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**An insubstantial defence of the Father,  
incorporating Djuna Barnes' melancholy  
corpus**

**By Nick Hocking**

Birkbeck, University of London

2015

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

I, Nick Hocking, declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Abstract

My thesis being a suitably rhizomatic proliferation of thematic obsessions, personal anecdotes, theoretical debates, political reflections, and close readings of several major works by Djuna Barnes, it feels like a particularly brutal kind of revisionary, reterritorialising horticulture would be required in order to state in a few hundred words what it is that I have tried to do, *at root*. But since I must, let's say that the underlying preoccupation of my writing, oriented through a focus on various figures of the Father in Barnes' writing, has been the (political, psychological and social) necessity of such *en-tirpatory* aggression: the selective, irreducibly ideological laying down of roots needed to construct an arborescent substance (such as a doctoral dissertation, or a social justice movement), and the role played in this kind of symbolic reordering by a retrospectively-posed legitimating figure (archetypally, the founding Father).

In a vaguely Sedgwickian gesture I contest here that critical theory, and contemporary Leftist thought more generally, suffers by its one-sided approach to fantasies of substantial identity. Some of us steadily insist with heroic Stoicism on the phantasmic misrecognitions entailed in all stable identities, others are continually moving on from such *passé* essentialisms as Nation, Family, or Self, giddily repeating the same gestures at each vibrant new theoretical 'turn', with Sisyphean regularity. Critical theory therefore appears stuck with a body that it can neither internalise nor efface. Meanwhile the latest capitalist crisis has found the Left ready with convincing analyses, but a fractured and disorganised base; capable of mobilizing mass *protest*, but without the co-ordinated strategy or political will to 'occupy' dominant power structures or attract popular support beyond the embattled enclaves of academia and activism. A few years earlier, Wendy Brown diagnosed this situation as an endemic Leftist melancholia in which 'the impulse to blame and complain tends to displace any impulse to develop strategies for the assumption of power', but, paradoxically, she also suggested that we might yet successfully mourn the catastrophes of history while proleptically recognising that the objects of our mourning are insubstantial; 'Something has died but we argue over what the body is (there will turn out not to be a body).' Conversely, this thesis ultimately flirts with a post-Jungian mythopoetic 'turn' in arguing that we need to *give substance back to our grief* and expend a few lachrymose passages over our Father's body, whoever he might turn out not to have been.

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### **List of abbreviations for books referenced frequently**

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<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Short title</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>
<i>A</i>	<i>The Antiphon</i>	Djuna Barnes
<i>FRGE</i>	'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism Without Reserve'	Jacques Derrida
<i>N</i>	<i>Nightwood</i>	Djuna Barnes
<i>R</i>	<i>Ryder</i>	Djuna Barnes



## **Chapter 1 - *Nightwood's* Jewish problem, and how we avoid mastering it**

If the very possibility of meeting the opponent on a common ground, without which no contact is possible, implies a certain symmetry, a sameness, a repetition of the error which the encounter is designed to correct, any true avoidance of that error entails a non-meeting or incompatibility between the two forces. If to hit the target is in a way to become the target, then to miss the target is perhaps to hit it elsewhere. (Barbara Johnson, 'The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida', *Yale French Studies*, 55/56 (1977), 457-505 (pp.468-69))

In this opening chapter and, with trajectory slightly recalibrated, in Chapter 2, that bullet-flecked target, Critical Mastery, will be resighted through a sustained meditation upon the figure of the Jew and the twinned themes of paternal dispossession and transmission in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936). I contend that current understandings of the novel reach an undecidable impasse: either the characters of Guido and Felix (the father and son who do not meet) are judged to be rooted in anti-semitic discourse without emancipatory remainder; or, since the text's narrative parodically embodies the underlying tensions in its own construction, Barnes is said to have hollowed out the figure of the anti-semitic 'Jew' (rapacious, parasitic, sickly, inauthentic...) from within. Without returning to the naïve position for which there would be an extra-discursive Jewish *essence* (to which the text does or does not adequate), I shall suggest that in this context the refusal to aim at critical mastery, the authoritative reading, too easily resolves into complacency about the position from which Barnes' texts 'speak', buoyed along, ironically, by an excessive respect for the manner in which Barnes' work itself subverts the all-knowing position of the paternalistic critic (that presumptively presumptuous reader whose motive is always to bring the text back into line, be it with a Modernist, Liberal Humanist, Structuralist, or even a Queer hermeneutic orientation).

I draw on Trubowitz's critique of the novel to show that the problem of appropriation and domination remains (indeed becomes all the more pressing) if indeed Barnes' writing does shift the ontological status of 'the Jew' from a psycho-socially inflected fantasy to an empty formal position in a narrative system. In order to elucidate the suppositions of readings which valorise it for its capacity to short circuit imaginary identification and implicate the desire of the reader in its camp staging of social, sexual and subjective incoherence, I will relate the treatment of Jewishness in some of *Nightwood's* recent critics, most particularly in the work of Daniella Caselli, to the exemplarity of Jewishness in the work of Slavoj Zizek, who similarly uses the Jew as the privileged figure of fantasy. Drawing together Hegelian dialectics with the Lacanian model of subject formation, Zizek frequently presents anti-semitic belief as the purest example of ideological fantasy. What he repeatedly shows is that 'the Jew' functions within social systems as an enabling obstacle to the ideal of an organically whole national community, that by appearing as the (eliminable) barrier to its full realisation the Jew covers over the antagonistic nature of the social as such. To give up such an illusion is therefore to give up the belief in a fully realisable social body.

A well-known difficulty shadows Zizek's entire theoretical wager, for it has been argued that he merely repeats this very same fantasy (of eradicating a barrier to radical socio-political change, a barrier which slides along a metonymic chain of Jewish signifiers) on the very theoretical level at which he claims to have 'traversed' it. Perhaps, then, Jewishness in Zizek's work continues to function as the barrier to the radical philosophical break with the capitalist subject (sustained in its classical form by a Protestantism and in its post-modern variant by an ironic distance from social role which is crucial to its continued efficiency). The decisive break Zizek advocates constantly defines itself against an emblematically Jewish prohibition on concrete representations of a suprasensible Thing-in-Itself: the Talmudic prohibition on the concrete representation of divinity, the Kantian Sublime, or Derridean *différance*. Each is taken to be characteristically Jewish regulative ideal, holding out the protected notion of a Thing-in-Itself beyond phenomenal or symbolic knowledge against the perceived threat of an Absolute Knowledge which (though from the 'Jewish' perspective it threatens to colonise all reality under the flag of an immediate self-identity) is nothing other than a crucial but minimal reflexive shift which allows us to

fully recognise the void at the heart of Being which sustains the dialectical movement of identity and difference of which we are the process, product and the pudenda. The latter insight is variously characterised as Christian, Hegelian or Lacanian. Here I follow Svenungsson, who argues that, in their shared attempts to reinvigorate a specifically Christian universalism for a contemporary politico-philosophic notion of the radical act, both Zizek and Alain Badiou invoke Jewishness as ‘a rhetorical marker which is interchangeable with any particular predicate that obstructs a truly universalist political order’.

So I raise the question whether Zizek’s failure to overcome ‘the lasting tensions generated by a universalist legacy that is dialectically reliant upon eliminating conflicting claims on definitions of the universal’<sup>1</sup> should not also make us question the emancipatory critical value of overcoming a logic of the phallic exception as is presupposed in the negativity of anti-representational thinking. It is necessary to speculate on whether Zizek’s repetition of the dialectical overcoming of Judaism introduces a crucial difference into its identity (one might say, an illegitimate repetition which bastardises the very self-assurance of the line of equivalences it inherits), or whether it freezes the Christian incarnation of Spirit as the transcendent frame of history.

In appearance this objection to Zizek’s work is identical to the oft repeated complaint that the Lacanian (and Freudian) collocation of Father, Phallus and Law is given an ahistorical status which betokens its patriarchal assumptions. Later in the chapter I will offer an initial defence of the conceptual value of these terms, and will do so in opposition to the use made of woman, Jew, proletariat, etc. by Zizek as privileged figures of a relation to the Symbolic which exceeds the Symbolic Law. For now, I simply note that, as Zizek himself writes, the ahistorical element in the series Phallus, Father, Symbolic Law is located at an inverse point of rupture to that of the figures of exclusion, such as that of Woman (or Jew, any figure whose enjoyment threatens my own with castration – where ‘my own’ is axiomatically the phallic One of affluent white male privilege):

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<sup>1</sup> Jayne Svenungsson, ‘Enlightened Prejudices: Anti-Jewish Tropes in Modern Philosophy’, in *Conceptualising History: Essays on History, Memory and Representation* (Huddinge: Sodertorn University, 2011), pp. 279-90 (p. 280).

In the case of the father, we have a discrepancy between the symbolic function (of the Father) and the reality of individuals who never fit this function, while in the case of *jouissance féminine*, we have the Real of *jouissance* which eludes symbolization. In other words, in the first case, the gap is between reality and the symbolic, while in the second case, the gap is between the symbolic and the Real.<sup>2</sup>

Crudely put, it becomes evident in Lacan's work that any claim to inherit the total omnipotence of the Father of the primal horde, or, correlatively, to speak with the omniscient authority of the Law-giving Oedipal Father is doomed to be *contra tempus*, since the role of Father must be filled by the living but can only be truly efficacious in so far as it holds the place of a dead man's name. We must therefore accept that the holder of the father's place is always in some sense illegitimate, an imposture. But the propaedeutic consequence which follows from this, I argue, is *not* the one which Lacan drew later in his career (and which Žižek, along with many of his critics, embraces), i.e. the need to articulate and inculcate in our audience an alternative subjective economy, another dialectic of desire in which the access to language and desire is not fatally implicated by the transcendental authority of the Big Other (i.e. in the Symbolic efficiency of our shared reality), somehow managing to formalise and transmit the non-symbolic excess. We risk ourselves, challenge our interlocutors, open the unnameable and irreducible gap between our words and the desirous objects which they originate from and aim towards, only when we attempt to claim and hold this impossible Symbolic place – not only or always affecting to be the Father, but at least to speak in his name (as I authorise myself here in under the aegis of 'Lacan'). An act which was always already impossible, but is doubly so in a Modern era wherein the paternal authority of the master has given way to the technical expertise of the administered society, and the moral imperatives of the Oedipal compromise are subordinated to an ethic of self-realisation brutally circumscribed by the acephalic drive of Capital accumulation and its vicissitudes.

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<sup>2</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 783.

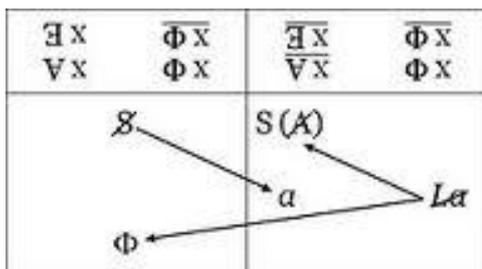
Retaining the sexed language of paternal law undoubtedly seems unnecessarily exclusionary, unconscionably reaffirming a persistent cultural association between anatomy and economic, legal and political authority, at a time when the unequal distribution of leadership positions, legal rights and social resources between the sexes, as well as the discursive and physical abuse of female bodies (to say nothing of the enduring suspicion towards non-normative sexualities, and the difficult but necessary work to address transsexual embodiments within discourses of rights and recognition as within Queer challenges to sexual regulation itself) are issues with which it is vital to engage. However, since Western liberal societies prefer to temporalise such problems as contingent remainders from less enlightened times (and places) and therefore as issues which are often subsumed to questions of immigration, assimilation, and the limits of liberal tolerance, and since (I would argue) this temporal and spatial distantiation is also at work within self-styled radical academic and activist formations – phallocentrism has long been the greatest insult that one can throw at another’s work, enough to taint and devalue it – we ought to accept the psychoanalytic notion that phallic objects are endlessly substitutable (the Phallus-in-Itself always imaginary, veiled, or vulnerable and potentially insufficient) and wonder whether the desire to brand another’s work as phallogentric is not itself an attempt to wrest the phallus from them without exposing one’s own desire?

Lacan’s theory of perversion draws on Freud’s claim that the perverse formation begins with an infant’s disavowal of the mother’s castration and the subsequent production of a fetish object as a ‘maternal phallus’ which enables the little pervert to evade the castration threat which would otherwise persuade him/her to accept socially recognised, Symbolic stand-ins for the Imaginary phallus – wealth, status, titles, etc.

In relation both to Zizek’s elaboration of critical negativity and to Caselli’s undeniably monumental work on Barnes ‘Improper Modernism’, I claim that such attempts to write and think from a subject position which takes into account its own illegitimacy leads to the inverse position of its stated non-mastery, towards a reification of their texts as space without lack, an impassive (w)hole ‘outside of which

nothing can be'.<sup>3</sup> Such theoretical constructs are to all intents and purposes a sophisticated elaboration of the basic fantasy of the 'maternal phallus'. Indeed, Žizek often thematises the close structural similarity between the position of the pervert and the psychoanalytic critique which he advocates; it is 'extremely close, almost imperceptibly close to the pervert's position', with the crucial (but arguably untenable) distinction being that 'rather than serving the fantasy, the analyst undermines it.'<sup>4</sup>

Žizek believes that the minimal difference between *object a* as fantasy and as void, without which we cannot register any difference between Hegelian logic and the pervert's fantasy, is only properly elaborated late in Lacan's teaching, when he produces his 'formulas of sexuation' to schematise the irreducible difference between masculine and feminine enjoyment, in Seminar XX (known as *Encore*, 1972-3).



Lacan explains that the right-hand, feminine side of the diagram, formalises female sexuality. 'Being the Other, in the most radical sense, in the sexual relationship, in relation to what can be said of the unconscious, woman is that which has a relationship to that Other'. Looking at the lower level of the 'diagrams of sexuation' with which he condensed the teachings of Seminar XX, we see that the feminine subject ( $La$ , because '*la femme est-elle alors "pas-toute"*'), since 'she' finds herself in the place of *object a*, is able to orient her pleasure towards the signifier of the void at the heart of the symbolic order [ $S(A)$ ]; she may equally direct her pleasure back towards the phallus ( $\Phi$ ), playing the part of a lack which could be filled with the man's desire as opposed to a void which bars all positive relationality, thereby recrossing to the

<sup>3</sup> Daniela Caselli, *Improper Modernism: Djuna Barnes's Bewildering Corpus* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2009), p. 175.

<sup>4</sup> Slavoj Žizek, 'The Sublime Theorist of Slovenia', interview with P. Canning, in *Artforum* (Mar 1993) 84-89.

masculine side of the diagram and preserving the imaginary lure of sexual complementarity (man and woman as two halves of a greater whole without lack or excess), ‘Woman has a relation with S(A), and it is already in that respect that she is doubled, that she is not-whole, since she can also have a relation with  $\Phi$ ’<sup>5</sup>.

While sharing the Lacanians’ suspicion of the immanent and innocent productivity of Deleuzian becoming, I hope throughout this thesis to think about how authority and indeed the phallus might be (or have been) deployed otherwise than as defensive insignia of male privilege and ontological security. After some theoretical groundwork, my reading of *Nightwood*’s narrative voice as it speaks of ‘the sum total of what is Jew’<sup>6</sup> will be an initial attempt.

It seems to me that, if one is serious about overcoming the disavowal/projection of violence and impotent claims to historico-political necessity endemic in much critical work with political aspirations, there is no surer way to simultaneously expose one’s complicity and to provoke aggressive contestation than to ventriloquize the voice of the Father. As I hope to make clear I am not advocating a return to the supposed stability of some ideal patriarchal culture. The standard Lacanian claim that the social link today is no longer underpinned by the figure of the sovereign master but by the expertise of techno-science is quite true, but it is also the case that today’s social link – christened ‘the university discourse’ by Lacan – nonetheless bears within it the veiled presumption of a Master (most ingeniously, Lacan suggests that the scientific process itself enacts a theological faith in God’s honesty). In such a social formation therefore, is there not something rather scandalous about adopting the position of the father, as the repressed truth of the modern self-revolutionising subject? To develop the first stages of this argument, it is the Lacan of the Father and the 1950s, when he is as close to and far from Hegel as only an errant child can be, to whom I will return.

In the opening decade of Lacan’s weekly seminar, devoted as it was to the texts that Freud bequeathed to his psychoanalytic horde, the determined goal of analysis

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<sup>5</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XX, Encore, 1972-1973*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p. 2.

was to guide the analysand to fully realise and accept the symbolic castration which submission to the Name/No-of-the-Father enjoins upon the subject, to recognise this as the condition of full participation within the inter-subjective community, as well as of entry into the field of desire. For Žižek, this earlier stage of Lacan's teaching is limited by its not-yet-Hegelian understanding of identity and/in difference: it depends upon a view of social reality as underpinned by a symbolic figure, phallus or Father (depending upon the point in the early topologies at which one encounters it) which is *sensu stricto* non-Real, but has determinate effects in the Symbolic. I will suggest that it is when we attend to this symbolic efficiency of the *Nom/Non du père* in the narrative focalisation of *Nightwood's* opening that we can allow for readings of its 'Jewish problem' which neither eliminate its Jewish figures as points of identification nor encourage an imaginary identification (with character or author) which places its choices beyond critique. Speaking from the position of Father, we claim a legitimate, and therefore contestable (for a claim to il-legitimacy will never be in dispute), reckoning with the psychobiographical and historical counternarratives that have accreted to the Barnesean phallus.

Backtracking marginally, I insist that it is not my (conscious) intention to idealise Lacan's authority, nor to maintain the Father as the ahistorical condition of all communal relations. My claim is that in his work of the 1950s he elaborated a discourse – under the name of the Paternal Metaphor and working in the name of Freud as the primal Father of psychoanalysis, whose hidden treasures Lacan would excavate as if registering them for the first time – that recognised how closely tied the human being in language seems to be to questions of paternal inheritance, and that his subsequent attempts to elaborate a mode of existence which would counter the law of the Father were as heroic as they were misdirected, and only terminated in the deadlock of Absolute Knowledge which he had earlier derided, when he diagnosed Hegel's endpoint as a phantasmatic collapse of the Real and Symbolic orders and a return to the imposition of self-certain authority which the Freudian unconscious had thrown into crisis.

In the teachings prior to the late 1960s, every statement which authorises itself on behalf of a primal father (who alone is not castrated by the cut of the signifier into

reality) lays itself open to opposition or interpretation, for it risks the possibility that the veil over its phallic potency may be lifted. It is a discourse which takes risks; performatively penetrating the ‘meaning’ of an object, it opens critical subjectivity and objectivity onto wider contexts and debates (sexuality, history, metaphysics, discursive formations, etc.). These issues can only arise *as* resistances to critical mastery; only in so far as some castrated and castrating authoritative reading fails to account for them to the next reader’s satisfaction.

In summary then, a phallic reading always leaves something to be desired. But, in Seminar XX, Lacan suggests that by so doing it stands as an obstacle to revolutionary change, and he proposes another mode of relation to an object. A non-phallic, feminine jouissance which, because not oriented towards the phallus, is able to discover a mode of enjoyment which breaks with any imaginary complementarity in which male and female could fuse into a whole without excess or lack. It can in a sense let the Other be other, because ‘Not-all’ is all there is. My impression, however, is that today’s critics predominantly enjoy themselves from this quasi-mystical position of non-mastery which Lacan nominated as feminine, and doing so they seem to inoculate themselves against intractable problems of interpretation with which they claim to be wrestling (complicity, illegibility, impropriety). This is not accidental, for the logic of ‘Not-all without exception’ (unlike the phallic ‘All + external enabling condition’), shifts the position of enunciation to a point where the speaking subject is no longer susceptible to questions of its Truth vis a vis subjective desire.

### **1. So how do you refute a claim to illegitimacy?**

In a useful overview of contemporary trends within Djuna Barnes scholarship, Cathryn Setz takes as her starting point the ferment of the early nineteen nineties, when the field began to ‘take shape’ following the publication ‘seminal’ critical anthology *Silence and Power*, in which Jane Marcus’ influential essay was collected<sup>7</sup>. She

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<sup>7</sup> Cathryn Setz, “‘The Great Djuna’: Two Decades of Barnes’ Studies, 1993-2013’, *Literature Compass*, 11:6 (2013), 367-87 (p. 370).

proceeds to descry three broad periods. 1993-99 witnessed a proliferation of feminist engagements with her work, which included ‘[s]cholars [who] were not only seeking the “rescue” of Barnes from oblivion, but also taking the measure of her writerly deployments – and critiques – of pathologising discourses around gender and sexuality’<sup>8</sup>. 2000-07 saw a broadening and deepening of the field, stimulated by fresh scholarly approaches in the wider arena of literary Modernism which had (re)proved the historical and aesthetic ‘give’ of the ‘Modernist’ label, most particularly ‘the renegotiation of a rigid (male) modernist canon’<sup>9</sup>. These disciplinary shifts facilitated newly confident readings of Barnes’ oeuvre in which prior assumptions about both the marginality of her writing and the emancipatory valence of its treatment of marginalised figures could themselves be simultaneously, if often non-contiguously, rethought. Finally, on or about 2008, an ‘exciting new phase’ of scholarship began, characterised by method more than by theory or aim, that takes its cues from studies of queer sociality, on the one hand, and an ‘archival turn’<sup>10</sup> (towards Barnes’ intertexts, editorial relations, publication histories, correspondences, etc.) on the other – methodological trends which converge in the most recent full length monographs by Caselli and Taylor (both of whom will provide important debating partners in this thesis).

Like the negative movement within a dialectic, Lara Trubowitz’s contribution on *Nightwood* and anti-Semitism falls, temporally and thematically, into Setz’s middle sequence, 2000-08, for which ‘the interrogation of Barnes’s writing of othered subjects – without falling back on an assumption of the radical or prescient nature of a work of literature’<sup>11</sup> is a common identifying trait. Setz commends the paper for its contribution to the common stock of aesthetic and cognitive capital, ‘Trubowitz’s reading enables a deeper appreciation of the text [...] [by] develop[ing] a critical strategy unafraid to deal with authorial blind spots and fallibility when it comes to early twentieth century attitudes towards race’<sup>12</sup>. Yet there is something discordantly presentist in such an accounting method. The Owl of Minerva takes flight only at the dawn of liberal tolerance, as early twentieth century ‘authorial blind spots’ are troped

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<sup>8</sup> Setz, p. 371.

<sup>9</sup> Setz, p. 374.

<sup>10</sup> Setz, p. 378.

<sup>11</sup> Setz, p. 374.

<sup>12</sup> Setz, p. 374.

as benighted 'attitudes' to be fearlessly dealt with, while an 'exciting new phase' in academic scholarship displaces and mysteriously builds upon (sublates?) Trubowitz's fearless questions and the 'strategy' she developed to deal with them. If the paper did indeed contribute a strategy, and if such a strategy was in fact 'enabl[ing]', then it could usefully be indexed to a developmental stage in the 'rich and fertile body of work'<sup>13</sup> that Barnes studies will have become via an autopoietic generation of 'emergent and highly productive strands of scholarship'.<sup>14</sup> But I find it curious indeed to gloss the paper in this way. I shall proceed to argue that Trubowitz is better understood as an essential but inassimilable excrescence growing upon the Barnesean corpus, one which can only be recognised as living element within the rich and fertile productive body if it is *misrecognised* in something like the Lacanian sense of the term.

In the past twenty years it has become a commonplace of Djuna Barnes scholarship that her representations of marginal identity - gay, lesbian, Jewish, black, disabled - appear worryingly implicated in reactionary, even fascistic, discourses. As we shall shortly discuss when we return to the depiction of 'Jewishness' in the novel's first pages, the charge is not without foundation. This aspect of her work sits uneasily alongside the reputation which she acquired through earlier feminist readings of her work, such as Jane Marcus's claim for *Nightwood* as a 'feminist-anarchist call for freedom from fascism'.<sup>15</sup>

Predominantly, later critics have responded to this dissonance by *putting to use* various post-structuralist reading strategies in order to show that Barnes' subversiveness lies not in progressive representations of Otherness but, more 'radically', in formally disruptive writing practices – deliberate catachreses which bring the very means of representation into a kind of self-aware crisis, exposing the phantasmatic violence behind any attempt to 'capture' life in coherent, normative subjectivity.

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<sup>13</sup> Setz, p. 377.

<sup>14</sup> 'Hegel is – to use today's terms – the ultimate thinker of autopoiesis, of the process of the emergence of necessary features out of chaotic contingency, the thinker of contingency's gradual self-organisation, of the gradual rise of order out of chaos.' *Less Than Nothing*, p. 467.

<sup>15</sup> Jane Marcus, 'Laughing at Leviticus: *Nightwood* as Women's Circus Epic' in *Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes* ed. Mary Lynn Broe (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 221-251 (p. 221).

Thus Susana S. Martins' 'Gender Trouble and Lesbian Desire in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*' (1999) sets out the potentially damning accusation that the text's portrayal of Jewish characters bears an 'anti-Semitic tone [which] has disturbed many of Barnes's readers'<sup>16</sup>, but the charge is brought against *Nightwood* in a purely performative display, a show trial in which the accused would always already have been totally acquitted. Martins calls star witnesses Judith Butler and Teresa de Lauretis to furnish Barnes with an unanswerable alibi, plus letters of recommendation to the Anti-Racist Alliance and LGBT associations worldwide, for: 'as soon as [Barnes] invokes the category of Jew, she troubles it as an 'essential' identity'.<sup>17</sup>

She [Barnes] works through and against patriarchal structures, sometimes seeming complicit with patriarchal discourse, in an attempt to articulate the woman-to-woman desire that could hardly exist [...] at the time of the novel's conception and writing.<sup>18</sup>

'Seeming complicit'. Where Barnes troubles us, we can be reassured that it is only insofar as we have missed the ways in which 'tropes of theatricality, framing, performance [...] suggest that Barnes recognizes a certain freedom from regulatory categories of identity (like "lesbian") in the play among signifiers, in the slippage between mask(s) and performer.'<sup>19</sup>

Sure enough, Lacan takes his place among the citable authorities in the show trial of Djuna Barnes vs Progressive Liberal Academia. In a single gesture, Merrill Cole's 2006 paper would secure the talents of both Barnes and Lacan in the economy of 'social change':

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16 Susana S. Martins, 'Gender Trouble and Lesbian Desire in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 20:3 (1999), 108-126 (p. 112).

17 Martins, p. 112.

18 Martins, p. 110.

19 Martins, p. 123.

I contend that Lacanian psychoanalysis offers a more compelling way to read *Nightwood* than the nostalgic and restitutive approaches offered by Jane Marcus [...] Nostalgia would eulogize, holding tight to a lost otherness, while Barnes novel celebrates that alterity's escape. Historical narrative that omits the unconscious – that closes the gaps, quiets disruption, and stops slippage – shuts itself to the mechanisms of social change.<sup>20</sup>

Rather than some comforting flight into nostalgia, we look backwards towards Lacan (who doesn't seem too unpalatable here – not once you can summarise him confidently in your own work) and he serves to reassure us that something valuable, revolutionary, new can be drawn from *Nightwood*. For Cole, Jane Marcus was right, in her way, to call *Nightwood* a 'cry of freedom', except she lacked the conceptual nous to locate that freedom ('alterity's escape') precisely in the unsavoury political symbolism which Barnes' text gives full reign to:

[A] black circus performer's penis spells out for all to see the sexual threat that the performer poses to racist society, but that spelling out renders the threat void: the offending object, naughtily visible but forever flaccid, is the sign of its own impotence. Yet these displays serve an aesthetic purpose, deploying homophobia, misogyny, and racism as the means to something else entirely: the apprehension of the uncanny, the enactment of a perversity just beyond what language can symbolize.<sup>21</sup>

If this were so, what status would the critic's own flaccid member (or indeed, Barnes') enjoy on this reading, when s/he 'purposefully deploy[s]' the symbol of male (im)potence?

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20 Merrill Cole, 'Backwards Ventriloquy: The Historical Uncanny in Barnes's *Nightwood*' *Twentieth Century Literature*, 52:4 (2006), 391-412 (p. 391).

21 Cole, p. 391-92.

Lara Trubowitz's paper also explores the disquieting sense of complicity with anti-Semitic discourses, but is noteworthy because it refuses to guarantee that her interrogation will lead to a more generative apprehension of the *prima materia*. Unlike Martins she departs from the view that one purifies Barnes' text by schematising its purposeful traversal of racist discourse and ultimate arrival at the utopic exit. If for Cole (but not only Cole) Barnes drives the reader to the point of anti-semitic focalisation in order to destabilise that position, Trubowitz argues that the problem with *Nightwood* is the reflexive shift from the Jew as (parasitic, inauthentic, decadent) figure to a novelistic frame in which these pathological traits convert into the very aesthetic form of the text. Those literary qualities which Martins adduces in the text's defence – its refusal to essentialise a Jewish 'type' inhering extra-discursively in the body or soul of her Jewish protagonists, the deliberate foregrounding of the slipperiness and unreliability of narrative – indicate to Trubowitz the profundity of the novel's colonisation and reification of Jewish history and experience. For while Barnes displays a belief in the literary usefulness or productivity of 'Jewish' traits, 'seemingly diverging, like her fellow modernist James Joyce, from prevailing anti-Semitic views of Jews as inherently degenerative or unproductive',<sup>22</sup> her text nevertheless 'transforms Jews from a racial or religious group into a narratological category, turning qualities she describes as distinctly Jewish into traits that can be given to non-Jews, even given to the narrative of *Nightwood* itself'.<sup>23</sup>

On this reading, the novel subsumes and erases what she describes (a little too hastily) as 'the actual histories of Jews from which such traits are drawn'. She further contends that it is '[s]uch loosening of Jewishness from any actual Jews [which] grounds *Nightwood* in a seemingly paradoxical equivalence between the statements "Jewishness is everywhere" and "Jews are nowhere"',<sup>24</sup> since Barnes 'ultimately employs both individual Jews and Jewish identity more generally [in the service of] the transformation of Jewish history and identity into a conceptual foundation, or analogy, for the art of storytelling, an art that in *Nightwood* is tantamount to self-erasure'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lara Trubowitz, 'In Search of "the Jew" in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*: Jewishness, Anti-Semitism, Structure and Style', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 51:2 (2005), 311-334 (p. 312).

<sup>23</sup> Trubowitz, p. 312.

<sup>24</sup> Trubowitz, p. 312.

<sup>25</sup> Trubowitz, p. 313.

In *Anti-Nazi Modernism*, Mia Spiro's treatment of the problematic erasure of Jewishness in the novel adds convincing and wide ranging historical context, fleshing out a 'Jewish living culture'<sup>26</sup> (passingly invoked by Trubowitz) with which Barnes' writing largely failed to engage, as well as the wider 'mythic and stereotypical tropes'<sup>27</sup> that Barnes' text draws on to determine her Jewish figures. Yet, despite or because of this approach, she too takes Trubowitz's central argument lightly – that the figure of "the Jew" functions not only at the level of theme or symbolism but is foundational to the novel's form, structure and aesthetic effects. Similar to the gloss in Setz's review, Spiro summarises Trubowitz's position as follows: 'the story of Felix as "Wandering Jew" becomes *a symbol for how the narrative functions as a whole*'.<sup>28</sup> While she does not elaborate a theory of symbolism here, it would appear she means that it is emblematic, rather than constitutive, of the narrative structure. As such she uses 'symbol' and 'metaphor' interchangeably when referring to the Trubowitz position. Again:

[A]lthough Barnes' Jew is a key metaphor for her narrative strategy, ultimately her method of using "the Jew" as a symbol becomes complicit in eliminating the "real" Jew from both official history and his [sic] own subjective Jewish story.<sup>29</sup>

This matters because Spiro's conception (of Trubowitz) explicitly pursues a goal of isolating these anti-semitic elements from the novel's 'overall anti-fascist strategy[y]'<sup>30</sup> in kind of trope-ectomy performed to ensure that the 'rich and fertile body' of Barnes' studies is unshadowed by morbidity.

If the Jew is used as a thematic tool, how do we as readers undo the erasure of the historical reality of Jewish experience in the 1930s?<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Mia Spiro, *Anti-Nazi Modernism: The Challenges of Resistance in 1930s Fiction* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2013), p. 161.

<sup>27</sup> Spiro, p. 156.

<sup>28</sup> Spiro, pp. 156-57.

<sup>29</sup> Spiro, p. 158

<sup>30</sup> Spiro, p. 156. My italics.

<sup>31</sup> Spiro, p. 157.

A knotty enough question; and in untangling it Spiro elucidates the archives of Jewish history/ies with ethical force and historical sensitivity. But it is also clear that in framing her research this way ('the Jew is used as a thematic tool') she avoids becoming entangled in Trubowitz's strongest claim – that Barnes' narrative strategy is ultimately inseparable from (because constituted by) the unfortunate Jewish symbolism which "represents" it – which is disavowed once again.

Before I elaborate my own reading of *Nightwood's* complex relationship to anti-semitic fantasy, then, I want to return and dwell in more detail on Žižek's exploration of the theme, especially his strong claim that we must reject any ethics of reading that is based on a recognition of the other's alterity and, concomitant to this, that appeals to 'the actual histories of Jews' necessarily support the very fantasies they were intended to undermine.

## **2. Can we enjoy more than the Other?**

In *The Metastases of Enjoyment* (1994), Žižek formalises three stages proper to the logic of anti-semitism. They progress logically, but not chronologically per se, since the first stage depends upon the circular logic of the final stage, the fully formed fantasy.

1. Immediation-abbreviation: Here the Jew functions as a 'marker [...] whose content (i.e. what its marker designates)' is nothing more than the series of other markers which it designates as a totality. To be 'avaricious, profiteering, plotting, dirty...' *is called Jewish*.
2. Explication: The formula is reversed so that the series of markers now explains the abbreviating marker. So, we call someone *a Jew because he is* 'avaricious, profiteering, plotting, dirty...' (This is the level of discourse upon which, in Žižek's view, Anglo-American cultural studies seeks to intervene.)

3. Reflexive determination: The classical Hegelian sublation (negation of the negation) in which ‘explication and abbreviation occur simultaneously’<sup>32</sup>. Result: *Person X is ‘avaricious, profiteering, plotting, dirty...’ because he is a Jew.* (Only at this stage, where fantasy has intervened to plug the gap in the discursive object do we have anti-semitism in the full horror of its modern form, ‘Insofar as the Jews were identified by a series of their properties, the goal was to convert them, to turn them into Christians; but from the moment Jewishness pertained to their very being, only annihilation could solve the “Jewish question”’<sup>33</sup>.)

At the third stage, recapitulating the dialectic of desire which Lacan described in the late 1950s, Žižek is able to argue that ‘the Jew’ is functioning simultaneously as a master signifier (one among a chain of signifiers which determines the meaning of the entire series) and as the infamous *objet petit a*, a fantasy object which subsists as an elusive something extra appended to the material phenomena which embody it (*‘fantasy is ultimately, at its most elementary, the stuff which fills in the void of the Master-Signifier’*<sup>34</sup>). Without the fascinating presence of the fantasy object, the Lacanian subject would be brought into a terrifying proximity to the fundamental incoherence of the signifying system in terms of which its will is formed. This is why, in the graphs of desire which he developed in the 1950s, Lacan inserts his formula for fantasy in terms of the lozenge which links-separates the subject divided by language from the object of ‘his’ desire which sustains ‘him’ ( $\$ \diamond a$ ). It is also the meaning of Lacan’s memorable apostrophe to the other being to whom my *objet a* becomes attached – ‘I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you – the *objet a* – I mutilate you’.<sup>35</sup>

But it is Žižek’s orientation towards Lacan’s later work<sup>36</sup> which leads him to conclude that the final goal of ideological critique, like that of psychoanalytic treatment, must be to induce the subject to ‘reach the point at which he [sic]

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<sup>32</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 48.

<sup>33</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2006), p. 290.

<sup>34</sup> *Parallax View*, p.373. Italics original.

<sup>35</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 268.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Hegel’s logic (“God prior to the creation of the universe”) endeavours to accomplish what Lacan later had in mind with “mathemes”: it does not provide any kind of “horizon of meaning”, it simply renders the empty, meaningless frame later filled out by some symbolic content (the subject matter of the Philosophy of Spirit).’ (*Metastases*, footnote, p. 51).

experiences his impossible identity with this absolute otherness'.<sup>37</sup> In turn, this disallows interventions, such as Trubowitz's criticism of *Nightwood*, which rest upon the normative ethical criterion that particular historical experiences of an identity group *must not* be collapsed into reductive binaries in which Jews function as *the Other* (of national unity, of sexual oblativity, of Christian charity...). Such a defence of the other(s) is said to be inauthentic because it merely pushes the fundamental fantasy (\$<a) further into the cultural unconscious.

Zizek has contemporary liberal rights discourse in mind here (with which he often seems to conflate, peremptorily, any ethics of alterity, from Levinas to Butler), when he claims that to defend a marginalised or minority social identity in terms of its inappropriable difference merely disavows the terror of an absolutely Other being which torments us with its inscrutable mode of enjoyment. Returning to the Hegelian dialectic, he can say that such an ethical stance halts at the second stage, the negation of a transparent essence by the mediation of language, saying, in effect: 'You call someone a Jew because they are "avaricious, profiteering, plotting, dirty..."', yet tested against reality these predicates do not fit the subject "Jew" in the way your definition presupposes, since (most) Jews do not possess such attributes.'<sup>38</sup>

Where Zizek reproaches the Levinasian tradition is in thinking that the solution to the undecidability of any debate about the representation of difference is to take what might appear to be an embarrassing aporia of post-Kantian epistemology (the intransigence of the Thing-in-Itself before human understanding) and turn it into the inviolable horizon of ethics. For such a tradition one assumes the insufficiency of representation to essence and critiques the urge to mastery which it finds in any claim to positive knowledge of an Other. Nevertheless, in terms of Hegel's dialectic one forecloses the negation of the negation by refusing to reconnect the fantasy about the object to the Thing-in-Itself.

Towards the end of the *Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), Hegel's theory of the Sublime is privileged as a crucial reflexive shift in a theoretical tradition which

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<sup>37</sup> ME, footnote, p. 50.

<sup>38</sup> I note that Trubowitz's argument does not explicitly articulate such a statement. And she and Zizek would surely agree that to engage in the debate about the adequacy of anti-semitic tropes to the reality of Jews-in-the-world is already to risk an argument on racist terms, insofar as it leaves out the perspective from which an external object comes to embody all that arouses disgust.

reserves a noumenal Thing-in-Itself as a mystical beyond. At this point that tendency is identified with Kantian aesthetics (but when his subject is Lacan, a parallel tendency to disavow the extra-discursive is represented by a ‘post-structuralism’ taken to be exemplarily Derridean). Protected from the disenchanting gaze of the Kantian philosopher is the ‘fundamental fantasy’ which sustains the subject’s disavowed reliance on *object a*, i.e. the little piece of the Real which appears as the externalised remainder of the process of subjectification. The subject’s ultimate support, its master-signifier is (from the perspective of determinate reflection which only Hegel – who is also, here, the ‘late’ Lacan – recognises) formally equivalent to the empty space in which the fantasy object finds its being.

In demonstration, Žizek stages the dialectic which we summarised above, this time deployed upon a logical teleology of religious forms which correlates the movement from Greek, to Jewish, to Christian religion to three orders of (rather broadly defined) hermeneutic procedures. In each series Kant/Derrida are implicitly assigned to the intermediary, Jewish, position. The religious dialectic, then:

1. Positing reflection – Greek pagan religion in which ‘the plurality of spiritual individuals (gods) is immediately “posited” as the given spiritual essence of the world.’<sup>39</sup>
2. External reflection – Jewish Yahweh as unrepresentable, infinite non-being; ‘the (Jewish) notion of God as radical Otherness, as unrepresentable, still remains the extreme point of the logic of representation.’<sup>40</sup>
3. Determinate reflection – Christian embodiment of God abolishes the bad infinity of the infinitely other: ‘God who created the world is Jesus, this miserable individual crucified together with two robbers . . . Herein lies the ‘last secret’ of dialectical speculation [...] this very negativity, to attain its “being-for-itself”, must embody itself again in some miserable, radically contingent corporeal leftover.’<sup>41</sup>

And the hermeneutic:

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<sup>39</sup> Slavoj Žizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), p. 228.

<sup>40</sup> *Sublime*, p. 232.

<sup>41</sup> *Sublime*, p. 234.

1. Positing reflection – naïve reading, ‘claiming immediate access to the meaning of the text’.
2. External reflection – ‘transposes [...] the “true meaning” of the text into an unobtainable beyond, making of it a transcendent “Thing-in-Itself”, in relation to which any particular reading can only reveal ‘partial aspects deformed by our subjective perspective’.
3. Determinate reflection – Shift in perspective on the ‘partial, distorted’ readings in 2, to recognise the essence of the text in these distortions: ‘to become aware [...] how the “essence” of this essence itself consists in this series of external determinations.’<sup>42</sup>

We can thus see why Žižek’s solution to anti-semitism is, pace Trubowitz, to negate the negation of the anti-semitic logic. The position of determinate reflection is reached only when I accept my underlying collusion within the fantasy. Possibly the ultimate example of this logic appears in *The Parallax View* (2006), where he avers that the only solution to anti-semitism (following his analysis that anti-semitic determination of the Jew constitutes him is the ‘limit-obstacle... constitutive exception’ to a unified community) is to reverse the anti-semitic determinate reflection into the reflexive determination: ‘what if this is the “solution to the Jewish problem”—that we all turn into “Jews,” into objets petit a, into exceptions?’<sup>43</sup> It is not enough to oppose fantasy to an ungraspable reality, for the only way to ‘open up the possibility of undermining the hold a fantasy exerts over us’ is to ‘*embrac[e] simultaneously, within the same space, the multitude of inconsistent fantasy elements*’.<sup>44</sup> The Jew is Not-All and so we are Not-all-Jews, are we not? But to embrace Jewishness as an empty, inconsistent fantasy suggests precisely the kind of Christian appropriation of the Jewish identity which Barnes also identifies and (if we take Trubowicz’s reading seriously) repeats.

Žižek’s response to such potential criticism is to reaffirm that *since* the correct view of such a Christian universality is Hegel’s (i.e. an historical affirmation the unbridgeable difference between the subject and its predicates, the universal and the

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<sup>42</sup> *Sublime*, p. 242.

<sup>43</sup> *Parallax View*, p. 259.

