drawing of five prostrate women represents the "multitudes" of women who have been "Soiled! Despoiled! Handled! Mauled! Rumpled! Rummaged! Ransacked" (R 26). This difficult chapter, dealing with sexuality, is fraught with contradictions. Numerous narrative voices, depicted as gossips, offer mixed messages. On the one hand, women are portrayed as wanton, asking to be raped, "leaping at the Bait" (R 30); yet rape is called "Horrid...Mad...Poisonous...Doth not the Shudder of it crack the Paint of Historic Beds?" (R 29).

In the same drawing, ominous clouds cast their dark shadows on the fallen women as they lie powerless on a slope, surrounded by phallic-like trees. Though the women are dressed in Puritan fashion,

their legs close together, and sometimes tied, there is little doubt that they have been ravished. A downward progression is noticeable through their expressionless faces, until the face of the figure in the foreground is hidden completely. Incestuous darkness pervades the chapter as one voice asks: "Does he not ride before his Mother, seeking his Mother?...What Infant gives Birth to its Parent...?" (R 35).

Andrew Field suggests the answer to the incestuous riddle lies in "the writer recreating her past" (43). The combination of rhetorical questioning and the chapter's parodic conclusion keep the reader in the dark regarding Barnes' position. While the text explores the etiology of rape, it also celebrates sexual activity. Mockingly, it concludes: "It is Spring again...and the Heart sings dilly, dilly, dilly! It is Girls' Weather, and Boys' Luck!" (R 36). Barnes' family chronicle has affinities with dark mysteries, for some skeletons still remain in the closet. Clearly, her silence seems not for the sake of the reader but probably for the sake of her own family.

There is no doubt, however, in the denotation of the illustration accompanying "Pro and Con, or the Sisters Louise." Con relates a parable where once women lived in harmony; they presented "a perfect prostrate tapestry of fecundity" (R 50). Then, suddenly, women imagine Wendell Ryder "setting forth from the earth with stupendous great wings...[his] thundering male parts [hanging] like a terrible anvil" (R 51). His appearance sets the women against each other. Symbolically, the eerie drawing, scattered with low-hanging clouds and threatening

birds, represents the parable of the fall. Paralleling Molly Dance's vision of creation, one narrator blames man, not woman. "Writhing, biting, tearing, scratching, screaming, crying, over and over they rolled, in blood and tears...down into the valley's bottomless depth" (R 51), filled with rank weeds and rubbish. Why? Carved on a stone in the drawing are the words: "All Because Of Wendell." Barnes' illustration of women in combat is analogous to the conflict among the women in the Ryder household--all because of Wendell, the "Cock o' the Walk" (R 215).

In this chapter, the pros and cons of Wendell's character are discussed in a ribald fashion. He is found wanting. Ironically, "[h]e paints a rosy picture...of polygamy for...the man" (R 49). Seemingly, Barnes takes the "con" side of the debate. Picturing Wendell as a kind of diminished "Everyman," who maintains that no woman can be happy "without his peculiar kind of collusion" (R 49), she makes him the agent of darkness. Wendell's concupiscence is associated with phallic worship, for historically "God-dominated religions adored the phallus" (Walker 793); moreover, oaths were sworn on the testicles (Genesis 14, 9). Mocking the penis as "the core of the codpiece" (R 216), Barnes treats it as an instrument that breeds suffering, not love.

Reminiscent of the "March" and "April" drawings in Ladies Almanack, which expose a woman's bare buttocks and another woman urinating, a picture in Ryder shows Kate-Careless playing a street-organ for her mother, "[a] buxom contralto from

Cork...stand[ing] athwart the gutters, singing and [pissing] like a stupendous hound dog" (R 99). Parodying the epistolary novel of the eighteenth century, in one of the many letters Ann writes to her sister Amelia, she tells her about the sweeping changes in London. Mrs. Chubble, for instance, now puts on airs, striding about, "farting like a bull with trumped-up fury against the restrictions of home" (R 91). Her husband, on the other hand, has no proper fear or reverence for death. He says when he dies he will have "a beautiful new pair of wings and a cambric nightgown, and with a goose-quill in [his] bottom, [he'll] brush round heaven looking under the angels' garments for duplicity" (R 91). This is exactly what he is doing in Barnes' companion drawing. He has his hand to his nose as he flips up the angel's dress. Barnes' portrayal of angels, down to the last stroke and feather, is very much in the style of Beardsley. Ann too is somewhat of a Barnes' alter ego, for she sees there is something wrong "in the way of the world" (R 89). In the end, "we will all land...somewhere in mid-air...fit for neither place, and a dreadful sight is that space between two stools..." (R 92).

The last drawing in the text exhibits the overwhelming darkness of a distorted world. It depicts man's final descent. Amid threatening clouds, an obscure moon, and a cluster of black stars, Wendell's bastard son falls into space with a stolen earthenware pot in his hand, possibly the last of Sophia's chamber pots. What does it all mean? We have only Barnes' prose to guide us. She uses Dr. O'Connor,

the family physician, to counsel and console the boy who is sceptical about doing anything worthwhile. He can see no point in learning, for it will only amount to "a worm's snack some midnight" (R 307). Echoing his grandmother's description of the heart, the fifteen-year-old cynic has looked at the heart and found it "a moiling cauldron of evil" (R 314). So has Barnes. She has stripped the mask from the heart--that loving and life-giving organ--and exposed its falseness. In an earlier chapter, Barnes states: "[A]ll things end where they began, tail in mouth" (R 160). Her drawing shows the boy falling with some sort of banner in his mouth. "I'm to be...the caboose" are the only words distinguishable on it. Without future certainties, it seems one can be sure of nothing but "death." Hence, the boy says he wants to get to his end "with saddle as empty as it is possible" (R 314).

For the most part, Ryder reflects a world devoid of Christ and His teachings. The past does not ring out hallelujah but rings with "feet flying to doom" (R 44). Sometimes, however, light penetrates Barnes' dark universe. Dr. O'Connor provides a stirring reverse to Wendell's arrogant potency. A homosexual, he is described as "tripping up to God like a good woman" (R 172). His feminine nature permits him to sympathize with women trapped in a patriarchal system, for he is as marginal as they. In a soliloquy, he speaks of "crying against the great darkness of [himself]" (R 176). Historically, the church was designed to offer comfort and salvation for distressed souls; in Ryder, however, the church, "turned upside-down" (R 177), serves up the "Dead

March...and fornication of the mass" (R 177). With hopes of eluding damnation, Dr. O'Connor pours out his sins to Father Lucas, "a Moll of God" (R 172), to no avail. Though the Doctor is blessed with human kindness, the church provides no consolation for his tormented soul. Shrouded with darkness, the soliloquy concludes with a recurring image of Christ, one that pervades much of Barnes' work: "Sorrow burst and the seeds fell and took root, and climbed about the stations of the cross and bore Him down to earth..." (R 177). For Barnes, this seems to be the end of all things, even humanism. "[T]here was Nothing, and this, too, they reached for and closed on, trembling terribly..." (R 178).

The burden of the vast history Barnes inherits, coupled with a waning faith, accounts for her view of life. Her world is indeed "brutish." Frances McCullough's tribute to Barnes on her eightieth birthday reads: "Beyond that stubborn sense of what is right and what must be upheld at all costs, beyond the wit and the fun...there is a great heart" (Gildzen n.p.). As Barnes closes her family album, a dark shadow falls on its cover. It becomes apparent that Barnes can only write about darkness in the world, not change it. Ryder, however, has prepared the way for Nightwood, for 'night everyone, everywhere, is unprotected" (R 319).

Chapter Three

From Nightmare to Catalepsy

[T]he night is a skin pulled over the head of day that the day may be in a torment. We will find no comfort until the night melts away; until the fury of the night rots out its fire. (N 85)

The dead have committed some portion of the evil of the night; sleep and love, the other. (N 86)

Eight years after Ryder, Barnes' fiction moves away from the family to the tree of night--"the hardest tree to mount" (N 83). Published in Britain in 1936, and the United States in 1937, Nightwood is a frightening journey through the alcoholic haze of Parisian bars, ruined gardens, and decaying chapels. While Barnes vacates the heterosexual sphere of the Ryder family and ventures into lesbian space, her excremental vision of the world continues. "[W]e shall be for the next generation not the massive dung fallen from the dinosaur, but the little speck left of a humming-bird" (N 154), says Dr. O'Connor. First appearing in Ryder, the doctor moves into Nightwood with a more vociferous role as the "god of darkness" (N 126). His monologues evoke human suffering to such a degree that their weight lingers long after the book has been put down.

This chapter discusses the "decay of the heart" as a reflection of Barnes' consistent belief that God's "grim machinery," flawed from

the time of creation, is running down. Often associated with feelings of love and compassion, the heart, for Barnes, is fossiliferous and a receptacle for pain and sexual suffering. Love is not only "a lie" but becomes "the deposit of the heart, analogous...to the findings in a tomb" (N 56). Embedded in Nora's heart is "the fossil of Robin, intaglio of her identity" (N 56). As a second concern, this chapter considers a descent into transmogrification as a further expression of Barnes' darkness. Drawing a fine line between beast and human, she seems to suggest that evolution has not brought "man" to civilization. Robin Vote, for example, has not yet attained the level of human, for she is described first as "beast turning human" (N 37) and later as "a wild thing caught in a woman's skin" (N 146). Barnes believes that "man" is born brutish; moreover, there is little possibility that he can overcome this primitive side of his nature. For Barnes, we struggle and suffer all our lives, then die. As a result, this chapter discusses what she calls the "universal malady," a significant factor in the waning of Judeo-Christian tradition. In Barnes' dark view of existence, she finds it is impossible to cure "individual sickness" when the world itself is ill--"full to the gorge with misery" (N 83).

Originally entitled Bow Down: Anatomy of Night, its change to Nightwood was suggested by T. S. Eliot (Field 212). Barnes, however, appropriately retained "Bow Down" as the title of her first chapter. In The Widening Gyre, Joseph Frank observes that the novel's eight titled parts are like "searchlights, probing the darkness each from a

different direction yet ultimately illuminating the same entanglement of the human spirit" (31-32). While the chapters at first seem unconnected, they are threaded together by a chain of phrases, images, and confessions, which help to create meaning. "Bow Down" begins with the birth of Felix Volkbein in 1880 and proceeds to outline the historical roots that have shaped him. He has inherited his father's "remorseless homage to nobility" (N 2) as well as the false title of Baron. Half Jewish and half Christian, with "an obsession for what he term[s] 'Old Europe'" (N 9), Felix is always "bowing down" to the "great past." He believes that to pay "homage to our past is the only gesture that also includes the future" (N 39). A "pretender" like Guido Bruno, on whom Andrew Fields believes he is largely modelled (14), Felix is a microcosm of the declining Judeo-Christian spiritual tradition, his history serving as a necessary introduction to a story of alienation and disintegration.

With the exception of Felix, who is Viennese, the major characters are American expatriates: Dr. Matthew O'Connor, Robin Vote, Nora Flood, and Jenny Petherbridge, all of whom are introduced in the first four chapters. "La Somnambule" belongs to Robin, "Night Watch" to Nora, and "The Squatter" to Jenny. The following three sections devoted, for the most part, to lengthy monologues by Dr. O'Connor, pick up previous thoughts and images and gradually build up a certain coherency. At the mid point of the novel--"Watchman, What of the Night?" the doctor tells Nora about the night and all of its dark

realities. The descent of Felix in "Where the Tree Falls" serves as a prelude to that of Dr. O'Connor in "Go Down Matthew." Both seer and philosopher, the doctor uses rhetorical discourse to express such a profound knowledge of human nature and the ills of the world that he seems often to overshadow the significance of Robin Vote.

Barnes' four-page coda, "The Possessed," recounts Robin's return to Nora in America. After abandoning Jenny, she wanders into the area of Nora's estate, circling closer and closer like an animal. Robin is described standing at "a contrived altar, before a Madonna" (N 169) in a decaying chapel on Nora's property. Led there by the barking of her dog, Nora arrives just as Robin begins to go down "on all fours" (N 169). The chapter closes with a strange ritual of the dog moving backward and forward in terror as Robin crawls after him, "grinning and whimpering...and bark[ing] also" (N 170), until she finally collapses.

From its beginning, Nightwood portrays a world in decline, without heart or conscience. The Pope himself is "shaken down from his hold on heaven with the laughter of a man who forgoes his angels that he may recapture the beast" (N 2). The so-called "great past" which Felix blindly worships and bows down to is nothing but a life-destroying inheritance that erodes the heart of humanity. With the foresight of Tiresias, Dr. O'Connor warns Felix that "[t]he last muscle of aristocracy is madness...[and] the last child born to aristocracy is sometimes an idiot...In the king's bed, is always found, just before it becomes a museum piece, the droppings of the black

sheep" (N 40). Unmindful of the doctor's concerns, and of the opinion that "[w]ith an American anything can be done" (N 39), Felix marries Robin Vote and she bears him a sickly, somewhat stunted, mentally deficient child who, "if born to anything, had been born to holy decay...an addict to death" (N 107). Felix had wanted a son to honour the past, for "without such love, the past...would die away from the world" (N 45). The text, however, suggests there is neither potential for the child nor indeed for the world.

After the birth of a son she did not want, Robin, the somnambulist, resumes her nightly wanderings, straying into convents, and drinking in bars. She leaves Felix and turns up months later with Nora Flood. Both innocent and degenerate, Robin lives in two worlds--"meet of child and desperado" (N 35). Connected with plants and animals, her state of being seems anterior to human experience. Looking back on their marriage, Felix realizes Robin had been searching for permission to live as a human; instead, he had tried to shape her according to his belief in the aristocratic traditions of the past. Attempting to steep her in the history of the Bourbons, he finds she reads "the memoirs of the Marquis de Sade" (N 47). The lesbian love affair of Robin and Nora is equally doomed to failure, for Nora too is unable to give Robin "permission to live," and to have her own identity. Trying to describe lesbian passion to Dr. O'Connor, Nora asserts: "A man is another person--a woman is yourself...on her mouth you kiss your own" (N 143). Robin is not only Nora's lover, she is

also her child; for this reason, Robin is "incest too" (N 156). Like Felix, Nora attempts to construct Robin in her own image. Though she "[beats] her head against her heart...rotten to the bone for love" (N 161), there is something about Robin's primitive nature and her innocence that cannot be known. As a consequence, Nora feels Robin will belong to her only in death, for Robin is "an amputation that [she cannot] renounce" (N 59).

By linking Robin with a primitive past, Barnes seems to suggest it is one from which we have all descended. Indeed, it may be her intention to open up certain features of ourselves that have been repressed. For her, the past just affirms that the seeds of "survival of the fittest" were planted at the beginning, and it has been "dog-eat-dog" ever since. Like a sleep-walker, Robin passes through the lives of Felix, Nora, and Jenny, always hovering between the human and bestial worlds. While controlling her impulse to dash her baby to the floor and, at times, responding to Nora's love, Robin can neither be kept nor contained. She has an instinctive urge to wander, particularly at night. Recalling their years together, Nora feels she has been loved by "something strange...[someone who] wanted darkness in her mind--to throw a shadow over what she was powerless to alter--her dissolute life, her life at night" (N 156). In some ways, Robin mirrors the world in her inability to overcome her animal nature; she struggles, and fails.

While Barnes' pervasive concern for women extends from Ryder to

Nightwood, its focus changes from the suffering centre of childhood to a preoccupation with lesbian love. To some extent, Nightwood looks back to Barnes' Ladies Almanack (1928), where under its facade of "satiric wiggling," as Barnes called it, one feels the pain of lesbian women, who are "neither in the Centre, nor to the Side" (LA 48), but cast as "others" or "inverts" within a heterosexual culture. An essay by Shari Benstock in Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions notes that "Nightwood shines a cold light on the fear of alternative sexualities and the force of their repression" (189). Unlike lesbian writers such as Natalie Clifford Barney and Radclyffe Hall, who used traditional and old-fashioned forms of expression, Barnes, like Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf, was an artistic risk taker (198). Certainly, in affairs of the heart, ambiguities abound in Barnes' fiction. Like her Almanack, Barnes' sexual ambivalence expresses both the pain of lesbian women and their lack of fulfillment. After Jenny steals Robin from her, Nora "can't live without [her] heart" (N 156). Her definition of suffering is "the decay of the heart [where] all we have loved becomes the 'forbidden'" (N 156).

While Barnes' sexuality has prompted a series of debates among critics, it remains something of an enigma. In 1973 Bertha Harris celebrated Barnes as a lesbian; in 1984 Tee Corinne characterized Barnes as homophobic (Broe 1991:54). The labels of "lesbian" and "bisexual," however, cause some uneasiness, for Barnes never identified herself as either. According to Hank O'Neal, she never came to grips

with her sexuality "despite how much she seemed to have enjoyed rollicking sex in the past" (170). Nonetheless, this sexual confusion is a major source of Barnes' darkness. Dr. O'Connor refers to love of woman by woman as an "insane passion for unmitigated anguish..." (N 75). Although Barnes denied she was a lesbian, Andrew Field writes that she used to go out into the Paris night "search[ing] frantically for Thelma [Wood], from bar to bar" (101), much as Nora looks for Robin. Debauching herself by trying to love what Robin loved, Nora "haunted the cafés where Robin had lived her night-life...drank with the men...[and] danced with the women" (N 156). Barnes' troubling portrayal of the night world matches the sexual darkness that permeates her work.