<sup>44</sup> *Parallax View*, p. 290. Italics original.

particular, the Hegelian Subject and Substance, as the only meaning of the holy spirit: an incarnate God, abandoned by himself, giving us the Hegelian truth that the universality proper to the Subject is the ‘internal self-split of Substance, the lack of identity within itself.’<sup>45</sup>), the accusation that such universality erases or subsumes the subjectivity of the non-Christian has misguidedly judged a reflexive determination from the (still phallic) viewpoint of external reflection, based yet on the unmediated opposition of representation/reality, inside/outside, universal/exception. Once we recognise that the universal can appear at all only as the Not-all, we recognise it as a site of rupture between itself and its determinations. It appears only retroactively as the screen against which those beings without a prior symbolic place struggle for recognition, making itself visible as a smear or a crack in the transparent surface. Seen aright, we cannot possibly view this ‘Christian’ sublation of abstract ‘Jewish’ transcendental Being as an erasure or overwriting Jewish identity, for ‘the whole point of [...] struggling universality is that true universality and partiality do not exclude each other, but *universal Truth is accessible only from a partial engaged subjective position.*’ On the one hand, Žižek’s refutation seems to imply a position of non-mastery which is pretty close to a standard liberal tolerance in relation to Jewishness: from the viewpoint of this struggling universality of the Not-all, the Christian-Jewish antagonism is seen as inherent to the universal frame itself, so while the Christian perspective naturally perceives itself as having the superior position vis a vis absolute knowledge, it does not need to ‘resolve’ the antagonism by attempting to destroy the Jewish particularity which forms a part of its own struggling identity. Simultaneously, his more ‘radical’ reading of his own position is that only from the reflexive standpoint of Christian universalism is it possible to escape the false (masculine) universalism which requires an external exception. For me, the question remains whether a teaching which makes a partial, engaged subjective position the condition and the truth of universality does indeed draw the neophyte towards such a radical break with their own narcissistic preoccupation with their Symbolic role. Does the Not-All undermine a fantasy of an immediate, positive universal order in which they can fully, phallic-ly, fulfil the function of the Father in the place of the (m)Other’s (w)hole, or can a fantasy

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<sup>45</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 119.

of being the part-of-no-part which breaks open the Symbolic frame not function as a properly postmodern defence against the universality of (the fantasy of) castration?

I am sketching out the logic by which Žižek's reading of Hegel allows him to elaborate both a very particular critique of Anglo-American critical theory and an increasingly dominant understanding of Lacan based on the priority of 'late', radical teachings of the mid-sixties through the early seventies over the work which makes up the bulk of the material collected in the *Écrits* (delivered originally in the 1950s and early 60s). On his reading, those earlier teachings (which elaborate the dialectic of desire relative to phallic jouissance) have not yet escaped the residual normativity of x (x = Post-Freudian normativity, Levi-Straussian structuralism, Kojève's misreading of Hegel, post-structuralist obscurantism. Delete as appropriate).

With regard to the later teaching, most particularly *Seminar XX: Encore*, I accept Žižek's claim that Lacan's 'discovery' of another mode of enjoyment, a specifically female jouissance which is not concerned with having or being the phallus, approximates far more closely to Hegelian Absolute Knowledge than does the earlier Lacan's explicit use of Hegelian concepts. Therefore, I return now to Lacan's discussion of Hegel in 1960's 'The Subversion of the Subject' in order to address my concerns about Žižek's radical subject whose enjoyment is Not-All bound to the Symbolic, and to test his proposition that we subvert anti-semitic political fantasy only when we can thus posit the Jew (not simply the distorted representation of the Jew) as Not-All instead of identifying our fantasy object with an immediately given Otherness.

Žižek's claims Lacan's references to Hegel in the 1950s display a misreading of Hegel's dialectic. What then is this reading? When for example, Lacan addresses a philosophical colloquium on '*La Dialectique*' in 1960, later published as 'The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious', he suggests that the Freudian unconscious displaces the Hegelian dialectic because in Hegel, 'from the outset and right to the end, the subject knows what he wants', whereas with Freud the end point of self-knowledge, Being-for-Itself, falls away. '[D]esire becomes bound up at that junction with the Other's desire, but that the desire to know

lies in this loop.’<sup>46</sup> The Other’s desire lies in the domain of signification, as the beyond of any articulation of demand – my beloved is saying this, but what do they really mean to say to me?

The aim of Lacanian analysis, at this stage anyway, is not to bring the subject to the point of absolute knowledge (Lacan sniggers, ‘What is this, if not a subject finalized in his self-identity?’<sup>47</sup>), but to bring the subject into a dimension of ‘Truth’ with regards to a knowledge (in the original French, ‘*connaissance*’, knowledge as articulated ‘science’ of the Real, not as experience derived from phenomena) which remains necessarily unconscious – ‘Truth draws its guarantee from somewhere other than the Reality it concerns: it draws it from Speech. Just as it is from Speech that Truth receives the mark that instates it in a fictional structure’.<sup>48</sup> In the dimension of language, the subject does not come to know the unconscious but to organise itself in a relation to an unconscious which is True, not in a veridical sense, nor as a doctrinal absolute, but True because it is that in the language of the Other which causes the speaker to ‘tremble due to the vacillation that comes back to him from his own statement’.<sup>49</sup>

This is how Lacan reads Freud’s “*Wo es war, soll Ich werden*” – no colonising Ego/I arriving at self-knowledge and taking ownership of its bespoke unconscious, only an empty I *coming to be* in the place where the unconscious as ground has already fallen away; ‘Where it was just now, where it was for a short while, between an extinction that is still glowing and an opening up that stumbles, / can come into being by disappearing from my statement’.

The ‘I’ only attains such Truth in the failure of synthesis, when speech bears witness to the ‘cut’ which the (Symbolic) signifier makes into the signified. The signified is not by any means the Real, In-Itself or For-Itself, any more than Lacan believes Hegel’s absolute knowledge (of reality as the mediation of Positing and Reflecting consciousness) could be; it is not an extra-linguistic ground of signification except insofar as it fails, falls away, recedes. The conclusion he draws from this is that analysis cannot possibly proceed to the point of absolute knowledge where the subject

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<sup>46</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious’, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (London and New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006) pp. 671-702 (p. 679).

<sup>47</sup> Subversion, p. 675.

<sup>48</sup> Subversion, p. 684.

<sup>49</sup> Subversion, p. 679.

abolishes itself by recognising finally its coordination with a determinable unconscious structure; every analysis begins afresh because its job is to take its bearings from the ‘holes in meaning’<sup>50</sup> which speech reveals.

Maybe it for this reason that Lacan (again, I must specify the Lacan circa 1960) claims that what is in Hegel the ultimate stage of the Spirit’s coming to Absolute Knowledge, the ‘movement of action’ through which ‘Spirit *is* in such a way that it is *really there*, that is, when it raises its existence into thought and thereby into absolute *antithesis*, and returns out of this antithesis, in and through the antithesis itself’,<sup>51</sup> is only, for Lacan’s Freud, the opening move of an analyst’s discourse. Moreover, its function is not one of revelation, return or synthesis; it is the necessary false start which precipitates speech towards the crisis out of which Truth falls.

[H]as anyone observed, in criticising Freud’s approach [...] that what surprises us as a preliminary indoctrination is due simply to the fact that Freud proceeds in exactly the opposite order? For he begins by introducing the patient to an initial situating of his position in reality *\reel\* even if this situating leads to a precipitation—I would even go so far as to say a systematization—of symptoms. [...] I have long stressed the Hegelian procedure at work in this reversal of positions of the beautiful soul in relation to the reality he accuses. The point is not to adapt him to it, but to show him that he is only too well adapted to it, since he assists in its very fabrication.

But the path to be followed with the other ends here. For the transference has already done its job, demonstrating that what is at stake is something altogether different than relations between the ego and the world.<sup>52</sup>

In the contemporaneous ‘Position of the Unconscious’ (1960), Lacan can therefore claim that he has utilised Hegel’s method, except that, by reinscribing the dialectic within the (linguistic) unconscious, he retains, with and against Hegel’s reflexive determination, the dimension of the Other which frustrates any systematic drive towards ‘ideal’ synthesis:

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<sup>50</sup> Subversion, p. 678.

<sup>51</sup> Georg W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 485.

<sup>52</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of its Power’, *Écrits*, pp. 489-542 (pp. 498-99).

[M]y use of Hegel's phenomenology bore no allegiance to his system, but [...] the statements Hegel makes, even if one sticks to the text, provide the opportunity to always say something Other. Something Other which corrects their fantasmatic link with synthesis, while preserving the effect they have of exposing the lures of identification.

That is my *Aufhebung* [sublation], which transforms Hegel's (his own lure) into an occasion to point out—in lieu and place of the leaps of an "ideal progress"—the avatars of a lack.<sup>53</sup>

Zizek, then, in positing the complementarity of Hegelian philosophy and Lacanian analysis as mutual elucidating hermeneutics, shows us that Lacan's work at this stage is *insufficiently* Hegelian, since Lacan has been led astray by the interpretations of Hegel which dominated French intellectual life in the mid-century, those of Hippolyte and Kojève, both of whom misrepresented Hegel as a “panlogist” who devours and mortifies the living substance of the particular’.<sup>54</sup>

Zizek argues that Lacan is truly Hegel when he moves away from a ‘structuralist’ conception of psychoanalysis in which the end goal is determined by the acceptance of symbolic castration as the condition of the subject's desire, towards a more revolutionary notion of a decisive moment of subjective destitution in which the subject confronts the void at the heart of the symbolic, the empty shell around which the particular content of one's fantasy has been constructed, and effectively abolishes oneself as a subject but in so doing one accesses the Real of the Drive. The teaching on sexualisation, with the Woman as Not-All, represents the culmination of Lacan's development towards a properly Hegelian dialectic in which the confrontation with the Real lack in the Symbolic Other corresponds to the negation of the negation:

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<sup>53</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘Position of the Unconscious’, *Écrits*, pp. 703-21 (p. 710).

<sup>54</sup> Slavoj Zizek, ‘Lacan: at What Point is He Hegelian’, trans. Rex Butler and Scott Stephens <<http://www.lacan.com/zizlacan1.htm>>.

Insofar as the symbolic constitutes itself by way of positing some element as the traumatic non-symbolizable Thing, as its constitutive exception, then the symbolic gesture par excellence is the drawing of a line of separation between the symbolic and the real [as, for Žižek, the earlier Lacan, who has criticised Hegel, continues to do]; the real, on the contrary, is not external to the symbolic as some kind of substance resisting symbolisation – the real is the symbolic itself qua “not-all”, i.e. insofar as it lacks the constitutive exception.<sup>55</sup>

While Lacan never declares a return to Hegel in his later work, the shifting emphasis of his analytic interventions (away from the Symbolic towards the Real) in the last years of the Seminar do arguably reflect a ‘Hegelian’ understanding of this dimension: not as that which precedes or escapes Symbolic closure, but as that which negates the negation which is Symbolic castration. Certainly this is Žižek’s wager; ‘From this perspective [that of the late Lacan], Absolute Knowledge appears as the Hegelian name for that which Lacan outlined [...] [as] the final moment of the analytic process, the experience of lack in the Other’.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, it is when Lacan begins to articulate a *jouissance* beyond that of the Symbolic phallus – that experienced by the female subject to the extent that she experiences herself as the negative, or symptom of phallic *jouissance* – that his teaching attains a point of view whereby Hegelian reconciliation can appear as a final renunciation of mastery:

[Lacan’s] Hegelianism is certainly not where one expects to find it – that is to say, in his explicit references to Hegel – but precisely in the last stage of his teaching, in his logic of the not-all, in the emphasis placed on the Real and the lack in the Other.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Slavoj Žižek, ‘Woman is One of the Names-of-the-Father, or How Not to Misread Lacan’s Formulas of Sexuation’, *Lacanian Ink*, 10 (1995),

<http://www.lacn.com/zizwoman.htm#14x>

<sup>56</sup> ‘Lacan: at What Point is He Hegelian?’

<sup>57</sup> ‘Lacan: at What Point is He Hegelian?’

### **3. Authority is Not-All**

What kind of non-mastery does this Other logic produce? According to Suzanne Barnard,

Lacan suggests that feminine structure (and hence, Other jouissance) is produced in relation to a “set” that *does not* exist on the basis of an external, constitutive exception. In other words, it is produced in relation to a set not haunted by a figure operating as a limit. [...] she is in the phallic function *altogether* or, in Lacan’s words, “She is *not* not at all there. She is there in full [*à plein*]” (Seminar XX, 71/77). Here Lacan seems to be playing with the way in which the double negation—“not not at all there”—works to effect a kind of affirmation, a strange form of positivity. The feminine subject inhabits the symbolic in this form, not as a simple absence but as a mode of presence that emerges from “beyond the veil” of phallic presence. In other words, the feminine subject is (wholly) alienated in the symbolic in such a way as to have a different relation to its limit. By being in the symbolic “without exception” then, the feminine subject has a relation to the Other that produces another “unlimited” form of jouissance.<sup>58</sup>

This notion of feminine jouissance, of a Real which eludes Symbolisation (save at the level of Hegel’s speculative idealism), functions here to close the gap within the subject between the total Symbolic system in which he/she is located and the unsymbolised remainder which continually evades self-identity. Such a phantasy of “unlimited” presence’ is surely redolent of the perverse belief in the maternal phallus as guarantee that the Other is not lacking, and therefore that their identity is also unthreatened by castration. Barnard continues:

What the paradoxical structure of the feminine subject ultimately reveals is the way in which the consistency of the symbolic, and of the gap between the

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<sup>58</sup> Suzanne Barnard, ‘Tongues of Angels: Feminine Structure and Other Jouissance’ in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan’s Major Work on Love, Knowledge and Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 171-85 (p. 178).

symbolic and real, is susceptible to the “unsettling” effect of the real. [...] while this gap holds within the universe of masculine structure—a universe in which the phallic exception is instituted *from the outside*— for feminine structure there exists the possibility for a provisional “master” signifier that is not instituted from without but from *within*; this institution of a master signifier from within would be produced through a contingency, via *tuché* as encounter. Another way of saying this is that without the constitutive illusion of the phallic exception as limit, the *symbolic becomes*, in a sense, *real*. One way of conceptualizing feminine jouissance consistent with this claim might be to say that in feminine jouissance, the real finds a signifier.<sup>59</sup>

From the point of view of Lacan’s earlier teaching, let us say: The problem here is that though ‘the phallic exception as limit’ is ‘illusory’, this does not mean that the misrecognition could be corrected by finding a signifier for its beyond – although *the original association* between the visible presence/absence of the penis in other little boys and girls and the ensuing *comédie humaine* of law, guilt, desire and transgression is certainly based on imaginary misrecognition, the limit for which the phallus arrives to stand in is necessary; ‘it is not the Law itself that bars the subject’s access to jouissance—it simply makes a barred subject out of an almost natural barrier’.<sup>60</sup> Lacan elaborated his views on the signification of the phallus to provoke the analysand to recognise the limit imposed upon them as embodied beings who find their existential coordinates in language, ‘the condition that the subject find the constitutive structure of his desire in the same gap opened up by the effect of signifiers in those who come to represent the Other for him, insofar as his demand is subjected to them’.<sup>61</sup> Insofar, then, as the child’s puzzlement over the presence and absence of this bodily protuberance in other infants is formative both of imaginary terrors of loss and physical mutilation, *and* of the cognition of presence-absence as the primary symbolic operation, the goal of analysis is to bring the neurotic subject to accept (at the cost of the phantasy of bodily and subjective integrity) the strictly intersubjective nature of the Symbolic phallus,

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<sup>59</sup> Barnard, p. 179.

<sup>60</sup> Subversion, p. 696.

<sup>61</sup> Direction, p. 525.

the receiving and giving of which are equally impossible for the neurotic, whether he knows that the Other does not have it, or that the Other does have it, because in both cases the neurotic's desire is elsewhere – to be it. And whether male or female, man must accept to have and not have it, on the basis of the discovery that he isn't it.<sup>62</sup>

At this stage, Lacan believed that if the subject was not brought to accept symbolic castration, analysis could only 'lead him back to the dyadic relation, which has no other outcome than the dialectic of misrecognition, negation, and narcissistic alienation'.<sup>63</sup> As we have seen, this was the reason that he could not accept the relation of the Hegelian subject to Knowledge; just as Bernard states that in Lacan's later work 'without the constitutive illusion of the phallic exception as limit, the *symbolic becomes*, in a sense, *real*', so Lacan complains that in the drive to logical synthesis in Hegel's system

Th[e] dialectic is convergent and proceeds to the conjuncture defined as absolute knowledge. As it is deduced, *this conjuncture can only be the conjunction of the symbolic with a real from which nothing more can be expected. What is this, if not a subject finalized in his self-identity?*<sup>64</sup>

Arguably such a short circuit between the impossible Real and the Symbolic is at work in Žižek's defence of Hegel. Take, for example, his revision of the sequence in Hegel's original dialect of religious movements. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* he amends Hegel's original dialectical movement from Jewish sublimity, to Greek beauty, Roman understanding and finally to Christianity, arguing, quite plausibly, that sublimity should proceed from and exceed beauty since, following and exceeding Kant, the sublime represents the shattering beyond of the well-formed beautiful object. Is this (reasonable) objection to the priority of Greek over Jew in Hegel's original system *necessary* from the perspective of Absolute Knowledge? This is not simply to infer a

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<sup>62</sup> Direction, p. 537.

<sup>63</sup> Psychoanalysis and its Teaching, *Écrits*, pp.364-83 (p.379).

<sup>64</sup> Subversion, p. 675.

psycho-biographical objection that if Hegel, the great man himself, was led astray in the development of his system it must lead us to doubt the validity of his entire procedure; Žižek can and does argue that the perspective of Absolute Knowledge includes the naïve positing of identity (for example the assumed superiority of Greek over Jewish culture) but empties it of meaning: so, Hegel himself necessarily proceeds through a series of pathological assumptions about the essence of and boundaries between determined cultures, for Absolute Knowledge can only be reached through such misrecognitions. Such is the cunning of history. ‘The Non-Duped Err’, declared Lacan, in the mid-1970s (punning on his earlier elaboration of the Symbolic Order underpinned by The Name/No of the Father [*Nom/Non du père*]), so, however flawed the contingent phenomenal support of Hegel’s judgements, the validity of the process would be unaffected. But leaving aside Hegel’s particular prejudices, does the reversibility of the immediacy and externality of Jewish and Greek cultures not undermine the supposition of radical political emancipatory power in that minimal difference between determinate reflection and naïve immediacy? In what sense is the model of/as determinate reflection radically distinct from a naïve positing, if its result so clearly seems to reify a contingent power dynamic between Christian and Jew?

Moreover, it may be a Hegelian Truth that we cannot detach the contingent, prejudicial remainder (anti-semitism, Christian triumphalism) from the movement of Spirit towards Absolute Knowledge. Finally we would no longer posit – in a naïve way – the Jew as monster or victim, nor would we be caught up in futile external reflections about the gap between representations of the Jew and ‘his’ real nature. Perhaps we would ‘all turn into “Jews”, into objects *petit a*, into exceptions’, but it would also follow that, since we cannot authentically externalise our fantasy of Jewishness (for example, by allowing its alterity as another intellectual system with its own porous limits), we must work to abolish/overcome/incorporate the subject-substance Jew as the end point of a specifically European enlightenment project. Is this what it would mean for the Real to find its signifier?

Žižek could respond that in the case of anti-semitism one still *believes* in the fantasy and thereby is compelled to enact the sublation of the Jew in immediate ‘reality’, whereas in reflexive determination we have traversed such a fantasy. Perhaps, though, it would not be that the fantasy were so much traversed as secured against the (Jew as) Other. One would have no need to erase the bodies, laws, customs

of ‘Jews’ since one has already assured oneself that the Jewish difference can be subordinated to the familiar Christian frame. There is a certain reversibility of terms here: does the philosophy student or analysand who has assumed the subjective destitution of the Not-All really ‘traverse’ the fantasy, or is it not that they protect themselves against the possibility of an event which would shatter the coordinates of that fantasy – the experience for example of having to review and struggle with the beliefs of the European enlightenment *in light of the pure form those beliefs took on under the Third Reich*?

As we have seen, Zizek’s solution is to emphasise the dual ontological/epistemological status of Lacan *objet petit a*, ‘stand[ing] simultaneously for the imaginary fantasmatic lure/screen and for that which this lure is obfuscating, for the Void behind the lure.’ It should be possible to delimit this minimal and crucial difference between relating the symptomal figure of the Jew as a lure/screen and relating to that figure as one’s point of access to the radically emancipatory point of rupture. If this distance can be specified and held apart then the emancipatory goal of Zizek’s work seems plausible. If not, the analyst (whether as therapist or cultural critic) might be indistinguishable from his own obscene spectral double: ‘the difference between the perverse social link (in which the pervert *knows* what the other really wants) and the discourse of the analyst who, while occupying this place of supposed knowledge, keeps it *empty*’.<sup>65</sup>

Should we not say here, paraphrasing Lacan, that the pervert is simply the truth of Zizek’s message returned from the Other in its inverted form?

#### **4. And what does this have to do with Barnes?**

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the problematic figuration of Jewishness in *Nightwood* has in recent decades invited post-structuralist analyses which, in the cases of Martins, Cole and Trubowitz, stake out, invert and supplement each other. Both readers note *Nightwood*’s formal and thematic interest in the artificiality of identity and the way in which desire always threatens and promises to rupture whatever fleeting stability perspective can afford. And where Martins privileges the ‘freedom from regulatory categories’ which such texts offer, Trubowitz

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<sup>65</sup> Parallax View, p. 380.

articulates a concern, which post-structuralist hermeneutics has never entirely shaken off, that in refusing the authority of individual experience, the structures of experience of culturally marginalised groups are thereby flattened out into easily appropriable gestures, styles, modes.

I have laid out the underlying stakes of my argument in terms of Lacan's shift from a system underpinned by a Symbol which cannot be realised to a system which is subverted from within by a Real which is not-not-in-the Symbolic but which marks its internal limit. From the Phallic angle of vision this Real will be a constitutive exception (the woman who has a mystical connection to nature, to the truths of embodied experience), but by a mere alternation of subject position – the parallax shift – reveals itself to be the point at which its integrity may be radically undermined (if ~~the~~ Woman does not exist then the entire phallic economy is put out of circulation). Now, before risking my own reading of *Nightwood*, I wish to engage Caselli's reading of the novel within a hermeneutic of collusive textuality. I will suggest that her argument relies on just such an angle of formally empty Absolute Knowledge. Something akin to the Lacan's feminine subject, sexed as Not-All, allows her to develop the idea that Barnes' texts 'unfather' themselves and do so by 'always including the angle of vision as part of the object framed'.<sup>66</sup>

Barnes fashions female authority in the text, through an unreverential and promiscuous use of sources aimed at unfathering her texts and at turning them into bastard offspring.<sup>67</sup>

If her texts are 'bastard offspring' this figure surely suggests that the father remains (the privileged figure of) their source, animating spirit and origin, but that they are not fully integrated within the Symbolic since they do not bear his name. Rather than writing 'from a position of marginality and minoritisation'<sup>68</sup>, Barnes' 'female' capacity to 'fashion' its own author-ity would be consequent on this loosened relation to the paternal (not not at all there in its structure), meaning that Barnes' writings

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<sup>66</sup> Caselli, p. 259.

<sup>67</sup> Caselli, p. 34.

<sup>68</sup> Caselli, p.258.

undermine *from within* the integrity of a Modernist movement against which they could in no way be differentiated. Consequently, it is the unique quality of Barnes' writing to expose in contrapuntal fashion both the high-minded violence of the Modernist writer's quest for linguistic purity *and* a particular Queer post-structuralist ethic of Beautiful Soul transgressiveness: 'Barnes' illegibility is instead produced as a crisis of critical mastery, in which the reader is uncomfortably poised between complicity and collusion'.<sup>69</sup>

For the sake of the argument I am trying to outline here, I will think these poles of complicity and collusion in relation to Žižek's three stage model of anti-semitism. We noted how this allows him to make of the (anti-Semite's) Jew an emblematic ideological figure, both Master-Signifier and *object a* – available to positing/abbreviating, externalising/explicating, and ultimately reflexively determining identity in the void of pure difference. Caselli claims that *Nightwood* moves beyond Modernism or, better, unsettles Modernism in its self-determination, because it loosens the Modernist novel's residual faith in signification, which it had sought to rescue from the Naturalist subordination to narrative and character;

The comfort of mimesis, which had residually survived in modernism in the epiphany, the ungraspable moment, the quotidian, the organic past, and the fleeting recuperation of memory, disappears in *Nightwood*. The novel not only undoes the notion of plot – as it has often been remarked – but also interrogates the status of image"<sup>70</sup>.

Caselli's fashioning of collusiveness-complicity, then, finds that the taint of illegible sexuality and indeterminate signification was everywhere already, it is the ahistorical condition not only of Modernism as a movement, not only of literature as a particular cultural form, but of any mode of Being that we might conceive. The event of Barnes' writing will have been to posit this presupposed dynamic at the level of *aesthetic principle*: we could adapt Caselli's own figuration of Barnes' writing wherein it is

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<sup>69</sup> Caselli, p.10.

<sup>70</sup> Caselli, p. 171.

‘still attached to the body of Modernism, [yet] it is also ineluctably severed from it’,<sup>71</sup> and say that Barnes’ work images itself standing on two phantasmatic legs: collusion with the history of textuality, on one side, and complicity in the textuality of history, on the other. These phantom limbs engender a phenomenal (aesthetic) presence which the ‘real’ limb never had, since in being merely present-to-hand (to mishandle Heidegger’s conceptual tools) the limb as self-identical was undifferentiated substance – something must fail or go missing in order to appear as subject (author-ity), phenomenon, or notion.

Having transcribed, faithfully but unreverentially, the ‘sublation’ of Modernism posited in Barnes’ improper Modernism (an overturning which at the same time appropriates and repeats its logic at another level) into the terms of Žižek’s defence of the Hegelian dialectic and the Lacan of the Not-All, I move to the question of critical mastery. Just as Barnard speaks of the female *jouissance* finding ‘a provisional “master” signifier that is not instituted from without but from *within* [...] produced through a contingency, via *tuché* as encounter’, so readings of Barnes’ resistance to mastery do not avoid the compulsion to produce the next ‘master’ term, transcending all previous readings of her oeuvre (including Caselli’s, including my own...).

Thus, Caselli claims that ‘The real is in Barnes always recalcitrant [...] readings are never definitive’, while her particular reading nonetheless transcends ‘even those few critics who crucially recognise Barnes’ obscurity as constitutive of her work’ who do not go so far as to raise ‘doubts about the legibility of such illegibility’<sup>72</sup>. These critics (Tyus Miller is the synecdochic figure) are not yet free of the need to master Barnes’ work. Even as they recognise in it a crisis of the signifier, they claim to be able to ground it upon a stable signified, a ‘solid [...] historical dimension’. In refusing to master Barnes’ text, then, Caselli simultaneously relativises all readings except for and including her own. The consequences of such a move are necessary, I argue, because her knowledge of the text is, as such, an Absolute Knowledge of its resistance to mastery.

Recall, Žižek’s point claim that deconstructive Cultural Studies remains at the level of external reflection, a liberal democratic formal freedom to interpret the object

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<sup>71</sup> Caselli, p. 258.

<sup>72</sup> Caselli, pp. 9-10.

diversely which evades the radical truth that the object is nothing in addition to the internal difference between the naïve attempt to represent its reality and the plurality of discourses to which the naïve symbolic object gives rise, it is nothing in addition to the symbol (master-signifier), but it is the Nothing (Not-All) which is further posited in the move to determinate reflection, the phantasmic thing which is ‘in the object more than itself’ which allows us to say ‘The Jew is x because they are a Jew’ or ‘Barnes’ work unfathers language because it is Barnesean’. As such the anti-systematic explication of Barnes collusive-complicit poetics is the last word on the meaning of Barnes, but as such it also falls short of its claim that Barnes gives us a literature which would catalyse the crisis of critical mastery. Caselli (or ‘Caselli’s Barnes’, for in our terms there can be no ‘Barnes’ and no ‘Caselli’ outside of an illegitimate genitive) exhibits the pure form of Barnes’ work, her improper corpus as Not-All:

*Nightwood*’s legendary impenetrability [...] derives from its structure: it is a system outside of which nothing can be, and inside which nothing can be innocent, not even queerness.<sup>73</sup>

Now, within this system, leaving aside the impossible question of whether it is Caselli’s or Barnes’ for now, the figuration of Jewishness is not heavily emphasised *as itself improper*. Having isolated ‘impropriety’ as the Barnesean unique trait which predefines and pre-defiles *everything* within her textual system, we cannot plant our phantom limbs on the side of critics such as Jane Marcus who find in the text a revolutionary celebration of the excluded and oppressed (*Nightwood*’s queerness is not a consequence of the way it ‘places on stage a series of minoritised groups’), nor behind Trubowitz’s accusation that the novel subsumes difference in universalising it (neither is it queer in consequence of the way it ‘metonymically recuperates [minoritised groups] as tropes of universal estrangement’<sup>74</sup>). In a single move, Caselli can simultaneously overrule critical positions which accuse Barnes of anti-semitism representations at the level of positing reflection (Barnes’ Jew’s are parasitic,

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<sup>73</sup> Caselli, p. 175.

<sup>74</sup> Caselli, p. 175.

degenerate, greedy, they disguise themselves as true Europeans, etc.) and more sophisticated readings such as Trubowitz's which identify Barnes' narrative technique as the problematic issue. The latter can only rebuke Barnes as long as they remain at the level of external reflection, presuming a real but strictly extra-linguistic particularity to the History of actual Jews which Barnes has violated and/or neglected, whereas in the collusive-complicit reading (where all is Not-All, everywhere and nowhere) 'the text's exploitation of identification and self-reflectiveness [...] do[es] not simply indicate identities, but map[s] out the complex problem of what and who produces desire, and how this can be written and read'.<sup>75</sup>

Here it is particularly cogent to situate Caselli's reading in terms of Lacan's formulae of Feminine Sexuation. A first consequence of this position would appear to be that identity categories are not excluded from Barnes' collusive-complicit system (Negated Universal: 'Not-All master-signifiers are compromised' but nevertheless the system allows and requires that there be an exception if it is not to abolish its universal claims of impurity and its logical refutation of any position of total mastery (Negated Existential Quantification: 'Not-all identity categories are compromised'). Sure enough,

*Nightwood* is also unsatisfied with the residual self-complacency of such a renunciation. In this novel, a complete denial of coherent identity would amount to an easy way out of suffering [...] Language cannot keep still and can always be appropriated and refigured; its affective theory fluctuates between identification and objectification, sameness and otherness, consolation and betrayal.<sup>76</sup>

Accordingly, the ethical dimension of Barnes work cannot reside in a challenge to representation, neither in the political nor aesthetic sense – as critics we have been lazy to stop at this point, resting on our anti-mimetic laurels. 'A complete denial of

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<sup>75</sup> Caselli, p. 185.

<sup>76</sup> Caselli, p. 176.

coherent identity would amount to an easy way out of suffering'.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, contra Martins claim that Barnes only *seems* 'complicit with patriarchal discourse', Caselli points out that since the binary of seeming/being is unfathered in Barnes' universe, we cannot dismiss the charge of 'complicity' but must regard it as an inescapable aspect of her poetics. This is why Barnes' texts continue to haunt even the most rigorously post-structuralist positions with their 'improper' capacity for 'implicat[ing] us in cognitive, aesthetic, and emotional fears'<sup>78</sup>, by 'always including the angle of vision as part of the object framed'.<sup>79</sup>

Caselli's Barnes alerts us to 'the necessity of participating in the scandal and to the impossibility of keeping meaning in its "proper" place'.<sup>80</sup> An approach which externalises a certain 'post-structuralism', and a certain 'Queer Theory', only to queerly reanimate these same traditions by bringing us back to their original disquieting qualities. That Caselli does not resolve the fort/da oscillation between those two directions in her reading is hardly surprising, since to do so would finally suggest a purity of intention and a clarity of position which would be at odds with her hermeneutic claim that 'language cannot keep still and can always be re-appropriated and refigured'.<sup>81</sup> An aspect of Caselli's approach which I hugely enjoy and admire is that she thereby underlines the ongoing capacity of Barnes to shame, frustrate and disconcert the rightly Left-leaning, 'appropriately transgressive' literary theorist:

Barnes's modernism is improper not because it jolts us from lazy realist interpretive conventions or ideological assumptions, but because it does not let us wallow in our complacent and appropriately transgressive reading practices.

For Caselli, even Lee Edelman's influential 'anti-social' reading of Lacan to critique the unquestionable value of 'the future' (which for him always signals a disavowal of the death drive which is then projected onto figures of 'Queerness') does not furnish

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<sup>77</sup>Caselli, p. 176.

<sup>78</sup> Caselli, p. 260.

<sup>79</sup> Caselli, p. 259.

<sup>80</sup> Caselli, p. 209.

<sup>81</sup> Caselli, p. 176.

us with a point of critical refuge from which we can contemplate a 'pure' negative value in Barnes' writing. Such a reading is revealed as inadequate precisely because it provides a secure point of critical anchorage despite its avowed intentions to resist symbolic appropriate-tion;

Lee Edelman has argued that the queerness of which he speaks 'would deliberately separate us from ourselves, from the assurance, that is, of *knowing* ourselves and hence of *knowing* our "good."' It is tempting to link this notion of queer to *Nightwood* and the Barnes oeuvre, but the use of 'deliberately' in Edelman's formulation implies a willing subject radically self-aware in her negation of knowing her own good. *Nightwood's* queerness lies instead in taking the risk of not being beyond reproach, of undoing even the anti-moralist position exemplified by Edelman<sup>82</sup>

The anti-identitarian ante is notched up a further level, but it is not clear to me how Caselli's invocation of collusion/complicity is any less liable to be recouped as a secure point of anchorage in the dialectic of desire between reader and author. But I know that I'm participating in a familiar game; here I am, right on cue, in the academic *mise-en-abyme* in which an infinite series of commentators 'appropriately transgress' a predecessor's attempt to nail the techniques and effects of Barnesean 'Queerness', revealing their limits and passing beyond them.

Therefore, I would like to try to break out of the series, if only rhetorically. By settling down, refathering my thesis. By finally *attending to the queerest of figures for straightness, authority and mastery: the Barnesean Father*. And here, in the opening pages of *Nightwood* – like so many admirable Fathers – he is dead and Jewish.

## **5. Re-opening questions**

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82 Caselli, p. 174.

In her reading, Trubowitz gives considerable weight to the novel's opening. This section functions at once as prelude, prefiguration, exegesis, and also as a screen memory for everything which is then set against it in the novel's various modes: secondary revision, apophasis, confession and subversion of its substantial structure. Here at the start we retrospectively witness the fates of Hedvig and Guido Volkbein, their histories unravelling in analepsis from a diegetic present (fleetingly rendered in the past tense) during which, in the course of fifteen digressive lines, their son was born, and Hedvig 'named him Felix, thrust him from her and died'.<sup>83</sup> The abrupt and (in all senses) immediate loss of the mother brings the text to the question of the father, and moves the narrative into a perverse state of omniscient analepsis.

'The child's father had gone six months previously, a victim of fever'.<sup>84</sup> From this line onwards we are given a history of the two parents which is both authoritative (the narrator, in the grand nineteenth century tradition, has unmediated access to their most intimate thoughts and furtive actions, and its epigrammatical statements frequently take the form of analytic judgements – furthermore, and crucially, there is no implied alternative perspective on the narrator's position from which the gap between narrator and implied author might be inferred) and clearly dubious, drawing attention to its constructedness both through its content (the apparently arbitrary, but self-evidently partial, selection of biographical detail) its theme (the insistent references to dissimulation in regard to patrilineage, religion, art and commerce) and its style (the swell of excessive, digressional waves of subclauses, breaking brutally against lapidary aphorisms whose meanings are generally elusive). I quote the following at some length, at this stage only as an illustration of this technique.

[Guido] had tried to be one with [Hedvig] by adoring her, by imitating her goose-step of a stride, a step that by him adopted, became dislocated and comic. She would have done as much, but sensing something in him blasphemed and lonely, she had taken the blow as a Gentile must – by moving toward him in recoil. She had believed everything he had told her, but often enough she had asked: 'What is the matter?' – that continual reproach which

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<sup>83</sup> N, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> N, p. 1.

was meant as a continual reminder of her love. It ran through his life like an accusing voice. He had been tormented into speaking highly of royalty, flinging out encomiums with the force of small water made great by the pressure of a thumb. He had laughed too heartily when in the presence of the lower order of title, as if, by his good nature, he could advance them to some distinction of which they dreamed. Confronted with nothing worse than a general in creaking leather and with the slight repercussion of movement common to military men, who seem to breath from the inside out, smelling of gunpowder and horseflesh, lethargic yet prepared for participation in a war not yet scheduled (a type of which Hedwig had been very fond), Guido had shaken with an unseen trembling.<sup>85</sup>

Here the simultaneous demand that we read the authority of the narration with complete confidence and in utter disillusionment is fitting for a chapter which has been entitled 'Bow Down' (Barnes' intended title for the entire novel), an imperative towards subjection which at the same time exposes the naked exercise of symbolic power, and itself engages in the sado-masochistic pleasures of its activity.

It is within this context that the lines occur which for Trubowitz inaugurate both the fundamental condensation of Jewishness with corruption and decay, and the metonymic displacement by means of which this 'Jewish substance' is appropriated to Barnes' wider narrative vision.

[Guido] had been seen carrying in a conspicuously clenched fist the exquisite handkerchief of yellow and black linen that cried aloud of the ordinance of 1468, issued by one Pietro Barbo, demanding that, with a rope about its neck, Guido's race should run in the Corso for the amusement of the Christian populace [...] This memory and the handkerchief that accompanied it had wrought in Guido (as certain flowers brought to a pitch of florid ecstasy no

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<sup>85</sup> N, pp. 3-4.

sooner attain their specific type than they fall into its decay) the sum total of what is the Jew.<sup>86</sup>

At first glance it is strange that Trubowitz should highlight as the most crucial instance of cultural appropriation a moment in the chapter where some historical specificity is admitted to the category of Jew and the phenomenon of anti-semitism. She argues, however, that in the shift from this historical instance of persecution to Guido's subjection to the universalising category 'the sum of what is the Jew' it is the parenthetical simile that underpins the dialectical subject of (Jewish) history and renders it inevitable; 'Ultimately, Barnes calls into question the historical grounds of her Jewish characters' conversions by likening Jewishness to decay and to death, both natural and inevitable processes.'<sup>87</sup> One can respond in counter-argument that Barnes' invocation of the natural is also a strictly literary allusion, and specifically 'à rebours' - one cannot but recognise from the entwined 'florid ecstasy' and 'decay' of Barnes' flora that it belongs to the Decadent genus, kin to Mirbeau's *Le Jardin Des Supplices* (1899), Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), as well as Huysmans notorious anti-Naturalist novel.

In a meticulous articulation of Barnes' debt to Decadent literature, her 'decadent historicism'<sup>88</sup>, as he terms it, Len Gutkin provides a formal heuristic for Barnes' Decadent style, privileging above all the strain which she exacts upon her metaphors. His analysis of the violence exacted upon figuration deploys I.A. Richards division of a metaphor into tenor (the referent whose qualities are ascribed to another object) and vehicle (the image that represents the ascribed qualities of the tenor) to suggest that Barnes' specific debt to decadence lies in the 'imbalance' between these two elements due to the 'perverse autonomy granted to a metaphoric vehicle'<sup>89</sup>. This means in effect that the original 'subject' of the metaphor disappears in layers of imagistic excess. Yet the formal dominance of the verbal image (as vehicle) over any 'real substance' which it could then be said to re-present does not simply denaturalise the artwork – for this outgrowth, the 'eerie metastasization' of the vehicle is

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<sup>86</sup> N, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> Trubowitz, p. 316.

<sup>88</sup> Len Gutkin, 'Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* and decadent style', *Literature Compass* 11:6 (2013) 337-46 (p. 341).

<sup>89</sup> Gutkin, p. 341.

understood within the decadent mode as a ‘decomposition’; not a metaphorical application of the qualities of organic decomposition to the literary effect, but – metaphoricity stretched to its radical limit – the technical decomposition of the textual unit ‘shift[s] its terms from a case of ‘style’ to a biological condition’<sup>90</sup>. So, if the anti-Natural-ism of Decadent style allows Decadent writing to usurp the place of *bios*-in-itself, we cannot dismiss Trubowitz’s reading of the ‘florid decay’ vehicle (as a naturalising and universalising movement) by suggesting she is deaf to the artifice of the Decadent topos.

Returning then to the passage in question, the manner in which history is evoked and attributed should give us pause. It was the handkerchief, the material object, which had ‘cried aloud’ of the traumatic event. The handkerchief therefore has at least as much in common with Marx’s dancing table (his famous illustration of commodity fetishism in the first volume of *Capital*) as with Proust’s madeleines. For if the handkerchief triggers involuntary memory, it does not do so by means of sensuous associations which had previously imprinted themselves on the subject, but by ‘grotesque ideas’ of its own which this inert object suddenly ‘evolves out of its own wooden [sic] brain’ in that ‘mystical’, ‘supersensuous’ transcendence whereby it acquires exchange value in relation to other commodities: ‘It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.’<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the manner in which historico-‘racial’ memory is given form in/for Guido is disenchanting exegetically a few pages later in the narrator’s commentary on the son, Felix: ‘The Christian traffic in retribution has made the Jew’s history a commodity; it is the medium through which he receives, at the necessary moment, the serum of his own past that he may offer it again as his blood.’<sup>92</sup> If Guido’s ‘Jewishness’ makes a commodity of his identity, then the ‘naturalisation’ of a social relation as *his* identity which Barnes’ evocation of the flower enacts must be read as a retroactive, reified ‘nature’ which Guido must offer back to the Christian, just as the (collusive) text offers it to the (complicit) reader:

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<sup>90</sup> Dana Seitler. ‘Down on All Fours: Atavistic Perversions and the Science of Desire from Frank Norris to Djuna Barnes.’ *American Literature* 73:3 (2001), 525–62 (p. 530), quoted in Gutkin, p. 344.

<sup>91</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 163-65.

<sup>92</sup> N, pp. 9-10.

nature as this past recoded as the ‘blood’ for which both Guido and his son will ‘need an alibi’.<sup>93</sup>

However, before we can dismiss Trubowitz’s reading for insufficiently understanding the dialectic of these improper, furtive relations between the categories of history, nature and commerce – an understanding, furthermore, which Barnes’ narrative voice has impelled upon us – we should reflect that her reading does take Barnes’ complex mode of enunciation into account.

*[It is] through her manipulation of the grammar of the text, as much as through the symbols and histories she evokes, [that] Barnes suggests an essential link between Jewish identity, death, and, in less literal fashion, disappearance—the decay of his type. Like the flower that attains its type at the very commencement of its own deterioration, Jewishness, it would seem, is Jewish only in the act of decaying, only in the process of disappearing.*<sup>94</sup>

The articulation of Jewishness-as-identity with a particular history, and with a recognisably Decadent trope of nature as a figure of mortifying excess, produces a dual signification, what Žižek would describe as a parallax gap in which the illegibility of one reading is the condition of the legibility of the second. On the one hand, Barnes’ narrator ‘defines Jewish history and identity’, on the other she ‘distances herself from the production of its representation’ (since the voice that author-ises is always illegitimate), giving a substantive definition of the Jew which includes the historical memory while reducing it to a mere content of the texts deterritorialising representational form;

she makes the act of representation itself, much like the blooming and decaying of the flower, into a natural or ahistorical phenomenon. This ahistoricizing process is typical of the narrative style of *Nightwood*, particularly of the doctor's speeches, where ideas appear to emerge without clear origin or cause, seemingly tangential to any principal story. However, the shifting of agency away from the author—as well as away from the Jewish characters

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<sup>93</sup> N, p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> Trubowitz, pp. 316-17.

themselves— is only the first step in Barnes's unhinging of Jewish identity from its actual historical, material, or even psychological roots. The second, and most important step, occurs within the logic of the figures themselves, as if independently of authorial action, and can only be traced through the most detailed registers of Barnes's language.

This is as far as I am willing to consent to Trubowitz's argument. I agree with her that Barnes' subsumption of historical memory and organic process under the text's literary form creates a problematic field in which anti-semitism, as much as Jewishness, is everywhere and nowhere, and the responsibility of no-one. Regarding what she calls the 'ahistoricising process', a point on which she negatively endorses Caselli's enthusiastic claim that in Barnes' writing history is never fully 'legible' as a contextual imprimatur of the work's ultimate significance (which is not to say that 'history' is therefore irrelevant, only that it does not constitute a level of meta-textual transcendence), I would want to qualify her argument somewhat, and it is here that what we have been calling the 'early' Lacan is useful to my argument.

If we agree that the text's staging of 'the production of [...] representation' makes its aesthetic 'complicity' less of a subversion of anti-semitism than its artistic instrumentalisation, we should nevertheless attend to the textual unconscious which plays itself out through the very attempt to circumvent the question of authorial agency by parodically deploying it against itself.

That Barnes' narrator intrudes so masterfully into the novel in these early pages, but that the interventions seem designed to belie and contradict themselves, such that the text invites us to read it as if it were independent of authorial intention, reminds us of what Lacan claims as the defining quality of human speech, and therefore of human desire, distinguishing both from the system of signs with which certain non-human cultures are organised: once we are inscribed as a subject within the register of the Symbolic it becomes possible, almost unavoidable, that communication takes the form of a 'feigning to feign'.

[A]n animal does not feign feigning. It does not make tracks whose deceptiveness lies in getting them to be taken as false, when in fact they are true—that is, tracks that indicate the right trail. [...]Speech begins only with the passage from the feint to the order of the signifier, and that the signifier

requires another locus—the locus of the Other, the Other as witness, the witness who is Other than any of the partners—for the Speech borne by the signifier to be able to lie, that is, to posit itself as Truth.

Thus Truth draws its guarantee from somewhere other than the Reality it concerns: it draws it from Speech. Just as it is from Speech that Truth receives the mark that instates it in a fictional structure.<sup>95</sup>

At this stage in his teaching, Lacan defends the importance of the dimension of Truth, but as we see here it is a Truth which can be spoken of only as the ‘fictional structure’ wherein speech feigns to feign, wherein our words always seem to intend more than they immediately signify as linguistic units. Desire emerges in this excess over signification because the Lacanian signifier, emblematically the Phallic signifier, is not delimited by its relation to a signified but is always capable of accruing additional significance insofar as its only limitation is the place it occupies in a Symbolic network (which is without a transcendental signified and therefore always potentially available to reorganisation). ‘[T]he signifier does not in advance contain within itself all the significations that we make it take on; it contains them rather by the place it occupies, the place where the symbolic father should be.’<sup>96</sup> As Fink explains,

He indicates that there is only too much meaning [in the analysand’s discourse] and that such meaning has mesmerized analysts, blinding them to the fact that the pursuit of meaning leads to the further alienation of the subject in the Other’s meaning and the Other’s desire, whereas it is only nonmeaning or nonsense that can separate the subject from these latter.<sup>97</sup>

The Truth which emerges from analytic speech is not the ‘correct’, ‘revealed’ or ‘total’ interpretation of the signifier, but nor at this stage in the Lacanian discourse does analysis forego the question of Truth altogether in search of ‘drive as a kind of “acephalic” knowledge which [...] involves no inherent relation to truth, no subjective

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<sup>95</sup> Subversion, pp. 683-84.

<sup>96</sup> Jacques Lacan, Seminar IV, quoted in Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the Letter: Reading Écrits Slowly* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 87.

<sup>97</sup> Fink, p. 88.

position of enunciation'<sup>98</sup>; Truth concerns the subject's ex-istence in the 'meaningless place' of subjectification where the Father 'should be' – and as the Father is not there, the subject could be said to 'Father' themselves, coming to be at the place where It had been.

Jane Marcus believed that '[t]he symbolic phallus as law is absent from *Nightwood*, replaced by the wayward penis of the outlaw and transvestite. But its presence is brilliantly conveyed in the person of a woman, Hedvig Volkbein.'<sup>99</sup> Yet since the 'presence' of the Lacanian phallus is always a symbolic placeholder for a 'presence' which is henceforth lost ('the symbol first manifests itself as the killing of the thing, and this death results in the endless perpetuation of the subject's desire.'<sup>100</sup>), it should be apparent that since Hedvig is presented as a phallic object, her masculinity does not so much destroy the patriarchal law ('breaking taboo by representing absent Aryan patriarchal power in the person of a woman'<sup>101</sup>) as prove the tertiary position of the phallus without the presence of which the fantasy of complementarity between man and woman breaks down. Here in *Nightwood's* 'primal scene' there is no suggestion that the feminine (whether embodied in Guido or Hedvig) could subsist in the mode of the Not-All, enjoying the senseless inconsistency of reality, free of the enigma of what 'she' signifies for the Other. It is not that the 'penis' is 'wayward' in *Nightwood*, like the acephalic drive which proponents of 'late Lacan' idealise; once the signifying order has substituted the precarious privilege of the visible male organ with the purely formal signifier of presence-absence ('the phallus—that is, the image of the penis—is negativized where it is situated in the specular image. That is what predestines the phallus to give body to jouissance in the dialectic of desire.'<sup>102</sup>), the possession of it is not a matter of biology but of speech and language. Its presence is enough to bind together Aryan and Jew, man and woman, but only in a manner which is as Barnes' narrator puts it, 'dislocated and comic'<sup>103</sup> As Lacan argues,

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<sup>98</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'Desire:Drive, Truth:Knowledge', in *Umbra: Journal of the Unconscious*, 1:1 (1997), 147-51 (p. 149).

<sup>99</sup> Marcus, p. 229.

<sup>100</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis', *Écrits*, pp. 197-268 (p. 262).

<sup>101</sup> Marcus, p. 229.

<sup>102</sup> *Subversion*, p. 696.

<sup>103</sup> N, p. 3.

These relations revolve around a being and a having which, since they refer to a signifier, the phallus, have contradictory effects: they give the subject reality in this signifier, on the one hand, but render unreal the relations to be signified, on the other.

This is brought about by the intervention of a seeming [*paraitre*] that replaces the having in order to protect it, in one case, and to mask the lack thereof, in the other, and whose effect is to completely project the ideal or typical manifestations of each of the sexes' behavior, including the act of copulation itself, into the realm of comedy.<sup>104</sup>

If *Nightwood*'s first pages adumbrate a similar sense of human desire as a comedy of masquerade and misrecognition, it must be said that while the narrator 'feigns to feign' omniscience at this stage, what is quite brutally excluded is the dimension of Speech, which was so crucial for the Lacan which interests us. Hedvig and Guido are mortified in language; the moment they are spoken of, they are dead. Nevertheless, there are two brief instances of direct speech in this section. Firstly, recalled to the fifteenth century Papal edict requiring Jews to run naked and leashed for the Christians' amusement, Guido

felt the echo in his own throat of that cry running the Piazza Montanara long ago 'Roba vecchia!' ['Old Clothes'<sup>105</sup>] – the degradation by which his people had survived.<sup>106</sup>

In Guido's case his one enunciation is very clearly a repetition of a signifier which comes from history as the locus of the Big Other: 'Roba Vecchia' is an echo which

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<sup>104</sup> Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', *Écrits*, pp. 575-84 (p. 582).

<sup>105</sup> Jacqueline A. Pollard suggests William W. Story's *Roba di Roma* as a possible source for Barnes' invocation of 'the Jew's' racial memory. [see Jacqueline A. Pollard, 'Barnes, *Nightwood* and 1468: A source for Barnes' "Ordinance of 1468"']  
<<http://japollard.wordpress.com/project-notes>>

Story explains 'Roba Vecchia' as the cry of the impoverished street sellers of Rome's Jewish Ghetto: "The poor old Jew, meanwhile, goes down to the street. Shall we follow him into the Ghetto, where he will empty his sack of all the *roba vecchia* he has gathered, and after cleansing, scouring, shifting, turning, sewing, patching, changing, brushing, and renewing, will finally expose it again for sale, at a hundred times its cost, and twenty times its value? Shall we beard the Hebrew in his den? the Moses in his stall? It is a curious place, I assure you, and well worth looking into." William Wetmore Story, *Roba di Roma* (1887), full text available at:

<[http://archive.org/stream/robadiroma02storuoft\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/robadiroma02storuoft_djvu.txt)>.

<sup>106</sup> N, p. 2.

comes to his throat from elsewhere, discarded material cast off by others, out of which Guido evidently cannot help but fashion his own degrading subjectivity. On the single occasion when we receive Hedvig's speech she, by contrast, does not echo the voice of the past, she addresses Guido with a token of her love. Nonetheless her speech constitutes an impossible demand that he respond with something in himself that is more than echo and imitation;

[S]ensing something in him blasphemed and lonely, she had taken the blow as a Gentile must – by moving toward him in recoil. She had believed whatever he had told her, but often enough she had asked: 'What is the matter?' – that continual reproach which was meant as a continual reminder of her love.<sup>107</sup>

Like Guido's speech, Hedvig's question is given an eventual, past perfect aspect ("she had asked") but pre-modified by an adverbial "often enough" the unique emergence of Hedvig's speech reduces to a habitual repetition. The question itself, 'What is the matter?', is the most open and penetrative of interrogatives, and likewise fuses two phases of desire – formal universality and unmasterable exceptionality – in the challenge that it poses to her loved-hated object to say what meaning is really there, in and behind the letter of his speech. The very fact that she 'believed everything he told her' is the precondition of such radical doubt: it is only in the workings of desire that the superficial cohesion of Imaginary 'having' and Symbolic 'seeming' becomes strained. The loved object comes to stand in for the absent centre of the Symbolic Order, for God 'him'-self, so that the subject's desire is driven by the question, which repeats because it is unanswerable and unavoidable, of what the Other desires. Lacan famously exemplified the emergence of desire from the Symbolic in a very similar formulation, '*Che vuoi?*'

[M]an's desire is the Other's desire [*le desir del'homme est le desir de l'Autre*] in which the *de* provides what grammarians call a "subjective determination" — namely, that it is qua Other that man desires (this is what provides the true scope of human passion).

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<sup>107</sup> N, p. 3.

This is why the Other's question [*la question de l'Autre*] — that comes back to the subject from the place from which he expects an oracular reply — which takes some such form as "*Che vuoi?*", "What do you want?", is the question that best leads the subject to the path of his own desire, assuming that, thanks to the know-how of a partner known as a psychoanalyst, he takes up that question, even without knowing it, in the following form: "What does he want from me?"<sup>108</sup>

The last sentence is crucial. Recall Žižek's valorisation of an *acephalic* drive which in the course of analysis is liberated from any 'subjective position of enunciation'. By contrast, Lacan here proposes that the task of the analyst is explicitly to bring the speaker to *subjectivize their own desire* in the place of the longed for 'oracular reply'. Where Žižek's Lacan invokes 'drive' as a substitute for divine revelation, *my* Lacan offers only to reframe the question ('What do you want?', 'What does s/he want from me?') moving from the imaginary 'You' to the intersubjective matrix 'You-sHe-Me' such that the subject's own being is recognised to be at stake, and therefore the dimension of so-called True speech, in their message to the imagined addressee.

In terms of the Lacanian dialectic, we will suggest that Hedvig inaugurates the question of desire in the novel at two stages. Her first narrative function (and her final, indeed only, diegetic intervention) is to break the imaginary continuity between child and mother by alienating the child in language, 'she named him Felix, thrust him from her, and died.' Her second, which has the obscure status of a speech event which has happened repeatedly in an undefined time sequence prior to the beginning of the novel, follows strictly from the entrance into language as the locus of the Big Other. Given a language in which to inscribe (his) loss, and to find symbolic substitutions for the mother, (the infant's) desire then emerges, in Lacan's phrase, it

begins to take shape in the margin in which demand rips away from need, this margin being the one that demand—whose appeal can be unconditional only with respect to the Other—opens up in the guise of the possible gap need may

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<sup>108</sup> Subversion, p. 690.

give rise to here, because it has no universal satisfaction (this is called "anxiety").<sup>109</sup>

The demands of the Other (the ambiguous genitive: demands that the subject makes *upon* the Other, demands that appear to originate *in* the Other), also have an unsatisfiable remainder in them: for example, when I ask for critical feedback on my writing it is the lack in the order of signification that I want you to fill – therefore my desire is irreducible to biological need as it is to symbolic demand, though it can only be expressed in terms of the former and by means of the latter. And what remains is the *anxiety* which Hedvig's 'personification' of assurance produces as its dislocated remainder, 'If ever there was a massive chic she had personified it – yet somewhere there had been anxiety. The thing that she stalked, though she herself had not been conscious of it, was Guido's assurance that he was a Baron.'<sup>110</sup>

After six pages in this mode of capricious authority (analepsis, extradiegetic and omniscient narrative voice) there is an abrupt cut in the narrative, whereby the narration of this deceased Aryan-Jewish couple's (pre)history is suddenly retroactively subjectified as the memory, conscious and unconscious, of their now adult son, Felix;

At this point exact history stopped for Felix who, thirty years later, turned up in the world with *these facts, the two portraits and nothing more*. His aunt, combing her long braids with an amber comb, told him what she knew, and *this had been her only knowledge of his past*. What had formed Felix from the date of his birth to his coming to thirty was unknown to the world, *for the step of the wandering Jew is in every son*.<sup>111</sup>

The primary thing to note about this cut of subjectification in the narrative is that the metonymic displacement that Trubowitz identified, due to which (a caricature of) Jewishness is everywhere and nowhere, takes form here. We can trace the uncoupling of Jewishness from Felix from this moment in which he is himself branded by it: the

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<sup>109</sup> Subversion, p. 689.

<sup>110</sup> N, p. 4. My italics.

<sup>111</sup> N, p. 7.

set is not specified within which ‘every’ male child would be marked by the imprint of the Wandering Jew – contextually we would assume there is an elision here and that the line is an abbreviated expression of, ‘... is in every son born to an “assimilated” Father’, but *to the letter* it means ‘is in’ *all* creatures designated as human, male and sprung from identifiable parents. And, for Lacan, it is the letter which determines the structure of the unconscious.

The apparent authority and omnipotence of the narration is suddenly reframed as the unreliable hints, half-truths and prejudices of Felix’s aunt (‘this had been her only knowledge of his past’), a character of whom we learn nothing further, except that she gave him this history ‘while combing her long braids with her amber comb’ – this action suggests the desire of the ego for an imaginary image, but we cannot decide whether the desire should be located in the aunt (as she preoccupied with her own image, which may have coloured her narrative; likewise we might infer she was disinterested in the signifiers she was weaving over Felix, merely garbling words as she remained within the Imaginary, focused as she may have been on her own specular image?), or if we ought to read the collocation of this history with the image of the aunt combing her ‘long braids’ with Felix’s not-quite-Oedipal desire for the figure who was bestowing the story upon him.

There is undeniably something of the Hegelian reflexive determination going on here. Barnes imposes upon her reader a reflexive short circuit between the narrative voice as extratextual authority and that same voice as nothing other than the dubious confabulations of this sub-diegetic Aunt archived in the memory traces of a character, Felix, who we know only as an instantly orphaned child, and an adult whose only backstory is that his lack of backstory exposes him to prejudice, insecurity and suspicion.

From the latter perspective the authority of the narrator, on whom the reader has no alternative but to rely, is no longer sustained by fantasy – that Voice is nothing more than the product of the nihilistic creativity of the Drive. As Žižek says, in Lacan’s terms voice is not ‘a bearer of plenitude and self-presence of meaning (as with Derrida) but [...] a meaningless object, as an objectal remnant, leftover, of the signifying operation’.<sup>112</sup> Barnes’ perspectival shift forces this uncanny experience of the voice

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<sup>112</sup> *Sublime*, p. 115.

outside of a fantasy frame which holds together our Symbolic roles and Imaginary identifications in some kind of coherence.

Recall that in the quote above Felix's memories are summed up in a tripartite taxonomy, 'these facts, the two portraits, and nothing else'. I do not think it is too fanciful to map these categories onto Lacan's three registers: 'facts' corresponding to Symbolically legitimated knowledge, the 'portraits' (the likenesses of 'two ancient and intrepid actors' which Guido purchased and misidentified as images of his mother and father) to the Imaginary, and 'nothing else' being the Real of the impossible void which Barnes' syntax *screens* (in the double sense of obscuring from view and of projecting into a visual field). To read *Nightwood* according to its internal dialectic we are indeed required to 'recognize in the properties attributed to "Jew" the necessary product of our very social system; we must recognize in the "excesses" attributed to "Jews" the truth about ourselves.'<sup>113</sup>

The novel certainly invites such a reading, I would even say it is the 'correct' reading to the extent that every text includes a dominant code of significance which one can read with and/or against. But I have argued that such a textual complicity between assumed author and implied reader provides a falsely satisfying solution to the complexities of power, authority and identity as they play themselves out in (but not *only* in) literature. The subjectification of the question of desire which is so central to the texts of Lacan on which I have drawn (the role of the analyst being, recall, to subjectify the question, 'What does the other want [*of me*]?'), should not be subordinated to this experience of the void behind fantasy – to the realisation that Jews, women, etc. are Not-All. That would be to impose absolute knowledge upon the reader, inviting us to read according to agreed protocols of non-mastery without passing through the dimension which Lacan called 'True Speech'.

If we are to trace a path through *Nightwood* which remains in touch with the desire of the Other in all its maddening, hopeful, surprising, idiotic, tender and painful convolutions, we require an itinerary on the course of which the text's troublesome aspects will not sublimate predictably as pure insights into the emptiness of identity or the illegitimacy of legibility, remaining instead objects of anxiety which we must read, repeatedly.

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<sup>113</sup> *Sublime*, p. 144.

Therefore, in chapter 2 I torsion my attention towards Felix, whose interest as a character may not transcend, confirm or negate the charges of anti-semitism which may be laid against the text. As a character who is infused with a desire which both is and is not his own – located in a dialectical struggle between Christian and Jew which is both the driver of the narrative and just one of a series of displacements of the irreducible void at the heart of patriarchal (or any) signifying order – Felix unassumingly commands our attention, not least because in his final ‘passage to the act’ he obeys the injunction to subjection with which the novel opened at the site of his birth, bowing down to a man in a bar whom he takes to be a displaced Russian aristocrat.

This is an involuntary act of obeisance. Like the *soi-disant* post-structuralist reader of *Nightwood* who is rightly assured that the text will have undermined all bonds of identity in advance, Felix is fully aware of the Grand Duke’s symbolic castration (at the historical hands of the Bolsheviks) and as such knows that he cannot be commanded to respond to this Master, but this knowledge has in no way liberated him from the need to submit before the Other, therefore he completes the motion ‘as an animal will turn its head away from a human, as if in mortal shame’.<sup>114</sup> (Again, much like the well-trained academic reader who writes their paper on *Nightwood* in unquestioning conformity with the desire of the Big Other of peer review).

All of the main characters in *Nightwood* ‘give up’ in some sense by the novel’s end, but it is possible to see in most of them figures of ‘abjection’ which pull the reader ‘to a place where meaning collapses’<sup>115</sup>, a place which is always available to sublation as a phantasmatic site of emancipation. In contrast, to recognise the persistence of our desire in such a figure as Felix is difficult. We do not want to identify with him as he compulsively repeats a gesture in which we perceive an abjection which could in no way be overwritten with our fantasies of liberatory *puissance*.

Worse still, in Felix’s very final lines there is a tender and equally unbearable exchange with his young son, named Guido Jr. after his father; a reminder that remaining within the frame of language and desire binds us into intersubjective bonds with objects of love which we are unable to avoid hurting, misleading and misreading:

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<sup>114</sup> N, p. 111.

<sup>115</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) p. 2.

[H]e turned and made a slight bow, his head in his confusion making a complete half-swing, as an animal will turn its head away from a human, as if in mortal shame.

He stumbled as he got into his carriage. 'Come,' he said, taking the child's fingers in his own. 'You are cold.' He poured a few drops of oil, and began rubbing Guido's hands.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> N, p. 111.



## **Chapter 2 – Tracing the Sovereign through *Nightwood***

The problem for me is how to avoid this question, central to the theme of right, regarding sovereignty and the obedience of individual subjects in order that I may substitute the problem of domination and subjugation for that of sovereignty and obedience. (Michel Foucault, 'Lecture 2, 14 Jan 1976', in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p. 34.)

I believe it is necessary, by way of philosophical, historical analysis, to deconstruct the political theology of sovereignty [...] But at the same time you should not think that you must fight pure and simple for the dissolution of all sovereignty: that is neither realistic nor desirable. (Jacques Derrida, 'For a Justice to Come', in *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, ed. Lasse Thomassen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 263.)

'[...] pray to the good God, she will keep you. Personally I call her 'she' because of the way she made me; it somehow balances the mistake. [...] That priceless galaxy of misinformation called the mind, harnessed to that stupendous and threadbare glomerate compulsion called the soul, ambling down the almost obliterated bridle path of Well and Ill, fortuitously planned, – is the holy Habeas Corpus, the manner in which the body is brought before the judge [...]' (Dr O'Connor, in Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood: The Original Version and Related Drafts* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995), pp. 124-25.)

In this chapter the field of analysis shifts from Lacanian psychoanalysis to political philosophy. Well, at least to the classical concept of 'sovereignty' (as a relay term for problematics of freedom, authority, law, justice, property, right and prohibition) as it is taken up, reframed and misused in a small number of texts by Derrida and Foucault. We will speculate: In what sense is sovereignty necessarily coupled to the patriarchal tradition within which it has been formulated historically? Can and should a notion of political-economic sovereignty be preserved within or

alongside the broad 'post-structuralist' commitment to decentring the subject, liberating power and desire from repressive regimes, and celebrating the discontinuous and multiple? And why exactly do we so often invoke the term 'radical' and brand our work as a liberation of the local, discontinuous, fluid manifestations of desire and power, while declaring war on figures of authority, normative values, boundaries? (Where) do fantasy images of the Father as bearer of Law, Right and Prohibition fit in such an intellectual climate? Without them, can a 'we' (radical or otherwise) make itself figure at all?

For Michel Foucault one answer appears to be that 'sovereignty' and the (male, authoritarian) Sovereign are articulated inseparably and must both be abandoned, therefore, in order to conceive an anti-disciplinary discourse which rescues 'subjugated knowledges' from the dominion of subjectivity; 'If one wants to look for a nondisciplinary form of power, or rather, to struggle against disciplines and disciplinary power, it is not towards the ancient right of sovereignty that one should turn, but towards the possibility of a new form of right, one which must indeed be antidisciplinarian, but at the same time liberated from the principle of sovereignty.'<sup>117</sup> Sovereignty, for Foucault, cannot function as an emancipatory ideal, since it is tainted by genealogical association with autocratic power:

Sovereign, law and prohibition formed a system of representation of power which was extended during the subsequent [Modern] era by the theories of right: political theory has never ceased to be obsessed with the theory of the sovereign [...] What we need, however, is a political theory that isn't erected around the problem of sovereignty, nor therefore around the problems of law and prohibition. We need to cut off the king's head: in political theory that has still to be done.<sup>118</sup>

And yet, as we shall see, in his genealogy of 'biopolitics' Foucault seems to hesitate (if only for rhetorical effect) when he is moved to address the way in which classical liberalism banishes the Sovereign from economic decision-making – conceiving as it

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<sup>117</sup>Michel Foucault, 'Lecture 2, 14 Jan 1976', in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p. 45.

<sup>118</sup>Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 109-33 (p. 122).

does of a minimal, night watchman state which does not interfere with the optimisation of productivity to be achieved via free trade and free capital movement. Noting the challenges to this ‘curse against the economic sovereign’ posed by various socialisms, Foucault lets the question hang: ‘In spite of everything, may there not be a point through which we can define an economic sovereignty?’<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, as he explores the rise of liberal political economy in his biopolitics lectures we hear discordant echoes of Bataille's work on the sovereignty of general economy (on which, see section 4 of this chapter, ‘A prayer without “margin”’), which suggest that mysterious status associated with legal sovereignty may indeed possess an enduring subversive potential for our neoliberal era; ‘The theory of sovereignty permits the foundation of an absolute power in the absolute expenditure of power. It does not allow for a calculation of power in terms of the minimum expenditure for the maximum return.’<sup>120</sup>

The (mis)treatment of legal sovereignty in Foucault's writings, and the way in which the image of the tyrannical patriarch overdetermines it, is one of the central criticisms raised against his work by Jürgen Habermas, who claims that Foucault's ‘uncircumspect levelling of culture and politics to immediate substrates of the application of violence’ means that ‘the ungrounded impression arises that the bourgeois constitutional state is a dysfunctional relic from the period of absolutism’.<sup>121</sup> While I would not wish to position my own work in especially close proximity to the Habermasian critique of post-structuralism, I feel that he highlights genuine limitations in much contemporary theoretical work which continues to apply the Foucauldian paradigm – genealogies of power/domination – with minimal self-criticism, and does so in circumstances far removed from the historical, social and political structures against which Foucault was working in the 1970s.

Bruno Latour's provocatively-titled ‘Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern’ (2004), notoriously claimed that critics

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<sup>119</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Lecture 11: 28 March 1979’, in *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-1979* trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 283.

<sup>120</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Lecture 2, 14 Jan 1976’, in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, Michael Kelly ed. (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 1994), p. 42.

<sup>121</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again’ in *Critique and Power*, pp. 79-107, p. 101.

are still fighting yesterday's wars with outdated, under-maintained and inappropriate theoretical weaponry:

What if explanations resorting automatically to power, society, discourse had outlived their usefulness and deteriorated to the point of now feeding the most gullible sort of critique? [...] Do you see why I am worried? Threats might have changed so much that we might still be directing all our arsenal east or west while the enemy has now moved to a very different place. After all, masses of atomic missiles are transformed into a huge pile of junk once the question becomes how to defend against militants armed with box cutters or dirty bombs. Why would it not be the same with our critical arsenal, with the neutron bombs of deconstruction, with the missiles of discourse analysis? Or maybe it is that critique has been miniaturized like computers have. I have always fancied that what took great effort, occupied huge rooms, cost a lot of sweat and money, for people like Nietzsche and Benjamin, can be had for nothing, much like the supercomputers of the 1950s, which used to fill large halls and expend a vast amount of electricity and heat, but now are accessible for a dime and no bigger than a fingernail. As the recent advertisement of a Hollywood film proclaimed, "Everything is suspect . . . Everyone is for sale . . . And nothing is what it seems."<sup>122</sup>

Unsettling and infuriating perhaps. As for myself, I bridle at the equivalence that Latour implies between 'the missiles of discourse analysis' and the 'neutron bombs' of deconstruction. Deconstruction cannot be understood as a total liquidation of prior structuring principles; neither is it a body of discourse which can be grasped cheaply (as many a perplexed graduate student will irately confirm). Furthermore, in Foucault's analyses one is often aware that, in spite of his protestations, his genealogies do claim the objectivity of a hard science and the certainty of a noble purpose – unveiling the real state of affairs behind official facades – and therein lies the temptation for a Foucauldean academic to grasp onto a simplistic metanarrative about the spread of technologies of disciplinary oppression in order to gain some purchase on the shifting

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<sup>122</sup>Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', *Critical Enquiry*, 30 (Winter 2004), 225-248 (pp. 225-248, pp. 229-230).

sands of postmodern thought. For example: ‘We must escape the limited field of juridical sovereignty and State institutions, and instead base our analysis of power on the study of the techniques and tactics of domination [...] I believe that what then comes into view is a solid body of historical fact.’<sup>123124</sup>

Derrida was always more circumspect (or equivocal, if you will) about both the desirability and the possibility of breaking with the major traditions of European culture, society and politics in the name of the ‘subjugated’ (a problematic term: third wave feminism is one example among many where implicit normative assumptions about what constitutes, sustains and differentiates a subjugated group have had to be questioned, along with the notion of inheritance – which can no longer simply be redolent of patriarchal imposition, but also of the complex legacies of second wave ‘matriarchs’).<sup>125</sup> His dialogues with the Fathers of various traditions (Plato, Carl

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<sup>123</sup>Michel Foucault, 'Lecture 2, 14 Jan 1976', p. 40.

<sup>124</sup>In criticising the Foucault who urged that we can access a ‘solid body [...] of fact’ if we ‘base our analysis of power on the study of the techniques and tactics of domination’, I am focusing on a particular aspect of his work, and a limited period of his career in the 1970s. I run the risk therefore of perpetrating an injustice upon a thinker who pleaded in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2002), ‘Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same’ (p. 19)?

Nonetheless, I believe the 'Foucault' that I identify and criticise in this chapter is the dominant ‘author function’, in so far as his name is ‘characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses’ within today's academia ('What Is an Author?' in *The Foucault Reader*, pp. 101-20 (p. 108)). If one measures influence by citations alone, it is clear that it is the Foucault that wrote – in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) – that ‘[t]he soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body’ (p. 30) which has been hegemonic. With 31,694 citations, *Discipline and Punish* is by far his most referenced work; the second most cited is from the same period, *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, with a comparatively meagre 18,970. Of his late works – in which his focus moved to ethics, the creative practices of self-formation, and questions such as, ‘why couldn't everyone's life become a work of art?’ ('On The Genealogy of Ethics', *The Foucault Reader*, pp.340-72 (p. 350)) – the most popular is a Spanish-language Mexican edition of *The History of Sexuality: Vol II (Historia de la sexualidad: El uso de los placeres)*, with just 6,509 citations.

<<http://scholar.google.co.uk/citations?user=AKqYlxMAAAAJ&hl=en>>

[accessed 09/06/12].

<sup>125</sup>See, for example, Diane Elam, 'Sisters Are Doing It to Themselves', in *Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue*, ed. E Ann Kaplan and Devoney Looser (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) pp. 55-67. Elam argues that ‘recourse to “common oppression” as a political platform has done more to deny the social condition of various women than it has helped to redress any injustices’ (p. 57). And she raises the question of what forms of association and differentiation between races, classes and generations of women feminism might yet engender. She treats the emergence of ‘post-feminism’ as an unwelcome ‘variation on the theme of Oedipal conflict’ in which ‘a younger generation will swing wildly between mother worship and disdain for past inadequacies,

Schmitt, Heidegger, Freud, etc.) are never parricidal, or are no more so than *any* contest where the meaning of meanings is at stake, instead establishing conversational mode in which these rather stiff, rigorous and robust figures are urged to let their guard down, to open to him, and to pass on materials out of which he can ‘cultivate’ a self:

[...] from the Bible to Plato, Kant, Marx, Freud, Heidegger, and so on. I don't want to renounce anything, indeed I cannot. Because, you know, learning to live is always narcissistic [...] one wants to live as much as possible, to save oneself, to persevere and to cultivate all these things which, though infinitely greater and more powerful than oneself, nonetheless form a part of this little “me” that they exceed on all sides. To ask me to renounce what formed me, what I've loved so much, what has been my law, is to ask me to die. In this fidelity there is a sort of instinct for self-preservation.<sup>126</sup>

Indeed, Derrida's preamble to his early paper on Foucault thematised his attempt to respond to his former teacher's work in an ironically Hegelian schema, wherein questions of parricide are reframed in the dialectics of self-recognition and alienation:

[H]aving formerly had the good fortune to study under Michel Foucault, I retain the consciousness of an admiring and grateful disciple. Now, the disciple's consciousness, when he starts, I would not say to dispute, but to engage in dialogue with the master or, better, to articulate the interminable and silent dialogue which made him into a disciple – this disciple's consciousness is an unhappy consciousness [...] This interminable unhappiness of the disciple perhaps stems from the fact that he does not know – or is still concealing from himself – that the master, like real life, may always be absent. The disciple

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while the older generation will act out its nagging sense of the possibility of ingratitude by either accusing younger women of betrayal or seeking to control them in ways structurally parallel to patriarchy' (p. 60).

<sup>126</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: An Interview with Jean Birnbaum*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Hoboken, NJ: Melville House Publishing, 2007), p. 30.

must break the glass, or better the mirror, the reflection, his infinite speculation on the master. And start to speak.<sup>127</sup>

As Simon Crichley notes, Derrida's challenge to Hegel's writing was aimed at what he read as the familial, domesticating structure of the dialectic. 'Derrida's claim will be that "the *Aufhebung*, the economic law of the absolute reappropriation of absolute loss, is a family concept" (Gtr133a), [...] the movement of speculative dialectics always results in reappropriation, "... the guarding of the proper [*la garde du propre*]" (Gtr134a), bringing back all phenomena within the circle of the proper property, of propriety, of one's own – love, home, family, community, cognition.'<sup>128</sup> Given their shared suspicion of Hegel, it is perplexing that Derrida should begin his response to Foucault from *within* – and in terms of – a dialectical speculation upon the authority of Foucault, the 'master': certainly this is playful and antagonistic, in light of Foucault's well-known aversion to Hegelianism, but is his artful recourse to the master-slave dialectic and its sublation in the unhappy consciousness not also an ironic reduplication *en abyme* of the mythic overthrow of the master?

In this chapter, I do not explore the subsequent debate between Derrida and Foucault directly, nor those of their critical offspring. I look instead at another early paper in which Derrida provides an extended commentary on George Bataille's conception of Sovereignty, and its very specific debt to Hegel, for it is here that Derrida, in taking up the Hegelianism of Bataille, clarifies the sense, the degree and the temporality in which it is even conceivable to break with "infinite speculation upon the master".

Djuna Barnes' near contemporary, and a fellow purveyor of obscene Parisian literature, Bataille's interest in various forms of transgression was an acknowledged influence on Foucault, whose own 'Preface to Transgression' (1963), written for a special edition of *Critique* marking Bataille's death, celebrates Bataille's achievement as an original and path-breaking transgression of thought, a preface to a philosophy

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<sup>127</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Cogito and the History of Madness', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), pp. 36-76 (pp. 36-37).

<sup>128</sup> Simon Crichley, 'A Commentary Upon Derrida's Reading of Hegel in *Glas*', in *Hegel After Derrida*, ed. Stuart Barnett (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.197-226 (pp. 205-06).

freed to give voice to limit-experiences ‘in a language stripped of dialectics’<sup>129</sup>:

In short, the experience of the philosopher who finds, not outside his language (the result of an external accident or imaginary exercise), but at the inner core of its possibilities, the transgression of his philosophical being; and thus, the non-dialectical language of the limit which only arises in transgressing the one who speaks.<sup>130</sup>

But, as Judith Serkis argues, Foucault’s essay is problematic insofar as its elaboration of self-loss effaces the privileged and reserved status of the (masculine) voice of the writer. Though Foucault claims that it is the dialectic itself which ‘since Kant, could only designate [limit-experience] from the distance and from the exterior’, Serkis asserts that Foucault and Bataille themselves reflect from a (non-dialectical, but most definitely specular) distance upon the ecstatic torture of madness and self-loss, this distance being effaced in an imaginary solution focused upon the exemplary self-loss of Woman:

Foucault’s readings collapse the narrator’s [of Bataille’s erotic fiction]/Bataille’s attempts at loss with the self-annihilation repeatedly imaged by feminine others [...] In focusing upon a self-loss that is perpetually deferred as long as he continues to theorise, Foucault finesses and obscures the position he remains in while writing. [...] An account of the gendering of Bataille’s transgression demonstrates how it remains within a specular and speculative economy in which the writing subject is always at a certain distance from what he “sees”.<sup>131</sup>

Suzanne Guerlac believes that Foucault’s essay decisively shaped the development of ‘post-structuralism’ because it claimed that this inchoate grouping of theorists were the proper heirs to Bataille’s legacy, and instated ‘transgression’ as one of their key

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<sup>129</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Preface to Transgression’, in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) pp. 29-52 (p. 41).

<sup>130</sup> Transgression, p. 44.

<sup>131</sup> Judith Serkis, ‘No Fun and Games Until Someone Loses an Eye: Transgression and Masculinity in Bataille and Foucault’, *Diacritics*, 26:2 (1996) 18-30 (p. 29).

terms:

From this point on, theorists will look to transgression as a way of getting beyond the constraints of the Hegelian dialectic. Taking their cue from Foucault, they will begin to identify transgression with language. Foucault's interpretation of transgression anticipates – we could even say programs – the role Bataille will be assigned in the context of poststructuralist theory.<sup>132</sup>

In this regard, Guerlac sees nothing substantially heterogeneous to this tradition in Derrida's own appreciation of Bataille, writing that his 'now canonical account' of Bataille's writing as 'systematic displacement' of Hegel reiterates the post-structuralist axiomatic as sketched out by Foucault four years earlier:

With [Bataillean] sovereignty, Derrida affirms, there is a renunciation of recognition and meaning. No longer to seek recognition, he declares, is "the ultimate subversion of mastery." The term "transgression" which Bataille uses to characterise eroticism (as well as poetry, laughter and sacrifice) has come to stand for this gesture of subversion which is in turn associated with the transgression of philosophy itself<sup>133</sup>

However, on my reading Bataille's idiosyncratic conception of (economic) sovereignty in relation to the Hegelian Master-Slave dialectic was in fact taken in a quite different direction by Derrida in 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without reserve' (1967); Bataille providing an occasion for Derrida to warn against his contemporaries (mentioning no names!) against 'shrugging off' the inheritance of Hegelian dialectics (see below).

Nevertheless, if Foucault and Derrida are sometimes too quickly conflated by the term 'post-structuralist', as in Guerlac's case, I will surely be guilty of succumbing to the opposite temptation - splitting the pair into the good and bad sons of Bataille. Still, temporarily bracketing my motivations for thus driving a wedge between these two figures, I claim that I have not hit arbitrarily upon this term, Sovereignty, or these

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<sup>132</sup> Suzanne Guerlac, 'Bataille in Theory: Afterimages (Lascaux)', *Diacritics*, 26:2 (1996) 6-17 (p. 7).

<sup>133</sup> Suzanne Guerlac, "'Recognition" by a Woman!: A Reading of Bataille's *L'Erotisme*', *Yale French Studies*, 78 (1990) 90-105 (p. 90).

texts, to force the division. Among others, Friedrich Balke has noted that for both thinkers the figure of the Sovereign and the question of sovereignty is crucial to their political interventions. In Balke's view, '[f]or Derrida, there is no escape from the structure of sovereignty, just as little as from that of metaphysics; what he apostrophizes as the coming democracy can never substitute sovereignty, but can only – if at all – differ from it in an inconspicuous, minimal manner.'<sup>134</sup> In consequence Derrida's metaphysical determination of sovereignty falls into 'hasty generalization, as there is in Derrida's thought no real history of sovereignty, but merely an initial 'onto-theological' determination which cannot be modified or thwarted by a historical event'.<sup>135</sup> Since such a historiographic horizon ought to be made visible, Balke suggests we must break with the deconstructive project and renew our affiliation with the Foucauldian genealogy of power:

For Foucault, the problem of sovereignty is not founded in a metaphysical basic position, in the – not at all arbitrary – impact of a model or a discourse that prevents us from thinking a power that has long ceased to function according to the model of sovereignty. [...] Foucault thus scans European history for what in its politics eludes the model of sovereignty. Whereas for Derrida the history of the political can never escape the spell of the sovereign, Foucault tries to excavate that moment in political history where the sovereign may not cease to exist, but forever loses his exemplary position.<sup>136</sup>

In staging these theoretical hostilities across Barnes' territory, I risk colonising the textual body – inscribing it as a mere specular object, an abstract thing-in-itself, in reflexive determination of which the sovereignty of my preferred philosophers can be recognised in their (non)mastery. Yet, Hegel being hard to 'shrug off', I claim this tendency towards appropriation is present in *any* textual encounter (see my commentary on de Lauretis and Burke below).

For a less ethically vexed defence of my approach I might appeal to Rachel

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<sup>134</sup> Friedrich Balke, 'Derrida and Foucault on Sovereignty', *German Law Journal* 6:1 (2005), pp.71-85, p. 80.

<sup>135</sup> Balke, p. 72.

<sup>136</sup> Balke, p. 80.

Potter's recent work. Insisting that the novel 'needs to be read in relation to the wider political context'<sup>137</sup>, she adumbrates the text's 'dark imaginative engagement'<sup>138</sup> with an interwar conjuncture characterised by 'States [...] in flux, both geographically [...] and in terms of political systems', out of which 'influential theories of Sovereignty were produced',<sup>139</sup> including Benjamin's critique of the relations between law and violence, and Carl Schmitt's elaboration of the Sovereign as the figure who has the power to suspend the law. Since her thesis is that

[I]mages of sovereignty, judgement and dispossession tend to connect to each other in the novel so that these terms are defined in relation to each other. [Taken together] [t]hey evoke a crisis of citizenship [...].<sup>140</sup>

There is value in also dwelling on the disputed intellectual legacies of George Bataille, both as a further contemporaneous discourse upon the dialectic interplay between sovereignty, law and (auto-)dispossession, and as a critical resource from which to model the complex *economies of sovereignty* present in *Nightwood's* evocation of social, political and cultural crises. Furthermore, the Bataillean notion of transgression also resonates with Potter's sensitive reading of the figuration of the Sovereign in *Nightwood* as 'as the one individual who legitimises the state by being able to disobey its rules, an idea of inclusive transgression'<sup>141</sup>, and whose authorisation so to so transgress contingent upon His place within a symbolic economy.

Why must the King be bowed down to? [...] Not because of any intrinsic qualities, but because he has been set apart. [...] [T]he King's sovereignty relies upon a theatrics of power [...].<sup>142</sup>

So a close reading of Derrida's essay on Bataille below, alongside Foucault's

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<sup>137</sup> Rachel Potter, 'Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* and Disqualification', *Affirmations: of the Modern* 1:1 (2013), 178-95 (p. 181).

<sup>138</sup> Potter, p. 195.

<sup>139</sup> Potter, p. 192.

<sup>140</sup> Potter, p. 180.

<sup>141</sup> Potter, p. 185.

<sup>142</sup> Potter, p. 185.

elaboration of the liberal biopolitical discourse which will apparently have supplanted this 'exemplary position' of the master/patriarch/sovereign, provides the means to read (maybe too much into) Felix Volkbein's flawed attempts to found a subjectivity upon the 'theatrics of power' of 'Old Europe'. Later, via an untidy system of interpretive regress, I use the reading of Bataille's Sovereignty – itself grounded in the glorious failure of Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic and having “as its milieu this night of secret difference”<sup>143</sup> between Master and Sovereign – to explicate the narrative of Robin and Nora's relationship in *Nightwood*, without betraying (or at least *betraying* without *discovering*) the 'secret' of its power. It may seem im- or non-pertinent to include one of modernist literature's great lesbian love affairs in my knotty discussion of patriarchs, political sovereignty and economic excess. I do so partly because the collision of Nora-Robin exerts an irresistible pull on even the most stable body of postgraduate argumentation. But as I yield to Barnes' gravity, I nevertheless wish to show that the critical issues discussed in the preceding sections are still in play; even if Robin does laugh her way out of her marriage to Felix, the enigmatic treatment Barnes gives to Robin and Nora's bond does not shrug off the issues of sovereignty, domination, Master-and-slave, etc. which defined Robin's marriage.