Robin and Nora's lesbian relationship anticipates recent debates on the nature of "difference." Diana Fuss' Essentially Speaking foregrounds the problems of defining the term "lesbian." She writes: "The lack of consensus and continued disputes amongst feminists over the definition of 'lesbian' pivot centrally around the question of essentialism" (44). Many feminists classify a woman on the basis of anatomy. Luce Irigaray, for example, says we are "woman already" (211); others, like Monique Wittig, remove the classification "woman" from any anatomical determinants. In The Straight Mind, she writes: "[L]esbian society destroys the artificial (social) fact constituting women as a natural group" (9). As for Barnes, she seems to undermine the così fan tutti tenet that all women behave the same way. Unlike

her parodic treatment of lesbian women in Ladies Almanack, Nightwood explores more deeply the anguish experienced by women of "difference."

Echoing Ryder, Barnes overthrows patriarchal religion that was "devoted to destruction of the sensual female nature...[because] women's sexual desire...was generally considered detrimental to the marital relationship" (Walker 915). In some ways, she finds her century no more enlightened than previous ones, for it lacks a sense that love is essential to the development of humanism. The heart of the world has become so eroded that "[t]here is not one of us who, given an eternal incognito, a thumbprint nowhere set against our souls, would not commit rape, murder and all abominations" (N 88), says Dr. O'Connor.

Since "[f]emale sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters" (Irigaray 23), Barnes reconstructs a new history for the "repressed." Her great comic creation--Dr. Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor, as he calls himself, has a heart full to "the brim" with suffering. He finds himself trapped in the body of a man, while in his heart is the desire for "children and knitting" (N 91). Though his long-suffering monologues are somewhat lightened by his Irish tongue, he is always aware that he is "the other woman that God forgot" (N 143). All he wanted was to be "a high soprano...with a womb as big as a king's kettle...and a bosom as high as the bowsprit of a fishing schooner" (N 91); instead, he is resigned to crying and kneeling in empty churches, holding "Tiny O'Toole" (N

132) in his hand. His experience with the heinous night includes watching "Tuppeny Upright[s] under London Bridge...holding up their badgered flounces, or standing still, letting you do it, silent and as indifferent as the dead" (N 130-131). Sexual darkness is so heavy at times that Barnes seems to want to abolish affairs of the heart entirely. She is adept, however, at combining wit with seriousness. When it comes to wit, Dr. O'Connor is "to advantage dressed" with his inversion of the word "love." Indeed, he says: "[I]f one gave birth to a heart on a plate, it would say 'Love' and twitch like the lopped leg of a frog" (N 26-27).

Throughout the novel, whose structure is largely one of descent, the night is "combed with the great blind searchlight of the heart" (N 93). While the chapter "Watchman, What of the Night?" (its title borrowed from the book of Isaiah), is primarily a soliloquy on the nature of the night, it is also about the destruction of the heart. It seems sleep, love, and death all pertain to the night. To make matters more complicated, Dr. O'Connor tells Nora that, "[f]or 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..." (N 87). When Nora visits Dr. O'Connor late one night, she finds him living in squalor in a tiny disordered room, scattered with rusty forceps, a broken scalpel, women's cosmetics and underwear, and a "swill-pail...brimming with abominations" (N 79). Seeing him in bed, heavily rouged, and dressed in a woman's nightgown, it flashes through

her head: "God, children know something they can't tell; they like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed!" (N 79). Quite put out, having expected someone else, and embarrassed by his feminine attire and heavy make-up, the doctor attempts to hide his transvestism by snatching a wig of long blonde curls from his head. Conversant with the seamy side of the night world through his own experiences, Dr. O'Connor's suffering rivals that of the other characters. While Nora's and Felix's heartaches are rooted in love and the loss of Robin, the doctor's suffering stems from casual encounters devoid of any affection.

Through his dark insightful monologues, Barnes vents her anger at a benumbed world that has lost its capacity to love. Weary of listening to a tale of broken-hearts, Dr. O'Connor rebukes Nora bitterly: "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...and that no one loves me" (N 147). Unable to cure Nora's love-sickness, he resumes his drinking at his habitual Café de la Mairie du VIe, where he blisters everyone there, particularly those who come to him "to learn of degradation and the night" (N 161). "[D]runk as a fiddler's bitch" (N 166), he falls down on a table, his arms spread, screaming out his grief and sobbing with fanatical laughter. Darkness hangs on his last words. He laments: "I've not only lived my life for nothing, but I've told it for nothing...Now...the end--mark my words--now nothing, but wrath and weeping!" (N 166). Unfortunately,

Tiresias-O'Connor can see the future but he cannot change it. The Egyptian idea of the heart as "the centre of the self, the soul, or the emotions" (Walker 376) still applies; but, for Barnes, it is also a terrible suffering centre, a place of loneliness, torment, and terror. Dr. O'Connor puts it this way: "If you don't want to suffer you should tear yourself apart" (N 164).

Certainly all the personalities in Nightwood have disorders of the heart and, in some ways, transmogrification is an aspect of the disease. While Robin has "an undefinable disorder, a sort of 'odour of memory'" (N 118) about her, Jenny Petherbridge is "avid and disorderly in her heart" (N 67) and gives off "an odour to the mind" (N 65). Robin is the beast turning human; Jenny is her opposite--"the accident that made the beast the human endeavour" (N 67). Somewhat of a fraud in everything, Jenny comes from "second-hand dealings with life" (N 66). A rapacious collector of other's possessions, Dr. O'Connor calls her an "old sandpiper" (N 161) who "nip[s] like a bird and void[s] like an ox" (N 138). Like an animal, she marks out her territory, and steals Robin from Nora. "Snatching the oats out of love's droppings" (N 101), she is as ferocious as a wild cat when Robin looks at another girl. More brute than human, Jenny scratches and tears at Robin until "the blood beg[ins] to run down [her] cheeks" (N 76). Dr. O'Connor's Irish wit, coarse as it is, helps to disperse the darkness that reduces humans to bestiality. He finds Jenny so greedy that "she wouldn't give her shit to the crows...[nor would he] piss on her if she were on fire"

(N 106).

Writing of female homosexuality, Luce Irigaray suggests that "the dominant sociocultural economy leaves female homosexuals only a choice between a sort of animality...and the imitation of male models" (196). The character of Robin Vote mirrors both. When Dr. O'Connor is summoned to a nearby hotel, he finds her unconscious on a bed, dressed in white flannel trousers and surrounded by evidences of the jungle. Described as "a tall girl with the body of a boy" (N 46), Robin has created a place for herself that reflects her animal nature. A confusion of potted plants, exotic palms, and neglected birds surround her. As the doctor manages to bring her around, she is pictured as "beast turning human" (N 37), her eyes resembling those of a wild animal. In a sense, she seems trapped in what Barnes calls "the halt position of the damned" (SW 32), or what Dr. O'Connor refers to as the "middle condition" (N 118). Neither the doctor nor Felix has a clear idea of Robin. Felix has an image of her but, as he explains, "that is not the same thing. An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties" (N 111). The closest Robin comes to a human state is through her relationship with Nora. Though Nora provides a home to alleviate Robin's fear of becoming lost again, Robin's animality proves the stronger in her struggle for existence.

Living with Nora until she leaves for America with Jenny, Robin descends into "night and the unconscious, and ultimately the

preconscious and ahistorical" (Kannenstine 94). Shedding vestiges of the human mask and, like an unthinking animal, Robin leaves both Nora and Jenny without caring, as if her pain is inarticulate. Finally, bowing down to her true nature, she sleeps in the woods or on a bench in Nora's decaying chapel. Even Nora's dog is attracted by Robin's animal scent. In one of the darkest descriptions of human-animal confrontation in twentieth-century literature, Robin's ultimate descent into transmogrification is marked by her "head-on" encounter with Nora's dog as they fall, crying together, onto the floor of the chapel. Terrified, the dog whimpers, "his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees" (N 170). Dr. O'Connor's prediction that "Nora will leave that girl [Robin] some day; but though those two are buried at opposite ends of the earth, one dog will find them both" (N 106) has come true.