Finally, to illustrate my point about the necessity for theory to take seriously the tensions, paradoxes and silences which are still carried in the figure 'sovereignty', I close the chapter with a discussion of Teresa de Lauretis' “*Nightwood*” and “The Terror of Uncertain Signs” (2008), reading it as an exemplary instance of an apparently productive reading of the novel which stultifies Barnes' textual effects in trying too hard to liberate them from more “conventional” readings of the book's signifying structure – here, one given in an early critique of Barnes' novel by Kenneth Burke. My feeling is that de Lauretis' claim to have discovered a radical reading strategy, by identifying the text's peculiar signifying structure with the Freudian death drive, is belied by her conclusion that she has thereby ‘come to terms’ with the uncanniness of Barnes. De Lauretis breaks radically with Burke's stifling and problematic religious reading of *Nightwood*, but – just as Habermas says of Foucault's attempt to formulate a nondisciplinary form of power that would break fundamentally

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<sup>143</sup>Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism Without Reserve' in *Writing and Difference* trans. Alan Bass (Oxford: Routledge Classics, 2001), p. 337 [henceforth abbreviated as 'FRGE'].

with the tradition of sovereignty – in so doing she ‘has robbed it of the experiential potential of an at once terrifying and attractive fascination’.<sup>144</sup> The patriarchal drive towards order and certainty returns here in the very gestures of a critic who tries to break it apart decisively; as the founder of deconstruction cautioned us, paternalistically, ‘given over to “play without rules,” poetry risks letting itself be domesticated, “subordinated,” better than ever.’<sup>145</sup>

### **1. Felix Volkbein's immaterial inheritance no.1, The Supplement – ‘Because of Dreyfus, therefore...’?**

What had formed Felix from the date of his birth [1880] to his coming to thirty was unknown to the world, for the step of the Wandering Jew is in every son.<sup>146</sup>

Before moving into these abstract theoretical concerns, in this section I take the bearings of my reading of Sovereignty and Jewishness (in *Nightwood*) from two catastrophic incidents in Jewish-European history which fall under the significant silent ‘unknown’ archive in Barnes' novel – both offering partial and insoluble solutions to the mystery of what exactly did form Felix, between the date of his birth (around 1880) and his reappearance, a paragraph later in the text, at the age of thirty.

The historical context of Felix Volkbein's sense of 'Jewishness' is left highly opaque in Barnes' text. Two particular incidents in that thirty year history of European Jews are brought forward to fill out the gap, penetrate the darkness. Rather a phallogocentric approach then, but both examples problematise a simple equation of sovereign, state and (in)justice. First, 'the Dreyfus affair', in which a Jewish officer in the French army was notoriously framed as a traitor to the State; then, the defence of Viennese Jews against popular anti-Semitism by the Austrian Emperor, Francis Joseph.

The second historical trace is quietly inscribed, twice, in *Nightwood's* second chapter: firstly, as Felix courts the young American, Robin Vote; then again, pages

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<sup>144</sup> Habermas, p. 96.

<sup>145</sup>FRGE, p. 330.

<sup>146</sup>N, p. 8.

later, as Robin is carrying Felix's child and attempting to refashion her identity in line with a fantasy of the grand European tradition which Felix wills his son to inherit. In both moments the trace of Emperor Joseph appears in association with a certain failure to ground the subjectivity of these two very modern characters. And that failure opens onto an experience of sovereignty, understood in the Bataillean/Derridean sense of the term we will discuss fully below.

The notorious Dreyfus Affair ignited an unprecedented wave of French anti-semitism, but also gave rise to a series of debates, discursive transformations, and phantasmatic anxieties about (among other things) male heroism, justice, and the Jewish body. All of which took form during the novel's elided time-frame between Felix's birth and his thirtieth year. In 1894 Alfred Dreyfus, a promising young Jewish officer in the General Staff of the French army, was falsely convicted of espionage, court-martialled, and sentenced to exile in conditions which were considered, *de facto*, a death sentence. The campaign to free Dreyfus and clear his name lasted over a decade, fought by the '*Dreyfusards*' in a series of court cases and press debates, best remembered of which are Emile Zola's open letter to the French establishment, '*J'accuse*' (1898), and the consequent trial in which that writer was charged with libelling the army. The controversy not only scandalised French society, but exposed, shaped and intensified virulent hatred of the figure of the assimilated Jew. In 1899 Dreyfus was pardoned, but not finally acquitted until 1906, at which point he was reinstated in the army.

The significance of what became known to posterity as the Dreyfus affair for European (and specifically French) Jewish identity was profound: identified as a key moment in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) by Arendt, and singled out by the founder of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, as the originary moment of his new exceptionalist vision.<sup>147</sup> Obviously, one reason for this is the level of violence and discrimination unleashed by the controversy. For example, in her reflection on the legacy of the affair, Jacqueline Rose describes the furious reaction of French 'patriots' to Emile Zola's letter in defence of Dreyfus:

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<sup>147</sup>Quoted in Jacqueline Rose, "'J'accuse': Dreyfus in Our Times', *London Review of Books*, 32:11 (2010) <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n11/jacqueline-rose/jaccuse-dreyfus-in-our-times>> [accessed 16/02/2012]

The publication of '*J'accuse*' in 1898, and Zola's subsequent trial, were the occasion for the most vicious outpouring of anti-semitism across France. The day after the letter was published, anti-Jewish riots, attracting up to 4000 people in each town, broke out in Nantes, Nancy, Rennes, Bordeaux, Moulins, Montpellier, Angoulême, Tours, Poitiers, Toulouse, Angers, Rouen, Châlons and Saint-Malo, as well as in Paris. Jewish shops were attacked, synagogues besieged, Jews were assaulted in the street, effigies of Dreyfus and Zola were burned.<sup>148</sup>

Shocking and ominous as this was, it was perhaps the singular fate of Dreyfus himself, his rapid incorporation into and sudden, unjust banishment from the state apparatus, which struck the greater symbolic blow to Jewish-European identity. A wealthy, successful officer, climbing the ranks of French society as he rose through its military hierarchy, suddenly became a despised pariah; his expulsion played out in a specifically anti-semitic register, shattering the hope that a Jewish person might be seen to 'belong' in French society and national life. Rose argues that anti-semitism took on a new form at this moment. Now the threat of the Jew was no longer his foreignness itself. The danger was his desire to assimilate to the body of the state, to count as integral rather than as a usurious addition to the organ whole – better he a money-lender than a General be;

If we look more closely at this virulent anti-semitism, one belief stands out from the rest: the conviction that the Jew was not a Frenchman. He was therefore inherently a traitor. Seen in this light, the Dreyfus affair was the fulfilment of an anti-semitic dream – 'an immense grace proffered to France', in the words of La Croix after Dreyfus's 1894 court-martial [...] Assimilation, on which the French Jew prided himself, turned out to have been a myth, since overnight one Jew had gone – in Hannah Arendt's terms – from being a parvenu to a pariah. In this context the worst offence of the Jew was no longer embodying the world of money to which his talents and history had consigned him (not that such views ever included any recognition of Jewish

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<sup>148</sup>Rose, "'J'accuse'".

history). If the Jew's crime was being a foreigner, a far worse sin was to think he might cease to be one. 'We used to attack them for being nothing but usurers,' one commentator wrote, 'today people want to strike at the Jews because they now claim to be foreigners at nothing.'<sup>149</sup>

As in Chapter 1, we might wonder at this juncture whether Djuna Barnes' novel, by failing to explicitly locate Felix's 'disqualification' from patriarchy in this vital historical context, perpetuates an insidiously naturalised, ahistorical vision of anti-semitism. Why, we might ask, does contemporary anti-semitism, and especially Dreyfus, not appear in its particularity in Barnes' text? Is her Jewish protagonist not described as a nationless wanderer with shady relations to the world of finance, the contemporary instance of the eternal archetype? But does Barnes not also, in uncritical accord with the dominant strain of early twentieth century anti-semitism identified by Rose, encode Felix's situation as a dislocated and dislocating adaptation to a model of European citizenship which would not (but cannot help) leave any trace of the 'foreign'? When he first presents himself to Robin Vote, the American girl he hopes will bear him a son 'who would feel as he felt about the "great past"',<sup>150</sup> Felix's association to the world of transnational capital is underlined and indexed, without detectable irony, to his polyglottic commerce across national-linguistic boundaries:

He told her he had a post in the *Crédit Lyonnais*, earning two thousand five hundred francs a week; a master of seven tongues, he was useful to the bank, and, he added, he had a trifle saved up, gained in speculations.<sup>151</sup>

Isn't it strange, given Felix's desire to produce for himself a kinship with nobility and monumental history – and to use Robin to achieve this – that he would try to woo her by playing up to the role of stateless Jewish financier? As per his father's dandyish appearance, Felix's rootlessness signifies more positively within *Nightwood's* bohemian enclave: less pariah or usurer, more modern cosmopolitan. After all, it is not Robin or any other character who denigrates Felix's nomadism, only Felix who self-

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<sup>149</sup>Rose, "'J'accuse'".

<sup>150</sup>*N*, p. 37.

<sup>151</sup>*N*, p. 39.

reflexively constructs his modernity as nihilism – he is referring to himself, as well as his hopes and fears for his son, when he remarks; ‘The modern child has nothing left to hold to, or to put it better, he has nothing to hold with.’<sup>152</sup> A chain of equivalence is in place here (Father [Felix] = Son [Guido Jr]) = (Jewish = Modern). Recalling Trubowitz’s claim that in *Nightwood* Jewishness is generalised into a narratological mode as well as a trope of universal cultural degeneration, it might be possible to say that if the entire cast of the novel are delineated according to a traditional anti-semitic narrative code (wandering, rootless, superficial, sickly), Felix is perhaps distinguished as the truly, originally Jewish figure precisely insofar as his thoughts, words and actions turn always upon the necessity of fabricating some ‘authentic’ (i.e. non-Jewish) tradition to which he could cleave.

There is a well-established and unsalutary overlap between the political right’s representation of parasitic Jews and of Modern urbanites, in which the former bear the sinister truth behind the freedom and optimism proclaimed by the latter. Yet, interestingly, Richard Cohen notes that ‘amid the tremendous outpouring of visual imagery during the Dreyfus affair’ the Wandering Jew was rarely mentioned, even though its ‘association with Christian tradition and with the notion of homelessness could have provided grist for the mill for those who desired to showcase these perspectives in the Dreyfusard/anti-Dreyfusard divide that pitted Christian and monarchical groups against liberal and republican ones.’<sup>153</sup> By contrast, in the year of *Nightwood*’s publication (1936) Léon Blum became France’s first Jewish Prime Minister and was subjected to a sustained media attack which drew on that rootless figure; ‘During the intensive anti-Semitic campaign against Léon Blum in France in the 1930s [...] he was often vilified for being a Wandering Jew’ in a series of representations which ‘feminised’ him, so that ‘he was perceived as a weak and unassertive prime minister, his political image merging with his cultural one’, and not only weak but ‘lacking deep roots in French soil’.<sup>154</sup>

This image of a Wandering Jew holding the reins of government is one I would like to linger in the mind – would it be naïve to imagine it, stripped of its anti-Semitic

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<sup>152</sup>N, p. 38.

<sup>153</sup>Richard I Cohen, ‘The “Wandering Jew” from Medieval Legend to Modern Metaphor’, in *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times*, ed. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 147-175 (p. 165).

<sup>154</sup>Cohen, p. 168.

overtones, as a deconstructive figure in which a nomad vs patriarch binary is overcome, a figure encompassing shared values, rights and responsibilities alongside openness, flexibility and creativity? As Rose remarks of the Dreyfus affair, it is crucial to the legacy of men like Dreyfus and Blum that we do not read their stories only as a particularist, local struggle for emancipation, but also to hear the note of a universal struggle for justice. Otherwise, the legacy of the Affair remains eminently appropriable by the political Right, and ironically by the 'military democracy' of the Israeli state;

Because of Dreyfus, therefore Israel. It is an argument that many find unanswerable: the crimes perpetrated by the French state against the Jewish officer heralded, for those who could hear, the end of the dream of emancipation for European Jews. Jewish nationalism would then be the most important lesson of the affair (for many in Israel it is Dreyfus as much as, or even more than, the *Shoah* that makes this unavoidably clear). But what happens if instead we run the line: because of Dreyfus, therefore justice, or rather the struggle for justice, crucially for the Jews a universal and endless affair?<sup>155</sup>

If a discourse of justice is to carry any weight, can we afford to depreciate the figure of the sovereign? Exclude the law-giver? Debar the judge? Conversely, could any universalising acceptance of 'sovereignty' ever genuinely be a sovereignty of the radical *demos*, available to multiplicities of social, cultural and biological aggregations and their agonistic fluctuations within networks of power which do not reduce to a binary struggle between master and subject?

My claim is that to envision a non-binary power network, it is necessary that Foucault's performs and legitimates the Sovereign violence which he would displace in that very act – the imaginary (or better, the symbolic) decapitation of the Father/King/Sovereign. Any or all of whom may turn out to be hydra-headed. Later in this chapter I will develop the claim that this decapitation has to be at the 'imaginary', or poetic, as opposed to 'conceptual' level, in order for the discourse to expose itself to a politico-poetics of non-mastery.

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<sup>155</sup>Rose, "'J'accuse'".

For now, let us assume that where the wish to destroy a master is allowed to determine the logic of argumentation, a pseudo-liberatory disenchantment with the object of research is the most likely outcome. As proof this axiom, I now bring a blunt axe down upon the work of Christopher Forth, whose *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (2009) sets out to show how a crisis of masculinity overdetermined other themes of the Affair around race, class, and the relative positions of intellectuals and 'men of action'. Forth explicitly acknowledges the post-structuralist, specifically Foucauldean, paradigm which his reading of the Affair turns on. It is one in which issues of political sovereignty are viewed as somewhat reactionary, cumbersome and 'conventional', especially as compared with the analysis of discontinuous, 'fluid' modes of 'constraint' which he proffers:

Of all the post-structuralist theorists who have risen to prominence in French and Anglophone scholarship since that time [the *fin-de-siècle*], Michel Foucault has had the most marked and durable impact on historians of France, particularly among those seeking to think beyond the methodologies offered by conventional social and political theory [...] Foucault offered an alternative model of power that emphasised the more fluid role played by discourses and techniques of constraint rather than the juridical power 'possessed' by specific individuals and institutions. As Foucault demonstrated, the post-revolutionary French world gave rise to new 'disciplines' in new sciences such as criminology, penology, and psychiatry, and in the increasingly scientific field of medicine. In the absence of monarchy, and with the waning power of the Church, the 'experts' in these professions assumed the discursive authority to distinguish truth from falsehood, particularly in their power to define the 'normal' and the 'pathological' or deviant. These discourses and disciplines played a special role in the recently consolidated Third Republic, which grounded its secularist worldview in bodies of knowledge purporting to offer the light of 'truth' rather than the obfuscations of religious tradition or popular custom.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>156</sup>Christopher E. Forth, 'Introduction' to *Confronting Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle France*, ed. Christopher E. Forth and Elinor Accampo (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 3.

Without wishing to discount the value of Foucault's work on the discursive dimensions of power politics, I believe that the shortcomings Habermas identifies when his ideas are applied to empirical research have some bearings on the way Dreyfus is read by Forth. Specifically I refer to his claim that

Genealogical historiography deals with an object domain from which the theory of power has erased all traces of communicative actions entangled in lifeworld contexts. This suppression of basic concepts that could take into account the symbolic prestructuring of action systems burdens his research with problems that [...] Foucault does not address [...] the issues of how social order is possible at all, and of how individual and society are related to each other.<sup>157</sup>

Both of these questions – the ordering of society, and the individual's role within it – seem lost in much Foucauldian work, or are casually reframed as issues of discipline and resistance. In such manner, Forth's reading of Dreyfus concludes that the most salient political afterlife of the Dreyfus Affair emanates from the strategic manoeuvres with which Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard alike asserted their masculine virility. These discursive formations spread across the twentieth century histories of fascism and liberalism into our own era. 'If rightists transformed intellectuals into effeminate, however, liberal and socialist intellectuals countered such claims with strategies of their own. As a number of recent studies of political discourses reveal, throughout the twentieth century, stereotypes about gender and sexuality have abounded in discourses that are for and against fascism.'<sup>158</sup>

We are not concerned here with ethical obligations to society's excluded others; nor with understanding the relative capacities and proclivities for the *fin-de-siècle* French state to pervert or deliver justice. But nor should we be, Forth suggests, for 'such a perspective has no doubt contributed to the political mythology of the heroism of liberal and leftist intellectuals.'<sup>159</sup> Instead, Forth demythologises the Affair by

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<sup>157</sup>Habermas, p. 98.

<sup>158</sup>Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crises of Manhood* (Maryland, BA: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 240.

<sup>159</sup>Forth, p. 238.

reframing it as an exemplary ‘conflict between men of thought and men of action’.

To wonder whether one or the other style of masculinity had more of a hand in the rise of fascism misses the point. Whereas in earlier decades, historians had confidently plotted the long-term development of totalitarian and racist thought by way of the most explicit instances of nationalist and anti-Semitic ideology, many scholars today dispute narratives that depict such developments as simple deviations from Western liberal humanism. If we accept [...] that fascism and the Holocaust were integrally bound up with the processes of modernity, we also need to admit that it took both kinds of men to initiate and maintain the fascist machine.<sup>160</sup>

Can we speak so disparagingly of ‘the political mythology of heroism’, without excluding the deontological claims of ‘justice’, which disappear from view in Forth's work: even if the 'heroes' of the Affair were trying to shore up a rather anxious sense of their own masculinity – in parallel to the anti-Dreyfusards – they did so in defence of a falsely accused man who they had no self-interested need to protect, unlike the anti-Dreyfusards who believed a Jew was a born traitor, and unlike those who expressed their anxieties about modernity by attacking Jews in the streets or burning their shops. I think that these are differences that any analysis should hold near the foreground. Since Forth is determined to locate the deeper meaning of Fascist and totalitarian thought in the discursive formations of anxious masculinity, he can only allow 'heroic' intellectual traits as autonomous reflection, rational critique, and anti-populist position-taking to register as proto-Fascist.

In a long chapter entitled 'Crowds, Contagion, and the Dreyfusard Body', he does begin with a brief, awkward acknowledgement that ‘The eruption of popular anti-Semitism in France is one of the most widely cited and disturbing aspects of the Dreyfus Affair, and no discussion of crowd imagery should distract us from the fact that there were concrete reasons to be shocked at the behaviour of the crowd.’<sup>161</sup> But this caveat does not detain him as he advances his thesis that at the heart of the Dreyfusards' resistance to popular behaviour lay the fear of a crowd that ‘suggested a

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<sup>160</sup>Forth, pp. 240-41.

<sup>161</sup>Forth, p. 103.

liquefaction that was more personal, even fantasmatic in nature [than a problem of mass political violence], a protean threat of engulfment that paralleled the period's anxieties about modernity and cut to the heart of conventional assumptions about masculine autonomy.' This 'fantasy' of a threat 'from the unruly mob, whose rebelliousness and irrationality called for vigilance, surveillance, and control'<sup>162</sup> was then countered by the masculinist rhetoric of the 'Dreyfusard Body [...] the only one capable of resisting seduction and suggestion.'<sup>163</sup> Is it naïve of me to be surprised that in this chapter Forth chooses never to mention or describe any of the 'concrete' examples of crowd violence which the Dreyfusard's excoriated? Would there not have been space to briefly note what their fear of 'engulfment' was a response to? Recall that 'Jewish shops were attacked, synagogues besieged, Jews were assaulted in the street, effigies of Dreyfus and Zola were burned.'<sup>164</sup>

This is not to deny that we ought to recognise subtle complicities of Dreyfusard discourses in homophobic, even anti-Semitic, fantasy. Forth is surely wise to deny the more-Left-than-liberal reader the comforting certainty of good conscience. But some of the myths which the Dreyfusard's enacted – justice, truth, the rights and obligations of state and citizen – are surely worth rescuing from the wreckage of masculine identity. We are disenchanted with those myths of the Good Father which might historically have provided Habermas' 'symbolic prestructuring of action systems'. Yet for a book such as *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* to be able to downgrade ethical normativity to a level at which Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard appear discursively equivalent, we must as a readership be equally enchanted with the imago of the Bad Father – He whose actions *only* make sense as subtle techniques of control, whose benevolence is *always* another strategy of domination and self-assertion. Has such a reading really left the figure of the Sovereign behind?

It may be said that I am being unfair to Forth, who does explicitly state that in reframing the affair around a discursive analysis of gender his aim 'is not to reduce the complexities of the Dreyfus Affair to matters of gender and the body but to observe that such discourses provided a common idiom for conceptualising and discussing issues at the heart of the Affair. It is to assert that the 'politics' of the Dreyfus Affair

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<sup>162</sup>Forth, p. 104.

<sup>163</sup>Forth, p. 110.

<sup>164</sup>Rose, "'J'accuse'".

invoked issues that were personal as well as public.<sup>165</sup> The claim that fantasies about gendered bodies inevitably give form and substance to supposedly rational debates about ‘democracy, humanity, justice, and truth’<sup>166</sup> is certainly one that animates this thesis too. I differ, however, in refusing the comfortable perspective of the genealogist who can subvert ‘conventional’ readings of treason, injustice, truth, etc. by revealing the deeper truth about gender anxiety with the prestigious exactitude of judge or neurosurgeon.

‘[A]longside the problem of whether or not Dreyfus was guilty of treason lurked a deeper uncertainty about the manly credentials of those whose opinions on this issue purported to represent the good of the nation.’<sup>167</sup> Note the mixed spatial metaphor here – gendered anxiety is both on a common plane with anxieties about national interest, ‘alongside it’, and at the same time it penetrates onto a richer and more profound level, ‘deeper uncertainty’. It is not exactly that Forth has *reduced* the Dreyfus Affair to issues of gender and body: he has so oriented critical discourse that gender and body anxiety become the transcendent signifiers for truth. Other issues are at play in the Affair, but these remain surface phenomena, beached on the plane of ‘conventional historical methodology’<sup>168</sup>. The real stakes in the history of the Affair are over how we read liberal power politics through its constitutive exclusions:

Dreyfusards have typically been seen as latter-day heirs of the Enlightenment, and have thus been located on the side of modernity (the defence of human rights) triumphing over the forces of tradition (prejudice, intolerance, and demonization). This opposition no doubt has its ideological benefits, particularly when one depicts anti-Dreyfusards as paving the way for later anti-Semitic atrocities, a view that confirms the liberal tendency to see fascism as an aberration in an otherwise rational project of Enlightenment.<sup>169</sup>

Rejecting Enlightenment’s irrational belief in human reason, and Liberalism’s mission to bring/announce progress to under-developed social bodies, Foucauldian analyses privilege local, strategic interventions. If such work often lacks an explicit normative

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<sup>165</sup>Forth, p. 5.

<sup>166</sup>Forth, p. 6.

<sup>167</sup>Forth, p. 5. My italics.

<sup>168</sup>Forth, p. 4.

<sup>169</sup>Forth, p. 6.

framework in which ethical judgements can be stated (and therefore contested, rejected, or reflexively refined) this gap is often indeed productive, since it eschews the imposition of homogenising regularity on the analysis of diffuse, complex discursive situations. And yet, I claim, since one cannot avoid speaking and judging on the basis of a *relatively* substantial (if radically contingent and phantasmagorical) standard, the Foucauldian silence on normative values is compensated imaginatively, furtively, unquestioningly and negatively by the spectre of the master – here the ‘lurking’ figure of the anxious heterosexual male.

Hence Forth's rather underwhelming conclusion, which surely simplifies rather than adding complexity to our understanding of twentieth century horrors; ‘fascism represented one more conflict between men of thought and men of action [...] we also need to admit that it took both kinds of men to initiate and maintain the fascist machine.’<sup>170</sup>

A more interesting and ethically nuanced interpretation of the politico-aesthetic dimensions of Hero-ism emerges in Venitta Datta's essay on heroism and the Dreyfus Affair, published (to give him credit) in a recent volume coedited by Forth. In 'From Devil's Island to the Pantheon? Alfred Dreyfus, the Anti-Hero' (2009), Datta notes that Dreyfus himself has, ever since the time of his arrest, been excluded from the mythic pantheon of 'heroes' attached to the Affair that bears his name; ‘Although Dreyfus himself could arguably fit the Dreyfusard ideal of the hero – a selfless, modest man who exhibited moral courage in the face of widespread opposition, and some did indeed depict him in this manner – he was frequently viewed with antipathy even by his allies.’<sup>171</sup> She notes a number of overlapping factors which may have influenced his exclusion: anti-Semitism, obviously; a gendered anxiety about Dreyfus as a modern, effete type of soldier, as per Forth’s work (‘Dreyfus was also the symbol for a new type of officer, promoted not necessarily for his courage in battle, but rather for his technocratic qualities’);<sup>172</sup> then there is Dreyfus' own decision to accept a pardon rather than push for full acquittal, seen by the Dreyfusards as a cowardly submission

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<sup>170</sup>Forth, pp. 240-41.

<sup>171</sup>Venitta Datta, 'From Devil's Island to the Pantheon? Alfred Dreyfus, the Anti-Hero', in *Confronting Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle France*, ed. Christopher E. Forth and Elinor Accampo, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 217-234 (p. 217).

<sup>172</sup>Datta, pp. 221-22.

to the State; further, a lack of performative panache in Dreyfus's self-presentation ('it was because he was not theatrical enough that Dreyfus was seen as having performed badly [at his trials and his degradation ceremony], like a bad actor who didn't know his lines or who couldn't deliver them convincingly.'). Ultimately though, Datta claims, what condemned Dreyfus to the status of anti-Hero, and continues to do so (the reference to the Pantheon in the paper's title concerns the recent decision of the French government to refuse a motion to have his remains reinterred among the officially designated 'National Heroes') is that *the political stakes in accepting Dreyfus as a hero were and are momentous*. In the 1890s, Dreyfus was

a figure of division at a time when French men and women, weary of such infighting, increasingly sought refuge in the fictions of theatre and the glories of the past enacted therein to find a unity 'beyond' politics [...] While heroes in the theatre did at times transcend contemporary divisions, the real-life Dreyfus did nothing but reveal these divisions and, moreover, he exposed the contradictions and anxieties underlying contemporary definitions of heroism.<sup>173</sup>

Datta differs from Christopher Forth in allowing that positive, productive, and radicalising tendencies are also at work in the (often masculinist, exclusionary) myth of the hero. Firstly, in her reading we have a more ambivalent sense that the hero symbol can be a healing, unifying symbol for people riven by conflicts and contradictions, both psychic and social. It is therefore, she reflects, a failure for the Left to have ceded the mythology of national heroes to conservative discourses ('Although the Right ultimately co-opted these heroes more successfully than the Left, the theatrical representations of Joan and Cyrano (and Napoleon much less so) did succeed in temporarily uniting fin-de-siècle audiences around national figures, regardless of political affiliation.'). Beyond this, there is a sense in which the role of hero might play a radical function in political discourse: a 'Dreyfusean' (rather than a 'Dreyfusard') hero figure could both embody the healing, unifying qualities of a national symbol and hold open the tensions and contradictions of the constructs 'hero', 'man', 'nation'. For, granting that the role of the hero may be to provide imaginary

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<sup>173</sup>Datta, p. 226.

resolutions to conjunctural conflicts by aggressively routing his antagonist semblable, in this case such a mechanism would not be depoliticising, as Dreyfus occupies a discursive space in French national life which means his heroism will not align with the narrative restitution of the liberal-democratic state, and therefore is potentially generative of destabilising, counter-hegemonic national myths;

Dreyfus as a victim is a symbol of the Republic triumphant, a sign of the victory of the forces of 'progress' against the 'retrograde forces of the past.' Writers, artists, and politicians fought to protect his rights and freedoms. This is an image neatly wrapped in the mythology of the Affair. On the other hand, Dreyfus as a hero is a symbol of the failure of the Republic to live up to its democratic ideals. If Dreyfus is to be celebrated as a hero battling the machinery of the state, this means the Republic itself is no longer viewed in heroic terms but rather as a villain perpetrating an injustice [...] French political elites are perhaps not yet ready to examine more critically the injustices of the Third Republic, preferring to retain an unproblematic view of its triumph over its enemies at the time of the Affair. This reticence may be due, in part, to weariness with obsessive national soul-searching about the Vichy regime and its role in the Holocaust.<sup>174, 175</sup>

Thus, a more inclusive discourse or mythos of Heroism might be possible, in which terms it would not merely name a discursive category within which social tensions are regulated and defused, but a mode through which practices of critique, resistance and social justice can organise and recognise themselves. This would be to grant no more than Foucault says himself, when he allows for the multivalence of power's discursive instantiations, 'entailing effects which may be those of refusal, blockage and

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<sup>174</sup>Datta, p. 228.

<sup>175</sup>Incidentally, I have not yet read Datta's 2011 book, *Heroes and Legends of Fin-de-Siècle France: Gender, Politics and National Identity*. But I was interested to note that of the six reviews quoted on the publishers website, five emphasised how the originality of Datta's argument lies in the way she not only uncovers the tensions and contradictions behind the hero cults of Cyrano de Bergerac, Napoleon and Joan of Arc, but also finds evidence of 'less frequently noted areas of national cohesion' around these figures, 'mitigating, if not healing, the many political and cultural divisions of the era.' Only Forth's review reverses these terms of approbation; for him Datta's 'indispensable contribution' is that she 'shows how conflicting ideas about the hero divided the very nation they aimed to consolidate.' Perhaps this is only a difference of emphasis, but I am sure Forth would agree with me how much a small inflection of meaning can reveal about cultural fantasy.  
<<http://cambridge.org/aus/catalogue/catalogue.asp?isbn=9780521195959>> .

invalidation, but also incitement and intensification: in short, the “polymorphous techniques of power”<sup>176</sup>.

My own suggestion is that the role of the Father (relayed through potentially infinite combinations of sexed, gendered, class, ideological, and racial positions – not to mention other factors like varying degrees of physical and mental able-bodiedness, or stages in the ageing process, which don't yet have a neat adjectival shorthand in progressive discourse) might be one such discursive element from which emergent practices of freedom, tolerance, creativity or love might emerge; that other discursive regularities could issue from and in opposition to the hegemonic collocation of paternity with Sovereignty and their mutually privileged relations to Right, Property and the Reason of the strongest.

But preparatory to our audience with the Sovereign, we return once more to *Nightwood*, and the second historical trace which we are entitled to imagine would fill out the thirty year gap which ‘formed’ Felix Volkbein.

## **2. Felix Volkbein's immaterial inheritance no.2, The Trace - Praying upon Emperor Joseph**

‘As for God and the Father – in Austria they were the Emperor.’ [Felix to Dr. O'Connor]<sup>177</sup>

It was Diane Warren who first noted two passing references to a key figure of *fin-de-siècle* Jewish history in the second chapter of *Nightwood*, 'La Somnambule', firstly in a section dealing with Felix and Robin's courtship, and again as Robin tries to fashion a new self-awareness while carrying Felix's child.

As Felix introduces Robin to Vienna (his parent's city, the city of his birth) he recalls to her the name of the Austrian Emperor, Francis Joseph. Ruling the country between 1848 and 1916, Joseph belonged to, nay *embodied*, a liberal tradition of tolerance towards his city's Jewish population, but reigned during the proliferation of anti-semitism in his country's popular political culture. This anti-Jewish sentiment took form in a (Christian-)Socialist movement spearheaded in Vienna by Dr Karl

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<sup>176</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Random House, 1978), p. 11.

<sup>177</sup>N, p. 33.

Lueger; like National Socialism in its turn, it's anti-semitism was also nominally anti-capitalist.

It might be said that antisemitism was the protest of society against a liberalism with which it had first appeared to identify, but had then denied. [...] the economic and demographic growth of the Habsburg capital greatly disturbed two fundamental elements in the traditional Viennese microcosm. Economic liberalism threatened the prosperity of the small tradesmen or craftsmen, and the stock-market crash of 1873 bankrupted many a small or modest business; the popularity of the Christian socialist movement, soon to supplant the Liberal Party, rested on its hostility to 'big capital', and as it was anti-capital, so it was anti-liberal.<sup>178</sup>

This was an awkward instance for Leftist discourses in *Nightwood's* immediate historical context wherein autocratic authority had taken the side of the Jews against a popular-democratic wave of anti-semitism with Socialist overtones. Warren notes that;

In 1895, the liberal bastion, Vienna itself, was engulfed in a Christian social tidal wave. Emperor Francis Joseph, with the support of the Catholic hierarchy, refused to sanction the election of Karl Lueger, the anti-Semitic Catholic mayor. Sigmund Freud, the liberal, smoked a cigar to celebrate the action of the autocratic saviour of the Jews. Two years later the tide could no longer be stemmed. The emperor, bowing to the electorate's will, ratified Lueger as mayor.<sup>179</sup>

I certainly do not wish to simplify the ambiguous, fractured political culture of fin-de-siècle Vienna into a Manichean battle between enlightened autocracy and mob rule. This is not a Hobbesian thesis! I recognise that the Emperor may have had strategic

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<sup>178</sup>Jacques Le Rider, *Modernity and the Crises of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, trans. Rosemary Morris (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 179.

<sup>179</sup>Carl E. Schorske, *The Jew in the Text*, ed by Nochlin and Garb, pp. 5-6, quoted in Diane Warren, *Djuna Barnes' Consuming Fictions*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2008), p. 125.

reasons for supporting the Jews in his capital<sup>180</sup>, just as I recognise that Lueger's conservative anti-Semitism was tempered by the politico-economic necessities of his own efforts at 'urban modernisation'.<sup>181</sup>

Clearly, this is a historical moment which reveals points of fracture in modernity's progressive values that have caused internal divisions within the politics of the Left and the Right in the succeeding century. Contradictions between tolerance of difference and popular will ('the only effective solution to the nationalism problem would have been a totalitarian regime, whereas the logic of the Habsburg monarchy led rather to an organic pluralism'<sup>182</sup>). Contradictions between economic progress and social conservatism ('Emperor Franz Josef's personal antipathy towards every manifestation of 'modern' life, including telephones, cars, lifts, bathrooms and electric light – not to mention contemporary art and architecture – is legendary, and symbolises the contradictions within a state that seemed vulnerable to the slightest change.'<sup>183</sup>). All of these tensions cluster around Emperor Joseph: an anachronistic, absolutist Sovereign in an unstable modern democracy. More abstractly though, here we see aporias in the notion of what exactly 'Sovereignty' is, what it might be, and how a group or an individual can claim it and experience it. Simon Critchley refers to 'the paradox of sovereignty'. 'If the only law that I can follow is a law that I give myself – a law that is consistent with my autonomy yet binding on all members of the social group – then by virtue of what does this law have authority?'<sup>184</sup> And conversely, in the Vienna of the 'enlightened' Sovereign and Sigmund Freud, if the democratically formulated 'will of the people' takes the form of an irrational drive to persecute vulnerable minorities, on what authority and by what power does the enlightened

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<sup>180</sup>Nevertheless, it should be recognised that in blocking the election of Lueger as mayor, Joseph did show some political bravery in a climate where it was dangerous to appear 'too accommodating' towards Jews. 'The Austrian tradition of liberalism [...] exploited the effective alliance between assimilated Jews, seen as the ideal *Staatvolk*, and Austrian Germans. But the liberal club was careful to do nothing which might confirm its reputation for being 'accommodating' to Jews, and its opposition to antisemitism often seemed timid.' Rider, p. 190.

<sup>181</sup> 'That Jews were by now an integral part of the Viennese economy, however, and not just an appendage of the imperial court, was demonstrated when Lueger himself, with his famous catchphrase "*I decide who is a Jew*" ("*Wer ein Jud ist, bestim ich*"), assumed the role of Jewish patron, successfully co-opting Jewish financiers in support of his ambitious scheme for urban modernisation.' Ivar Oxaal, 'The Jews of young Hitler's Vienna: Historical and Sociological Aspects', in *Jews, Antisemitism and Culture in Vienna*, ed. I. Oxaal, M. Pollak and G. Botz (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 34.

<sup>182</sup>Rider, p. 22.

<sup>183</sup>Rider, p. 21.

<sup>184</sup>Simon Critchley, *Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 60.

patriarch withdraw popular sovereignty, invoking reason and fairness?

If we follow Foucault's recommendation and cut off the head of the sovereign, will we not be violently foreclosing such questions? Again, this is one of the main charges levelled by Jürgen Habermas at Foucault's genealogical 'myth'<sup>185</sup>, in which the Truth of the bourgeois state would be the development of technologies and practices of domination:

As soon as Foucault takes up the threads of the biopolitical establishment of disciplinary power, he lets drop the threads of the legal organisation of the exercise of power and of the legitimation of the order of domination. Because of this, the ungrounded impression arises that the bourgeois constitutional state is a dysfunctional relic from the period of absolutism.

This uncircumspect levelling of culture and politics to immediate substrates of the application of violence explains the ostensible gaps in his presentation [...] such a selective reading hinders Foucault from perceiving the phenomenon actually in need of explanation: In the welfare-state democracies of the West, the spread of legal regulation has the structure of a dilemma, because it is the legal means for securing freedom that themselves endanger the freedom of their presumptive beneficiaries. Under the premises of his theory of power, Foucault so levels down the complexity of social modernization that the disturbing paradoxes of this process cannot even become apparent to him.<sup>186</sup>

'In the interest of digging my own grave',<sup>187</sup> Simon Critchley pursues such worrying questions about legally-guaranteed freedoms through a reading of Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762). Against those who would see it as 'an apologia for a liberalism which is supposedly based on a social contract', Critchley draws out a distinction (alas an unstable one!) between Rousseau's concept of the general will (which he parses as 'the common interest that tends towards the public good [...] one's will as a citizen.') and the supposed 'will' of an electorate under representative democracy, which in

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<sup>185</sup>I use the word 'myth' here in the spirit of Critchley's 'supreme fiction', described below.

<sup>186</sup> Habermas), pp. 101-102.

<sup>187</sup>Critchley, p. 90.

reality 'is simply the aggregation of particularities rather than the construction of an association based on generality.'<sup>188</sup> An individual's particular views, limited and self-interested (yet possibly lacking a rational or systematic view of what might *really* be in their interests), somehow must be made to conform to the general will of 'The People'. For this to happen without violence, says Critchley, Rousseau explores solutions which pull in two opposing directions – 'towards' popular sovereignty on the one hand, and on the other 'backwards' towards the dictatorship of the Sovereign. Significantly for us, *both* poles of Rousseau's sovereignty seem to rest on creative fictions of the Father, only enacted at different levels of an imaginary political body. For popular sovereignty to become a reality 'citizens must be formed, they must be taught to *love* the law'. And how is this possible?

The answer is clear: love of the *patrie*, [...] it is patriotism that is the key to making people virtuous, it is love of the fatherland, the love of what Rousseau weirdly calls "*la mère patrie*" (the mother fatherland), which is the passion that forms citizens and teaches them to love the law.<sup>189</sup>

Therefore, the very notion of a popular sovereignty embodied directly in the citizenry is peculiarly dependent upon 'a moment of transcendent authority in law in order to bind subjects to the law, a moment of radical externality or heteronomy, like the function of the monarch in Hobbes.'<sup>190</sup> In our own example, the intervention of the Austrian Emperor was necessary – if not sufficient – to arrest a slide of Viennese popular opinion into dangerous anti-semitic fantasy. Yet, in so acting, the Sovereign exercises a right to suspend or abrogate the democratic sovereignty which his role was supposed to guarantee. It is very easy to see how this fiction of the fatherland, the transcendent authority of law, and the priority that Rousseau gives to civic virtue over private interest, can lead to an apologia for that other political function which is frequently discharged in the persona of a wise, benevolent and firm father – the dictator.

For Rousseau, the necessity for the passage from popular to dictatorial

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<sup>188</sup>Critchley, p. 42.

<sup>189</sup>Critchley, p. 44.

<sup>190</sup>Critchley, p. 60.

sovereignty arises when there is a purported threat to national security. At such moments the dictator can declare *iustitium* and legitimately banish or put to death those who threaten the nation: the internal or external enemy.<sup>191</sup>

Noting echoes of this logic in the post-millennial War on Terror, Critchley's book is a brave attempt to consider not only the dangers inherent in 'the sacred underpinning of sovereign power',<sup>192</sup> but also to confront a more awkward fact: such quasi-transcendental foundations for law and authority also seem to be necessary conditions for justice, equality, indeed for society itself. Therefore, the role of the critic cannot only be 'the exposure of the fictions that sustain government and the philosophical analysis of politics [as] a historical and analytical labour of demythologization'.<sup>193</sup> More properly it must be to challenge any instrumental, empirical vision of 'the' truth about subjectivity, citizenship, authority – and to recognise, but embrace, the radical fictionality of these categories – as what Critchley calls *supreme fictions*:

I understand critique in the Kantian sense, as demystifying any empiricist myth of the given and showing the radical dependency of that which is upon the creative, ultimately imaginative, activity of the subject [...] Paradoxically, a supreme fiction is a fiction that we know to be a fiction – there being nothing else – but in which we nevertheless believe. A supreme fiction is one self-conscious of its radical contingency.<sup>194</sup>

In a moment we will return to George Bataille's model of 'sovereignty', or more particularly Derrida's reading of the same, as an especially pertinent thinking of a subjectivity which is both sovereign and acutely aware of its 'radical contingency'. To do so, we fix yet again upon *Nightwood* and consider just how Barnes includes Emperor Joseph's name as an opaque, unstable sign of authority. For it is surely the failure of Felix Volkbein to communicate the authority he has (melancholically) incorporated within himself, and his wife Robin's failure to receive and introject that patriarchal tradition which bridges old Europe and modern liberal democracy, which

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<sup>191</sup>Critchley, p. 67.

<sup>192</sup>Critchley, p. 67.

<sup>193</sup>Critchley, p. 90.

<sup>194</sup>Critchley, p. 91.

triggers a trembling moment – like Kierkegaard's submission before God, but in the form of compulsive laughter as meaningful connections dissolve – which is properly Bataille.

As previously noted, both of the references to Emperor Joseph in *Nightwood's* 'La Somnambule' chapter are fleeting, apparently inconsequential. Obviously Barnes does not draw out Joseph's historical importance to European Jews. Yet his appearance in the novel is more important than first sight suggests. Of Felix's references to 'Old Europe', Joseph is the only name which Robin is able to recall a few pages later, as she is trying (not) to mould herself into the patriarchal structure which Felix is hoping to recreate for their child. Moreover, Robin's recollection of Emperor Joseph comes in one of the very few passages in which her thoughts are presented to the reader unmediated by anything other than the narrative voice itself.

At the very least, the Emperor's name could spur us to think through Felix's devotion to nobility as something more complex than mere internalised oppression. Joseph Francis, I will suggest, is a coded secret within Barnes' text, one which is vital to understanding the way in which her text is, and is not, a seditious challenge to the Law of the Father. It will therefore repay the effort to think in detail about both passages in which his name is inscribed.