The doctor, recalling a personal experience in World War I, proposes the notion that there is not much separating man and beast. Indeed, "the tragedy of the beast can be two legs more awful than a man's" (N 22). With bombs falling, and facing death, the doctor scrambled into a cellar along with an old Breton woman and her cow, and a soldier from Dublin. Dr. O'Connor voices Barnes' excremental response to the failure of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Trembling in terror at the cow's rear, the Irish soldier prays for salvation, whispering "Glory be to God" (N 22) as the cow drops her dung in his face. Though relieved he had her "head-on," the doctor noticed the animal had tears in her eyes and her hide was "running water...like

water tumbling down from Lahore" (N 23). When it comes to dying, Barnes reminds us that animals and humans alike face the same uncertainty.

Dr. O'Connor would like to believe we were "created that the earth might be made sensible of her inhuman taste[] and love that the the body might be so dear that even the earth should roar with it" (N 83). Alas! humanity weeps with anguish. The suffering experienced by Nightwood's characters reflects the "maladies" of a world where cruelty is substituted for love. Barnes blames God; she finds many flaws in the way He created the universe. Speaking of Felix, she states: "A Jew's undoing is never his own, it is God's" (N 10). Moreover, man's defective nature has neither allowed him to manage himself nor his world. It seems the only cure for the sickness is an end to reproduction itself.

Barnes' angst-ridden characters are paradigms of outsiders who demonstrate a sense of alienation. Cast as the "wandering Jew," and having little knowledge of his past, Felix has come from "some country that he has devoured rather than resided in, some secret land that he has been nourished on but cannot inherit" (N 7). According to Dr. O'Connor, Felix's life is hopeless. He asks: "[W]hat kind of a Jew is that? Screaming up against tradition like a bat against a window-pane..." (N 153). Nor is the Irish Catholic doctor any better off; he has drunk himself half around the world, living in exile and making "[his] house...the pissing port" (N 90). Like Felix and Dr.

O'Connor, Nora too bears the mark of estrangement. Reminiscent of the salons of Zadel Barnes, Sophia Ryder, and Natalie Barney, Nora's salon in America had once been a place for "poets, radicals, beggars, artists, and people in love" (N 50); but it falls into ruin when her obsession with Robin takes over her life. To Nora, the "world and its history [are] like a ship in a bottle" (N 53). She sees herself as an outsider, somewhat on the periphery, like Felix, for she cannot understand the world to which Robin belongs; nor, in fact, does she understand herself. She has "some derangement in her equilibrium that [keeps] her immune from her own descent" (N 51). Moreover, her character embodies so many dark images and ambiguities that she seems to epitomize the human condition. Nora's possessive love, which destroyed her relationship with Robin, is a microcosm of universal human misery. Barnes imagines a world that is largely neurasthenic, where suffering does not "purify."

Since the fall of Adam and Eve, as the Catholic doctor submits, "Man was born damned and innocent from the start, and wretchedly--as he must--on those two themes--whistles his tune" (N 121). For Barnes, the burden of life is heavy and religion of any nature is comfortless. Life offers nothing but "confusions and anxieties" (N 22), since Barnes has a long list of the world's "maladies." Felix is a not only "damned from the waist up" (N 26) but a victim of "Christian traffic...[that] has made the Jew's history a commodity" (N 10). Nora, on the other hand, as Dr. O'Connor ironically observes, is a "religious

woman...without the joy and safety of the Catholic faith, which at a pinch covers up the spots on the wall when the family portraits take a slide" (N 60). A Protestant, with the temperament of "an early Christian[,] she believed the word" (N 51), but her values remain twisted. She admits there is "something evil in [her] that loves evil and degradation--purity's black backside" (N 135).

Moreover, Nora's decaying chapel symbolizes waning faith, not only in God but in anything. After taking the Catholic vow rather suddenly, Robin, like one in sleep, wanders into churches where she kneels in prayer. Her prayer, however, is "monstrous because in it there [is] no margin left for damnation or forgiveness, for praise or for blame" (N 47). For her, there is only failure, a perpetual struggle toward an identity without redemption. It seems that God has made a botch of things, for despondency and pessimism pervade the lives of all the characters. In fact, Dr. O'Connor proposes that "[t]his would be a fine world, Lord, if you could get everybody out of it" (N 132).

Although Monique Wittig does not mention writers such as Radclyffe Hall and Natalie Barney in her reflections on writing and language, she asks:

Before Barnes and Proust how many times had homosexual and lesbian characters been chosen as the theme of literature in general? What had there been in literature between Sappho and Barnes's Ladies Almanack and Nightwood? Nothing. (64)

While Barnes denied a lesbian identity, Nightwood is narrated with such

passion that there is a strong awareness of her empathy for lesbian women. A deep distrust of sexuality, both homosexual and heterosexual, however, is evidenced by the failure of Nora's and Robin's lesbian relationship and the marriage breakup of Robin and Felix. The futility of marriage is indicated by its product--a sickly child associated with death. Among Nora's tortured memories is the night when Robin, drunk and angry, takes the doll she had given Nora as their "child," and hurls it to the floor, kicking and crushing it. Remembering the hurt, Nora states: "We give death to a child when we give it a doll--it's the effigy and the shroud; when a woman gives it to a woman, it is the life they cannot have, it is their child" (N 142). Dr. O'Connor, whose voice cracks on the word "difference," articulates Barnes' sexual darkness: "The last doll, given to age, is the girl who should have been a boy, and the boy who should have been a girl" (N 148).

In making the Irish doctor her prime articulator of shattered humanity and universal malady, Barnes attempts to "round out the inevitable ever-recurring meanness of life, to push the ridiculous into the very arms of the sublime" (R 10). Unlike the old Longinian sense of the sublime, Barnes' response to the word seems closer to Edmund Burke's association of the sublime with "emotions of displeasure such as anxiety, panic, and terror" (4), as defined in Mary Arensberg's The American Sublime. To a certain extent, Dr. O'Connor's epigrammatic discourse helps to lighten the weight of the novel's darkness. Though Felix Volkbein remarks that the doctor's profundity sounds much like

"dogma," his ironic and paradoxical wit is so well expressed it keeps his "narrative" from becoming intolerably black. He maintains: "You beat the liver out of a goose to get a pâté; you pound the muscles of a man's cardia to get a philosopher" (N 87) but "[o]nly the scorned and the ridiculous make good stories" (N 159).

Moreover, as prophet and philosopher of the night, Dr. O'Connor is a paradigm of universal suffering. He explains it this way:

I'm no exception, God knows; I'm the last of my line, the fine hairline of least resistance. It's a gruesome thing that man learns only by what he has between the one leg and the other! Oh, that short dangle! We corrupt mortality by its industry. You never know which one of your ends it is that is going to be the part you can't take your mind off. (N 139)

Nor is Felix speaking only for himself when he states: "We are adhering to life now with our last muscle--the heart" (N 40); it is a shared experience of all the characters. In Nightwood, Ryder, and The Antiphon, Barnes refuses to take the path of "least resistance" in dealing with the agony of the heart and its universal maladies. Without watering down her prose, she tells "the story of the world to the world" (N 161).

Chapter Four

Creeping Catafalque

I suppose one lives by the lack of ability to hold the memory too close--otherwise, none of us would reach maturity.

--Djuna Barnes to Emily Coleman, 20 Sept. 1935 (Broc 1989:51)

It has been remarked from advent to the terror
Woman is most beast familiar-- (A 205)

Twenty-two years after Nightwood, Barnes brings to the stage her last major response to twentieth-century disillusionment, despair, and cruelty. Published in 1958, The Antiphon, a verse drama in three acts, is as chilling as a Tourneur or Middleton revenge tragedy. While the language of Nightwood is modern, The Antiphon echoes the diction of the Renaissance. Many critics admire its style but they also consider it "unplayable." Dudley Fitts, writing in the New York Times Book Review (April 20, 1958), states: "It is scarcely a play: one cannot imagine it on any stage...but it is dramatic poetry of a curious and sometimes high order." In her introductory "Cautionary Note," Barnes writes: "As a misreading of The Antiphon is not impossible, it might be well to keep in mind that this play is more than merely literal" (A 79).