In 'La Somnambule', Felix has brought Robin to Vienna, intending to play the master initiating her into the grandeur of the European tradition. Instead of this, he finds her detachment from his narration of Vienna's glorious past forces upon him an awareness of his own exile from a full (European) identity, poisoning his world-historical communion with the unwelcome impression that 'he too was a sightseer', an outsider consuming a dissembled spectacle of the true city. Suddenly, like (Derrida's) Rousseau, he is forced to rely on textuality as a *supplement* to his 'confused and hazy' relation to the full living presence of the European tradition<sup>195</sup>:

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<sup>195</sup>See "...That Dangerous Supplement...", chapter 5 in *Of Grammatology*, for Derrida's famous elaboration of the concept of supplementarity. In Rousseau's *Confessions*, Derrida finds a penetrating analysis of Signification as that which by "inaugurating speech, dislocates the subject that it constructs" (p. 141). Rousseau, claims Derrida, attempted to 'exorcise' the spectrality of Signification, and to restore Being as the Full Presence of the Subject. However, in so doing Rousseau necessarily had recourse to the same writing practice which he both 'valorizes and disqualifies' (pp. 141-42) under the figure of the 'supplement' – that which ambiguously both 'insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*' a lost presence (p.145) and 'adds itself [...] a plenitude enriching another plenitude, *the fullest measure* of presence.' (p. 144). (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998)).

He kept saying to himself that sooner or later, in this garden or that palace she would suddenly be moved as he was moved. Yet it seemed to him that he too was a sightseer. He tried to explain to her what Vienna had been before the war; what it must have been before he was born; yet his memory was confused and hazy, and he found himself repeating what he had read, for it was what he knew best.<sup>196</sup>

Emperor Joseph suddenly appears here as a 'trace' or 'supplement' for Felix's lineage, in the Deconstructivist sense given to those terms. Joseph's name stands as a link in 'an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing in itself'<sup>197</sup>. His name stands for a certain patriarchal inheritance, alien to Robin and always already alienated from Felix (who somehow knows himself to be a 'sightseer', just as Derrida says we intuit the play of difference 'a priori, but only now and with a knowledge that is not knowledge at all'<sup>198</sup>).

Uniquely in *Nightwood's* chain of signification, Joseph stands for the Father who stood with the Jews, defending them as citizens before the law. If we accept that Derrida's theorisation of supplementarity was never simply an anarchic attempt to explode all authority<sup>199</sup>, but rather to open it to the Other in a transformative ethical encounter,<sup>200</sup> then we might use the idea that Joseph appears as 'trace' of a European tradition and a 'supplement' to Felix's fractured sense of subjectivity to tease out the polyvalence of the Father in *Nightwood*. Here are the two passages in full where he appears.

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<sup>196</sup>N, p. 41.

<sup>197</sup>Derrida, OG, p. 157.

<sup>198</sup>Derrida, OG, p. 164.

<sup>199</sup> Again in *Of Grammatology*, he famously disparages Lévi-Strauss' account of the peaceful, organic Nambikwara tribe corrupted by the introduction of the written word (thereby defined as the Western male instrument of hierarchy and enslavement). The terms in which he does so ought to dispel any notion of deconstruction as a radical libertarianism:

The tone that pervades these reflections [by Lévi-Strauss] is of an anarchism that deliberately confounds law and oppression. The idea of law and positive right, although it is difficult to think them in their formality – where it is so general that ignorance of the law is no defence – before the possibility of writing, is determined by Lévi-Strauss as constraint and enslavement. Political power can only be the custodian of an unjust power. A classical and coherent thesis, but here advanced as self-evident, without opening the least bit of critical dialogue with the holders of the other thesis, according to which the generality of the law is on the contrary the condition of liberty in the city. (Derrida, 'The Violence of the Letter: From Levi-Strauss to Rousseau' in *Of Grammatology*, p. 131).

<sup>200</sup> 'There is no ethics without the presence of *the other* but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, difference, writing.' (Derrida, OG, pp. 139-40).

1. He [Felix] began speaking of Emperor Francis Joseph and of the whereabouts of Charles the First. And as he spoke, Felix laboured under the weight of his own remorseless re-creation of the great, generals and statesmen and emperors. His chest was as heavy as if it were supporting the combined weight of their apparel and their destiny. Looking up after an interminable flow of fact and fancy, he saw Robin sitting with her legs thrust out, her head thrown back against the embossed cushion of the chair, sleeping, one arm fallen over the chair's side, the hand somehow older and wiser than her body; and looking at her he knew that he was not sufficient to make her what he had hoped; it would require more than his own argument. It would require persons exonerated of their earthly condition by some strong spiritual bias, someone of that old régime, some old lady of the past courts, who only remembered others when trying to think of herself.<sup>201</sup>

2. [...] Robin smiled, taking the spray, and looked down at the tomb of Lafayette and thought her unpeopled thoughts. Kneeling in the chapel, which was never without a nun going over her beads, Robin, trying to bring her mind to this abrupt necessity, found herself worrying about her height. Was she still growing?

She tried to think of the consequence to which her son was to be born and dedicated. She thought of the Emperor Francis Joseph. There was something commensurate in the heavy body with the weight in her mind where reason was inexact with lack of necessity. She wondered through thoughts of women, women that she had come to connect with women. Strangely enough these were women in history, Louise de la Vallière, Catherine of Russia, Madame de Maintenon, Catherine de Medici, and two women out of literature, Anna Karenina and Catherine Heathcliff; and now there was this woman Austria. She prayed, and her prayer was monstrous, because in it there was no margin left for damnation or forgiveness, for

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<sup>201</sup>N, p. 41.

praise or for blame – those who cannot conceive a bargain cannot be saved or damned. She could not offer herself up, she only told of herself, in a preoccupation that was its own predicament.

Leaning her childish face and full chin on the shelf of the *prie-Dieu*, her eyes fixed, she laughed, out of some hidden capacity, some lost subterranean humour; as it ceased, she leaned still further forward in a swoon, waking and yet heavy, like one in a sleep.<sup>202</sup>

In both extracts the focalised characters are attempting to force an identity for themselves, asserting this upon a tangle of signs, affects and social relations. Arguably, Felix is trying to bolster his claims to patrician authority by proxy, fabricating a destiny for an other (for his wife and their child), while Robin in her turn is trying to conform to his patriarchal fantasy of her meaning and function, a conformity which she resists at a psycho-somatic level which for the reader is registered as an irreducibly textual maladjustment. Reading the dialogic complicity of Felix and Robin in this way tempts us to observe the strict boundaries between self and other, oppressor and oppressed, enslavement and resistance, which Barnes' writing does not wholly support – and that their shared impression of Joseph helps to unbed.

After all, it is Felix's anxiety, not Robin's resistance ('Robin's life held no volition for refusal'<sup>203</sup>), which undermines his fantasy of the nuclear family with himself embodying the Father. And Robin's body does not register a subversive, disruptive materiality (a 'beyond' of discourse) in the first passage, but appears as a projection of Felix's own desire and anxiety ('looking at her he knew he was not sufficient to make her what he had hoped').

Earlier in the novel, at their first encounter, the narrator has already spoken of Robin's dangerous allure for Felix as a 'woman who presents herself as a 'picture' forever arranged' whose movements 'will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience; a mirage of an eternal wedding'.<sup>204</sup> Self-presentation, at least for women, is not here a voluntarist self-*creation*, since in the presentation they thereby 'reduce to an image' of the (male) subject's desire for union and continuity. But 'woman' in this passage is overdetermined as a cultural product ('picture', 'arranged', 'image',

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<sup>202</sup>N, pp. 43-44.

<sup>203</sup>N, p. 40.

<sup>204</sup>N, p. 36.

‘myth’) and *also* the carrier of something beyond of culture. ‘A woman who is beast turning human’: *turning* human, and bringing into the human field of culture the guarantee of its constitutive outside. ‘Woman’ is not just one image in a foundationless chain of signification, she is an image ‘of a forgotten experience’, a symbolic anchor which relates directly to a transcendental signified, an access point to a forgotten origin.

If this passage appears to support the idea that ‘woman’ can provide access to a beyond, this does not necessarily run against a deconstructive reading (or rather a reading of the text as itself deconstructive). She may *stand for* something radically exterior, but Barnes’ ‘beast turning human’ certainly does not lift the veil of textuality to reveal a biological, theological, or anthropological truth. Still less does she sanctify ‘Woman’ as the mythic personification of an Other to history and culture that can be either sublated into man’s lineage (see below), or used to blow tradition apart in a liberating transgression.

Kate Armond’s fascinating paper, ‘Allegory and dismemberment’, juxtaposes *Nightwood*’s poetics with the German baroque *Trauerspiel* tradition and Walter Benjamin’s study of the same (in which he elaborates his famous distinction between symbol and allegory), centres in upon this ekphrastic introduction to the character of Robin. Following Benjamin’s distinction, Armond suggests that the danger with which Barnes’ prose flirts is the lure of a transcendent reading which captures Robin’s image in ‘the permanence and fixity of the symbol’. Against such a fixed meaning, the ‘allegorical’ impulse registers the nagging insufficiency of image to Truth, it traces a ‘slow historical progress’ in which ‘truth is endlessly deferred, as one image or fragment after another is liberated, allegorised, and discarded.’<sup>205</sup> Crucially, on Armond’s reading, the power of Barnes’ writing arises from ‘the restlessness or strain between [the] two aesthetic forms [the symbolic and the allegorical]’; without the interplay of the symbol’s power to arrest thought upon the fascinating promise of ‘instantaneous revelation’, allegory would perhaps be little more than the ‘mechanically repetitive and arbitrary form’<sup>206</sup> which derives a merely formal equivalence between object and abstraction, the particular and the universal – for if indeed the allegorist understands that ‘Truth, as such, only exists through a sense of

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<sup>205</sup> Kate Armond, ‘Allegory and dismemberment: reading Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood* through the forms of the baroque *Trauerspiel*’, *Textual Practice* 26:5 (2012) 851-70 (p. 858).

<sup>206</sup> Armond, p. 855.

its absence'<sup>207</sup> then the aesthetic registration of that absence cannot be wholly separated from the symbol's allure. The motive force of such an aesthetic, indeed the sense in which Barnes could be said to politicise aesthetics, is in the constant threat and tease that the symbolic might gain the ascendancy, 'allowing [the artistic form] to pass out of history into myth'.<sup>208</sup>

In light of this interplay of symbol and allegory, we can say that 'Woman' is not, *per se*, the mythic Other, or beast; but since she is 'turning human' she marks the self/other border. Barnes' fascination with artifice in this passage invites us to read "turning" in the rhetorical sense of the 'trope'<sup>209</sup>. This is why woman, as 'beast turning human', both reveals and deceives; it is true enough to say she stands for a forgotten experience, but even *as* the symbolic stand-in for this experience 'woman' is not transcendent of culture. The forgotten experience, something like Kristeva's notion of the semiotic, turns to a 'mirage of an eternal wedding' once it assumes a place in a fully symbolic economy – an economy driven by patrilineage, with woman presented as a sacrificial offering in a somewhat homoerotic exchange between the son and Father; 'we feel that we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers.'<sup>210</sup>

As Felix's mirage, Robin externalises a nagging, paralinguistic absence which manifests involuntarily in his speech:

She was not listening, and he said in an angry mood, though he said it calmly, "I am deceiving you!" And he wondered what he meant, and why she did not hear.<sup>211</sup>

Perhaps 'she' did not hear because Felix is not speaking to her. He is addressing this confession to himself, deceiving himself not Robin, and projecting his own predicament onto his wife. Plumb's annotations to the text reveal that Barnes was indignant at Coleman's reading of Felix as a 'sycophant' towards patriarchal authority and claimed that he behaves as someone 'who is afraid he has mistaken that which he

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<sup>207</sup> Armond, p. 855

<sup>208</sup> Armond, p. 858.

<sup>209</sup> See Melissa Jane Hardie on the tropological 'turn' in Barnes' *The Book of Repulsive Women*. Melissa Jane Hardie, 'Repulsive Modernism: Djuna Barnes' *The Book of Repulsive Women*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 29:1 (2005), 118-32.

<sup>210</sup> *N*, p. 36.

<sup>211</sup> *N*, p. 42.

most honours.<sup>212</sup> And in the passage where Emperor Joseph first appears in the text, Felix realises that he can only continue to honour the great past he represents by splitting off the form of paternal authority the emperor represents from his own social relations, abstracting it into a properly theological Beyond.

Felix's failure to weave Robin's sense of self into the great monuments of European culture does not cause him to abandon faith in patriarchy; it causes him to lose faith in his own ability to embody the figure of patriarch. And it is only where this failure makes itself felt that 'patriarchy' assumes for him the fully religious significance of a transcendent form of authority. In Felix's mind, the avatars of the aristocratic ideal, Emperor Joseph amongst them, still possess the soteriological promise of fullness of being, destiny and redemption: 'exonerated of their earthly condition'. Now he thinks that this is only possible for a Sovereign subjectivity which can transcend (be 'exonerated' from) the discursive limits of Felix's 'confused and hazy' memory, with its ineffectual re-presentations of aristocracy cribbed from the textual supplement, from 'what he had read.'

Following this epiphanic disappointment, it is not surprising that Felix abandons his paternalistic course of symbolic initiation for Robin and begins to 'put his faith in the fact that Robin had Christian proclivities, and his hope in the discovery that she was an enigma.'<sup>213</sup> This is not only the moment when Felix embraces Christianity, it is also when he fully converts to a logic of speculation which is more than merely financial; properly economic, in fact:

He said to himself that possibly she had greatness hidden in the non-committal. He felt that her attention, somehow in spite of him, had already been taken, by something not yet in history.<sup>214</sup>

### **3. Becoming nomad, becoming aristocrat, becoming liberal - Felix 'reiterating the tragedy of his father'**

Rather than playing the symbolic Father bearing the weight of tradition, Felix's hopes now take the form of a gamble or a prayer directed towards the yet-to-come, with

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<sup>212</sup>N, (note to p.9), p. 212.

<sup>213</sup>N, p. 41.

<sup>214</sup>N, p. 42.

Robin as a speculative investment and messianic promise – as prophet of the future and future profit. Here we are close to the realm of Adam Smith's ‘invisible hand as the remains of a theological conception of the natural order’.<sup>215</sup> Something is taking place in Barnes' text which seems analogous to the movement Foucault delineated in the passage from pre-Modern sovereignty to a 'biopolitics' in which the warring couple, State and the Market, inherit the functions of social control from the paternal decrees of the Sovereign. The tension played out in Felix's marriage to Robin parallels what Foucault calls ‘the heterogeneity of the subject of interest and the legal subject’ in the emergent capitalist system. At this point in the novel, let us say that Robin becomes for Felix an exchange(abl)e partner, and he therefore attempts to rearticulate and restructure his marital transactions upon classical economic principles for trade and investment, the agents of which belong to the species *homo oeconomicus*:

*Homo oeconomicus* as he appears in the eighteenth century [...] basically functions as what could be called an intangible element with regard to the exercise of power. *Homo oeconomicus* is someone who pursues his own interest, and whose interest is such that it converges spontaneously with the interest of others. From the point of view of a theory of government *homo oeconomicus* is the person who must be let alone. With regard to *homo oeconomicus*, one must be *laissez-faire*; he is the subject or object of *laissez-faire*.<sup>216</sup>

Having failed to master her with his arguments from patriarchal tradition, Felix trusts that by allowing Robin to follow her own intangible pre-occupations she will bring about the fulfilment of both their destinies through a mystic and spontaneous convergence of interest, through that ‘greatness hidden in the non-committal’. If there is any question that Felix's sudden investment in Robin's Christianity is linked to a modern, liberal economic ideal, then note what activity Felix is engaged in at the moment when he begins to have doubts about his new faith;

“A child,” he pondered, “Yes, a child!” and then he said to himself, “Why has

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<sup>215</sup> *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 278.

<sup>216</sup> *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 270.

it not come about?” *The thought took him abruptly in the middle of his accounting* [my italics]. He hurried home in a flurry of anxiety, like *a boy who has heard a regiment on parade, toward which he cannot run, because he has no-one from whom to seek permission* [my italics], yet runs unhaltingly nevertheless; coming face to face with her, all that he could stammer out was, “Why is there no child? *Wo ist das Kind? Warum? Warum?*”<sup>217</sup>

The subject of interest, the *homo oeconomicus* of the emerging liberal market, is not producing the output Felix desires, and he again seeks recourse to a sovereign authority. But there is no longer any sovereign, emperor, or father to whom he can appeal for permission, remission, or filial transmission. He has not been fully liberated from the Law of the Father, which still structures his demand for a child, but nor has his self-interested belief in letting Robin follow her own desire allowed greater freedom, happiness or intimacy for either of them in the relationship: ultimately Robin is still the symbolic token with which Felix means to taste ‘the blood on the lips of our forefathers’. Foucault continues;

I think this paradox enables us to pinpoint the problem I would like to say something about, which is precisely this: since the eighteenth century, has *homo oeconomicus* involved setting up an essentially and unconditionally irreducible element against any possible government? Does the definition of *homo oeconomicus* involve marking out the zone that is definitely inaccessible to any government action? Is *homo oeconomicus* an atom of freedom in the face of all the conditions, undertakings, legislation, and prohibitions of a possible government, or *was he not already a certain type of subject who precisely enabled an art of government to be determined according to the principle of economy* [my italics], both in the sense of political economy, and in the sense of the restriction, self-limitation and frugality of government?<sup>218</sup>

Barnes' narrator (we are always unsure of the veracity of the voice) would seem to think 'he' is a subject of the latter 'governmental' type; ‘There was something pathetic

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<sup>217</sup>N, p. 42.

<sup>218</sup>*The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 271.

in the spectacle: Felix reiterating the tragedy of his father.<sup>219</sup> The tragedy is not that Felix is trapped in the role of (his) Father, nor that he is excluded from it, but that he wields sovereignty unknowingly, in the only way he now can, by renouncing it and projecting his power (as Subject) onto an abstraction – onto Emperor Joseph (the State), and onto his wife (the Market) – assuming in the process that the interests of all three persons and all three institutions will cohere, in the Modern ‘mirage of an eternal wedding’.

We are reminded of Felix's ‘tragedy’ as Foucault draws out the emerging Modern conflict between the legal and the economic conceptions of the subject, leading to two irreducible versions of political power: state and market. His encapsulation of the legal subject, *homo juridicus*, could be describing Felix’s sorry position, or indeed the divided Oedipal subject split by the Name/'No'-of-the-Father whose 'Law' we discussed in the previous chapter;

[He] agrees to a self-renunciation and splits himself, as it were, to be, at one level, the possessor of a number of immediate and natural rights, and, at another level, someone who agrees to the principle of relinquishing them and who is thereby constituted as a different subject of right superimposed on the first. The dialectic or mechanism of the subject is characterised by the division of the subject, the existence of a transcendence of the second subject in relation to the first, and a relationship of negativity, renunciation and limitation between them, and it is at this moment that law and prohibition emerge.<sup>220</sup>

Following this analogy, *Homo oeconomicus* would appear to be cognate to the errant object *a* of desire itself, in Lacanian terms, which always exceeds and destabilises the subject, resisting symbolisation while functioning through it; ‘The subject of interest constantly overflows the subject of right [...] He overflows him, surrounds him, and is the permanent condition of him functioning.’<sup>221</sup>

In the doctrine of the invisible hand sovereignty is elevated above the sphere of any human agent; the only Sovereign who can know the best interest of all is the eternal disembodied one, and 'He' decides the desirable course of history through the

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<sup>219</sup>N, p. 42.

*The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 275.

<sup>221</sup>*The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 274.

interactions of atomised individuals pursuing their narrow interests in the market. This is the absolutely Modern taboo: no human agent can or should then embody the wider concerns of such an 'economic sovereign'.

For Foucault, therefore, liberal political economy presented itself partly as a critique of absolute sovereignty; 'the disqualification of the very possibility of an economic sovereign, amounts to a challenge to the police state [...] a disqualification of a political reason indexed to the state and its sovereignty'<sup>222</sup>. But with the ascent of economic man over judicial man it is not only totalitarian power which was undermined; notions of justice, community, self-sacrifice, respect for the other are all also heterogeneous to economic 'reality', even if they are prized by the politico-juridical discourse of liberalism. The consequences of this tension would be felt in the political economy of Barnes' own time, consequences which recurrently pose themselves as questions about the uses and abuses of paternalism (in Barnes, in Lacan, in Foucault...).

In this discussion Foucault does touch upon the very paradox which (as we saw above) Habermas accused him of ignoring: the nature of modern legal rights and protections has been to both extend and curtail freedom. And here, again, Foucault wavers in his commitment to break the connection between right and sovereignty:

All the returns and revivals of nineteenth and twentieth century liberal and neo-liberal thought are still a way of posing the problem of the impossibility of the existence of an economic sovereign. And with the appearance of planning, the state-controlled economy, socialism, and state socialism the problem will be whether we may not in some way overcome this curse against the economic sovereign which was formulated by political economy at its foundation and which is also the very condition of the existence of political economy: In spite of everything, may there not be a point through which we can define an economic sovereignty?<sup>223</sup>

I have been tempted to read Felix's reference to Emperor Francis Joseph allegorically, illustrating Foucault's thesis concerning liberalism and the disappearance of

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<sup>222</sup>*The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 284.

<sup>223</sup>*The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 283.

sovereignty ('dis-appearance', in the sense of becoming visibly 'invisible' – an empty, sacred space – rather than becoming meaningless or irrelevant). Felix fails to communicate the full meaning of the past that Joseph is supposed to carry to his wife. 'His own remorseless re-creation of the great, generals and statesmen and emperors'<sup>224</sup> is missing that essential element, the *parousia* [a term whose genealogy marvellously encompasses: the arrival of royalty, the Second Coming, and the material substance, property or inheritance of a legal subject] which is meaning-full only in the person of the patriarch. And so, in the essential gesture of liberalism, he elevates the Emperor to an abstract principle, an invisible sovereign. In this worldview, his wife becomes both the commodity and the entrepreneur whom he speculates will still bring him a return in the form of a legitimate heir. All this through the workings of an invisible hand.

#### **4. A prayer without “margin”: Robin Vote, Sovereign in a General Economy**

Something similar, but vitally different, is happening in the second extract (labelled '2' above), where Robin's interior discourse also alights briefly upon Emperor Joseph. Felix's faith in her 'hidden greatness' is undercut from the very instant the reader enters into Robin's 'unpeopled thoughts'. Her attempt to become a bearer of the European tradition, for her husband and for their son, is literalized as an attempt to “people” her mind with these great figures of history. And like her husband she begins with the name Emperor Francis Joseph, only for her mind then to drift; 'She wandered to thoughts of women'.<sup>225</sup>

To 'wander' conveys well the ambiguous agency which Robin seems to possess, having 'no volition for refusal'<sup>226</sup> but also some real resistance to symbolic determination, shown in her politically significant turn away from the male line of European history. But while her thoughts turn to a female lineage, we are told that she 'peoples' her mind with women who 'strangely enough' are 'women in history', and 'women out of literature', and 'now there was this woman Austria'.<sup>227</sup>

'[S]trangely enough' for Robin, who is apparently unused to the 'abrupt necessity [...] to think the consequence to which her son was to be born and dedicated'? Or perhaps strange to the reader, who is cheated of a promised glimpse

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<sup>224</sup>N, p. 41.

<sup>225</sup>N, p.43

<sup>226</sup>N, p.40

<sup>227</sup>N, p.43

into the mysterious noumena of Robin's mind, since her secret life is presented to us, much like Felix's own thoughts, as another series of supplementary intertexts ('women she had come to connect with women') from the pages of other books –*'il n'y a pas de horstexte'* here.

The last link in the metonymic chain, connecting the body of the woman to the social body of the nation, is rendered colloquially, with a casual inexactitude which sounds very much like Robin's own voice; 'and now there was this woman Austria.' We might hear a mocking, liberatory inversion of Felix's imperialist, sexist rhetoric, one which deflates the Great Mother imago and her deep roots in the atavistic past, shifting 'her' into an aspect of transitory, deictic immediacy ('now', '*this* woman'). With the appearance of phenomenological drift, Robin's thoughts reiterate these female names from 'his-story' without challenging or redefining them, so that the chain can still end in the possessed land which is administered and distributed by the male sovereign. Rather than opening these literary and historical women to resignification, Robin finds that her interiority, hitherto 'inexact with lack of necessity', is simply starting to inscribe her into a conventionalised symbolic femininity.

So is she resisting this strange symbolic violence? Before her mind wanders, Robin actually seems to be sincere in her efforts to engage with the history Felix presented to her. And between her spiralling thoughts of the women inscribed into history and the mysterious burst of laughter which then wells up inside her, she enacts a peculiar sort of prayer. It is the prayer, and more especially the laughter *which follows from it*, that seems to undermine Felix's hopes that Robin's Christianity can be turned to a profit. This is because, to use Foucault's classical term once more, Robin cannot function as *homo oeconomicus*: she has no conception of 'interest':

She prayed, and her prayer was monstrous, because in it there was no margin left for damnation or forgiveness, for praise or for blame – those who cannot conceive a bargain cannot be saved or damned. She could not offer herself up, she only told of herself, in a preoccupation that was its own predicament.

A 'monstrous' prayer. We are not privy to its depths – Barnes' focalisation shifts and effaces its contents, but this does not mean that we lose an internal vantage point upon her cognition; rather we switch from a phenomenological to a structural mode of description. If the chain of women peopling her thoughts represents the 'turning

human' of Robin, this prayer displays her bestial part at its most resistant, but does so purely in a formal account of its logic, out of which emerges abstract Knowledge of an excess which simply cannot be rendered in a phenomenal register – 'she could not offer herself up, she only told of herself'.

At this period Keynes was speaking of the 'animal spirits' of the stock market, which a managed economy would have to render stable and profitable through the sort of enlightened economic husbandry which classic political economy had barred *a priori*. But Robin's prayer signifies more than a conflict between economic management and enlightened self-interest.

'Her prayer was monstrous, because in it there was no margin...'. Any transaction which ignores the laws of marginal utility, or cost/gain ratio, obviously cannot be conceived in terms of the neoclassical economic theory of rational individualism. But in the discursive fallout from the 1929 stock market crash, the 'margin' in economic language was less tied up with that classical concept (marginal utility as the primary determinant of exchange value, with its corollary - the law of diminishing returns) than with moralistic analyses of the irrational spirits behind the speculative boom, which had been driven by securities purchased 'on the margin'.

Purchase 'on the margin' meant the acquisition of securities for which a 'buyer' did not have to put up the purchase price. Instead a broker would loan the speculator the primary cost of the purchase, and 'he' in turn would leave the securities in the broker's possession as collateral. In this context, the margin was 'the cash which the speculator must supply in addition to the securities to protect the loan and which he must augment if the value of the collateral securities should fall'<sup>228</sup>. As it happened, margins were 'not low' in the late 1920s, 'most brokers required customers to put up forty-five to fifty per cent of the value', the only problem was that 'this was all the cash numerous of their customers had'<sup>229</sup> so any fall in the securities market would trigger a complete collapse; 'ownership on margin would become meaningless and everyone would want to sell.'<sup>230</sup>

Prior to the stock market collapse, despite some economists' misgivings about the sustainability of the rising market, purchase on the margin was regarded as a great

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<sup>228</sup>John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Great Crash 1929* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 47.

<sup>229</sup>Galbraith, p. 58.

<sup>230</sup>Galbraith, p. 51.

innovation in a financial system no longer subject to the periodic depressions of the business cycle. By the 1930s it had become a practice viewed with opprobrium, an unwholesome reminder of system utterly discredited. Gilbraith's history of the crash noted sardonically; 'The power to fix margin requirements was given to the Federal Reserve Board by the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, a year in which the revival of speculation about equalled that of a renaissance of prohibition.'<sup>231</sup> We must keep this context in mind in trying to understand what a prayer *without margin* would have connoted as Barnes was writing in the early 1930s.

Furthermore, what is offered up here in Robin's prayer is not analogous to the self-sacrifice of *homo juridicus* before the law as Foucault described it. Robin cannot offer herself at all, neither as subject nor as commodity/object; nor can she seek a 'bargain' which would allow her to make profit. The problematic here, the 'preoccupation which was its own predicament', is that Robin's faith forms part of her attempt to render a coherent subjectivity for herself but, like Felix's hopeless prostrations to nobility, she finds that her prayers do not ground her being in something deeper than the atomised ego or the primary process of the Id; they are circumscribed only by an anxiously internalised performance of herself as woman.

A prayer which was not 'monstrous' would leave the margins of representation untouched; bracket the discontinuities of the self, the strangeness of the exteriority of the ego to itself, the phantasmic nature of the address to God; and allow the mirage of a reasoning, discriminating, intentional consciousness to form. By contrast, Robin's monstrous prayer leaves nothing outside it, and as such becomes discursively static, ineffectual.

Yet the predicament *is* broken through. Its solipsism is interrupted by an eruption of laughter through her body drawn from 'some lost subterranean humour', as if a form of chthonic deity replies to her supplication, an impression which is reinforced by the language of possession which then overtakes her, 'waking and yet heavy, like one in sleep'. The invisible hand of the market relies, in a theological sense, on a monotheistic, rational deity; so, in an immanent form, does the notion of the economic sovereign which in Foucault's account bears within it the threat of totalitarian violence. Whereas Robin's Catholicism, because uncalculating, opens onto another different kind of spiritual experience altogether, and a different economic

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<sup>231</sup>Galbraith, p. 59.

model. One which I claim is very close to George Bataille's vision of 'sovereignty' in what he calls a 'general economy'.<sup>232</sup>

In essence, Bataille, following Max Weber, describes a capitalist economic agent defined by the Reformation's ascetic impulse towards work, productivity, utility and investment, which he designates 'restricted economy'. His concept of 'general economy' widens the field of economic analysis to take into account what cannot be secured, reinvested or insured, the ultimate need of any system for excess (of energy, of capital, of discourse, etc.) as a constitutive outside of classical political economy. He makes it a fundamental of his economic theory that there is a need for this excess to consume, or sacrifice itself in a total expenditure. For Bataille, capitalism is therefore dangerous because its reduction of human activity to labour and production denies a more basic drive to exceed the bounds of the rational, productive management of forces, and this impulse is then discharged violently in totalitarianism and in global war.

Bataille produced a very different kind of critique of capitalism, one focused not on production but on consumption. He found that in archaic economies “production was subordinated to nonproductive destruction” (1989a:90). The great motive force of these societies was not the compulsion to produce (which unleashes a process of objectification whereby all forms of life, including humans, become things) but a desire to escape the order of things and to live for the present moment through exuberant consumption in the form of excesses of generosity, display, and sacrifice. [...] They set aside a major proportion of their wealth for expenditures which ensured the “wasting” and “loss” of wealth

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<sup>232</sup> I will not quote Bataille's own descriptions of general economy or of sovereignty at length, since I am more interested in their reception in later critical thought. But the principles of general economy are outlined in *The Accursed Share: Volume I*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991), and of sovereignty in *The Accursed Share: Volumes II & III*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991).

I will briefly note that there is a close fit between Robin's marginless prayer terminating in laughter and Bataille's idea of moments of sovereignty being moments of 'unknowing', 'beyond utility' and beyond 'anticipation' (*Vol III*, p.203, p.198, p.211), such as when an object of thought “provokes a laughter that won't stop” (p.204). Also, that it is structurally vital within Bataille's system that the chains of prohibition, rationality, teleology and signification should be in place; for sovereignty is experienced, momentarily, 'each time that *anticipation*, that which binds one in activity, the meaning of which is manifested in the reasonable *anticipation* of the result, dissolves, in a staggering, unanticipated way, into NOTHING.' (p. 211).

rather than rational accumulation. This destructive consumption allowed them to avoid the deadly hand of utility and to restore some of the lost “intimacy” of an existence without a separation between sacred and profane. Whereas Weber (1958) looked to religion to explain the origins of the capitalist ethic, Bataille looked to archaic religion for seeds of a subversion of capitalism.<sup>233</sup>

We could read Robin's Catholicism, and her prayer in particular, as just such a form of nonproductive, subversive expenditure, which disrupts and threatens Felix's vision of the patriarchal nuclear family, even as it answers to a desire within him for a more irrational, archaic union. And yet, perhaps Robin fails to do what one would expect Bataille's 'primitive' economic agent to do, as we recall that she ‘could not offer herself up, she only told of herself’. Turning human, peopling her mind with the figures which could render her a legible identity (the literary examples of Catherine Heathcliff and Anna Karenina *represent* a kind of subversive, and self-immolating, excess of desire, but *ipso facto* they constrain that rebellious impulse towards the unconditioned), does Robin not signify the impossibility of the total expenditure which would break the chains of patriarchy? Taking this thought in another direction, could it be argued that Bataille's economy is better exemplified in *Nightwood* in the object of Barnes' most cruel satire, Jenny Petheridge?

She was generous with money. She made gifts lavishly and spontaneously. She was the worst recipient of presents in the world. She sent bushel baskets of camellias to actresses because she had a passion for the characters they portrayed. The flowers were tied with yards of satin ribbon, and a note accompanied them, effusive and gentle.<sup>234</sup>

Jenny, by general consent the novel's least sympathetic character who 'steals' Robin from Nora Vote later in the novel, is: ‘A dealer in second-hand and therefore incalculable emotions’; ‘a ‘squatter’ by instinct’; ‘master of the over-sweet phrase, the over-tight embrace’<sup>235</sup>. She seems as far from Bataille's ideal of self-surrendering

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<sup>233</sup> Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, 'Putting Global Capitalism in Its Place: Economic Hybridity, Bataille, and Ritual Expenditure', *Current Anthropology*, 41:4 (2000), 477-509 (p. 482).

<sup>234</sup>*N*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>235</sup>*N*, p. 60.

excess as one could imagine. But behind her bourgeois 'master[y]' of 'stolen or appropriated [...] dignity of speech'<sup>236</sup> lies the same desire for orgiastic transcendence which inspires Robin's prayer, and the same failure to break out of the restricted economy of discourse; 'one should not have thought of her in the act of love at all. She thought of little else, and though always submitting to the act, spoke of and desired the spirit of love; yet was unable to obtain it.'<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, Doctor O'Connor recognises that Jenny's calculating, manipulative nature is inverted only within the realm of consumption:

“That woman,” the doctor said, settling himself more comfortably in his chair, “would use the third rising of a corpse for her own ends. Though,” he added, “I must admit she is very generous with money.”<sup>238</sup>

How do we account for the contradiction? In Jenny do we have a model of the cynical 'entrepreneurial' manoeuvre - simulating, assimilating and appropriating the subversive potential of non-productive, excessive gift giving? Or does her presence in the text signal a weakness in the very idea of excessive desire as a subversive political energy? Certainly, it has been argued that Bataille's interest in consumption simply prefigures the direction of post-Fordist capitalism, and does not challenge it. Nevertheless, Bataille's defenders point out that consumer capitalism remains in the service of private capital accumulation, and so is not a gift economy in its true sense:

[...] despite their overt similarities, the principles of ritual consumption and those of consumer capitalism are basically incompatible. If Bataille had addressed our consumer society today, he would have said that this sort of consumption is still in the service of production and productive accumulation, since every act of consumption [...] merely feeds back into the growth of the economy rather than leading to the finality and loss of truly nonproductive expenditure. [...] Nor, despite its economic excesses, does our consumer culture today challenge the basic economic logic of rational private

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<sup>236</sup>N, p. 60.

<sup>237</sup>N, p. 60.

<sup>238</sup>N, p. 98.

accumulation as a self-depleting archaic sacrificial economy does.<sup>239</sup>

Such a defence of general economy risks positing a pure economy which could be 'finally', 'truly' beyond tabulations of rationality and self-interest. Consumerism then has to become more abandoned, more pure, as in the “archaic” past, rhetorically and programmatically shorn of its justificatory imbrication with GDP: such rhetoric has an ideological parallel in the neoliberal rear-guard analyses of the financial meltdown of 2008-9, claiming that the vast inflation and subsequent turbulent correction of market value came to pass because competition was never enabled to operate in any reasonable approximation to its 'pure' form: free of welfarism, free of fiscal intervention, free of paternalistic regulation.<sup>240</sup> Helpfully putting this argument back into the historical, and literary context which concerns us here, Perry and Maurer note that Mauss' gift economy, a key influence on Bataille, was already implicated in the orgiastic financial speculation and conspicuous consumption of early twentieth century capitalism;

[...] in 1925, the same year that Mauss published *Essai sur le don*, F. Scott Fitzgerald offered one of the greatest tributes to the potlatch in all of American literature, *The Great Gatsby*. Gatsby, in the economic expansion of the Jazz Age, buys an enormous mansion and throws lavish parties every night for a summer to try to raise his social stature in the eyes of Daisy, whose voice, famously, “sounds like money.” Of course, the ritual, even magical, fetishism of commodities had already been observed by Marx in the 1850s. Gatsby's consumption, furthermore, is performative; it constructs his identity, [...] This sacred and exuberant quality of consumption, inscribed into American literature by Fitzgerald in the 1920s, troubles the periodization implicit in Bataille and in Yang's extrapolation of his argument of there being distinct precapitalist, capitalist, and postmodern capitalist formations following one another in time and tied to varying degrees of desacralization. Gatsby, we

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<sup>239</sup>Yang, p. 483.

<sup>240</sup> See, for example, Charles K. Rowley and Nathanael Smith, *Economic Contractions in the United States: A Failure of Government* (Fairfax, VA: The Lock Institute, 2009). The monograph offers a warning from economic history that ‘the Great Depression – almost certainly caused by incompetent monetary policy managed by a Federal government body – was not only blamed on the market (like our own financial crash) but was used as an excuse to change the face of the US in a socialist direction. The US faces this threat again today.’ pp. viii-ix.

suggest, both foretells and disrupts the forward and backward temporal narratives of modernization theory.<sup>241</sup>

While agreeing with all of the above, we will still work through Bataille's process. For I want to believe in his resacralised economy, based on expenditure without reserve; believe it the best way to understand Robin's prayer without 'margin left for damnation or forgiveness'; believe it offers us a way of specifying a Sovereign subject without sanctioning logocentric fantasies of full, masculine self-identity. A first step must be to understand why Jenny Petheridge (and for that matter, consumer capitalism) can be fairly read as simultaneously true to the notion of General Economy *and* a total betrayal of it, rather than showing that general economy would involve rituals, practices or protocols which are radically heterogeneous to calculation and reification.

We recall that the aporia of Robin's prayer, the failure to either fully present herself or to sacrifice herself, to be damned or saved, was resolved by such an outburst of unaccountable laughter; 'she laughed, out of some hidden capacity, some lost subterranean humour'. By contrast, Jenny has 'no sense of humour or peace or rest'<sup>242</sup>; strictly, she has a 'performative' sense of humour (in the most superficial sense of the term), as her anecdotes are 'humorous, well told' but her gestures are empty, merely calculated for effect on others; 'She would smile, toss her hands up, widen her eyes; immediately everyone in the room had a certain feeling of something lost, sensing that there was one person who was missing the importance of the moment, who had not heard the story – the teller herself'.<sup>243</sup>

Here Derrida's essay on the debt that Bataillean sovereignty owes to Hegel's master/slave dialectic is crucial for its insight that methodological fidelity to the dialectic generates excess as laughter. The laughter appears to be neither hysterical (in so far as it does not question the master, nor demand full accountability from him), nor is it indicative of the pervert's enjoyment, filling the lack in the (m)other in defiance of the paternal law. How then does Derrida specify its place in Bataille's symbolic economy?

The essay begins by chastening contemporary readers of Bataille<sup>244</sup> for too

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<sup>241</sup>Richard Perry and Bill Maurer, response to Yang, *Current Anthropology*, 41:4 (2000), pp.499-500 (p. 500).

<sup>242</sup> *N*, p. 59.

<sup>243</sup> *N*, p. 59.

<sup>244</sup> These figures are unnamed, but would almost certainly include Foucault whose tribute to Bataille,

easily dismissing the unfashionable ‘constraint of Hegel’ upon the elaboration of General Economy; ‘Perhaps the self-evidence would be too heavy to bear, and so a shrug of the shoulders is preferred to discipline.’<sup>245</sup> Provocatively, Derrida argues that, considered as a system of thought, Bataille's work is entirely lifted from Hegel; ‘Taken one by one and immobilized outside their syntax, all of Bataille's concepts are Hegelian.’<sup>246</sup> And this is necessarily so, because Bataille was opening the Hegelian system as a whole to indeterminacy, chance, and the sacred; ‘In the course of this repetition [of Hegelian discourse] a barely perceptible displacement disjoins all the articulations and penetrates all the points welded together by the imitated discourse. A trembling spreads out which then makes the entire old shell crack.’<sup>247</sup> But Derrida insists that in doing this Bataille does not, and must not, subvert Hegel via a practice of fragmenting and decontextualising his system:

To take such a system seriously, Bataille knew, was to prohibit oneself from extracting concepts from it, or from manipulating isolated propositions, drawing effects from them by transportation into a discourse foreign to them [...] Bataille doubtless put into question the idea or meaning of the chain in Hegelian reason, but he did so by thinking the chain as such, in its totality, without ignoring its internal rigor.<sup>248</sup>

Derrida seems at pains to avoid the impression that Bataille's use of Hegel can be understood through the now ubiquitous Situationist gesture of *détournement*; ‘where the accumulation of detoured elements, far from aiming to arouse indignation or laughter by alluding to some original work, will express *our indifference toward a*

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*‘Préface à la transgression’* was published only a few years previously (see above). One may infer that the equally anti-Hegelian Deleuze is also implicated. Reidar Due's critical introduction to Deleuze's work notes that he took from Bataille both the ‘notion that there is a dimension of existence that is essential to us, but which we have nevertheless covered up or lost touch with [...] modes of experiencing the world *which are not hedged in by rationality in any form*, whether moral, political, or scientific [my italics]’, and the means of recovering this lost dimension; ‘In their conception of literature and sexuality as opening up a special kind of experience, Foucault and Deleuze are again influenced by Bataille who created the notion that sexuality is the stage on which the subject is potentially *displaced* from itself, loses its bearings, and thereby gains access to a different openness to the world. [italics original]’ (Reidar Due, *Deleuze* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2007), p. 18).

<sup>245</sup>FRGE, p. 317.

<sup>246</sup>FRGE, p. 320.

<sup>247</sup>FRGE, p. 329.

<sup>248</sup> FRGE, pp. 319-320.

*meaningless and forgotten original*, and concern itself with rendering a certain sublimity.<sup>249</sup> No indifference, and no *bricolage*<sup>250</sup>: Derrida insists that only by bearing the full weight of Hegel can we truly exceed the bounds of his thought.<sup>251</sup>

Derrida further claims that Bataille's 'general writing' ought to, in a sense, preserve the system it wishes to revolutionise. 'Bataille's writing [...] draws upon, in order to exhaust it, the resource of meaning. With minute audacity, it will acknowledge the rule which constitutes that which it efficaciously, economically must deconstitute.'<sup>252</sup>

This transgression of discourse (and consequently of law in general, for discourse establishes itself only by establishing normativity or the value of meaning, that is to say, the element of legality in general) must in some fashion, and like every transgression, conserve or confirm that which it exceeds. This is the only way for it to affirm itself as transgression and thereby accede to the sacred<sup>253</sup>

What he says Bataille is trying to transgress/preserve is Hegel's similar notion of Sublation (*Aufhebung*), the third term in his dialectic of the progression of the Spirit. In German '*Aufhebung*' carries the untranslatable ambiguity of being preserved, lifted up and destroyed – perhaps a concept only translatable into English in the sense of the 'creative destruction' of capital and its productive forms, and therefore a concept belonging strictly to the restricted economy of work, productivity and growth.<sup>254</sup> In

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<sup>249</sup> Guy Debord, Gil J. Wolman, 'A User's Guide to Détournement', originally published in *Les Lèvres Nues* no.8 (May 1956), trans. Ken Knabb.

<<http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/detourn.htm>>. My italics.

<sup>250</sup> 'If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur* [...] [but] as soon as we admit that every finite discourse is bound by a certain *bricolage* and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of *bricoleurs*, then the very idea of *bricolage* is menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down.' ('Structure, Sign and Play in the discourse of the human sciences' in *Writing and Difference* pp. 351-70 (pp. 360-61)).

<sup>251</sup> While certainly not sharing the same view of Hegel, Derrida seems to anticipate Slavoj Žižek's more recent criticisms of *détournement* and its contemporary heir, ad-busting. For Žižek, these gestures only create an ironic, playful detachment which functions as an anaesthetic to genuinely revolutionary energies within a securely neo-liberal capitalist frame.

<sup>252</sup>FRGE, p. 341.

<sup>253</sup>FRGE, p. 347.

<sup>254</sup>'Our lives are controlled by a ruling class with vested interests not merely in change but in crisis and chaos. Uninterrupted disturbance, everlasting uncertainty and agitation,' instead of subverting this society, actually serve to strengthen it. Catastrophes are transformed into lucrative opportunities for redevelopment and renewal; disintegration works as a mobilizing and hence an integrating force.

*The Phenomenology of Spirit* the dialectic of master and slave involves a servile consciousness raising itself to the level of master through putting itself 'at risk', enduring the possibility of losing one's life (symbolically if not biologically). Having attained 'lordship', Hegel acknowledges that the master thereafter is paradoxically bound to the slave for the recognition of his mastery and also to the 'thing' which he must preserve by deferring the pleasure of consuming. But this kind of destruction as preservation, continuity and progress is not quite what Bataille or Derrida have in mind. For Bataille, Derrida says, Hegelian mastery is the philosophical correlate of a capitalist, restricted economy: what appeared to be a trial of the spirit in speculation, exchange and competition turns out to be a contrivance for the preservation of the self and the expansion of its properties and powers – a gamble which cannot fail to pay off. True risk, actually embracing the dissolution of the subject, is anathema to the Hegelian system:

Hegel clearly had proclaimed the necessity of the master's retaining the life that he exposes to risk [...] To rush headlong into death pure and simple is thus to risk the absolute loss of meaning, in the extent to which meaning necessarily traverses the truth of the master and self-consciousness. One risks losing the effect and profit of meaning which were the very *stakes* one hoped to *win*. Hegel calls this mute and nonproductive death, this death pure and simple, *abstract negativity*, in opposition to “the negation characteristic of consciousness, which cancels in such a way that it preserves and maintains what is sublated, and thereby survives its being sublated.” [...] Through this recourse to the *Aufhebung*, which conserves the stakes, remains in control of the play, limiting it and elaborating it by giving it form and meaning, this economy of life restricts itself to conservation, to circulation and self-reproduction as the reproduction of meaning; henceforth, everything covered by the name lordship collapses into comedy. The independence of self-consciousness becomes laughable at the moment when it liberates itself by enslaving itself, when it starts to *work*, that is, when it enters into dialectics.

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The one specter that really haunts the modern ruling class, and that really endangers the world it has created in its image, is the one that traditional elites (and, for that matter, traditional masses) have always yearned for: prolonged solid stability. In this world, stability can only mean entropy, slow death, while our sense of progress and growth is our only way of knowing for sure that we are alive.’ (Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (London: Verso, 1983) p. 95).

Laughter alone exceeds dialectics and the dialectician: it bursts out only on the basis of an absolute renunciation of meaning, an absolute risking of death, what Hegel calls abstract negativity. A negativity that never takes place, that never *presents* itself, because in doing so it would start to work again.<sup>255</sup>

Relating Hegel to the restricted economy of the 1920s, and before we again refer it back to Robin's marginless prayer, we might reflect that like the Hegelian Master (whose risk is calculated on the expectation of sublation, future profit, and the unthinkable of absolute loss) the American mania for stock market speculation between 1927 and 1929 was fuelled by a faith in a gamble which was supposed to be no gamble at all. Recalling the economic orthodoxy in the months preceding the 1929 crash, Galbraith wrote of the trade in securities on the margin:

Never had there been a better time to get rich, and people knew it. 1928, indeed, was the last year when Americans were buoyant, uninhibited, and utterly happy. It wasn't that 1928 was too good to last; it was only that it didn't last.

In the January issue of *World's Work*, Will Payne, after reflecting on the wonders of the year just over, went on to explain the difference between a gambler and an investor. A gambler, he pointed out, wins only because someone else loses. Where it is investment, all gain. One investor, he explained, buys General Motors at \$100, sells it to another at \$150, who sells it to a third at \$200. Everyone makes money.<sup>256</sup>

This pundit from the aptly-named *World's Work* is also, after his fashion, 'indifferent to the comedy of the *Aufhebung*', and so, according to Derrida 'blind [...] to the experience of the sacred, to the heedless sacrifice of presence and meaning.'<sup>257</sup> As presumably were the millions of investors in a bull market, all 'buoyant, uninhibited and utterly happy', who only exposed themselves to speculative risk in the evangelical *certainty* of future profit.

If it is a mistake to associate Bataille's argument for the systemic necessity of total expenditure with either the social capital gained through generosity in *potlatch*,

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<sup>255</sup>FRGE, pp. 322-3.

<sup>256</sup>Galbraith, p. 49.

<sup>257</sup>FRGE, p. 325.

or the exuberant hopes fuelling deregulated speculation, since either option would put the general economy *back to work*, we cannot imagine that a more radical programme of state expenditure or marketization would better approximate to orgiastic self-renunciation. Rather, we might speculate upon this traumatic episode of the global financial order – which more than any other fixes the meaning and the iconography of a ‘depression’ – and say that where general economic forces were in play in the late 1920s they were necessarily in excess of the rationality of individual bankers, investors, market regulators, and economists for whom loss had become unthinkable. Is it then the unthinkability of total loss which causes economic rationality to blind itself to the possibility of total loss, or could it be that the unthinkability of loss is a precondition for the properly inhuman dynamic of orgasmic expenditure to emerge? Could it be, then, that opening the subject of self-conscious mastery onto the play, the risk, the abyss of the general economy *might* paradoxically reduce the impulsion to consumerism in the restricted sphere? This would not be so because, as Yang argues, such restricted consumption is then revealed as still being in servitude to productive economic growth (how could it not have been so, except in the ‘archaic societies’ which she takes for historical, rather than mythic, models?), but because consumerism in the restricted economy is the space through which the healthful productive ethos of the restricted economy splits open traumatically onto the abyss of the general economy. If we are honest, if we can bear the full weight of this knowledge, then most of us are not brave or foolish enough to expound total excess as a sound principle of economic life; in other words, if we acknowledge the existence and the necessity of a general economy of play, sacrifice, chaos, and total consumption, we might be less keen to model a restricted economy upon consumerism, and more cautious about how we create spaces for general economy. In 1929, mostly unknown to themselves, by embarking on an investment strategy which was wholly underpinned by the capriciously rising market, America’s investors had embarked on an orgasmic destruction of value, which would consign them to years of unemployment and economic stagnation. As Galbraith notes, by the 1930s belated laws were brought in to curb speculative excesses which had already become taboo; formal legal interdiction was far behind the pace of a generalised social revulsion which had developed towards market speculation.

Perhaps this kind of unconscious complicity in the codification of general economy (i.e. the flip-side of the deregulation of any restricted economy) is what

Derrida is gesturing towards when he repeatedly insists that transgression must preserve and bear the weight of the law it destabilises; ‘one understands nothing of the general strategy if one absolutely renounces any regulation of ascertaining non-pertinence. If one loans it, abandons it, puts it into any hands: the right or the left.’<sup>258</sup> The law, if not transgressed by the laughter of general economy may become totalitarian, but a transgression which shrugs off the contingency of the laws in the name of general economy finds itself renouncing both the means to play *and* the means to order and regulate play. In other words, it renounces 'sovereignty'.

Conversely, by acceding to the form and method of Hegel, Bataille’s writing exceeds the dialectic in its operative dynamic. ‘Transgression’ on Derrida's model ought to play a role much like the Kristevan semiotic – inhering in the rhythms and ambiguities, the poetry, of discourse; opening out onto the pre- or extra-discursive, without inscribing that outside into the discourse itself. Transgression is properly a (in)formal, poetic (rather than argumentative, or even performative) feature of all discourse:

The poetic or ecstatic is that *in every discourse* which can open itself up to the absolute loss of sense, to the (non-)base of the sacred, of nonmeaning, of unknown, or of play, to the swoon from which it is reawakened by the throw of a dice. What is poetic in sovereignty is announced in the moment when poetry renounces theme and meaning”. (EI, p.239) It is only announced in this renunciation, for, given over to “play without rules,” poetry risks letting itself be domesticated, “subordinated,” better than ever. This risk is properly *modern*.<sup>259</sup>

We might conclude that the law maker who would make poetry and play *into* the law, principle and technique of their economy will succeed in turning play into one more form of domination – and one which is much trickier to subvert. By contrast, Bataille’s performance of the dialectic amplifies and intensifies the poetic dimension in the performative utterance – such that its power is fully experienced both as a subversion from within of the master’s voice, *and* as the stamp of authority upon his statements.

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<sup>258</sup>FRGE, p. 350.

<sup>259</sup> FRGE, p. 330.

Such a procedure of sensitisation would be an alternative apotropaic against the totalitarian governmental impulses of the Father. An alternative to the ‘curse’ upon the ‘economic sovereign’ identified by Foucault with liberal political economy, one which does not specify the utility-maximising rationality of the market as guarantee and regulatory principle of individual freedom. As Foucault himself remarks, the individual is amenable to governmental rationality to the degree (s)he is entrepreneur developing his/her own human capital (*‘Homo oeconomicus is someone who is eminently governable’*<sup>260</sup>). To the degree (She/)He is sovereign affirming him(/herself) in momentary transgressions of the norms and values which constitute Him, we can invert Foucault and say that the subject of right (juridical subject of symbolic order) ‘overflows [...] surrounds [...] is the permanent condition of’<sup>261</sup> the subject of interest: in the Sovereign moment when the calculus of interest is suspended, He/She exerts deconstructive pressure on the prevailing systems of governmentality, as autarchy and autocracy fuse in anarchic laughter.

### **5. A prayer for secrecy: Robin, Nora and Dr Freud share a bed**

‘The independence of self-consciousness becomes laughable at the moment when it liberates itself by enslaving itself, when it starts to *work* [...] Laughter alone exceeds dialectics and the dialectician: it bursts out only on the basis of an absolute renunciation of meaning, an absolute risking of death [...] that never *presents* itself, because in doing so it would start to work again.’ Just so, Robin's prayer does not liberate her from the dominant patriarchal power which Felix would hold over and through her; it does not ground her in an agency indexed to a set of interests of her own, nor initiate a self-mastery through which she might determine the law of her own being. Therefore, when she leaves Felix for Nora she is still caught in the same dialectic between the freedom of Becoming and the security of Being that seems incapable of sublating into a third term:

In the lobby Nora said, “My name is Nora Flood,” and she waited. After a pause the girl said, “I'm Robin Vote.” She looked about her distractedly. “I don't want

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<sup>260</sup> *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 270.

<sup>261</sup> *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 274.

to be here.” But it was all she said; she did not explain where she wished to be.

She stayed with Nora until mid-winter. Two spirits were working in her, love and anonymity. Yet they were so “haunted” of each other that separation was impossible [...] Robin told only a little of her life, but she kept repeating in one way or another her wish for a home, as if she were afraid she would be lost again, as if she were aware, without conscious knowledge, that she belonged to Nora, and that if Nora did not make it permanent by her own strength, she would forget.<sup>262</sup>

Barnes' default mode of description, especially when talking about Robin, is on a blurry line between indicative and subjunctive moods: for example, it is only ‘as if’ Robin fears loss; ‘as if’ Nora is her ‘true’ master. And we cannot interpret with any clarity whether this ‘as if’ indicates the unreality or the indefinability of their bond. Robin hovers between the servile consciousness that she not only belongs *with* Nora but ‘to Nora’, and an alluring promise of freedom which is also the threat of ‘anonymity’, the loss of recognised identity.

The ‘two spirits’, ‘love and anonymity’, are also working at the formal level of Barnes' writing, soliciting but refusing to guarantee the reader’s investment in the romance between Nora and Robin. The narrative voice does declare emphatically that ‘[t]here were’ two spirits in Robin, and the Other spirit in Robin, ‘anonymity’, because desiring separation, laughs at the first spirit’s fantasy of her possession. Here an irreducible but legible split is given in the character. Rather more uncertain is the identity of the subject/agent in the sentence concerning two agents ‘so “haunted” of each other’ that their division was ‘impossible’. Does the ‘they’ refer us back to Robin and Nora, in testament to the underlying truth and continuity of their love, an example of two opposing individuals co-mingling in a third, higher unity? Or does ‘they’ refer to the two ‘spirits’ in Robin herself? If the latter, there may be nothing intrinsic at all bonding Robin to Nora. What *is* affirmed in this passage – and in the novel's treatment of their relationship as a whole – is the *risk* of a love whose ultimate meaning and significance is not underwritten, the pain and the uncertainty, and therefore the absolute opening to the sacred, within and beyond its institutional approximations.

Here is the final reflection on Robin by Nora, triggered by a memory of

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<sup>262</sup> *N*, pp. 49-50.

wandering the streets of Naples as she mourned the breakdown of their relationship. Again the syntax is riddled (in both senses) with declaratives and subjunctives, as Nora uses the space of the church, the gaze of the other, and the image of the Madonna to give some fixity to the indefinite, indescribable dynamic between her and her lover. She recalls one street where ‘In open door-ways night lights were burning all day before gaudy prints of the Virgin’, and one room in which she comes across a ‘young girl’ sitting before an image of the Virgin in ‘semi-darkness’:

When she saw me she laughed, as children do, in embarrassment. Looking from her to the Madonna behind the candles, I knew that the image, to her, was what I had been to Robin, not a saint at all, but a fixed dismay, the space between the human and the holy head, the arena of the 'indecent' eternal.<sup>263</sup>

This tableau is fascinating because of the number of binary relationships that intersect (perhaps 'collide' would be a better word), a-chronically, in this one moment: Nora and the girl, the girl and the Madonna, Nora and Robin, the human and the divine, the 'indecent' and the holy. Little wonder that the scene is one of embarrassment and dawning self-consciousness consummated, once again, in laughter. Is the child embarrassed by Nora's glimpse of her private, secret prayer? Or by the weight of signification she is expected to carry? Or, is embarrassed laughter the result of a secret prayer being brought into the harsh daylight in which it is expected to perform as a revealed truth, as the photogenic, the transcendental, 'fixed' signifier of child and Madonna, rather than as the 'gaudy print' it clearly is?<sup>264</sup>

Is this girl's secret revealed in the scene anyway? Following the gaze between girl and Madonna, Nora somehow both 'knew' the girl's thoughts and, by analogy, finally understood what she herself had signified for Robin. Thereby the girl in her turn becomes the holy object, the 'fixed dismay', for Nora. Rather than mysteriously understanding how the girl views the 'gaudy print' of the Madonna, maybe the inverse

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<sup>263</sup> *N*, p.130.

<sup>264</sup> Cf. Derrida's comparison of Bataille's *sovereignty*, with the Hegelian *lordship* whose terms it repeats. Both systems struggle with the same opposition as Robin Vote; between love and anonymity, 'the continuous and the discontinuous'. The difference is that lordship resolves the contradiction logically, by the demand of 'recognition', by 'breaking of secrecy', whereas Bataille's *sovereignty* reserves space in his writing for the shadow of the secret, and therefore does not resolve the tension of continuous/discontinuous but keeps them in *play*; 'Sovereignty is absolute when it is absolved of every relationship, and keeps itself in the night of the secret. The continuum of sovereign communication has as its milieu this night of secret difference.' (FRGE, p. 337).

is true; Nora's perspective on Robin shifts because she unconsciously identifies herself with Robin here, making the girl-Madonna into a projected representation of herself-as-other. The reader is likewise inserted into the scene as witness, invited to identify, analyse or simply enjoy the voyeurism of interior discourse, but without assurance as to the meaning of what is told or the legitimacy of their responses.

And there is one other figure in this textual rhizome of inter-subjectivities, Dr O'Connor, Nora's interlocutor in this reconstruction of the scene. Elsewhere in the novel he acts as a kind of interpreter of the thoughts and actions of others. Whereas here, after Nora's soliloquy is concluded upon the scene of the girl and the Madonna, he 'staggered', 'stood in a confused and unhappy silence' and without a word of reply or of exegesis 'went out'.<sup>265</sup> Nora's narrative constructs a topology which cannot be interpreted without collapsing into a Bataillean space of death, sacrifice and the obscene. Still, one can see a restricted economy taking shape within the chaos of the telling. Note how her story dissolves itself, not only into 'eroticism and death'<sup>266</sup>, but into a 'necessary and impossible'<sup>267</sup> image of a centre, a conjugal bed, and a shared love:

At that moment I stood in the centre of eroticism and death, death that makes the dead smaller, as a lover we are beginning to forget dwindles and wastes; for love and life are a bulk of which the body and heart can be drained, and I knew that in that bed Robin should have put me down. In that bed we would have forgotten our lives in the extremity of memory, moulted our parts, as figures in the waxworks are moulted down to their story, so we would have broken down to our love.<sup>268</sup>

The foregoing reading is intended to illustrate the necessity of deliberately framing a reading of Barnes' text within a constricting hermeneutic model such as that of the master-slave dialectic. For only in reading this way, and then suffering the result as one's interpretation falls into contradiction and incoherence, do we experience what Bataille aims at under the name of sovereignty, or what Barnes refers to around the

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<sup>265</sup> *N*, p. 130.

<sup>266</sup> *N*, p. 130.

<sup>267</sup> FRGE, p. 319.

<sup>268</sup> *N*, p. 130.

time of the novel's publication as a 'secret [...] that one day becomes public, but still secret if written as it should be.'<sup>269</sup>

I draw this chapter to an overdue close by considering Teresa de Lauretis' essay, "Nightwood" and "The Terror of Uncertain Signs", which also considers the novel's disconcerting resistance to interpretation. De Lauretis focuses on the idea that Barnes is giving textual form to the primary (unconscious) processes defined in Freud's late theory as Eros and Thanatos (pleasure principle and death drive). A reading for which the conclusion of Nora's story (quoted above) gives abundant and all too obvious support ('I stood in the centre of eroticism and death').

For de Lauretis, while *Nightwood* appears to be lacking figurative anchorage (its 'chain of signifiers would not halt, would not find a resting point where meaning could temporarily congeal'<sup>270</sup>), we can, nonetheless, apply the insights of post-structuralist semiotics and depth psychology and begin to meet the challenge of the novel by recognising Barnes' figural opacity as 'the textual inscription of the death drive.'<sup>271</sup> However, I believe that de Lauretis' reading betrays its stated aim to 'sustain the traumatic process of misreading – not looking for the plot, that is, for narrative or referential meaning, but going instead with the figural movement of the text and acquiescing to the otherness in it'<sup>272</sup> [my italics] because in all too willingly abandoning the search for meaning, subjectivity, and even a kind of religious authority which I have argued that *Nightwood* enacts, it reduces meaning to figuration and elevates figuration to the status of revealed truth. It too easily forgets that in Nora's climactic affirmation of 'eroticism and death' there is also (the 'congealed' impression of) an 'I' and a 'centre'. Eroticism and death do not structure the scene, but colour it with the imprecision of heightened affect.

I have singled out this essay, firstly because it seems to illustrate what Derrida calls the renewed danger of poetry being 'subordinated' more fully than ever when it claims to have thrown off all phallogocentric restraints (particularly narrative, referent

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<sup>269</sup> Djuna Barnes, letter to Emily Coleman, 30th Nov 1937, quoted in Caselli, footnote pp. 195-96.

<sup>270</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, 'Nightwood and the "Terror of Uncertain Signs"', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 34, No. 5, Special Supplemental Issue for W. J. T. Mitchell (2008), pp. S117-S129, p. 118.

<sup>271</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, p. S129.

<sup>272</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, p. S129.

and subjectivity), but secondly because the argument enacts its own narrative arc, in spite of itself, through which a tyrannical founding authority from the family romance of Barnes' scholars is contested, overcome, and mastered: Kenneth Burke and his 1947 essay 'Version, Con-, Per-, and In-: Thoughts on Djuna Barnes's Novel *Nightwood*'.

When Barnes' work was recovered for feminist and queer revisions of the Modernist canon, Burke's essay (along with T.S. Eliot's introduction to the text) represented a certain patriarchal imposition ('condescending and self-important'<sup>273</sup>) upon Barnes' text which a new generation of critics were understandably keen to challenge. In Burke's critique his 'conventional understanding of rhetoric, combined with a conventional view of life and literature'<sup>274</sup> lead him to complain of 'a Rhetorical problem' with *Nightwood*'s language deriving from its 'reliance upon ethical or religious values, even though they are exemplified in *reverse*'.<sup>275</sup> And therefore, he sees in the novel a clumsy attempt at narrative 'completion' in the 'transcendence downward' of Robin's 'ambiguous translation into pure beastliness'<sup>276</sup>. Coming to Barnes' defence, De Lauretis counters that Burke has mistaken a quasi-theological structure for a far more radical figuration of what lies beyond conventional language:

In *Nightwood*, under the cultured, highly wrought discourse of the doctor, and the differently inflected discourses of Felix and Nora, runs a layer of nonverbal or presemiotic communication that the novel registers in Robin's relation to animals and children.<sup>277</sup>

Therefore the novel's original achievement lies in giving a textual form to this 'nonverbal or presemiotic level', namely –

the figural inscription of sexuality as drive, a psychic excitation that the ego, in the case of Robin, is unable to bind to itself or to external objects, and in any case (specifically in Nora's case but in the doctor's as well) disrupts the emotional coherence and threatens the self-possession of the ego by the

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<sup>273</sup>Teresa de Lauretis, footnote, p. S126.

<sup>274</sup>Teresa de Lauretis, footnote, p. S126

<sup>275</sup>Kenneth Burke, "Version, Con-, Per-, and In-: Thoughts on Djuna Barnes's Novel *Nightwood*", *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley, 1946), pp. 240-53 (p. 243, p. 241). Quoted in de Lauretis, p. S126.

<sup>276</sup>Burke, p. 250, p. 244. Quoted in de Lauretis, p. S126.

<sup>277</sup>Teresa de Lauretis, p. S129.

violence of its affective charge. It is in this violence, in this unmanageable quantity of affect and the shattering effects it has on the ego, that sexuality is figured in *Nightwood* as a psychic force that is at once sexual drive and death drive.<sup>278</sup>

Her essay's denouement announces that the greatest value of conceptualising the figure of the unrepresentable death drive is that it allows her to 'come to terms' with that in *Nightwood* which is 'the disturbing, spectral presence of something silent, uncanny, unrepresentable, and yet figured'.<sup>279</sup> In abandoning the search for narrative resolution and denotative meaning, by keeping the safe distance proper to an analyst with their patient, or a professor with their text, this reading strategy removes the appreciation of the novel to an abstracted level of acquiescence, muting the unsettling elements which she earlier identified. In this sense, Burke's uncomplimentary assessment of Barnes' awkward reliance on traditional 'ethical or religious values' might point to something with which de Lauretis would not so easily be able to come to terms.

### **Inconclusion - "Stop *praying* for me!"<sup>280</sup>**

If this inconclusive thesis appears to be embracing nostalgia for paternal authority – secular, religious and familial, perhaps even critical – this is a danger that cannot be easily avoided, and a possibility I must admit. My approach is coloured by feeling that transgressive gestures within critical academic discourse are becoming increasingly ineffectual: parodic of themselves. Transgressive gestures are reifying into the default mode by which we glibly interrogate texts, at the same time as our institutional settings define us more than ever as competitive liberal individualist subjects (not to mention rationalised, heavily monitored and assessed researchers and pedagogues).

But I do not believe I am retreating into a reading of Barnes along 'conventional' lines which have already been disposed of or rendered irrelevant.

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<sup>278</sup>Teresa de Lauretis, p. S127.

<sup>279</sup>Teresa de Lauretis, p. S129.

<sup>280</sup> Barnes' response to Emily Coleman's campaign to convert her to, and claim her for, Catholicism (Djuna Barnes to Emily Coleman, 3 Feb 1943. Quoted in Philip Herring, *Djuna: The life and work of Djuna Barnes* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 254). According to Herring's biography Coleman also wrote an essay for Charles Henri Ford's *View*, calling *Nightwood* 'the religious book of their generation' (Herring, p. 254).

Following Derrida's warning about the contemporary desire to shrug off Hegelian metaphysics in favour of a Nietzschean play of pure becomings, and his criticism elsewhere of a certain giddy fetishisation of post-metaphysical freedom<sup>281</sup>, I believe that the way 'ethical and religious values' feature in Barnes' work – structuring it, but in such a way that its form seems both unfinished and on the brink of ruin – must be considered alongside the complex weave of power, sexuality and desire which undoubtedly also thread through her writing; considered alongside the later but not reconciled, nor given priority; simply there to ensure that the stigmata of the sovereign reader continue to bleed.

This leaves us with the unresolved question of the Father. In this chapter we have read the relationship between Derrida, Bataille and Hegel, not as 'unfathering' *per se* but as opening an horizon of freedom within which the Father's rules and authority takes a vital but decentred, unstable and contestable position; 'I do not limit myself to a determined and abstract kind of knowledge or unknowledge, but I rather absolve myself of absolute knowledge, putting it back in its place as such, situating it and inscribing it within a space which it no longer dominates.'<sup>282</sup> Without finding some such accommodation with mastery on the one hand, and the self-loss of general economic forces on the other, our critical options are as constrained as is Felix at the beginning of *Nightwood*. Felix, who promiscuously fabricates an identity, and doing so finds he has no place of authority to speak from, no community to stand with, no justice to which he can appeal. Somewhat like the more fortunate subjects of deregulated capitalism, he has mobility, disposable income, and freedom of choice. But in the absence of any real access to (phallic) power, he can only choose his own servility.

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<sup>281</sup>In 'Structure, Sign and Play' he observes a spellbinding appeal in the structuralist endeavour: '[...] what appears most fascinating in this critical search for a new status of discourse is the stated abandonment of all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an *origin*, or to an absolute *archia*.' And while he acknowledges a 'necessity' in this project, he foresees a danger that if theorists become spellbound by our 'stated abandonment' of conventional categories and fail to fully interrogate the philosophical concepts we may wish to throw out or transform (he gives the examples of 'sign, history, truth') then 'we condemn ourselves to transforming the alleged transgression of philosophy into an unnoticed fault in the philosophical realm [...] the passage beyond philosophy does not consist in turning the page of philosophy (which usually amounts to philosophising badly).' ('Structure, Sign and Play', p. 361, pp. 363-64).

<sup>282</sup>FRGE, p. 341.



### **Chapter 3 – Sowing no seeds of doubt: a disappointing intersectional reading of *Ryder's* paternal plot**

What [certain Marxists] really like is the family, authenticated genealogy, family resemblance; it reassures them to recognise the old familiar things, to recognise each other as they reassure each other; that way one knows who's who, who belongs to which family and which family line [...] There are still sons - and daughters - who, unbeknownst to themselves, incarnate or metempsychosize the ventriloquist specters of their ancestors. (Jacques Derrida, 'Marx and Sons', in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Derrida's Spectre's of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999) pp. 213-69 (p. 253, p.262).)

While I do think that the satire in the above quotation hits its mark, such ironical treatment of intellectual patriarchies only makes it the more shameful for those working in a (post)deconstructive academia to honestly interrogate their own affective investment in familial imaginaries, including that which has formalised and institutionalised itself as Deconstruction. For these regressive fantasies of authority and security are supposed to be the stuff of right-wing reaction (plus a fair few *bad* left-wingers in our midst: the 'brocialists', 'manarchists', etc.). As this chapter attempts to move beyond the re-examination of the function of the father and his fraternal associates (the Sovereign, the Master) in Lacan, Foucault and Derrida, it considers the unacknowledged investments in these men as 'fathers' to our own intellectual projects and how this shapes the 'post-theoretical' academic scene in which we all work and define ourselves. In the fallout from this I will spin a tale about how such family dramas play through in a (hazily and broadly) leftist intellectual context in which a quasi-empirical, quasi-formalist notion – 'intersectionality' – is solemnly offered as a panacea for the thousand power struggles, appropriations and wilful misreadings which the radical flesh is heir to, and then how the intersections of material-productive and queer-libidinal economies can be read through the final chapters of Barnes' *Ryder* (1928).

From previous chapters it will perhaps be anticipated that my suspicion of the term ‘intersectionality’ derives from its scientific abstraction – its language of networks, systems, ‘vectors of oppression’,<sup>283</sup> ‘matrices of domination’<sup>284</sup>, and its fidelity to a complex realist model of social phenomena, against the ultimate indeterminacy of power relations. Following Derrida as I compulsively do, I prefer to acknowledge the phenomenon of ‘domination within a field of forces while suspending the reference to this ultimate support that would be the identity and self-identity of social classes’<sup>285</sup>; it seems to me that advocates of intersectionality often react to (against?) the legacy of Marxism in precisely the opposite direction of travel. On the poststructuralist model (and indeed on a Gramscian-Marxist model<sup>286</sup>) it is the very absence of transcendental guarantee for categories such as class (or race, gender, mental and physical ‘health’, etc.) which ensures that they remain sites of ideological contestation, and this does not in any way deny the relatively determinate material realities which they construct. Intersectionality theories, while not always incompatible with this approach, tend instead to model a social field in which relations of domination, exclusion and exploitation can (in theory) be objectively measured, albeit within localised, determinate contexts, and provided one is able to factor in complex interactions of multiple oppressive categories.

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<sup>283</sup> George Ritzer, *Contemporary Sociological Theory and Its Classical Roots: The Basics* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007), p. 204.

<sup>284</sup> See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 221–38.

<sup>285</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1993), p. 69.

<sup>286</sup> A collective will can only be forged by a process of intellectual and moral reform that will create a common conception of the world. There must be ‘a cultural-social unity through which a multiplicity of dispersed wills with heterogeneous aims, are welded together with a single aim, as the basis of an equal and common conception of the world’ (SPN 349).

However, this new common conception of the world will not be a purely capitalist or a purely monopoly capitalist one in the case of the bourgeoisie; nor will it be a socialist ideology representing in a pure form the outlook of the working class. Instead, there had to be a more complex synthesis of class objectives with themes that have arisen out of the original and unique history of each country. [...] [I]f a class is to become hegemonic it has to succeed in combining these popular-democratic themes, which are rooted in the history of each country and which do not have a necessary class character, with its own class objectives in order to create a national-popular will. For this is the only way in which the ideas and aims of a revolutionary class can become deeply rooted among the people. (Roger Simon, *Gramsci’s Political Thought: An Introduction* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2015), pp. 61-62.

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If 'Intersectionality' grants an assumed (sometimes disavowed) objectivity, it offers a tool with which we can measure, analyse and maybe even intervene in and reshape the intersectional dynamics of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability... Furthermore, as intersectional research subjects we can and must '*check* our privilege' against the coordinates of this matrix. The cultural reach of this moralistic imperative surely has much to do with the fortuitous polyvalence of its predicate. Our privilege (source of so much guilt and embarrassment) can be 'checked': 'stop[ped] sharply or suddenly', 'restrain[ed]', 'control[led] by some method of comparison [...] ensuring accuracy and authenticity'. Self-auditing ourselves in this way, we sublimate our privilege, bringing it within the movement of self-reflection, assuring our authenticity while at the same time cancelling and transcending its negative moment.

Still, working intersectionally clearly facilitates more nuanced representations of observable phenomena than linear, monocausal theories, and I would obviously not want to argue here that a self-reflexive theory of overdetermination is irrelevant to radical politics. The concern is that the language of intersectionality places us beyond the all too human, monomaniacal dramas which cause us to adhere to, say, a Marxist rather than a critical race theory in the first place. Paradoxically, the register of 'intersectionality' invites us to perpetuate the myth of the intellectual labourer as disinterested expert, even as it posits the partial perspective of every individual social agent, embedded within the social system. This is because in stepping outside one metaphoric system, the family, and into that of the network, we run the risk of a dissociated analysis in which we seem to master our blindnesses and speak from a coherent, ethically sound position, when all we have really done is shift our language into another symbolic register: why exactly, for example, is it considered a theoretical advance to speak of 'axes' of oppression as opposed to, say, the fractious fellowship between the Four Horsemen of Socio-Cultural Abjection – White Face, Able Body, Mighty Phallus and Landlord?

While I am not seriously suggesting that pseudo-biblical exegesis should replace geometric calculation as the dominant metaphoric field for leftist solidarity (nor for that matter do I believe that metaphors of paternity ought to predominate in our discourse, this project merely wishes to re-examine their currently abject status), we should be alert to the pseudo-objectivity which the formalist trope reintroduces.

Another early worry. Am I then conflating methodology and metaphor in a

problematic fashion? Perhaps wiser to accept that methodological questions go to the heart of intellectual enquiry (at root: how to approach phenomena in such ways that generate authentic knowledge in the Real), while working with metaphor is secondary, generative and/or disruptive of meaningful fictions? Such a hard and fast distinction is difficult to maintain though, so this chapter will continue to worry away at the tensions on the (imaginary) fault line between method and metaphor, or (if you must) between what one intersectionality theorist, Leslie McCall, calls ‘anticategorical’ intersectionality, concerned with the real damage wrought by the *fictions* of categorical analysis, and ‘intercategorical’ intersectional approaches, which only ‘provisionally adopt existing analytical categories [in order] to document relationships of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions.’<sup>287</sup>

Fundamentally, McCall and I most likely agree that intersectional methodologies (whether anti- or inter-categorical) imply, presuppose and demand a philosophical shift from post-structuralism towards ‘critical realism’:

abandoning such hallmarks of positivism as predictability and linear explanation does not mean that anything goes: reality is complexly patterned but patterned nonetheless. We can determine the source of the complexity, we can describe it, and we can theorise it. In this view, changes in patterns of inequality and in the underlying structural conditions of society are dynamic, complex, and contingent but also amenable to explanation.<sup>288</sup>

Therefore we would differ solely insofar as she regards this as a welcome development (since it facilitates the aim of ‘managing complexity’), and I am not so confident that the production and management of complex hermeneutics and algorithmics to ‘determine’ identity and power relations are a wholly beneficent development. At this point we might consider that though the discourse of intersectionality emerged ‘as a legal concept grounded in black feminism’,<sup>289</sup> indebted therefore to the insights of extensive qualitative case studies, the personal-as-political theorising of African-

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<sup>287</sup>Leslie McCall, 'The Complexity of Intersectionality' *Signs*, 30:3 (Spring 2005) 1771-800 (p. 1773).

<sup>288</sup>McCall, p. 1794.

<sup>289</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Justice Rising: moving intersectionally in the age of post-everything*, online audio recording, 26 March 2014,

<<http://www.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/videoAndAudio/channels/publicLecturesAndEvents/player.aspx?id=2360>>.

American writer-activists such as Audre Lorde (whose own celebrated metaphor warning of the limitations of appropriating the master's tools seems applicable here), its subsequent elaboration has taken it far from the original critical impetus to critique the oppressive power structures of technocratic modernity.

Critical legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, from whom the term is generally held to derive, certainly does concern herself with structural conditions. In her influential article 'Demarginalising the Intersection of Race and Sex' she critiques the dominant juridical discourse around discrimination for its neglect of structural barriers, but does so as part of a broader analysis of the neutralisation of a white/male universality through the proliferation of particularised categories of discrimination:

[On this model] [d]iscrimination which is wrongful proceeds from the identification of a specific class or category; either a discriminator intentionally identifies this category, or a process is adopted which somehow disadvantages all members of this category [...] Race and sex [...] become significant only when they operate to explicitly disadvantage the victims; because the privileging of whiteness or maleness is implicit, it is generally not perceived at all.

Underlying this conception of discrimination is a view that the wrong which anti-discrimination law addresses is the use of race or gender factors to interfere with decisions which would otherwise be fair or neutral.<sup>290</sup>

What she opposes to this is not a more *accurate* mapping of the social field, but analyses which work to disrupt the erasure of subject positions whose 'visible invisibility'<sup>291</sup> maintain the discursive margins of prevailing liberal identity categories. The importance of the 'margin' to her original conception of intersectionality should not be neglected; in a sense her project in 'Demarginalising the Intersection' can be understood as a deconstructive model of intersectionality rather than, in MacCall's terms, either an anti- or inter- categorical one. Indeed, she states elsewhere the

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<sup>290</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalising the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', in *Feminist Legal Theory: Foundations* ed. D. Kelly Weisberg (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), pp. 383-95 (p. 386).

<sup>291</sup> Crenshaw, *Justice Rising*.

significance of deconstruction for her interventions in the field of discrimination law. Following a lengthy quote from Derrida's *Dissemination* on the 'structure of polarised categories [which] is characteristic of Western thought' she explicitly aligns her conception of (racial) discrimination upon this model; '[r]acist ideology replicates this pattern of arranging oppositional categories in a hierarchical order'<sup>292</sup>.

More recently she has expressed frustration at

a particularly vexed contradiction. Although intersectionality was coined to counter the disembodiment of black women from law, the challenge today is to resist the disembodiment of black women from intersectionality itself. [...] From the plantation to the prisons, spaces of disempowerment have been populated by black women's bodies, but the imaginaries of emancipation have rarely specifically engaged them. [...] My own efforts to articulate a black feminist imaginary was premised on the paradox of black women's *highly visible invisibility* in anti-discrimination law. [...] Intersectionality was *a conceptual frame that was built on a common readily accessible metaphor*; it was designed to articulate a black feminist critique of the various instances of subordination and erasure that black female plaintiffs were facing in efforts to bring law to their defence.<sup>293</sup>

I claim that it is not coincidental that the specific erasure of the black female (imaginary) body from the discourse of intersectionality accompanies the above described epistemological shift: from 'intersection' as a 'readily accessible metaphor' which works to deconstruct a particular juridical discursive context by attending to its 'visibly invisible' exclusions, through the naturalisation and positivisation of the intersection, to McCall's objectively measurable 'underlying structural conditions of society'.

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In the final chapter, I intend to explore the strategic possibilities of a maligned

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<sup>292</sup> Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, 'Race, Reform and Retrenchment: Transformation and legitimation in antidiscrimination law', in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader* ed. Les Back and John Solomos (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 549-60 (p.550).

<sup>293</sup> Crenshaw, *Justice Rising*. My italics.

alternative approach to the imaginary. In relation to *The Antiphon's* familial politics (in which the familial- and the geo-political echo each other, reciprocally providing the metaphoric depths of the other) I entertain a 'post-Jungian' mythopoetic hermeneutics derived from the work of Andrew Samuels. For Samuels, paternal fantasies are not so much traversed à la Lacan, as mercurial elements in an “‘imaginal network’ [which] inflect[s] the personality’, a first-order phenomenon which is not derivative of ‘a structure prior to and separate from such contents.’”<sup>294</sup>

Meanwhile, in preparation for such an untimely return to Jung, in this chapter I will attack contemporary critical theory in both its Marxist and Queer guises, but only in order to defend it against the positivistic complexity of ‘intersectional’ work which would reduce both the Queer and the Marxist epistemological frames to variables (sexuality, class) within a manageable social whole, absorbing both forms of critique into consensus politics. I defend the pull of *fidelity* to a critical inheritance, and the eruptive force of competing master narratives. I want today's post-structuralist writers to be more self-reflexive about their emotional investments in that mostly male pantheon of sixties radical intellectuals, but I still want them/us to fight over these and other stakes *passionately*. A rare and precious example, Jane Gallop's *Anecdotal Theory* makes this brave and fascinating admission:

My graduate education had reconstructed me as a daughter of Derrida and Lacan [...] Derrida's critique of Lacan made me feel like the child of divorcing parents; if they were opposed, then I had to choose; if I had to choose then I had to lose [...] Through my panic I could not help but see that they were indeed not together; I could not both bring them together and be where they were; we could not all three be together.<sup>295</sup>

We could not all three be together. An anxious thought for a Christian theologian, certainly, as it must be for a Marxist or Hegelian dialectician... but merely a truism, surely, for one schooled in the asymmetries and discontinuities of post-structuralism? As a prominent member of our family-which-is-not-one, it is unsurprising that Gallop acknowledges the shame she experienced as she became conscious of her internalised

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<sup>294</sup>Andrew Samuels, *The Plural Psyche* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 11. See *Plural Psyche*, pp. 39-47, on using the concept of 'imaginal network' in transference and interpretation.

<sup>295</sup>Jane Gallop, *Anecdotal Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 95.

patrimonial conflict between these two great men, who, together but apart, had supposedly abolished, or at least decentred the father function? During the nineties, decades on from the original dispute, she revised an essay she had originally written contemporaneous with the Derrida/Lacan controversies and found her youthful 'attempt to repair what I experienced as Derrida's castration of Lacan' to be 'an embarrassment'. With maturity and hindsight she 'had the good sense to excise'<sup>296</sup> the offending lines.

She also relates how she discovered in the intervening years a more satisfying reparative reading of the dispute in Barbara Johnson's paper, 'The Frame of Reference' (1977). In Johnson's text she felt she had 'found a sister' and with the help of this sibling she believes she has finally learned to mourn the original loss of family unity. '[Johnson's] article looks unflinchingly at their quarrel, sides with neither, and, without at all denying their opposition, brings them together, reinscribing the opposition within a 'round robin', a game of taking turns. Split by Derrida's critique, I felt repaired by Johnson and immensely relieved.'<sup>297</sup> So, when Gallop agreed to write the article from which I now quote, she did so confident in having achieved an accepting and nuanced attitude towards the antagonism.<sup>298</sup> She would, she believed, revisit that traumatic dispute with the 'clear-sighted wisdom, cool recollection' of an adult thinker who 'no longer has a strong stake' in these gibbering old father-figures. Setting out to settle accounts with the past, Gallop discovered that the paternal fantasy had lost none of its troubling fascination: 'Instead I got anxious [...] as I wrote this paper or rather as I resisted writing this paper, resisted really getting into Lacan and Derrida again, reopening that can of worms.' When we speak of the father 'something comes back to us – figures return from the past to disturb an idyllic present, aliens threatening domestic security.'<sup>299</sup> Rest easy; we will not bring the Father's Ghost onstage until the next chapter, in which Hamlet becomes an unavoidable reference point. For now, Gallop aside, we are moving within the ranks of critics who want nothing to do with ghosts.

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<sup>296</sup>Gallop, p. 94.

<sup>297</sup>Gallop, p. 95.