A war-torn world forms the background of the The Antiphon; it is 1939: the stage is set, the Hobbs family gathers, and the horror begins. Although The Antiphon drew the admiration of Edwin Muir and Dag Hammarskjöld, its theatrical exposure, according to Kannenstine, consists

only of a reading by the Poet's Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1958, and a performance in 1961 at the Royal Dramatic Theatre of Stockholm (152). In a conversation with James B. Scott in 1971, Barnes states: "I wrote it as a verse-drama because I like the form. But it can't be acted" (Broe 1991:344). It seems the play's cryptic lines have made it a closet drama. Not a novelist suddenly turned playwright, Barnes involved herself with the theatre as actress, writer, and drama critic from as early as 1916, an involvement she continued for half her lifetime. This theatrical experience is evident in her careful attention to setting, set design, and stage directions. Since an antiphon is a composition consisting of passages for alternate singing or chanting, Barnes takes as her setting, Burley Hall, formerly a college of chantry priests. The chants one hears, however, are responses to universal deterioration as well as the sexual oppression of women. The Antiphon concludes Barnes' reaction to the perpetual cycle of procreation and its devastating consequences.

Using certain findings expressed by Judith Herman in Father-Daughter Incest, as well as those of Irigaray and Wittig, this chapter discusses an ideology that regards women as victims of male power. Again, Barnes sees the father figure as a destructive force that treats women as sexual objects. In a patriarchal family such as the Hobbs one, man is the proprietor of women and children. As explained by Luce Irigaray, "the family has always been the privileged locus of women's exploitation" (142). As a second concern, this chapter examines the use of symbols, children's stories, and nursery rhymes to heighten dramatic effect and to

foreground cruelty toward women and children. Finally, this chapter discusses Barnes' dark view of the incest taboo as well as a mother's betrayal. "Maternal collusion in incest, when it occurs, is a measure of maternal powerlessness" (Herman 49). Without any interference from her mother, the sixteen-year old Miranda is "[t]ipped to a travelling cockney thrice that age" (A 186). The script indicates that the father "had him handy" in case he himself might be blamed for an accidental pregnancy.

Before entering the chilly atmosphere of The Antiphon, Barnes gives us a detailed description of the set. The Great Hall of Burley in Beewick, England, the scene of the action, reflects a disturbing sense of ruin with its "tumbled" walls, "paneless" Gothic windows, and "ruined" colonnade. The badly damaged house, the ancestral home of Augusta Burley Hobbs, is also a symbol of the destruction of World War II, already in progress. The "flags, gonfalons, bonnets, ribbons and all manner of stage costumes" (A 81) convey Miranda's association with the theatre. Suggestive of the estranged and divided Hobbs family, the halves of a gryphon, once a car in a carousel, are placed at each end of a settle. As well, an ominous sense of destruction is implied by the contents of the ruined home. Vestiges of a broken family remain: a battered gilt mardi-gras crown, broken statues of man and beast, guncases, masks, and toys. Most significant, however, is a brass curfew bell, for it is the instrument that brings the play to frightening closure.

During the play, we find that Jeremy Hobbs has summoned to Burley Hall his mother Augusta, his brothers Dudley and Elisha, and his sister

Miranda. Act One begins with the entrance of Miranda, a tall woman in her late fifties, dressed in theatrical costume. She is accompanied by Jack Blow, wearing high boots and a long coachman's coat, carrying a whip and creel. Though he is Miranda's brother Jeremy, in disguise, his identity is kept hidden from the other characters throughout the play. They are welcomed by Jonathan Burley, steward of Burley Hall, and brother of the widow Augusta. As the Hobbs family gathers, the Hall resonates with painful recollections of mental and physical cruelty. Titus Hobbs, "Egoist and Emperor...like Abraham" (A 144), is already dead, but his atrocities live on in his sons Dudley and Elisha and, to some extent, in Jeremy. Barnes inverts the traditional festive occasion of a family reunion and turns it into Gothic horror. Miranda keeps repeating: "I fear merchants" (A 88-89). Like animals in search of prey, Dudley and Elisha, American businessmen, prowl about the Hall before they make their entrance. Moreover, hearing the tapping of the ferule of her mother's umbrella, as she is about to enter, Miranda cries out in terror: "No, no, no, no, no, no, no!" (A 114)

While Act One forecasts imminent calamity, Act Two brings it into play. After Augusta makes her entrance at the beginning of the Act, family skeletons of horrendous import are aired on the stage. Darkness intensifies as we hear of the sexual escapades of her late husband Titus Hobbs, including his "monstrous practice of polygamy" (A 156). We witness the grossness of Dudley and Elisha donning animal masks and physically attacking Miranda and Augusta, "as if the playthings would make them

anonymous" (A 175). While Jeremy and Jonathan are off stage, Elisha knocks Miranda's cane away, grabs her, trips her, kicks her, and pins her arms behind her back. Meanwhile, Dudley uses Jeremy's whip to make his eighty-year-old mother dance; as well, he presses Elisha to molest Miranda sexually. "Slap her rump, and stand her on four feet!/That's her best position!" (A 176), he yells.

Writing of parental power, Judith Herman states: "Children are essentially a captive population...they will do whatever they perceive to be necessary to preserve a relationship with their caretakers" (27). Playing themselves, Dudley and Elisha act out pent-up bitterness toward their mother for her lack of nurturing and protection when they were children. They quickly shed their masks when Jeremy returns, bringing a doll's house to centre stage. The audience shudders as Augusta is forced to face the part she has played in the corruption of parental love. Horrified at the sight of the box and its contents, she is assailed by repressed memories of guilt and treachery. Throwing herself over the doll house, she beats at it with both hands, for she recoils from the memory of the day Miranda, at sixteen, was raped by a man three times her age. Though Titus Hobbs instigated the act, Augusta had done nothing to stop it. As the curtain falls Miranda, expressing affection for her uncle, prefers to spare him from the ordeal she believes imminent. "This is a clocked encounter/To which I would not have you sacristan" (A 189), she warns.

Act Three opens in pitch-black night as the antiphon begins between

mother and daughter. Like stichomythia, used to create tension and conflict, Augusta and Miranda lock horns in a lyrical duel but one that is far removed from religious chants. Acting like a frightened child, Augusta says: "[L]et us play. The epilogue is over,/The boys asleep, and we are girls again" (A 193). While Augusta tries to bury the horrors of the past, Miranda cannot forget; the wounds are too deep to heal. Augusta blames Miranda because Jeremy, her favourite son, went away and never returned; indeed, she blames Miranda for everything.

On the other hand, Miranda accuses Augusta for not protecting her from her odious father:

To think I had a mother should betray me!
Tax me guilty both of audit and default;
Tot me up, as idiots their droppings,
And as indifferently, tick off the count. (A 195)

During the mother-daughter confrontation, Augusta hears Dudley and Elisha making their escape. Again, blaming Miranda for their desertion, she seizes the curfew bell and brings it down on Miranda's head. "Both fall across the gryphon, pulling down the curtains, gilt crown and all" (A 223). As the act closes, Jonathan asks Jack Blow why he caused their deaths. Revealing himself as Jeremy, he admits his error in thinking he could "medicine contumely/With a doll's hutch--that catches villains!...[Instead, he has] breathed up disaster and [himself]" (A 224). He realizes that his attempt to join fragments of what had once been a family has been hopeless from the start. Leaving his uncle with the two bodies, he appears indifferent as he walks off the stage and ends the

play. Possibly this is Barnes' antiphon to creation itself: doomed from the beginning.

In many ways, The Antiphon continues and brings to a conclusion Barnes' first novel Ryder. The names have changed, but patriarchal power looms stronger and crueller than ever. Wendell Ryder, however, was not so tyrannical as his patriarchal counterpart Titus Hobbs. Possibly modelled on Titus Oates, "one of the vilest characters in all of English history" (Field 187), "Bull" Titus, that "old Ram! Cock-pit Bully Boy!" (A 151), has left a legacy of scars. Titus Oates was condemned for perjury for pretending to discover the Popish Plot against Charles II in 1678. In choosing Titus as the name of the father, and prefixing it with "Bull," Barnes indicates a distinct hostility towards the lusty patriarch.

From Miranda we get a clear picture of Barnes' view of life, love, and marriage. For her, love is death--"Perambulator rolling to the tomb;/Death with a baby in its mouth" (A 219). Suggesting her mother became a victim like herself the day she married Titus, she reports that before Augusta's fall,

Hopping and singing went she, when in one
Scant scything instant was gaffed down,
Lying still as water in a stick
That carpenters do level with:
All backward in a flail of locks went to,
With cobalt eye in passion's clabber drowned,-
Holding a single flower upright. (A 87)

Moreover, from the same source, we learn that Augusta had wanted fame; instead, she married Titus, and gave birth to a lifetime of

disappointment. As Miranda explains, her mother performed "the tragic ballet on her back...And of that marriage pupped truncated grief" (A 87). Apparently, for Barnes, Augusta's fate is a microcosm of the marriage "malady" that harkens back to "Carrion Eve...Before the tree was in the cross, the cradle, and the coffin,/The tragic head-board, and the victim door..." (A 193-94).