<sup>298</sup> Gallop clearly allude to the Kleinian depressive position in which defensive schizoid splitting of ambivalent feelings into good and bad objects. Discussion of the currency of Kleinian Object Relations will follow in the final chapter, particularly in relation to Sedgwick's influential commitment to the 'reparative' reading mode which a 'depressive' critical position enables.

<sup>299</sup>Gallop, p. 99.

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In this chapter, I want to address a yet greater and historically more vitriolic rift within Leftist academia, that between post-structuralism and Marxism. I do so firstly through an exploration of the divisions and mutual suspicions which have sometimes existed at the intersections between these fields. I then go on to consider several attempts from within the field of Queer Theory to come to terms with Marx, with particular consideration of Judith Butler's polemic 'Merely Cultural' (1997) and Kevin Floyd's more recent (and more overtly reparative) *The Reification of Desire: Towards a Queer Marxism* (2009), a text which nevertheless, for logically inevitable reasons, tends to privilege one term in the dialectic; '[the] basic methodological orientation is drawn from Marxism. I forthrightly frame key insights from queer thought in Marxian terms'.<sup>300</sup>

Queer cast as universal spirit realising itself in the form of Marxism? This would be a grotesque caricature of Floyd, but not necessarily a criticism. We shall contrast the prosaic violence of Butler's essay, which asserts that the proper name 'Althusser' has already been signed upon the death warrant of Orthodox Marxism (allowing her to merely re-present that prior authorisation), with Floyd's 'forthrightness' in announcing a preference for one structuring principle over another, against the discursive grain of intersectional discourses as I unkindly read them. Far from stymieing dialogue between Queer and Marxist work, his open acknowledgement of his commitment is the *sine qua non* of meaningful dialogue across these two fields. Recall here Derrida's words, written shortly after the (biological) death of the author, on the relation between the 'unavoidable' texts of Roland Barthes and the spectral subjectivity of their producer:

[T]he individual "subjects" who inhabit the zones most difficult to avoid are not authoritarian "superegos" with power at their disposal, assuming that Power can be at one's disposal. Like those for whom these zones become unavoidable (and this is first of all their history), they inhabit them, and, rather than ruling there, take from them a desire or an image. It is a certain way of

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<sup>300</sup> Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Towards a Queer Marxism* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 3.

relinquishing authority, a certain freedom in fact, an acknowledged relationship to their own finitude, which, by an ominous and rigorous paradox, confers on them an additional authority [...] Not that one is ready to agree that they are right, a priori and in all cases, not that one awaits a verdict or believes in a lucidity without weakness, but, even before looking for it, the image of an evaluation, look, or affect imposes itself.<sup>301</sup>

Kevin Floyd's work is not at all disingenuous in *both* claiming to further the project of 'direct engagement'<sup>302</sup> between Queer and Marxist work *and* systematically giving priority to Marx; he recognises that in any intellectual endeavour there is a point where the 'paternal metaphor' has to be operative, where one writes 'no means no', 'left is not right' or 'one must prioritise a commitment to sexual over class politics' (or vice versa), not because one fancies that one possesses 'lucidity without weakness', nor because one wishes to give this impression to an other, but simply because one finds oneself occupying a position from which one must produce efficacious statements.

The exact weight one gives to class or sexual oppression (or other visibly invisible identity categories) cannot finally be decided by rational calculation. Without suggesting that one ought to ignore research data, there comes a point in any argument, decision or ethical commitment where ignoring the utterly contingent authority of the superegoic law-giver leaves only two alternatives – a complex yet technocratic determination of social order, or a total unravelling of identity which as Derrida noted in his discussion of Bataille, ultimately makes the (post)subject all the more available for domination. In the best of cases, (and I claim Floyd is one of the better) the necessarily paternalistic decision will take a nuanced form which recognises overlapping modes of social reproduction (psycho-social, economic, legal, etc.) which simultaneously, if not symmetrically, marginalise, exploit and exclude certain figures (non-heterosexual monogamous groups and those without capital, for example).

I argue that as the bearers of whatever authority academic status conveys, within the discursive constraints of a neoliberalised academic field, we should be more willing to imagine ourselves in the figure of the (castrated) father, and consider what agency that allows us. It is not quite without shame or anxiety, therefore, that I will

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<sup>301</sup>Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 55-56.

<sup>302</sup>Floyd, p. 2.

shortly draw this chapter into an extended identification with the symbolic dilemmas of Wendell Ryder.



Jane Gallop's sense of a personal familial investment in the 'great names' of theory is familiar to me, and her honesty is both heartening and potentially transformative. One measure of how difficult it is to speak of the Father without ironic distance is that it took thirty years for Gallop to feel she had enough cultural capital to burn by publishing this fantasied relation to Derrida and Lacan. Furthermore, it was still necessary to frame it as a juvenile relationship to these bodies of thought, one which she recognises as shameful. Nevertheless her rare and brave self-awareness suggests to me that Derrida may well have been right to read the adverse reaction towards deconstruction within some sections of the Left as proprietorial fury at an attack on the Father's laws through which one has given meaning to one's world and one's struggle within it.

Other examples abound, especially where Marx is involved. Martha Gimenez's 2005 polemic sets Marxist-feminism against post-structuralist-feminism in rhetoric which portrays Deconstruction as a home-wrecking intruder on the naturally-ordained marriage of feminist and Marxist insights, with catastrophic consequences for the development of their offspring. Thus:

The deconstruction of “women” as a category of analysis, the focus on “discursively constructed” genders, sexualities, bodies, and manifold differences among women seem to have severed the links between Marx’s work, feminist theory and women’s liberation. As Epstein argues, “feminist theory has come to mean feminist post-structuralism” and this entails the adoption of principles (e.g., anti-essentialism, social constructionism, the reduction of social reality to discourse, relativism, the rejection of macrolevel theories, the so-called “metanarratives”) antithetical to the development of social analyses and political strategies useful for all social movements, including women’s liberation. The very idea of women’s oppression and struggles for liberation presupposes the material reality of their plight and the validity of their claims, notions outside the purview of theories for which

everything is relative and discursively constructed.<sup>303</sup>

The 'severed links' between Marx and feminism, the coerced 'adoption' of genetically alien ideas, the child's suspicion that the adoptive parent's pseudo-legitimate status as step-Father (consummated in the bitter oxymoron 'Feminist post-structuralism') only masks a wish to destroy the daughters of the earlier, truer marriage, the eponymic wish to re-establish 'visit[ing]' rights with Marx. I belabour my point - perhaps because I harbour a fear that Gimenez is not completely wrong about Deconstruction. Many of my postgrad peers, particularly in the more 'worldly' disciplines of politics or the social sciences, now bemoan the 'linguistic turn', and, still more threatening to my own investment in Derrida, they periodize it, confining that intellectual project to an era which predated the US imperial wars of the 2000s, prior to the reconsolidation of neoliberal hegemony in the wake of the 2008 financial crash, prior to the revival of popular resistance from uprisings in the middle-east, prior to resurgent feminist activism, anti-globalisation movements, etc. Deconstruction apparently belonged to a time where a divided and disillusioned Left retreated into nihilistic language games, valorising the performativity of identity having struck a chord with the resurgent liberal doxa of individual freedom, and the extension of the governmental imperative to 'make something of yourself' into the most intimate areas of social, psychological and sexual life. Furthermore, such a 'paranoid' reading of Deconstruction's ubiquity in Anglo-American academia has a bitter resonance with recent trends in social attitude surveys, which suggest that among the younger generation (born 1980-2000) a rising percentage have interiorized a belief in self-sufficiency and a concomitant hostility towards recipients of social benefits, and a basic acceptance of contemporary right wing discourses about welfare fraudsters vs entrepreneurial achievers. Such views are more widely held in the UK than in any previous generations born since the second world war<sup>304</sup>, but so is an attitude of 'tolerance' towards racial, sexual, and (to some extent) religious and national Others.<sup>305</sup> Could there be some truth in the idea that

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<sup>303</sup> Martha E. Gimenez, 'Capitalism and the Oppression of Women: Marx Revisited', *Science & Society*, 69:1 (2005), 11–32 (p.13). My italics.

<sup>304</sup> See <<http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-30/spending-and-welfare/who-has-changed-their-mind.aspx>>.

For example, 'The view that unemployment benefits are too high has increased by 31 percentage points among the youngest age group, compared with 17 percentage points among the oldest age group'.

<sup>305</sup> See <<http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-30/personal-relationships/conclusions.aspx>>.

Deconstruction has been a bad step-father to an errant intellectual Left which had lost touch with its real progenitor, Karl Marx, whose severe, dogmatic and unglamorous advice to refer discourse back to material conditions, to devote our attention to working conditions and the finer points of political economy, seemed so unsexy while we were seduced by the play of *différance*. With hindsight he clearly knew the score, and had our best interests at heart! A travesty of both Marxism and Deconstruction. But as a fantasy is it not heard everywhere these days? Here, for example, in Terry Eagleton's *The Event of Literature* (2012):

For all its intellectual brio and fertility, deconstruction (indeed, post-structuralism in general) signified a certain loss of political nerve – a wariness of ambitious forms of action, for example, in the wake of a history in which such projects had too often bred monstrous consequences.<sup>306</sup>

This heterosexual (almost Darwinian) collocation of ‘brio’ (vigour or spirit) and ‘fertility’ did not produce offspring, lacking the potency of ‘political nerve’, the ‘ambitious forms of action’ of other unmentioned intellectual sires that we had mistakenly grown ‘wary’ of. One could patiently show that this is not what Derrida, who always referred to himself as ‘a man of the Left’, meant or intended. One could do the same for Foucault, and for surviving post-structuralist luminaries such as Judith Butler, though as we will see she can speak up for herself. But nonetheless is there not something slightly defensive in Derrida's uncharacteristically hyperbolic tone when in the early 1990s he felt the need to

cr[y] out, at a time when some have the audacity to neo-evangelise in the name of a liberal democracy that has finally realised itself as the ideal of human history: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity.<sup>307</sup>

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E.g. ‘[I]n relation to attitudes to premarital sex and homosexuality [...] each generation, defined by its decade of birth, is successively more liberal than the one before it, a relationship which has not changed as these generations age’.

<sup>306</sup>Terry Eagleton, *The Event of Literature* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 105.

<sup>307</sup>Derrida, *Spectres*, p. 106.

For it is surely not only avowed opponents of deconstruction like Gimenez who feel that it was in the name of Deconstruction that a link between material oppression and social analysis was ‘sever[ed]’. For Max Kirsch, writing in 2000, his experience of teaching Queer Theory (a US offshoot of Gay and Lesbian studies with deep intellectual debts to French post-structuralism) was that his young students' enthusiasm for these ideas bore out a sense of generational shift towards the political Right. While his comments reflect his obvious disdain for the subject matter, they do provide anecdotal support for the idea of a neoliberalised generation which has easily assimilated a (contentious) version of post-structuralist thought:

While teaching an undergraduate class on Queer theory, it became quickly obvious to me that the students did not have the same questions about “queer” that I did, and that in fact the question really did not interest them. When I asked them to think about queer analytically, to define what the categories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender represent and how this assumed coalition of “LGBT” peoples operates, I was accused by a few of forcing Gay and Lesbian Studies down their throat. They wanted this class to be a discussion of identity – on their own terms. These terms are not about theory, but validation. For them, the goals are a general awareness of difference, an understanding of inclusion and human rights in the broadest sense. They include anything other than the status quo. It means a differing lifestyle from what they perceive as mainstream, a different kind of cognitive supermarket where granola is next to the milk instead of cream cheese.<sup>308</sup>

Kirsch's objections to Queer Theory closely mirror Gimenez's hostility to post-structuralism. A 'real' coalition of exploited, marginalized people (women, LGBTs), an analysis of the conditions for their oppression, and a serious commitment to strategies for collective liberation is renounced. And, arguably, at a symbolic level families are broken up (‘Queer theory [...] deconstructs collective community’<sup>309</sup>; ‘Queer theory becomes separate from past gay and lesbian politics by dismissing

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<sup>308</sup>Max H Kirsch, *Queer Theory and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 6.

<sup>309</sup>Kirsch, p. 8.

“gay” and “lesbian” as categories containing subjects, for asserting subjects automatically erases those who do not perfectly match.’<sup>310</sup>) If Gimenez positions herself as the child of a feminist mother who has suddenly shackled up with a slippery and ethically dubious Frenchman and cut the daughter off from Marx's paternal embraces, Kirsch arguably takes upon himself the mantle of the abandoned Father, whose children no longer respect the boundaries and aspirations he tried to instil in them. One senses his woundedness when these young minds accuse him of the paternal sin of taking true doctrine (Gay and Lesbian Studies) and ‘forcing [it] down their throat’, that idiom dripping with all the sexualised connotations of a non-consensual, intrusive and abusive pedagogy. It's clearly not easy being a Father these days.

Generational and familial dynamics do not wholly explain or account for the splintering of Leftist solidarity, which is rather uncertainly being rebuilt around the buzzword of intersectionality – my point is precisely that nothing could wholly bring a social field to account or to identity with itself. Yet without an honest attempt to understand the ways in which investments in father figures and a disavowal of the position of the father underlie many bitter debates on the Left, it seems inevitable that intersectionality will flounder on the unspoken fantasy that, in the lonely hour of the last instance, my dad could still beat up yours. We are, after all, the Left – are ‘we’ not? Sinister children who threaten the smooth manipulation of the environment by the right-thinking adults; cack-handed crusaders, inured to defeat and habituated to noble but slightly ineffectual opposition. Sons and the daughters, we, who are never quite fated to take a controlling share in the family business, and perhaps never quite up to the task, or never willing to fight dirty enough.

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Q. How can the queer and Marxist Left(s) 'intersect'? A1. Queerly! A2(+3). Dialectically!

Judith Butler's most sustained response to critiques in the Kirsch and Gimenez mould came in a 1997 paper entitled 'Merely Cultural?'. Here she identified two related objections which have been levelled at her work and Queer studies more generally. Firstly, the complaint that such disciplinary movements have emasculated Marxism by undermining its basis in material conditions of production, distribution and

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<sup>310</sup>Kirsch, p. 35.

consumption: the supposed 'reduction of Marxist scholarship and activism to the study of culture'<sup>311</sup>. Secondly, a dismissive attitude towards the 'merely cultural' issues of gender and sexuality which frames them as 'factionalising, identitarian, and particularistic'<sup>312</sup>; essentially apolitical, individual concerns which distract from deeper issues of social justice. Butler unsurprisingly takes issue with the assumption that a 'destructive, relativistic and politically paralyzing' post-structuralism has 'thwarted Marxism'<sup>313</sup>, but rather than mounting an extended theoretical defence of a body of thought labelled 'post-structuralist' taken to be in competition with another discrete discourse, 'Marxism', Butler's essay invokes a *Nom du père* guaranteed to disrupt her opponents' narrative of warring dynasties.

[T]his recourse to an apparently stable distinction between material and cultural life is clearly the resurgence of a theoretical anachronism, one that discounts the contributions to Marxist theory since Althusser's displacement of the base-superstructure model [...] the untimely resurgence of that distinction is in the service of a tactic that seeks to identify new social movements with the merely cultural, and the cultural with the derivative and secondary, thus embracing an anachronistic materialism as the banner for a new orthodoxy.<sup>314</sup>

So, Althusser. Neither orthodox Marxist nor apostate post-structuralist, his contorted theoretical and political stances embodied many of the tensions between the two critical tendencies. Famously he suspended the question of economic determination over the heterogeneity of social and cultural consciousness by relegating the primacy of the economic base over the cultural superstructure to the 'lonely hour of the last instance' which 'never comes.'<sup>315</sup>

Butler goes further than an Althusserian ordinarily would in claiming that his legacy is to have 'displace[d]' the division base-superstructure. 'Althusser' functions here as an important genealogical link, establishing a common ancestral lineage, the

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<sup>311</sup>Judith Butler, 'Merely Cultural', in *Adding Insult to Injury: Nancy Fraser Debates Her Critics*, ed. Kevin Olson (London: Verso, 2008), pp. 42-56 (p. 42)

<sup>312</sup>Butler, p. 42.

<sup>313</sup>Butler, p. 43.

<sup>314</sup>Butler, p. 45.

<sup>315</sup>Louis Althusser, 'Contradiction and Overdetermination', in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: The Penguin Press, 1969), pp. 87-128 (p. 113).

very mention of which legitimises Butler's claim upon the legacy of Marxism. It authorises her to dismiss contemporary Marxists' concern that 'class as a mechanism of surplus extraction'<sup>316</sup> has been downgraded as a heuristic concept (for both post-structuralist work and Leftist political formations) over decades in which the politico-economic policies of the neoliberal Right were dismantling the post-war settlement decisively in the favour of capital. Butler's reference to the Great Man substitutes for a sustained analysis of how and why the base-superstructure distinction no longer holds. Given that Althusser's work, and more so Butler's own, is intended to expose the violent ideological exclusions involved in the reiteration of stable, coherent identity, this is a surprisingly casual use of the proper name. For as Balibar put it;

There is nothing in fact like a systematic work of Althusser, with a beginning, an end, a structural unity [...] His legacy is made of a handful of ambiguous notions, one single book and a number of partial and lacunary texts, [...] all heavily dependent on a certain context – both discursive and political – with amazing discrepancies of style and positions among them.<sup>317</sup>

In feigning otherwise, by invoking the decisive meaning of the Althusserian bequest, does Butler evade some of the contradictions in Althusser's work on the material base of society?

While in a sense Althusser does indeed 'displace' the base-superstructure theory of social being in his theory of overdetermination by mutually constituting levels (economic, politico-legal, ideological), his position on the economic level is that while it is neither independent nor impervious to changes in politico-legal or cultural/ideological levels it nonetheless holds primary status as the 'structure in dominance' over the other levels.<sup>318</sup> So, Althusser argues that 'the Superstructure is not the pure phenomena of the [economic] structure, it is also its condition of existence [...] production has as its condition of existence its form: the [social] relations of production'<sup>319</sup>; consequently, in determinate historical circumstances, the economic sphere (mode of production) may be 'displaced' from the dominant role in the social

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<sup>316</sup>Gimenez, p. 28.

<sup>317</sup>Etienne Balibar, 'The Non-Contemporaneity of Althusser', in *The Althusserian Legacy*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1993) pp. 1-16 (p. 3).

<sup>318</sup>See 'On The Materialist Dialectic' in *For Marx*, pp. 161-218.

<sup>319</sup>Althusser, OMD, p. 205.

formation. And if we fail to recognise this we neglect the Marxist dialectic and fall into a naïve ‘economism’:

It is economism that identifies eternally in advance the determinant contradiction-in-the-last-instance with the *role* of the dominant contradiction, which for ever assimilates such and such an “aspect” (forces of production, economy, practice) to the principal *role*, and such and such another “aspect” (relations of production, politics, ideology, theory) to the secondary *role* – whereas in real history determination in the last instance by the economy is exercised precisely in the permutations of the principal role between the economy, politics, theory, etc.<sup>320</sup>

Althusser distinguishes the 'role' of dominant contradiction (which is necessarily unstable and capable of variation according to the overdetermined complexity of the social totality) from the determination-in-the-last instance of the economy; ‘in real history’ it seems we can only understand the principle place of the economy by importing psychoanalytic categories which account for the development of identity out of the primary libidinal drives: ‘determination in the last instance by the economy is exercised [...] essentially, for internal and necessary reasons, by permutations, displacements and condensations.’<sup>321</sup>

But if history works by displacement of the economic base, by ‘the exchange of roles between contradictions and their aspects’, and by the condensation of these contradictions which results in the 'identity' of opposites in real unity, then Marxist theory and praxis will have to remember that beneath the changes in role ‘the structure in dominance remains constant.’<sup>322</sup> Only with this awareness of the structural inevitability of economic determination-in-the-last-instance can we detect the ‘weakest link’ in this chain of substitutions, like the analyst attending to their patients’ parapraxes, ‘so that the whole chain will follow, or, to use a less linear image, it is the latter which occupies the strategic nodal position that must be attacked in order to produce “the dissolution of (the existing) unity”.’

Even, on Althusser's own terms, then, we cannot quite accept Butler's gloss on

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<sup>320</sup>Althusser, OMD, p. 213.

<sup>321</sup>Althusser, OMD, p. 213.

<sup>322</sup>Althusser, OMD, p. 212.

his work as a ‘displacement’ of the base-superstructure model of analysis itself: ‘displacement’, for Althusser, was actually a conceptual tool by means of which he meant to preserve the theoretical primacy of the ‘economic base’. From such a methodological position it is of the essence to recognise the uneven development of history as so many ‘displacements’ of the material economic foundations of social relations; failing this we would fall into a mechanical ‘economism’ on the one hand, or else mistake history for pure contingency – in either case we fall short of the Marxist science.

Yet, Butler's invocation of Althusser is even more problematic when we consider that the legacy of his thought has given rise to a particularly intractable debate about the role within it of psychoanalysis. For Michèle Barrett, the contradictions and provocative questions which constitute Althusser's legacy cluster around an unresolved conflict within his thought between Marxist and psychoanalytic approaches towards ideology, and in her view this split within Althusser's own work has contributed towards a similar split within Leftist academia between ‘those [Butler would call them 'orthodox' Marxists] who see ideology as functional to the reproduction of capitalism and those who see ideology as a key to the understanding of subjectivity as an important question in its own right.’<sup>323</sup>

These reservations are not given space in Butler's argument, which confidently authorises itself with reference to the ‘structural unity’ ‘Althusser’ (a classic humanist gesture) while ignoring the fact that even on its own terms Althusser's anti-humanist model of social levels does not authorise the collapse of the ideological into the economic which Butler goes on to perform. All the while Butler claims that opposition to this elision is simply evidence of ‘an anachronistic materialism’ which wants to violently turn back the clock to the Stalinism from which Althusser fought to rescue the French Community Party. Unlike, the name ‘Althusser’, the powerful fetish of ‘Stalinism’ is not laid out on open display. But it is only more potent for being veiled by such gossamer euphemisms as ‘new orthodoxy’,<sup>324</sup> ‘vanguardism dedicated to the production of hierarchy and dissension’,<sup>325</sup> and the suppressed reference to the gulag

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<sup>323</sup>Michèle Barrett, ‘Althusser's Marx, Althusser's Lacan’, in *The Althusserian Legacy*, pp. 169-82 (p. 170).

<sup>324</sup>Butler, p. 45.

<sup>325</sup>Butler, p. 48.

in Butler's attack on Marxists who want to speak of the 'universal' determination of capital and call for Left 'unity' and would go about their business by the 'transcendence or obliteration' of heterogeneous social movements.<sup>326</sup>

Butler asserts that the proper, the non-anachronistic and therefore presumably progressive, strategy of the Left must be one which concentrates on disrupting stable identifications at the cultural level. There would be some support for this, both in Marx and Althusser, the latter taking his cue to focus on Ideology from Marx's remark in the preface to *The Critique of Political Economy* that 'it is in the ideological forms' of social consciousness that historical antagonisms are "fought to the end".<sup>327</sup>

However, a theoretical dispute between 'economist' and 'culturalist' Marxisms is surely itself one such site of ideological struggle, and an 'orthodox' pedagogic practice which focuses on the economic level of analysis would clearly still be intervening at the level of ideology – to claim otherwise would be to confuse the level of academic praxis (the Ideological Apparatus of the education system) with the level which it is analysing (the economic base). Therefore, her appeal to Marx and Althusser cannot quite substantiate her main claim that by contesting the identification of culture with 'the derivative and secondary'<sup>328</sup>, 'queer studies [makes] an important return to the Marxist critique of the family, based on a mobilising insight into a socially contingent and socially transformable account of kinship.' Convincingly demonstrating that kinship is both contingent and transformable says nothing about what might be the most effective strategy for transforming contemporary kinship structures. And the insight can just as easily be used as a justification for 'Queer Liberalism', as we will explore below. But sticking with Althusser for a moment longer, Barrett further notes that Althusser's attention to the importance of social reproduction actually did not extend to biological reproduction or the ideological status of the family.

Looking back on the essay ['Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'], one might even ask why it had been thought [by Marxist feminists] that the 'social reproduction' thesis did or might imply a loosening up of an exclusive focus on social class [...] [Althusser] is keen to emphasize this question of class

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<sup>326</sup>Butler, p. 47.

<sup>327</sup>Marx, quoted in Balibar, p. 7.

<sup>328</sup>Butler, p. 45.

struggle, as opposed to a more mechanistic approach, but in the very process of doing so he rules out a looser, less class reductionist, interpretation of the theses on reproduction.<sup>329</sup>

Butler's use of Althusser suggests that the intellectual Left has long since progressed beyond the conceptual priorities of economic determination and class antagonism, leaving her Marxist critics looking flat-footed and luddite, whereas Althusser's thought itself testifies to an ongoing struggle to reconcile the economic and psycho-social axes of oppression and agency. Moreover, his solution is described by Barrett as 'intellectually colonialist' in the sense that he 'harness[ed] Lacanian psychoanalysis to the project of Marxism'<sup>330</sup> and in so doing 'misrecognised' the proper place of the barred subject in Lacan. The charge of 'intellectual colonialism' is one which we will encounter again in dispute between Butler and Nancy Fraser on this question of the intersection between gender politics and Marxism.

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Fraser contends that in 'Merely Cultural?' Butler collapses the distinction between cultural and economic levels, and is mistaken in so doing both empirically and strategically. Empirically, since in her view the 'heteronormative regulation of sexuality' which is Butler's main area of interest (at least at the time of writing in the late 1990s) 'structures neither the social division of labor nor the mode of exploitation of labor power in capitalist society.'<sup>331</sup> Without dismissing the cultural and legal regulation of 'normal' sexuality as a field of injustice, she would maintain a theoretical division between the desire for 'recognition' sought by sexual minorities and the desire for 'redistribution' on the part of the economically exploited.<sup>332</sup> Strategically, Fraser is suspicious of Butler's desire to deconstruct these theoretical differentiations because that project vitiates attempts to construct sensitive models of 'the structurally differentiated and historically specific character of contemporary capitalist society.'<sup>333</sup> Such models are important for Fraser for they 'locate the antifunctionalist moment,

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<sup>329</sup>Barrett, p. 171.

<sup>330</sup>Barrett, p. 177.

<sup>331</sup>Nancy Fraser, 'Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism', in *Adding Insult to Injury*, pp. 57-68 (p. 63).

<sup>332</sup> See Nancy Fraser, 'From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Postsocialist" Age', in *Adding Insult to Injury*, pp. 9-41.

<sup>333</sup>Fraser, p. 67.

the possibilities of countersystemic “agency””. In sum, effacing a *meaningful* distinction between these levels does not, Fraser counters, destabilize the material effects of cultural or economic structures *in reality*. To imagine that it does, one would have to locate the possibilities of social change not in ‘the actual contradictory character of specific social relations’ but in ‘an abstract transhistorical property of language, such as “resignification” or “performativity”’.<sup>334</sup>

As will be clear from my defence of Bataillean ‘general economy’ in the previous chapter, I cannot agree with Fraser that the ‘regulation of sexuality’ along with its forces and forms is heterogeneous to the mode and forces of production – indeed, her bipartite political field, divided between ‘recognition’ and ‘redistribution’, would seem to me to beg the question of the distribution of ‘recognition’ within libidinal economy. She is perspicacious though, I think, in worrying that Butler replaces economic determinism with sexual performativity as the motor of social change, not so much locating gender normalisation within analyses of the production, circulation, accumulation and destruction of value, as making gender normativity the knot which holds these classical categories in place. For Butler claims that since ‘the sphere of reproduction that guarantees the place of “gender” within political economy *is circumscribed by sexual regulation*’ and that the (sexual) reproduction of the labour force is therefore ‘delineated and naturalised’ through the ‘production’ of homosexuality, bisexuality and transgender embodiment ‘as the sexually “abject”’ i.e. as the ‘mandatory exclusions’ from the productive economy,<sup>335</sup> the disruptive potential of Queer sexualities thus poses ‘a *fundamental* threat to its very workability’.<sup>336</sup> Fraser is therefore complicit with a strain of ‘neoconservatism within the Left’ as it tries to ‘colonise and contain homosexuality in and as the cultural’.<sup>337</sup>

Butler and Fraser's debate confirms that a variant of the base-superstructure model still marks a division between broadly 'post-structuralist' and 'Marxist' camps, each fearing colonisation by the Other. And their positions seem all the more intractable for their efforts to present their dispute as a dialogic attempt to bridge the 'cultural' and 'material-economic' Left. Note the element of paternalist fantasy, the particular patronymic that seals the intractable opposition between Butler and Fraser.

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<sup>334</sup>Fraser, p. 67.

<sup>335</sup> Butler, p. 52. My italics.

<sup>336</sup> Butler, p. 53. My italics.

<sup>337</sup> Butler, p. 56

Althusser's proper name does function as a 'displacement' of the boundary between them, but only in the sense that his work is a symptom, a reaction formation amid profound theoretical and strategic tensions, rather than an 'authentic' relay onto an objective meta-level of analysis.



Barnes' *Ryder* is a novel which lends itself most readily (if not whole-heartedly) to Queer and Feminist reading, since it functions as both a bawdy intervention in the gendered politics of representation and as a textual unweaving of the power dynamics of intrafamilial sexuality. We shall see the difficulties that ensue for such a reading if it attempts to envision a material economic reality to be decoded from the complex, overdetermined whole. One can certainly refer the material form of text to the forces of history, or else descry in Barnes' writing a poetics of refusal: a refusal, that is, to have its textual body decoded and mastered by any epistemological mode that privileges the production of true knowledge over word and flesh at play. But can these two reading methods intersect?

The novel's opening page contains an injunction to 'reach not beyond the image',<sup>338</sup> which Althusser might have echoed; committed he was to an anti-hermeneutic critical practice which refuses to 'interpret' the text as a reflection of nature or history but to 'scientifically' evaluate its material form. But the problem of voice intervenes for us right here on page 1. The chapter in which this imperative appears is titled 'Jesus Mundane', which declaims itself with the cadence of King James' Gospel truths – a reader does not know whether the eponymous Jesus Mundane is also the speaker, and we must be equally cautious not to take the voice for that of an author prefacing her narrative with direct address. The writing does not even evince an unreliability against which a reader might decide that its imperatives are to be received ironically. Nonetheless, each drawing slightly different lessons, Taylor and Caselli both take this opening chapter to be a credo for the novel which it introduces<sup>339</sup>;

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<sup>338</sup>Djuna Barnes, *Ryder* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), p. 3.

<sup>339</sup> For Taylor the caution is against privileging hermeneutics over affect, paranoid system over reparative immediacy; 'Barnes warns against hermeneutics and the search for grand narratives, against cosmic certainties and universal truths, and advocates instead a focus on the bodily, the affective, the immediate and the uncertain' (Taylor, p. 85), while Caselli understands it to be a warning that language is inescapably collusive and unstable, quoting the narrator's invocation of

does the text enable us to trust this voice which insists we not reach beyond images, when the image of this secular preacher is itself grounded in no other form than the chapter's title, refers to no visible phenomenon except the words on the page themselves? We may try to suspend our credence towards the referential function of language – but doing so we suspend our belief in the very voice which instructed us so to do. To '[r]each not beyond the image' presumes we can grasp and delimit the image itself, but alas! we cannot resist overlaying the cultural associations of this name, and our own speculations on its meanings, upon the impossible mundanity of the commandments-in-themselves.

Without allowing us to forget the admirable anti-hermeneutic sentiment imprinted on its opening page, the narrative constantly forces the role of (bewildered) interpreter upon the reader. To give a brief example, the novel's protagonist Wendell Ryder finds himself summoned before the local education board charged with polygamy, religious dissent and home-schooling. Called upon to defend his unorthodox parenting, he responds to his inquisitors with gnomic counter questions:

“Do you realize,” quoth Wendell, “that your heathen put your Europe into that bed which is not your history.”

“They [Ryder's children] will grow up,” continued the principle, *ignoring this sally, for he knew not what to do with it*, “deflowering women, and defaming God.”<sup>340</sup>

Here credulous readers may try to ‘reach beyond’ Wendell's cryptic utterance, attempt to find a referent for the signifiers (‘heathen’, ‘europe’, ‘bed’, ‘history’) and some common system of agreed meaning, encouraged to think that the remark must mean *something* by its familiar syntactic structure. There seems to be a figurative sense to the aphorism, but only if we credit an allegorical level to which we as readers have no access. So the more circumspect decoder is entitled to assume that Wendell's remark signifies no more than his character's proclivity to cultivate the false appearance of profundity. If we read in the latter fashion we find ourselves identified with the

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<sup>340</sup>‘words that go neither here nor there, but traffic with the outer ear, and gossip at the gates of thy insufficient agony’ as confirmation of the novel's refusal of linguistic authority. (Caselli, p. 209).  
<sup>340</sup>R, p. 130.

position of the School Principle, addressee of the question which so vexes us ('Do you realise [...]?'), and his stultifying rectitude. The reader is in a hopeless situation. Perhaps the only solution which gets us out the position of the school authority without making the psychotic/totalitarian move of creating our own private system of meaning (attributing it to what Barnes intended Wendell to mean) is for us decide that the principle 'didn't know what he could do with it' because he was trying to interpret the sentence by reference to external linguistic codes, to reach beyond the image. So we shift, with relief, to an immanent, quasi-Foucauldean level of analysis: taking as our object the relation of forces between Wendell and the education authority, the remark then functions as a performative attack on the linguistic codes of the educational institution, disarming the authority that justifies the confessional discourse within which it would contain and proscribe Wendell's experiments in self-cultivation on the basis of a 'true reading' of religion which classifies the Ryder brood as 'Heathen'.

Now, steering this particular path between the Scylla of bureaucratic idiocy and the Charybdis of psychotic certainty<sup>341</sup> (i.e. that this incoherent utterance actually has a clear message that only we can interpret), this enlightened reader will in effect be following an Althusserian/Spinozan path through the text. Warren Montag argues that Spinoza's reading of Scripture occupies a particularly crucial place in Althusser's intellectual formation since it is his 'materialist' reading in which 'the words and sentences of which Scripture is comprised no longer reveal or conceal meanings deeper than themselves. Instead they congeal into objects to be investigated.'<sup>342</sup> Interestingly, though, Montag notes that thirty years before Spinoza, Thomas Hobbes had instigated a similar reading practice. Hobbes also found numerous contradictions and inconsistencies in the material form of the Bible, but, according to Montag, Hobbes then took an unjustifiable and regressive step, reintroducing the sphere of mystery to the otherwise transparent materiality of the text by inserting the Sovereign as guardian of the secret:

[For Hobbes] the radical absence of organic unity necessitates the mediating function of the Sovereign who, through the institution of the established

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<sup>341</sup> On the Lacanian distinction between psychotic "doubt" and psychotic "certainty", see Bruce Fink *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Analysis*, (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997) p. 84.

<sup>342</sup> Warren Montag, 'Spinoza and Althusser against hermeneutics: Interpretation or Intervention?', in *The Althusserian Legacy*, pp. 51-58 (p. 55).

church, will bring textual conflicts and antagonisms into an artificial unity possessed finally of an (artificial) meaning. Hobbes therefore needs mystery. He must suspend his search for an interpretive method in *Leviathan* at this point because to proceed any further towards a rationality proper to Scripture would undercut the very existence whose existence the mystery of Scripture justifies and makes necessary.<sup>343</sup>

Without drawing the same political consequences as Hobbes, we might reopen this Althusserian notion of 'a rationality proper to Scripture' as promised outcome when the groundless authority of the Sovereign is 'undercut'. In the last chapter we encountered the Foucauldian genealogy of intellectual and political discourse of the modern in which sovereignty has been displaced by expertise and rationality, both as a mode of governance and as a category of socio-political analysis. On such an account, Spinoza will certainly be seen to have progressed further than Hobbes towards the science *of* modernity (double genitive...). On the other hand we may see here why the Lacanians' objections to the tendency in Althusser to conflate imaginary and symbolic orders might contain a grain of authority. If it is at the mirror stage, the foundation of the imaginary ego, that the child receives 'an image of its own unity and coherence'<sup>344</sup>, and if the Symbolic initiation takes place at a totally different level and is itself a 'cut' in the imaginary unity of the subject, then the name/no/noun of the 'Father', which famously inserts the infant into language, performs an equivalent function to Hobbes' Sovereign, saving the infant from a total, psychotic identification with the *mater*-ial body. For a Lacanian, the absence of the Father function opens the path to psychosis, since the access that one achieves to language remains dominated by imaginary (essentially mimetic) relations. We might wonder whether Montag's idea of a 'rationality proper to Scripture' is one which remains caught in imaginary identifications rather than accessing the truth of the text with the scientific rigor that it imagines, in so far as its desire is to do away with a mediating function which produces only 'artificial' unities and meanings.

Wherever these speculations leave us, Barnes' text enacts exactly this failure of the father function on thematic, narrative and formal levels, making it difficult to

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<sup>343</sup>Montag, p. 56.

<sup>344</sup>Fink, p. 87.

sustain any reading protocol which assumes an appeal to authority – be that Marxist, psychoanalytic or other. Even so, the text continually imposes a critical awareness of, for want of a better term, 'the material basis of ideology', even as the 'Queerness' of the writing compulsively unravels epistemological modes which might straighten out the contradictions of ideology by reference to history, production, or any other foundational motif.

*Ryder* exposes, or it is exposed, depending on our reading protocol, depending whether we read as sadist or masochist, pervert or hysteric. We could say that it exposes *and* is exposed, in a classical dialectical tension between its legibility in the context of the 'historical situation of "modernity" in which artistic modernism can be grasped as an intelligible social process'<sup>345</sup> and its own errant form which shows every sign of having been constructed to expose the libidinous violence and circular justifications of any reading protocol at all. We are left with a choice to make and no ultimate grounds to decide: a point of sovereign decision, then?

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Let us briefly consider one recent attempt to read *Ryder* which invokes a contemporary economic problematic and articulates this with/in a literary-discursive mode, to see where the novel itself might be inserted in such a configuration. Susan Edmunds' *Grotesque Relations* (2008) examines the text in the context of early twentieth-century US State Welfare programmes, and of sentimental representations of domestic femininity which, she argues, provided the ideological frame in which the welfare system was naturalised.

Edmunds grounds her reading of the novel in Barnes' strategic choice to 'promote figure over fact', which 'implicates the generative terms of US welfare policy in a scandal which cannot be localised'.<sup>346</sup> As in an Althusserian reading, the factitious material forces of 'diffuse and long-ranging sociohistorical movements' are 'condensed' into an overdetermined figure, here of threatened female virtue, and only by unpicking the discursive tensions within this figure are we able to attain an insight

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<sup>345</sup>Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), p.161.

<sup>346</sup>Susan Edmunds, *Grotesque Relations: Modernist Domestic Fiction and the US Welfare State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 63.

into the invisible ideology of the liberal state as it assumes an increasingly invasive relation to the family, crystallised in welfare discourses which ‘secured a version of home that upheld the coercive and exploitive power of wage labor, white supremacy, heterosexual monogamy, and female dependency’.<sup>347</sup> Her analysis therefore foregrounds a corporate capitalist frame, but maintains that we only access any such historical totality through ‘the specific narrative of a young girl's sexual violation’.<sup>348</sup>

Edmunds' procedure shares Queer Theory's interest in Foucaudean disciplinary norms, and specifically the genealogical analysis of the imposition of heterosexual monogamy, but her critical process is also indebted to Althusser's version of dialectical analysis in which the specific (in this case, sexual violence and its equally brutal criminalisation) ‘condenses [...] long-ranging sociohistorical movements’ which can be read off the figural movements of Barnes' text.

Edmunds' reading seems to allow for a determinable relationship between the novelistic text and a socio-politico-economic context, a result which a Queer(er) critical approach, will not ultimately endorse. For Caselli, the level of sexuality is not so neatly locatable as a 'figure' for historical conflicts; instead, one should understand Barnes' writing as immanent to an ‘economy of pleasure’ in which ‘pleasure and meaning’ and ‘the politics of representation’ are indissolubly linked<sup>349</sup>. From this perspective, a conclusion such as Edmunds' may have a certain performative force but is itself a condensed and displaced figure for the pleasures, terrors and puzzles of *Ryder*: on the pretext of decoding the text, a further hierarchy of hermeneutic levels is installed, with Welfare interventions promoted as the structure in dominance.

Through such acts of condensation, the unorthodox home life of the Ryder family *comes to stand as the site* on which old and new middle-class reform philosophies vie for the authority to determine state and federal norms of domestic and social life.<sup>350</sup>

Does this mean that we cannot situate Barnes' work in relation to such politically salient contexts as Fordism, the labour and feminist movements, or the mid-century

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<sup>347</sup>Edmunds, p. 61.

<sup>348</sup> Edmunds, p. 42.

<sup>349</sup> Caselli, pp.38-39.

<sup>350</sup> Edmunds, pp. 41-42.

crisis of *laissez faire* liberalism without imposing reading protocols which are instantly undercut by its unparseable and unsurpassable, always already disillusioned political economy of ‘pleasure and meaning’? Wither Queer Marxism, if this is so?

♀

Edmunds introduced her attempt to situate Barnes in the history of US Welfarist discourses by invoking Walter Benjamin's allegory for Brechtian estrangement, in which he asks the reader to picture the following scene of domestic, civic and state convergence:

Suddenly a stranger enters. The mother was just about to seize a bronze bust and hurl it at her daughter; the father was in the act of opening the window in order to call a policeman. At that moment the stranger appears in the doorway. This means that the stranger is confronted with a situation as with a startling picture: troubled faces, an open window, the furniture in disarray. But there are eyes to which even more ordinary scenes of middle-class life look almost equally startling.<sup>351</sup>

Whose eyes are these? That subject position is the unspeakable. As with the paternal metaphor itself, we can only say, with the authority of the guilty, ‘It is there, It is watching us’. But once we articulate the possibility of such a gaze, we will see it seeing the warp and the weft of the ‘artificial’ domestic-social fabric which the paternal metaphor had woven seamlessly together. This gaze would be that of the scientific investigation which Althusser's method aspires to produce. Conversely, we could say that an ‘intersectional’ reading involves another, more clearly situated, identification within the scene. Working intersectionally we see ourselves as the stranger in Benjamin's doorway, knowing that, as Richard Seymour puts it, ‘one's location in the social structure enables one to see, or prevents one from seeing.’<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>351</sup>Walter Benjamin, ‘What is Epic Theatre?’, quoted in Edmunds, p. 3.

<sup>352</sup>Richard Seymour, ‘The Point of Intersection’ (2013) <[www.leninology.co.uk/2013/03/the-point-of-intersection.html?m=1](http://www.leninology.co.uk/2013/03/the-point-of-intersection.html?m=1)> Incidentally, I feel could almost endorse the (limited and delimiting) defence of the concept of ‘intersectionality’ given by Seymour here: ‘The concept of intersectionality is a way of posing a problem, not an ultimate theoretical solution. And the problem it poses is, I think, a specific instance of the global problem addressed by Gramsci: that of achieving effective political unity among the oppressed’. I hesitate because, as discussed above, I fear

Determining one's objective place within the social structure, untangling it from one's ideological fantasy about one's place in society, is one of the profound challenges which Marx's methodology creates and has yet to surpass; 'I am as a Marxist inside and wholly determined by the totality, and as an aspect of the totality have no chance whatever of getting outside to view the end or meaning of the process of which I am a part.'<sup>353</sup>

Achieving an intersectional understanding of the social assumes one can have the ecstatic experience of Benjamin's stranger in the doorway, alienated from the bourgeois kinship structure long enough to see how exactly one has been deluded inside the domestic frame. Would the estranged position of Benjamin's stranger in the doorway be a disinterested, disillusioned or disenchanting one? Confronted with Benjamin's family tableau, poised at the boundary of the domestic exterior, to be either excluded, exiled, or welcomed through the agency of that mystical portal into the bourgeois home; isn't the stranger in his turn always on the cusp of some identification with one or another of the figures in the domestic space?