According to Freud, "the perfect achievement of the feminine destiny...lies in reproducing the male sex, at the expense of a woman's own" (Irigaray 87). Looking back, Augusta tells her adult children how Victoria, Titus' American mother, took her money and her trust, and closed her eyes to her son's constant philandering. "She had my purse, my person...Even stones wear down beneath the lick of flattery/And I but rock-salt to her stallion son" (A 154), she laments. Like Zadel Barnes and Sophia Ryder, Victoria Hobbs kept a salon in London, married twice, and could "cluck in anyone for daughter" (A 154). When Jonathan asks why she chose Titus Hobbs for a husband, Augusta answers: "He said he was the stud to breed a kingdom" (A 161). She seems to think that mothering will give her an identity. In addition, Jonathan cannot understand how Augusta condoned a husband who turned his family out like "bastards" when the law caught up with him, so that "he might make at least one hussy legal" (A 159). Much put out by the rekindling of old wounds, Augusta admonishes him: "Don't come at me too! I was a victim:/I've done my duty to the state--in children" (A 159). Augusta's bitterness is twofold; she not only feels she has been trapped by marriage but she is also envious of

Miranda's career as actress and writer. Barnes foregrounds a time when women had no choice but to marry and bear children. "In my day we did not leave our husbands" (A 160), Augusta laments.

Writing of the category of sex as a totalitarian system, Monique Wittig comments:

Being...physically and mentally tortured and abused, being raped, being battered, and being forced to marry is the fate of women. And fate supposedly cannot be changed. Women do not know that they are totally dominated by men, and when they acknowledge the fact, they can "hardly" believe it. (3)

Despite her husband's maltreatment, Augusta makes excuses for him. He was "a self-molested man!" (A 208), she says. Like Amelia Ryder, Augusta recalls the terrible fear of the law because of Titus' polygamy. She still hears his blatant cry: "Down with church, with schoolroom, and with king!" (A 08). Although Augusta was treated abominably by her husband, she just accepted her destiny and put up with her husband's "hussies."

Without any semblance of self-esteem, Augusta admits to Jonathan that she has remained a fool. Though she had experienced London before her marriage, she acknowledges:

I don't improve, because I won't ask questions.
I won't ask questions because I find I sweat me
In three several horrid generations,
And would know nothing. (A 175)

Here Barnes submits that women have never been privileged with a voice. Similar to Amelia Ryder, Augusta "slaved, without undue astonishment,/...Down on her knees" (A 144) while Titus' women sat

drinking coffee and he thumbed through the book of Genesis, looking for affirmation of his role as a great patriarch. Dudley remembers his father marked a passage in the Bible: "Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go" (A 144). Ironically, at Hobbs' Ark in America, Titus served neither God nor his family; he went looking for new victims.

Barnes sees the sins of the father perpetuated in sons; for example, Dudley and Elisha are their father's "blasphemy." When Dudley cannot understand something, he "kicks" it. Echoing, in some ways, Nightwood's connection with the "beast" world, Dudley and Elisha lower themselves to bestiality by putting on animal masks. The pig's head suggests Dudley's grasping nature; the ass' head, worn by Elisha, conveys the braying of insults at Miranda. With or without masks, they are still Dudley and Elisha Hobbs, bent on performing animal acts on helpless women. While Miranda has a physical disability and walks with a cane, Augusta, a "cold mouse" of eighty, is fair game. With all the debasement and darkness Barnes can muster, Dudley laughs as he makes his elderly mother dance to the tune of Jeremy's whip. "I love to see a sway-back on the run;/It's game to haul a bang-tail by the scut;/...Hog-backed and dousing for a grave!" (A 177-78), he taunts. He describes himself when he calls Augusta "hog-backed." Reminiscent of a boxing-match, he knocks Augusta down and strikes out at her with rapid taps, as if sparring with an opponent. Adding insult to injury, and acting out childhood repressions, he derides her with questions: "Want to play with baby? Going to play with baby?"

Who's afraid?" (A 176).

Writing of sexual abuse, Judith Herman notes that a significant number of female victims, recalling their experiences, "feel themselves to be permanently scarred...they have...difficulty developing a positive, self-respecting sexual identity and a rewarding sexual life" (34). A recurring concern for Barnes, sexual degradation explodes with horrific magnitude in the play; in fact, it appears to be a way of life in the Hobbs family. Like father, like son, Elisha gives Miranda a violent shove toward her mother. "She's your dog, do as you like with her" (A 179), he says. Augusta responds: "Even dogs are not abandoned in a ruin, Elisha" (A 180); but women are, for Barnes. Elisha's abuse of Miranda is so beastly one assumes that he is also playing the role of his father. Driving his knee into her back, he says, viciously:

You'd never listen to your brothers, would you, Toots?
 Tick-bird, riding out the Grand Conception,
 Which father's lack of guts, left in your corner.
[Raising his knee]
 Let's see, if by your scumber, you are fox! (A 176)

Expressing pity for her mother, Miranda tries to stop Dudley's assault by coming between them. Taking her mother back in memory to the cradle, Miranda explains: "There is he mapped--if he be mapped at all" (A 181). Barnes leaves no doubt that Titus' sons were raised on violence, for Elisha brags that he loved to "gouge [his] chin into the shoulder bone,/And whiz [his] thumb into the buttock joint" (A 139). While Miranda, in some situations, shows compassion for her elderly mother,

Augusta has little for her. "I've seen my daughter die before, and make it" (A 180) is all she offers. In keeping with Barnes' scatological imagination, Dudley reminds his mother: "You've pissed like a cat to hear of lechery!" (A 149).

Women have been taught that they are "property, private or public, belonging to one man or all..." (Irigaray 203); thus Elisha and Dudley believe they can exercise this right. Demeaningly, Elisha calls Miranda his "well-used spinster...The damned and dedicated 'victim'" (A 176). Alarmed at what Miranda might write about them, if they take her back to America, they think "[s]he'll blot [them] up" (A 180), perhaps even become a financial burden. Elisha comes very close to "home" when he calls Miranda "continental shoat...souser...[m]anless, childless, safeless document" (A 178-9), for Barnes was all of these. Indeed, the discourse is so violent and painful that one is tempted to think of Miranda as Barnes. "I hear Miranda's all get-out in France,/And apparently a scribbler in England" (A 125), the envious Elisha remarks to his uncle.

As victim, Miranda, young and inexperienced, was pushed out by her mother "as sole provider" (A 169) for the family after Augusta herself was put "out to pasture" (A 169). Clearly, Miranda has been shoved around by everyone but her uncle. Preferring sons to daughter, and repeating patriarchal dogma, Augusta states: "If one child was meant to be a gifted child/It should have been a boy..." (A 147); moreover, debasing her own gender, she asserts: "Of course, men are a pleasure. What's a woman?" (A 140). In Dudley's disporting opinion, a woman is but "[a] cow, sitting on

a crumpled grin" (A 140). For Miranda, the doll's house brings back all the horrible memories of life on the family farm. She asks her mother if she remembers what happened in the "cock-loft." When Augusta recoils, Jeremy pressures her to look in the miniature house to see, "as in a glass darkly...[t]he fighting shadow of the Devil [Titus] and the Daughter" (A 185). Dramatic darkness heightens as Miranda reminds her mother that what she sees is "Miranda damned,.../Dragging rape-blood behind her, like the snail--" (A 185); Jeremy adds: "Beneath her, in a lower room, her father/Rubbed down his hands" (A 185). Though we cannot verify that Barnes was raped by her father, or indeed by any man, her dark vision of woman's degraded condition is deeply embedded in her work.

So aptly called a "beast-box," the doll's house seems hermetically sealed until Augusta is coerced by her sons to let its demons out. In some ways, the bestiality it contains symbolizes the apocalyptic state of the outside world. World War II is in its early stages and, as Yeats would put it, a "rough beast...slouches towards Bethlehem to be born." Explaining to Jonathan how he happened to arrive at Burley Hall with Miranda, Jeremy expresses his fear that "[s]he's forsaking covert for some prowl,/As the leopard in a land made desolate" (A 104). Possibly, like his brothers, Jeremy is afraid Miranda will reveal too much. Between the lines there is a suggestion that, when they met sometime ago in Paris, Jeremy "became her man--/Out of the high fear" (A 113), a subtlety that might be overlooked by an audience. In any event, the only luggage Jeremy brings to the reunion is a beast-box--the house that "Jack" built as a

reminder of painful childhood. To intensify the horror of the drama that is unfolding before us, Barnes often follows a character's lines with a nursery-rhyme-response from another character.

Epitomizing cruelty, Jeremy's whip or billycock is used by Dudley to make his mother step to this hair-raising chant:

'Step upon a crack, you break your mother's back--'
 Jump, old woman, jump! jump off the world!
 Be dead, be done, be modest dead, be quick!
 A snipe can smell his meat ten inches underground;
 On scent, old crow, downward to the feast!
 Dance! Dance! Dance! (A 180)

With remarkable ingenuity, Barnes uses the game of hop-sotch as a means of recalling the past and airing childhood repressions. In addition, the whip, a symbol of patrimony in the drama, brings back memories of Titus Hobbs' abuse. Elisha claims his mother "did exactly what he told [her],/And let him get away with anything" (A 143); with anger, Dudley adds: "Uh, even as a baby in your arms/You let him lash me with his carriage whip" (A 143).

When Dudley and Elisha put on their animal masks and make their beastly assault, Augusta thinks they are playing a game rather than taking revenge. As Dudley pushes his aged mother about, he taunts her in this manner: "I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house down!" (A 175). Earlier, evoking latent abuse, Elisha recites: "And when she startles with her carving knife--/Three boy mice, see how they run!" (A 169). As for Jeremy, he answers his mother's recollection of the time the two of them went hunting with a sexual chant:

Hunter, hunting hunter,
 Turns the tiger to a rabbit's skin
 To wrap his mama Bunting in. (A 133)

Though it seems that "Sonny" has gone a-hunting with "Mommy," and not "Daddy," one never can be quite sure of Barnes' intention. She uses a nursery rhyme of the oral tradition, usually sung by a mother to her child, and gives it an Oedipal connotation.

By assigning sinister connections to children's stories, Barnes is literally presenting a dark drama of the world. To have been born at all is held up for consideration. Augusta resorts to childhood make-believe to block out the realities Miranda puts before her. Drawing on "Sleeping Beauty," she asks: "Was I ever princess in a legend?/Did I sleep a hundred years?" (A 199). Now that "the animals are put up in their box" (A 193), Augusta wants to have a "girl talk". She mounts the bed, facing Miranda, and asks her to give her some news of her life abroad. Shunning worldly gossip, Miranda answers: "Looking down the barrel of your eye,/I see the body of a bloody Cinderella/Come whirling up" (A 193). Whatever baleful suggestion is put upon "Cinderella," "Cock Robbin" or "Red Riding Hood," there is a strong indication that Augusta and Titus have imposed their sexual deviations upon their children. Barnes is only too aware that fantasizing oneself back into childhood for a fresh start is hopeless, for the pain never goes away.

Throughout the play the gryphon, as well, takes on symbolic significance. In J. E. Cirlot's A Dictionary of Symbols, the griffin is described as

a fabulous animal, the front half of which is like an eagle and the rear half like a lion, with a long, serpentine tail...like certain kinds of dragon, [it] is always to be found as the guardian of the roads to salvation, standing beside the Tree of Life...(133)

Barnes' gryphon, however, has been "sawed up" by Titus, leaving no possibility of redemption for his family. While she does not reveal her attachment to the mythic beast, we know from Hank O'Neal that Barnes had "a gryphon-like ceramic creature" (8) on the mantelpiece in her small apartment in Patchin Place. In addition, The Antiphon's gryphon, "once a car in roundabout" (A 81), reminds one of Nora's purchase of a similar piece for her apartment in Nightwood.

When the curtain falls on Act Two, Miranda asks her uncle to help her "make of this divided beast/An undivided bed" (A 189), as if she wants to heal the wounds inflicted upon herself and her mother by Titus' prurient nature. By the beginning of Act Three, the gryphon has been brought together. Inspecting it, Augusta remarks: "A solid beast, an excellent stage, fit for a play" (A 192). Thinking the gryphon moves, Augusta enters a childhood world of fantasy and encourages Miranda to join her on a trip to exotic places. The gryphon will be their carriage and, as well, their means of escaping impending disaster. Paradoxically, however, the two women fall to their death across it. In Nightwood, "Love is the first lie" (N 138); in The Antiphon, "Love is death" (A 196).

Moreover, the curfew bell rings out destruction from the time Augusta makes her entrance in Act Two. Looking around Burley Hall, her ancestral home in the township of Beewick, England, she sees the bell that

her cousin Pegamont used to ring "over barley broth/To call his needy pensioners..." (A 118). Again, we have to guess at Barnes' symbolic use of the bell. Possibly it suggests an early custom of ringing a bell for children to return to their homes, or it may typify the medieval practice of ringing a curfew bell during wartime. Certainly the Hobbs' siblings have been called to their mother's former home at a time when war is raging both outside and inside the Hall. At the beginning of Act Three, as Miranda lies sleeping, Augusta says: "There's the curfew-bell, and it's o'clock, and bedlam./Shall I ring and wake her?" (A 191). Tension builds as Augusta attempts to assume Miranda's identity. Without permission, she takes off Miranda's shoes, puts them on her own feet, and in exchange puts hers on Miranda. Thinking that Miranda has led an exciting life in Europe, Augusta indulges in fantasy by imagining herself as the Empress Josephine and the beautiful Lily Langtry, the English actress. Miranda, however, neither co-operates with the fantasy nor reveals anything of her personal life. Like Barnes, she is "Trappist--sprung--and of an hard-won silence" (A 202). The sound of the curfew bell that had awakened Miranda at the beginning of the act rings The Antiphon to a close.

In one of the most disturbing mother-daughter antiphras in women's literature, Augusta's hatred for her daughter comes into full view in Act Three. Barnes confronts a topic that most writers tend to avoid--the incest taboo. Irigaray defines it this way:

The society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women. Without the exchange of women, we are told, we would fall back into the anarchy (?) of the natural world, the randomness (?)

of the animal kingdom. The passage into the social order, into the symbolic order, into order as such, is assured by the fact that men, or groups of men, circulate women among themselves, according to a rule known as the incest taboo. (170)

Barnes unmasks the myth of motherhood that usually protects rather than betrays daughters. Though Augusta is a victim herself, she is also a collusive parent. Mothers "who have been rendered unusually powerless within their families, for whatever reason, often tolerate many forms of abuse, including sexual abuse of their children" (Herman 47). Suggesting that mothers are often the instruments of the patriarchy, Barnes again reworks the myth of Genesis. Calling Augusta "Carrion Eve," Miranda declares: "Titus Adam/Had at you with his raping-hook/And you reared back a belly full of thumbs" (A 193-94). Continuing the lyrical battle, Augusta replies: "I was slumming when I let you wear my belly" (A 194). Resentful that she was ever born, Miranda retorts: "A door slammed on Eden, and the Second Gate,/And I walked down your leg" (A 195).

Despite Augusta's betrayal of her daughter, Miranda is expected to forgive those who have degraded her. Barnes seems to suggest that the mother will often blame the daughter for a father's barbarous act. "If you are speaking of your father, I forgive him" (A 208), says Augusta. Though begging Miranda to show mercy, Augusta serves up recriminations. Reminding Augusta of her treachery, Miranda states:

Only yesterday, the heaped up chronicle--
Where you crossed your palms upon your gown
To guard the secret of the belly's botany--
Was grappled by my father's bloodhound hand
And I ripped public for the scapegoat run. (A 195-96)

Again, barely subliminal, are suggestive images of father-daughter incest. Who is to blame? For Barnes, history has shown that everyone is reluctant to accept either guilt or responsibility.

Similarly, she will not allow us to have any romantic notions that mothers are loving nurturers. We have it from Miranda that "[e]very mother, in extortion for her milk--/With the keyhole iris of the cat--draws blood" (A 210); we have it from Dudley that Augusta had Miranda convinced "she was the devil" (A 164) when she was seven years old, and since that time she has been "hunting for her crime" (A 164). Elisha recalls that twenty years ago Jeremy was so terrified of his mother that he left home and never returned. Moreover, in Dudley's opinion, Augusta would gladly have him back, "climbing up her string,/Like [a] tin monkey" (A 133). Augusta herself hints at a taboo relationship with Jeremy. She complains: "He left me, howling in an alien room,/...stranded on an high bad bed" (A 133).

Judith Herman claims that some studies of incestuous fathers and their families have shown that brothers who have been physically abused often develop "assaultive and abusive behavior in identification with their fathers" (94). Hence Dudley and Elisha consider Miranda "[their] 'deadly beloved vixen, in the flesh./What more could two good brothers want?'" (A 99). Jeremy, on the other hand, remembers that Miranda was mistreated by both parents. Though Augusta begins to wonder how Jack Blow knows so much about the family, Jeremy tells her she made "[herself] a **madam** by submission/With...[her] apron over [her] head" (A 185). When

Titus gave his young daughter to a much older man, Jeremy recalls with horror:

Though Miranda cried first, like the ewe,
'Do not let him--but if it will atone--'
Offering up her silly throat for slashing,
The jolted tongue
Blowing off the hacking caw-- (A 186)

If Miranda has any connection with Shakespeare's play, Barnes has turned his Tempest into a horrific nightmare; if "we are such stuff as dreams are made on," then Miranda Hobbs is no more than a sexual object of her father's sexual fantasies.

In her essay, "To Make Her Mutton at Sixteen," Louise DeSalvo suggests that Miranda is given or sold to a farmer "to protect the family's reputation" (Broe 1991 309). This may be true, for Barnes drops subtle hints that Miranda might have been impregnated by her father. Besides, since Augusta cannot bear to be reminded of the loft at Hobbs' Ark, it seems obvious that something sinister has taken place there. With great agitation, she cries: "I did not see it! I did not hear it! (A 186). What kind of mother would say of a little girl, "I liked her most when she looked wanted" (A 164)? Or a brother admit, "[W]e loved the lamb--/Till she turned mutton" (A 147)? Clearly, Miranda, like Julie Ryder, has been a victim of sexual degradation, betrayal, and abuse.

Though cheated of a caring mother, Miranda extends an invitation to Augusta to stay on with her and Jonathan after her sons desert her. Despite Miranda's reminding her that Dudley and Elisha "[w]ould mate the

pennies on a dead man's eyes/To breed the sexton's fees" (A 221), Augusta refuses to believe they came back to Burley Hall to hasten her death. She can forgive father and sons for their atrocities, but she can never forgive her daughter. The curfew bell sounds the death-toll; then there is silence. Jeremy remarks to Jonathan: "I might have known, being weary of the world,/And all the bootless roar of vindication,/She'd not defend herself" (A 223). He had intended to catch "villains" in the doll's hutch, but he caught the "victims"--mother and daughter. Jeremy was of home "so utterly bereft,/[[he] dug [him] one, and pushed [his] terror in" (A 224). For him, home was no more than a beast-box; for Barnes, it is the seedbed of universal malady.

The darkness is so thick in The Antiphon that one has to struggle to reach the light again. Seemingly, as Barnes grows older, her work becomes darker, even more complex. We have neither Dr. O'Connor's epigrams nor his monologues to help us with her play; instead, we have a language "largely informed by the diction and vocabulary of Shakespeare...[with] strained, unusual metaphors, drawn from apparently unrelated sources" (Scott 137). Yet, while The Antiphon foregrounds the mental and physical suffering of women at the hands of the "mighty righteous and original father" (AB 23), its structure demonstrates Barnes' virtuosity both in language and drama. In the darkness of this "kingfisher night," Miranda articulates Barnes' beauty of phrasing:

...As the high plucked banks
Of the viola rend out the unplucked strings below--
There is the antiphon.

...So the day, day fit for dying in
Is the plucked accord. (A 214)

Chapter Five

The Passion Spent

How does one arrange for life...how do writers keep on writing? Professional ones do, I don't see how my kind can--the "passion spent," and even the fury--the passion made into Nightwood the fury (nearly) exhausted in The Antiphon...what is left? "The horror," as Conrad put it.

--Djuna Barnes to Peter Hoare, 18 July 1963 (Broe 1991 337)

Responding to a statement that there was no such thing as a really talented artist being unknown and not being recognized, Ruth Ford, a friend of the author, spoke up and said: "Oh yes there is...Djuna Barnes" (Broe 1991 341). This was in New York in the late forties; yet almost a half century later Barnes remains something of a "famous unknown." Unlike many writers of her time, she has refused to make herself a legendary figure through biographies and memoirs. In 1971, when asked if she might publish her memoirs, Barnes reacted with horror: "How can you ask me such a question? Lillian Hellman's and all those people's memoirs are so disgusting...why should I want to add to it?" (Griffin 138). Though Field's Djuna is not an authorized biography, his book has helped to bring new interest to an author who has been neglected in the broad context of modern criticism.

A diversity of genres as well as Barnes' involvement with literature of past periods has prompted Louis Kannenstine to consider her as one of the "last classicists" (x). Monique Wittig, who translated Barnes'

Spillway into French, claims: "It is Djuna Barnes who is our Proust (and not Gertrude Stein)" (64). Writing in a century of experimentation, Barnes works both inside and outside traditional literary modes, making it difficult to place her. Douglas Messerli's 1975-bibliography of Barnes notes that, although Barnes had an acknowledged influence on Faulkner, Dylan Thomas, Eliot, Durrell, Lowry, Crane, and perhaps Joyce, even in universities [at that time], few were familiar with her work. Messerli attributes this lack of appreciation to "the complexity and elusiveness" (xi) of her style; yet it may also have something to do with our reluctance to face the dark realities she puts before us. In Unless Soul Clap Its Hands, Erika Duncan's response differs somewhat from Messerli's. She asserts:

It was not the intellectual, philosophical or stylistic "difficulty" which deterred a more widespread appreciation of this acknowledged genius of the English language. The "difficulty" was of a far more subtle yet more devious nature and had to do with our acceptance of the validity of pain as an experience within a culture which places a high premium upon comfort and contentment. (181)

Recently there has been renewed interest in Barnes' fiction but Nightwood remains her greatest achievement. Writing to T. S. Eliot about the preface he did for Nightwood, she comments: "You, and that book and that foreword are the three only things that have pleased me in ten, twelve years" (Fuchs 297).

For the most part, Barnes herself continues to be associated with the expatriate period. She wrote much in the way she lived--unconventionally.

Her public life, however, came to an end when she returned to New York at the onset of World War II. In a rare interview in 1971, she described herself as "a recluse, a form of Trappist" (Griffin 135). After The Antiphon, Barnes returned to her beginnings, for it was as an aspiring poet that she had begun her artistic career. "Quarry," published in 1969, which is said to be her epitaph (Kannenstine 167-68), was followed by "The Walking-Mort" in 1971. Similar in theme, they capture the mood of the aging poet. The later poem begins: "Call her walking-mort; say where she goes/She squalls her bush with blood. I slam a gate." Moving toward death, the persona continues: "So, shall we stand, or shall we tread and wait/...Or shall we freeze and wrangle by the wall?"

Like her narratives, Barnes resumed her dark vision of the world in her poetry. For example, "Quarry" echoes a downward movement:

While I unwind duration from the tongue-tied tree,
Send carbon fourteen down for time's address.
The old revengeful without memory
Stand by--
I come, I come that path and there look in
And see the capsized eye of sleep and wrath
and hear the beaters' "Gone to earth!"
Then do I sowl the soul and strike its face
That it fetch breath.

According to Hank O'Neal, Barnes considered the poem very important; furthermore, she told him: "If you don't know the meaning of 'sowl,' it is impossible to figure out the ending of the poem" (43). Turning a noun into a verb, she attempts, to no avail, to bring the soul to life as time runs out.

Isolated in her small apartment in Greenwich Village and suffering from chronic emphysema and arthritis, Barnes channeled what little energy she had left from her poetry toward fighting with her publishers. Though she lived to correct the galleys of her final work, Creatures in an Alphabet, she died four months before it was published in October, 1982 (Field 243). Somewhat juvenile, the little book of animal alphabet rhymes, accompanied by Barnes' drawings of birds, fish, insects, and animals is her coda to one of the longest literary journeys on record. She would have been enraged to have heard that Andrew Field referred to the book as a "slight work." In many ways, her rhymes and animal illustrations bring her career full circle, for "beast familiar" (A 205) images are often present in her work.

Barnes once said to Hank O'Neal: "There have only been two things in my life that made me truly happy and both were aborted, but I could always be happy whenever I could strike a line I liked" (97). Surely the lines she struck for Dr. O'Connor must have made her happy, for her verbal sharpness electrifies his epigrammatic monologues. Whether writing of women's suffering on Bulls'-Ease farm in Ryder, or sexual degradation of women at Hobbs Ark in The Antiphon, or the journey into the "night wood," a "leaf of darkness" casts its shadow on the life of man--"solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." This is the manner in which Barnes' life ended on June 18, 1982; however, in her case it was, as she told O'Neal, only "painful and nasty." Clearly, Miranda of The Antiphon speaks best for this enigmatic, eccentric, and reclusive writer

who struggled to "sowl the soul." Miranda states:

By the unrecording axis of my eye
It should be observed I have no people;
But on the dark side, there I entertain.
(A 205)

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