Frederic Jameson conceives of 'totality thinking', as a labour of interpretation which recognises not positive features of a social being stripped of false consciousness, but 'strategies of containment'<sup>354</sup>, 'means of denying the intolerable contradictions that lie hidden beneath the social surface'<sup>355</sup>. This negative approach to the social totality presupposes that the contradictions any given reader may be able to articulate will be contested by other perspectives, but that progress towards socio-historical knowledge will result from this contestation. So, for example, Kevin Floyd suggests that Queer Studies rightly criticises Jameson's neglect of heteronormativity, but that it can and should do so in a manner that is fundamentally consistent with Jameson's method.<sup>356</sup>

Now, to return to Seymour's gloss on intersectionality, if it requires an acknowledgement that 'one's location in the social structure enables [...] or prevents one from seeing', what can such recognition mean in practice when any statement about one's position in the social structure must itself be an ideological strategy of

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'intersectionality' is too often evoked in order to foreclose rather than pose profound, necessary and searching questions, strategic and metaphysical, about the solidarity of 'the oppressed'.

<sup>353</sup>William C. Dowling, *Jameson, Althusser, Marx: An Introduction to The Political Unconscious*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 52-53.

<sup>354</sup>Jameson, quoted in Dowling, p. 54.

<sup>355</sup>Dowling, p. 54.

<sup>356</sup>See Floyd, chapter 4, pp. 154-94.

containment? Perhaps, within the family tableau which we've been examining, it simply means that instead of identifying with the stranger in the doorway at the moment of estrangement, we experience ourselves as held by their impenetrable gaze.

Any careful reading of Benjamin's parable must proceed from the insight that as readers we are denied the focal point of the stranger. We identify with Benjamin's objective/anonymous observer of the 'ordinary' ideological frame only up to the point of his declaration, 'there are eyes...' which obliterates our identification, leaving us with no orientation for understanding that constative intrusion.

The final line of the allegory leaves no doubt that the mystical problem of focalisation is at the heart of Benjamin's notion of alienation. We follow the alien presence, and seem to view the *unheimlich* violence of this family from its perspective. In the final sentence, we realise that we have not been the stranger, we have been watching him; 'a stranger enters'. We are seeing the events from the point of view of a consciousness which possesses knowledge of eyes which can find 'even more ordinary' scenes equally startling – perhaps, therefore, we should infer that the narrator's own eyes can see this? We do not know, since at this point the narration no longer engages our scopic faculties, but simply offers word, in good faith, that such a point of view is indeed possible – the disenchanted perspective of social relations, which would also be a God's eye view. And this brings us back to our own location as reader – for we are not the stranger at the doorway, although we might mistakenly identify ourselves with that figure at first. We identify then with the narrator, 'Walter Benjamin', but he also forces us to recognise our distance from him by demanding we simply trust that he knows what we cannot (yet) know. Where are we in this scene? Free-floating, dizzy, alienated, grasping for the meaning of the passage? Having had the position of stranger pulled away from under our feet, since we know there is another viewpoint from which this stranger is still part of the scene, not so strange therefore, an unknown viewpoint from which our very notion of strangeness comes to seem utterly bourgeois? The stranger then is reinscribed in the scene, and must take up a position: the mother whose fury apparently threatened the family structure is a position which seems naïve, having been at the doorway we know that the mother's violence is engulfed by the relations of domination which exist within the domestic space, but that does not suggest an impotent rebellion so much as an epistemological shift from a symptomatic 'acting out' of one's oppression to a capacity for representational violence, from alienated insider, the reader choosing to see

themselves in the mother becomes what Seymour, following Collins, calls the 'outsider-insider', 'fundamentally subverting the existing paradigms by virtue of the particular forms of knowledge they were able to contribute' due to 'their particular location, within a grid of class, race, gender, and other determinations'.<sup>357</sup> It is potentially offensive to suggest that such a knowledge can also be achieved simply through the experience of reading. Seymour offers the term 'outsider-insider' to parse Collins' work on the insights of African-American women working as domestic servant of affluent white families, an experience of concrete economic exploitation to which reading a paragraph of historical materialist allegory is not correlative. And yet, Collins' work also draws a parallel between social and cultural insider-outsider status when she claims that black women working in academic institutions occupy a similar 'inside-outsider' status to black women working as domestic servants, since they could 'perceive the routines and patterns, the assumptions, of an existing body of social theory that had been largely dominated by white men.'<sup>358</sup> I would argue that this is no less problematic than my appropriation of the 'insider-outsider' position to describe an aesthetic experience available to any reader regardless of material position in social reality. The social theorist is manifestly not in the same structural position as the domestic help, they are in a position of relative power and privilege by comparison with the domestic servant, even as they may experience racial and gender exclusions in relation to the hegemony of white male intellectual discourses, practices and institutions. In reaching the threshold of the culturally privileged space of the academy, is one still able to identify with the transgressive rage of the Mother? Or is one not already in transition towards the position of the Father, defending his interests by awkwardly justifying his position before the representative of state authority?<sup>359</sup>

In summary, then, an important insight of contemporary Marxism has been that the dominant ideology succeeds not to the extent that it excludes oppositional discourses, but insofar as it is able to take opposing ideological positions into itself. As Laclau argues, 'it is not in the presence of determinate contents of a discourse but in the articulating principle which unifies them that we must seek the class character of politics and identity.'<sup>360</sup> This suggests that the success of neoliberal ideology is that

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<sup>357</sup> Seymour.

<sup>358</sup> Seymour.

<sup>359</sup> Cf. Collins' discussion of the 'double knowledge' – folk and intellectual – of the black female academic, *Black Feminist Thought*, pp. 33-39.

<sup>360</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London:

it incorporates resistance in such a way that competing discourses are 'dearticulated' from the social antagonisms which generated the alternative ideas. The trouble is that, by virtue of its internal mechanisms of incorporation, destruction and recomposition, capitalism is surely the ultimate 'intersectional' discourse.

The ideology of the dominant class, precisely because it is dominant, interpellates not only the members of that class but also members of the dominated classes. The concrete form in which the interpellation of the latter takes place is a partial absorption and neutralisation of those ideological contents through which resistance to the domination of the former is expressed.

The characteristic method of securing this objective is to eliminate antagonism and transform it into a simple difference. *A class is hegemonic not so much to the extent that it is able to impose a uniform conception of the world on the rest of society, but to the extent that it can articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralised.*<sup>361</sup>

A question must be posed as to whether leftist appeals to unity in theoretical diversity can ever be other than instances of the appropriating tendency of the hegemonic agency – as we have seen in both the accusation that Althusser 'colonised' Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse in the name of a fundamentally Marxist hermeneutic, and in the Butler/Fraser controversy, attempts to overcome division and hostility seem unable to even establish the nature of the antagonism without subordinating, or undermining the other's approach from the start.

This is a dilemma which current work at the intersections of Marxist and Queer reading practices cannot afford to ignore. Eng, Halberstam and Munoz's well known intervention 'What's Queer About Queer Theory Now?' was an important call to understand the intersections of economy, colonialism, and sexual normativity; it represented a seminal intervention in Queer politics because of its explicit acknowledgement that Queer Theory has indeed run dangerously close to 'Queer liberalism' when it neglected to connect its analyses to the differential effects of class, race, nationality. But the methodological implications of Queer intersectionality have

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Verso, 2012), p. 162.

<sup>361</sup>Laclau, p. 160. My italics.

yet to emerge clearly, even if a mindset based on what Munoz elsewhere calls 'ontological humility' appears to have been established as a precondition for such theoretical work.

'Ontological humility' will be of little help as we proceed to articulate a very partial reading of Barnes' *Ryder*. For it is swiftly exposed as one more feint of mastery. This is a text to be wrestled with, guiltily.



At the beginning of this chapter I related the intractable guilt of the critic to the figure of the Father, suggesting that the disavowed investments in the familial fantasy space have been an obstacle to the labour of translation between Marxism and post-structuralist 'identity politics'. More specifically, I have claimed that what avowedly Queer and Marxist readers often have in common is a desire to evade the position of the father; 'granted a position of authority not so much because he is a "true master" – a truly authoritative, brilliant, or inspiring figure who commands total respect – but simply because he is the father and is expected to take on the functions associated (in many people's minds) with "father".'<sup>362</sup>

To be the father is to be recognised as the puppet of authority. One is positioned as out of date, senselessly aggressive, domineering; yet also exposed and vulnerable, since one's imaginary role is to be killed. I argue however, that Queer's current interest in the imaginaries of failure, humility, and (not unrelatedly) intersectionality would benefit from a willingness to acknowledge (itself in) the role of Father in relation to emerging social movements – 'Queer' work has been around for well over two decades now, isn't it about time it thought about settling down and provide the stability and boundaries for its intellectual and political children (to transgress)?

Moreover, assuming the role of father, far from enjoining the arbitrary imposition of your authority over 'minor' discourses, actually counters the tendency inherent in attempts at intersectional work to 'articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralised', for it involves above all the acceptance that the ideas you've produced will outgrow you in ways you will certainly wish to influence but which you cannot predict or control. They may cease

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<sup>362</sup>Fink, p. 81.

to bear the family resemblance at all.

Becoming a disappointing Father, recognising and accepting one's disappointed urge towards mastery, while allowing that one's capacities are finite, one's authority limited, and both outstripped by the responsibilities which the semblance of power entails: is this not the subject position from which the knowledge is (im)possible that the Big Other and the subject-supposed-to-know do (not) exist, and that we are (not) their representatives? Let us privilege Wendell Ryder's position in the narrative as well as the imagined family structure, as we cast our supervisory gaze over the Ryder family home that Barnes produces for our adjudication, and see what kind of 'intersections' of material, economic and sexual politics are thrown up by and for it.

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*Ryder's* narrative surges and withdraws in its capricious manner, performing all the pleasures, agonies and anxieties of its protagonists in portmanteau (incestuous, artificial and promiscuous) narrative forms: a Chaucerian ballad on Wendell's extra-marital "Occupations" sits beside dream sequences, epistles, soliloquies, lists, nursery rhymes, fragments of *bildungsroman* and picaresque episodes, overlapping, echoing and parodying the dense significations of Surrealist and Symbolist verse; sentimental tales of feminine distress counterpose and overflow quasi-Biblical passages of parable and exegesis hewn from the adamantine rhetoric of King James. Chapters in which a peremptory narrative voice shouts down any content they might possess; others in which playful glitches break the representational frame; a few stray episodes in which the mercurial narrating voice is elided in a more or less Realist mode, though the anachronistic cadences of Chaucer, Fielding and King James are never far from the mouths and mentations of the cast of *fin-de-siècle* New Englanders.

Amid the manically skewed tonal, stylistic and structural qualities of *Ryder*, the one constant is its formal and thematic preoccupation with the motion of 'coming to, and going from'. In this we might detect an echo and inversion of another early modern intertext, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the narrative progress of which is steady and linear, 'from this world to that which is to come' (as its subtitle declares) on the 'straight and narrow way', and, along the way, punishes the indirect means by which 'Mr By-Ends' seeks salvation in financial profit.

It may be said that Barnes' textual experiments deny Wendell Ryder, the novel's picaresque hero and patriarch, both the symbolic and the narrative supports which a Sovereign requires to shore up his authority: tradition, propriety, linearity, and the mythic complementarity of female sexed body to the male organ of generation. More than this, in Winnett's sense, the novel refuses to correspond to 'the narrative dynamics and the erotica of reading [...] derivable only from the dynamics of male sexuality'<sup>363</sup> – where male sexuality is taken (problematically) to mean an Oedipalised sexuality, which corresponds to the familiar narrative arc of 'arousal and significant discharge' resolving in placid homeostasis, 'detumescence and discharge'.<sup>364</sup> Winnett claims that all narrative dynamics have their 'source in experience – in fact, in experience of the body'<sup>365</sup>, such that if as readers we make meaning and take pleasure in the text in obedient good faith, 'decoding', as Hall puts it, 'in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded'<sup>366</sup>, we do so from the assumed position of the (Oedipalised) male. In this narrative schema, female desire is subordinated and reified as the object by means of which a masculine subject overcomes and re-embodies the weight of paternal law; 'woman is always a stage (in both senses of the word) for or in the working out of a problem of paternal interdiction [...] without any acknowledgement of what her value outside this circuit of exchange may have been'.<sup>367</sup>

However, the interest of Ryder's formal-thematic 'coming to, and going from' is not principally that it liberates, produces or delineates any identifiably and essentially 'female' economy of desire. Animated by this narrative dynamic, Wendell Ryder's 'masterplot' takes on a function which is the inverse of Laclau's hegemonic discourse.

The ways in which Wendell's pretensions to omnipotence are thwarted in the text by the stubborn insistence of errant female bodies and desires would seem at first glance to support such a reading as Winnett's. However, recent work on Barnes, informed above all by various texts in the field of Queer Theory, have noted that it is the very male/female complementarity which is radically undone in Barnes' writing. What such work has not yet done is address the (im)possibility of non-omnipotent

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<sup>363</sup> Susan Winnett, 'Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure', *PMLA*, 103:3 (1990), 505-18 (p. 506).

<sup>364</sup> Winnett, p. 509.

<sup>365</sup> Winnett, p. 508.

<sup>366</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/decoding', in *Culture, Media, Language. Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979* (London; Routledge, 1980), pp. 128-38 (p. 136).

<sup>367</sup> Winnett, p. 512.

authority as it figures in her writing. Rather than being able to ‘articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralised’, Wendell’s quest to articulate all versions of the world as subordinate moments within his grand conception has the effect of forcing antagonisms into view – theatrical stages become visible as material, constructed supports for the fantasy scene; dialectical stages, no less so. We would be wrong to read Wendell’s role primarily or straightforwardly as a target for satire on patriarchal authority – his radicalised attempts at self-authorisation are still points of climax in the narrative, yet they do not (only) resolve in ‘significant discharge’ but also proliferate irresolvable dissatisfactions, and irreducible contradictions – his function remains both totalising and generative, then, but no longer generative of the totalised field as a secured, naturalised and reproducible territory.

Let us dip a toe into these capricious currents which ultimately seem to ‘drown’<sup>368</sup> our protagonist, and use whatever theoretical ballast we can to stay afloat throughout a reading of several episodes near the novel's end which figure his gradual undoing, or, as he describes his own trajectory, the process by which he ‘unfather[s]’<sup>369</sup> himself. We focus on episodes late in the novel which intensify and accelerate this to and fro proliferation of narrative excitation and release from Wendell’s desire for univocal narrative sense. Two chapters in which Wendell notably fails to sire children by two of his manifold ‘conquests’: the first encounter because his supposed conquest is as promiscuous as he, rendering uncertain the identity of the child that she may conceive, the second because the Lady, being post-menopausal and a friend of/substitute for his dying mother, pursues a sexual pleasure untied from reproductive utility. Inserted between these two unsuccessful inseminations is a chapter wherein Wendell takes medical counsel (and spiritual counselling) from the community’s family physician Dr Matthew O’Connor, whose interest in heterosexual union is strictly, and sceptically, theological. We consider O’Connor’s intermediary role at this point in the narrative. Finally, a reading of Ryder's fateful encounter with the state education board, whose revivalist Christian values and bureaucratic norms close around his dream of a utopian community in which he is ‘Father of All Things [...]’

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<sup>368</sup>R, p. 242.

<sup>369</sup>R, p. 239.

though never one bourgeois or like to other men as we now know them'.<sup>370</sup>

The school authorities arrive at Wendell's door accusing him of impropriety and demanding that his children should be educated by the state. Wendell seemingly eludes the regulatory standards of the state by inventing the tale of a travelling salesman who visits the farm once a year to procreate. With this invented persona he accounts for the presence of a second wife and family in the home. Retrospectively, though, this encounter is shown to be ruinous to Wendell: two chapters later he confesses to his mother, 'I have lied to the law, and the law does not believe me,'<sup>371</sup>, and between them it is agreed that Wendell should banish his first (and sole legal) wife and their offspring rather than have Wendell 'fall'<sup>372</sup> from his position at the head of the family.

Wendell's intercourse with two women who refuse the phallic circuit of desire and power, and with the obstetrician who is also the queerest of theologians, at once prefigures, defers and initiates the manner in which he 'unfathers' himself before the representatives of the state. Yet we should not treat the first of these episodes, 'Fine Bitches All, And Molly Dance', as origin or source of the novel's resolution, nor as the precipitant of the climax. It is simply, as I feel sure Molly Dance would agree, as good a place to begin as any other... And, being such, is it also a decisive and dizzying turning point.

Before Wendell appears on the scene, Barnes describes Molly's pedigree in three pages of folksy, somewhat Chaucerian, typology through which we are lead to read the imprint of her profession, dog-fancier, upon her morals, her metaphysics and (pre-eminently) her sexuality.

Molly, it must be writ, was no better than her dogs, and seldom as good, for she got her children where and when it pleased her. There were some ten, and no one looked like, nor could one have pointed, with any certain finger, to its sire, or have penned it a tree of any proportions, above the sturdy root which was Molly.

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<sup>370</sup>R, p. 210.

<sup>371</sup>R, p. 238.

<sup>372</sup>R, p. 238.

Molly said that the human breed was of no importance anyhow and so what mattered it if they came from the ends of the earth? She herself was torn between two gentlemen, both of whom, at times, she called father, and at others, no father at all, for her mother before her had been stricken of a cast in the eye, which led her into all manner of mistakes, for that she could never see but half a man at best, and the halves that she saw, were, she said, as identical as peas in a pod, and how could God hold her responsible, if he made so small difference in such important matters?<sup>373</sup>

We might note that ‘the sturdy root that was Molly’ attains its firmness, its earthy humour, and inextirpable views, by dint of her capacity for non-knowledge, her forgetting of and indifference to authenticated genealogy. And the impossibility of ‘penn[ing] a tree of any proportions’, punning on the incarceratory aspects of language, of the subject penned in by its proper name, extends beyond the domestic sphere of Molly’s family life to her errant understanding of the virtues of: self-sufficiency (‘She had kept herself, and her children, up to that age appropriated for self-support, by the good round prices her well-mannered kennel netted her, and slept in the assurance that her sins, if any, would be forgiven her, as she had done her best with a very bad tangle, had cheated no-one, and had paid her way.’), religious guilt (‘you could not come at her with good and evil; these two things were thought out by someone in the beginning who had no liking for all things, of all kinds, all at once, in the same place. Molly had liking for just that’), aesthetics (popular in taste, ‘she consumed one after another some hundred of shilling shockers’, though seamily disarrayed by an anarchic visual sense which shares in the sentimental, militaristic and religious tastes of contemporary bourgeois homes but disarranges them with a wild impulse for collage, dadaist in its affront to ‘good taste’; ‘Her walls were somewhat covered with cheaply-framed lithographs in high bleeding colours, battle scenes and infants’ pictures, trulls and virgins. Molly thought nothing of hanging the “Little Maid Crossing the Brook” next to the gentleman who got out of bed one second too late [...] No, Molly Dance loved life and its miscarriage, but for arrangements she had no eye, save in the narrow and exact road of dogs’), pedagogy (‘Molly had a number of things mixed up in her education, so mixed, indeed, that another would have considered it a

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<sup>373</sup>R, p. 191.

lack. Not so Molly. She said that she had knowledge both sides, back and front'). An unruly pun of an ideological system, in other words, which directly threatens Wendell's hegemonic view of a world founded on the potency, self-identity and privilege of the male generative organ.

Still, as ideological systems go, it is perhaps no more messy and overdetermined than any other; indeed, it overlaps with nineteenth century bourgeois sentiment in its choice of aesthetic objects (if not in their tidy arrangement), and in emphasising the great virtue of supporting a family without outside assistance – the point on which Wendell's ideology is most offensive to liberal, conservative, socialist and Queer perspectives alike: his anti-commercial doctrine, his refusal of wage labour, the ineptitude of his attempts to trade his goods, and, above all, his unreflexive reliance on his wives labour and his mother's begging letters to wealthy patrons.

For Caselli, Molly's home exemplifies 'an aesthetics of the blasphemous' in which '[p]roliferation, stratification, juxtaposition, and excess do not reveal but leave instead nothing untouched' leaving no margin for any 'ultimate belief in the sacred quality of an image that cannot be represented.'<sup>374</sup> An acute characterisation of Molly's disruptive effect upon the novel's protagonist. But whereas Caselli argues that Molly's point of view 'stands for the strategies of equivocation which characterise the novel as a whole'<sup>375</sup>, I would suggest that at another level Molly is both spiritually and materially straight and dog-matic. For just as the questions of sovereignty and authority do not become irrelevant, even if they become unspeakable, in the nineteenth century industrial capitalist economy, so, in the apparent chaos of Molly Dance's domicile, the sacred quality of exchange value, and the mechanisms of force, domination and order which regulate it, have not become inoperative. They are displaced from the 'human breed' to her 'well-mannered kennel', where she makes her fortune, and where her consciousness finds its 'sturdy root' in the 'narrow and exact world of dogs'.

While Wendell's grossest transgressions generally pertain to the sphere of (waged) production, Molly's transgressions are confined to her role in the process of social reproduction, in which area her household is doubly monstrous, not only lacking a Father for her children but even lacking the lack of one: there is no place in Molly's

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<sup>374</sup> Caselli, p. 207.

<sup>375</sup> Caselli, p. 208.

world for a father. Nevertheless, in her business, the rearing of dogs, Molly is herself the most punctilious adherent to the sacred principle of patrilineage. Her dogs are

fine bitches all, with a sire to each, and to each sire and bitch a pedigree that would put a king to shame for its lack of straying, done in blue and red ink, and with marginal decorations representing intertwined ivy, and very infrequently a black cross against a name. For whenever, on whatsoever night it befell, that some grand dame of dogs so far forgot herself as to break loose in another breed (thereby bringing disgrace down upon her head, and unto her children forever and ever, like any erring girl) this one suffered the stigma of a black ink cross, with hour and date of the downfall, could Molly discover it<sup>376</sup>

Here Molly's is the surveilling, misogynistic gaze of the master whose economic dominance entails the discursive reproduction – as creatures of inferior will and high, if easily diminished, exchange value – of the female sex that multiplies his workforce. Barnes seems to anticipate one of the Marxist-Feminist critiques of Queer Studies, in this patriarchal dimension of Molly's economic existence which maintains her position and exculpates her sexual adventures beyond the circuit of heteronormativity; in the 1990s, some argued that Queer Studies had become complicit in liberal ideologies to the degree that 'affirming sexual agency and nonreproductive sexualities often came to mean that pleasure and sexuality were unhinged from the social structures which organise them.'<sup>377</sup>

When queer theory's critique of a naturalized patriarchal heterosexuality displaces an interrogative critique with analysis of textual play, cultural norms, or eroticized bodies, it fails to connect the re-engendering of sexual identities in postindustrial culture and the increased visibility of lesbians and gays with new, but still unequal, divisions of labor and work in capital's global political economy. As an exclusively cultural analysis, it risks re-enacting the ideological effects of the discourses of liberal tolerance it purportedly disputes.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>376</sup>R, p. 191.

<sup>377</sup>Rosemary Hennessy, 'Queer Theory, Left Politics', *Rethinking Marxism* 7:3 (1994), 85-111 (p.106).

<sup>378</sup>Hennessy, p. 108.

Barnes' chapter on Molly's kennel, while doubtless revelling in its own performative excesses, deliberately frames Molly's narrative around her material role in the social structure. From the first sentence, the appellation/interpellation 'Molly Dance, dog fancier' is not simply a shifting subject position among others in a moveable symbolic system, it also refers to a beyond of Barnes' textual play, to a material position which functions within the text to complicate and undercut Molly's status as an emancipatory figure of female jouissance.

How then does this tension between textual play and the inscription of material, structural limits develop, once Wendell (whose own mixture of radical challenge and reactionary complicity with patriarchal structures of social domination, while comparable with Molly's, are utterly at odds with them) enters the frame? His arrival is unceremonious; he appears mid-sentence, midway through a paragraph, in a pair of Russian Doll parenthetical clauses which only retrospectively introduce Wendell as the addressee of Molly's discourse on knowledge. He has arrived in order to transact with her over a dog, a subtle sign within the narrative masterplot that Wendell's fantasy of being a father sufficient unto himself and his family is breaking down and he is finally being forced to enter the marketplace:

Molly Dance had a number of things mixed up in her education, so mixed, indeed, that another would have considered it a lack. Not so Molly. She said that she had knowledge both sides, back and front, and when Wendell struggled with her in these things (he had come to buy a bitch, and stayed to talk), she could not be got, on any account, to see what was wrong with her information, though on the other hand, she would have been the last to cry Wendell's down. "For," she said, "I've one way in my head and you have another, and the world's the world for all that, and what you think is fine, and what I think is fine, and better suited to my purpose, so where's the harm?"<sup>379</sup>

This is anathema to Wendell, who in an earlier chapter entitled 'Julie Becomes What She Had Read' even disowned his daughter, so enraged was he by the reading of sentimental novels and her identificatory outpourings over their tragic, suffering

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<sup>379</sup>R, p. 194.

heroines, an activity which seemed to undermine his exclusive entitlement to pronounce identity ('She is none of mine. Did I not here her deriding me greatly?'<sup>380</sup> he fumes.) Now though, having arrived with no choice but to make a purchase, he finds himself snared in the depthless system of market equivalences which the capitalist entrepreneur Molly introduces. Discourse itself is apparently one more commodity: exchangeable, and of purely relative value. The one immovable conviction that Molly defends is that knowledge is not true, save in the sense that it is 'suited to [...] purpose'. A position which, if not redolent of post-structuralism so much as a Rortyeian liberal pragmatism, does correspond to the hegemonic liberal gloss on postmodern thought, as analysed and bemoaned by Hennessy.



Here is an opportunity to break off our reading momentarily and examine more contemporary work at the contested borders of Marxist and Queer studies, since we will once more discover the same tension between a strategy exposing and historicising the violence of essentialising and universalising categories, and the methodological impetus to abstract and generalise a dynamic but systematic model of the social totality. Turning to a roundtable discussion on capitalist crisis from the 2012 issue of the *GLQ Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, we see this split dynamic emerge around the figure of Marx when the discussion turns to the methodological function of thinking the social totality.

The panel's discussion of 'rapprochements between queer studies and Marxism/political economy/historical materialism' hones in on the epistemological status of totality as the key methodological question in light of the recent crisis of capitalism and the aggressive neo-liberal reforms which have followed: 'in the wake of identity politics, as we forcefully interrogate some of the presumptions of identity-based sexuality studies, have we opened the way to a new conceptualization of totality, a rapprochement with what had at one point appeared most unqueer to queer studies?'<sup>381</sup> The boundary comes into focus between participants of a more overtly

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<sup>380</sup>R, p. 110.

<sup>381</sup>Christina Crosby, Lisa Duggan et al, 'Queer Studies, Materialism, and Crisis: A Roundtable Discussion', *GLQ*, 18-1 (2012), 127-47 (p.138).

Marxist bent, such as Kevin Floyd, to whom thinking the 'totality' means a Lukacsean/Jamesonian attempt at 'cognitive mapping' – a dialectical movement in which the critic must 'grasp a social field as unified precisely in its disunity'<sup>382</sup> – and others such as Lisa Duggan, for whom there is still a fear that the impulse to dictate grand theory lurks within a reheated rhetoric of 'thinking the totality';

From a queer studies perspective, our analyses of the mutually constituting politics of class, race, gender, sexuality, nationalism, religion, and disability will shift with the scale, time frame, and location of the political economic framework through which we focus our work. If we focus too consistently and relentlessly at the broadest time/space scale, we will risk missing significant variations and moments of contest in specific times and places. [...] perhaps it makes more sense to speak of provisional, shifting, totalities?

Moving beyond the Marxist notions of the relative autonomy of culture, or the contingent hegemony of regimes of state power, might we consider the usefulness of shifting frames for historical, political analysis? I like to think of queerness, for instance, as a kind of promiscuous relational experimentalism. (Roundtable, p.146)

Arguably, the letter of Duggan's points about the necessity of attending to context, and recognising that totalities are shifting and multiple does find common ground with the 'epistemologically humble' form within which Floyd's *Queer Marxism* recasts the notion of social totality. And yet, 'promiscuous relational experimentalism' suggests an anti-Oedipal transgressive stance from which Marxist appeals to understand the ideological demand for 'promiscuous experimentation' as explicable within a relatively fixed context of economic expropriation based on a flexibilized workforce, deregulated financial frameworks, and economic growth driven by ongoing creative destruction of resources and modes of production (not to mention the more local impetus within neoliberalised academia for radical thinkers to constantly feed their 'innovative' experiments into a publishing sector rightly described as a monopoly<sup>383</sup>)

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<sup>382</sup>Roundtable, p. 139.

<sup>383</sup>Though academic libraries have been frantically cutting subscriptions to make ends meet, journals now consume 65% of their budgets, which means they have to reduce the number of books they buy. Journals fees account for a significant component of universities' costs, which are then passed on to their students. [...] Universities are locked into buying their products. Academic papers are

are defensively cast as the 'relentless' harangue of the paternal superego.

As discussed above, Floyd's monograph *The Dialectic of Desire: Towards a Queer Marxism* explicitly grounds its readings of social totality in particular intersections of economy, social movements and cultural praxis, and his methodology – following Jameson's defence of Lukacs' work, as well as more recent work on intersectionality – insists that critical descriptions of social totality always proceed from an embedded position within that totality, through 'a rigorously negative practice' which renders a positive God's eye view of the totality of relations not only dangerously totalitarian, but quite impossible. Refusing to give positive content to the totality, for Floyd it is nonetheless crucial that Queer Theory abjures 'epistemological fetishisations of difference', because 'a social and epistemological severing of connections is precisely one of capital's most consequential objective effects'<sup>384</sup>.

'[S]tumblyingly, inadequately', the task of any Queer Marxism must be 'to comprehend what this ontological and epistemological atomization makes it impossible to apprehend: capital as the systemic, global source of this enforced social dispersal.'<sup>385</sup>

As there between Floyd and Duggan, there is a similar but non-identical imaginary faultline, we could call it an intersection, in the symbolic proximity between the work of Floyd and Jose Esteban Munoz, whose *Cruising Utopia: the There and Then of Queer Futurity* (2009) echoes and converges with Floyd's affirmation of a 'queer perspective [which] aspires to an integration that is not positive but critical, not abstract but concrete, a response to the total character of social disintegration.'<sup>386</sup> Crucial to Munoz's work is a reparative drive to avoid the either/or split of 'positive' and 'critical'; to trace untimely Utopian strands within the 'total character of social disintegration'. Like Floyd, Munoz insists that we deal with the systematic qualities of 'asymmetries and violent frenzies which mark the present'. Like Floyd, he is critical of a Utopian thought which offers only the abstract fantasy of escape; 'imagining a queer subject who is abstracted from the sensuous intersectionalities that mark our

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published in only one place, *and they have to be read by researchers trying to keep up with their subject*. Demand is inelastic and competition non-existent, because different journals can't publish the same material. (George Monbiot, 'Academic publishers make Murdoch look like a socialist', <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/aug/29/academic-publishers-murdoch-socialist>> [My italics.]

<sup>384</sup>*Reification*, p. 6.

<sup>385</sup>Roundtable, p. 139; *Reification*, p. 6.

<sup>386</sup>*Reification*, p. 223.

experience is an ineffectual way out.<sup>387</sup> Yet, without Utopian imagination, he believes Queer politics is doomed to enact either an uncritical adoption of liberalism ‘pragmatic rights discourse’<sup>388</sup> (p.38); or else the ‘Anglo-normative pessimism’ which he associates with Lee Edelman's synthomosexuality, a Queerness which opposes itself to all hope, all visions of futurity.<sup>389</sup>

Therefore, rather than a naïve, abstract utopian impulse ‘simply to turn away to the present’, Munoz turns to the Utopian impulse recorded in Marxist historiography from Ernst Bloch to Fredric Jameson, whose lesson is that ‘we animate our critical faculties by bringing the past to bear on the present and the future’<sup>390</sup> (p.27). The reparative dimension of critical praxis consists in this: once we recognise that ‘the present must be known in relation to the alternative spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future’, a utopian imagination is awakened in which signs of the ‘no-longer-conscious’ and the ‘not-yet-conscious’ (concepts from Bloch which Munoz aligns with the Derridean ‘trace’)<sup>391</sup> are just barely discernible within ‘bonds, affiliations, designs, gestures that exist within the present moment’, signs which shoot beyond the here-and-now with ‘a type of affective excess that presents the enabling force of a forward-dawning futurity that is queerness.’<sup>392</sup>

What brings Munoz's Queer utopian project closer to Floyd's Queer Marxism than to Duggan's suspicion of the Marxist desire to systematise the flux of social relations, is his belief in the non-chronological persistence of the past, for if ‘we animate our critical faculties by bringing the past to bear on the present and the future’ then we cannot ‘move beyond’ Marx the Father without being haunted by one of the ‘spectres’ of Marx (which are now also spectres of Derrida, and which will revisit us later). We cannot challenge the present in the name of possible futures to come without the critical capacity to imagine an outside to contemporary social relations; this means both understanding the current situation as a totality, and retaining a sense from the past that it might yet be otherwise. Benjamin's fictive disillusioned gaze might then seize upon us long after we crossed the boundary (like the stranger in the doorway), when we find ourselves imitating the father, attempting to give an account of our place

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<sup>387</sup>José Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), p. 96.

<sup>388</sup> Munoz, p. 38.

<sup>389</sup> Munoz, p. 96.

<sup>390</sup> Munoz, p. 27.

<sup>391</sup> Munoz, p. 27, p. 28.

<sup>392</sup> Munoz, pp. 22-23, p. 23.

in the scene within the terms of the dominant discourse (talking to the police, addressing ourselves to the law). So we shall now see how the tribulations of Wendell Ryder become the focus for this gaze in Barnes' text – that vista for which 'ordinary scenes of middle-class life look almost equally startling' – as he accounts for himself before the holders of capital, medical and religious authority, and juridical power.

♀

We reopen *Ryder* at the point where Wendell is struggling to retain his grasp on authority against the anti-essentialist market logic of Molly, trader in 'fine Bitches'. Drawing now from Floyd's work on the historical contradictions out of which male identity was being reformulated in the early years of twentieth century America, we will attempt to sharpen the respective discursive positions of Wendell and Molly and limn the intensification of Wendell's identity crises against the horizon of a historical conjuncture, as well as imagining scenarios in which the encounter between Wendell and Molly, 'radical patriarch' and 'feminist capitalist', might have contained underdeveloped utopic potential for challenging the mode in which each agent systematically exploits the other.

Floyd, attempting to historicise Judith Butler's work on the performative model of gender alignment and the imposition of compulsory heterosexuality in Marxist terms, notes a shift from a rugged, embodied rhetoric modelled on the nineteenth century frontiersmen, and exemplified by President Theodor Roosevelt, to one based on the anxious foreclosure of homosexual desire:

This physiologically articulated regime of sexual knowledge [that of late nineteenth century America] represents male bodies as operating according to an economy of desire, while female bodies operate according to an economy of reproduction. Male sexual energy is valuable from this perspective both for the energy it can contribute to what Roosevelt called the strenuous life and for its relevance to the future of the white race [...] White Americans who rejected their assigned gender role were implicated in the possibility of race suicide; they were race traitors compromising the global mission for which

they shared responsibility.<sup>393</sup>

It is easy to see in Wendell's philosophy the echoes of this model (as when he holds the male generative capacity to be the highest moral and physiological good) plus a profound perversion of it, in as much as his sexual energy is not channelled into the self-sufficient productivity of the 'strenuous life', and remains *excessively* focused on sexual reproduction, fixated on genital satisfaction. Wendell's notions about himself are founded in his sense of what a man is, and what a father is. Contrasted with Molly's dazzling rhetoric, he appears caught off balance in the transition between nineteenth and early twentieth century discourses of male subjectivity. And, pace Freud, Wendell Ryder is a 'perverted' subject because his libido remains fixated at the genital stage! Simultaneously excessively faithful to the nineteenth century "economy of desire", radically exceeding it, and falling short of its expectations of male achievement and self-mastery, Wendell is nevertheless clearly unable to tolerate the possibility of female bodies which are not subordinated to reproduction. This is what he encounters in Molly Dance, and experiences even more self-shatteringly, as we shall see, in the post-menopausal form of Lady Bridesleep.

Between these two errant females, Wendell is confronted with yet another economy of desire, that of Matthew O'Connor, whose 'queerness' we assay below. And Wendell does not attempt to reform Matthew, nor to suppress or contradict him. Matthew is assigned the role of wise fool to whom Wendell appeals for insight into the anxiety he feels (following the preceding chapter with Molly).

Wendell's lack of anxiety in relation to Matthew indicates that the character has a closer affinity to the vigorous frontiersman of the nineteenth century regime than to Butler's performative masculinity, which for Floyd is a symptom of the shift to a Fordist production, and the consumer-driven consumption emerging as America underwent rapid economic transformation and growth. I make this claim in the light of the distinction Floyd draws, following the work of Michael Kimmel, of the 'conceptual and historical' distance between nineteenth century 'manhood' and twentieth century 'masculinity':

Manhood referred to an "inner quality," a capacity for independence, morality,

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<sup>393</sup>Floyd, p. 87.

and self-mastery that adult men were expected to have achieved – mastery of the body’s diffuse sexual impulses especially, impulses thereby transcended – and that male adolescents were expected to learn as they matured, an education that in this respect might even be said to have defined manly maturity as such. The opposite of manhood, in these terms, was not womanhood but childhood. But if nineteenth-century manhood was defined internally, twentieth-century masculinity [...] had to be performed; it was a physical demonstration, not a moral or ethical one. And what this performance held at bay, its opposite – and here Butler and Kimmel are in agreement – was not immaturity but femininity. Whereas the spermatic economy of manhood and the reproductive or nurturing economy of womanhood made men and women so irreducibly different that no standard of comparison between them was possible, masculinity and femininity are defined wholly in relation to each other [...] in the very opposition between their accepted and prohibited objects of desire.<sup>394</sup>

This conceptual distinction will allow us to plot the complex and overdetermined vectors of Wendell's intersubjective matrices, should we wish to do so – for example, his feminine features finding simultaneously an early appreciative gaze and a model in Oscar Wilde, who is an attendee of his mother's literary Salon before his arrest and imprisonment. Floyd's reading captures a dialectic link between the reifying effects on bodies and sexualities of the capitalist production process and the modern liberal subjects through which it functions: defining this shift from the 'Manly' to the 'masculine' as an effect of the 'increasingly universalized, abstracted, reified'<sup>395</sup> nature of value, he claims that the symbolic opposition of masculinity and femininity replaces that of Man-Child because qualities (desire, full subjectivity) previously assumed to inhere naturally and exclusively to the male must now be firmly pinioned to the male body, and this because of the abstracting effects of a commercial society in which the purely formal equivalence of qualities determines value, the corollary being that male and female bodies can now also be 'understood in terms of more or less equivalent capacities for sexual desire,<sup>396</sup> shifting sites of desire and identification. As Molly says, 'what you think is fine, and what I think is fine, and better suited to my purpose'. But

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<sup>394</sup>Floyd, pp. 87-88.

<sup>395</sup>Floyd, p. 89.

<sup>396</sup>Floyd, p. 91.

for a 'sorrowful' Wendell this still only proves that she lacks knowledge of the 'fundamentals'<sup>397</sup>. His faith in such fundamentals is what is then tested in the transaction between them.

Wendell has possessed no fears concerning his masculinity. At this point he does not foresee the narrative's calamitous process over which his radicalized, perverted (in the most generative sense) take on the ideal of 'manhood' leads him into bewildered, belated attempts to maintain his family by undertaking minimal commodity exchange, all terminating in financial ruin, legal controversy and, finally and bathetically, the novel and unaccustomed role of 'citizen Wendell'<sup>398</sup>. Still, in the exchange with Molly he displays the first inkling of the need to perform his masculinity. Thus, in the chapter which follows upon it, he is put in dialogue with the queer sexuality of Matthew O'Connor for the first and last time in the text, to play off of and against a figure whose embodiment and desires Wendell must shortly learn to foreclose if he is to conform to the heteronormative standards of a twentieth century American 'citizen'.

By way of an essential parenthesis, my reading so far has tended to cast Molly in the role of predatory bourgeois. As a (dialectical) corrective to this we should note the deconstructive force of her dialogue. The conversation between Wendell and Molly is organised by the phallogocentric questions of the former, but driven and utterly disrupted by the disseminatory force of Molly's imagination. So, Wendell's attempts to sound out Molly's 'confused' beliefs around the concept of original sin (the better to impress upon her the 'fundamentals' of his own knowledge) prompt responses from Molly which are (im)properly Derridean in that they neither refuse nor negate the bases of Wendell's metaphysical discourse, but 'work, rather to transform and displace its statement, and towards examining the presuppositions of the question'.<sup>399</sup> Therefore, Wendell's accusation that Molly does not understand the 'fundamentals [of knowledge proper]' is not refuted but displaced; not at all, for the fundamentals 'scream about the place,' she replies, referring to the excretions of her dogs that litter her home, 'what better proof?' A signifier of logos itself which doubles as a euphemism for shit, Molly's pun overturns the linguistic veiling of civilisation's abject

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<sup>397</sup>R, p. 194.

<sup>398</sup>R, p. 131.

<sup>399</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p. xvi.

productions, and rather than simply un-veiling Wendell's demand for fundamentals as a defensive appropriation, Molly accepts the protocols of Wendell's rational discourse – its demand for proofs – only to produce such proofs in a form which no longer reassures.

Reassurance or 'certainty' is what Wendell is searching for with faltering hopes as he continues to assess Molly throughout the chapter. 'He had come to buy a bitch, and had stayed to talk.' How should his motive for stopping be read? Does the reader assume (given all we know of Wendell's determination to spread his seed at every opportunity) that Wendell stays back to talk after the financial transaction is complete only in order to enjoy mastery of Molly's body? There is more going on; for though procreation is his constant goal, he turns to it in despair this time around, as a last resort, having entirely failed to contain Molly's proliferating, luxuriating, punning rhetoric within his own discourse. He complains; 'How is a man to have pride of his ways in you, when he cannot find them ten minutes later?' And, finally,

Wendell gave up with, "Molly, do you, for instance (not to perplex you unduly), know who is the father of, say, your last born?"

"As to that," said Molly, in no way distressed, "who cares? He didn't, I don't, and the child won't have to, and that's simplification."

"Molly," said Wendell, "what do you say to knowing, for once, who is the father of your next child?"

"It's a good idea," said Molly, "but how is it to be?"

"Here I am," said Wendell, "and there you are, Molly, and there's certainty in that."

"Do you think," asked Molly, "that it would be a way of setting things in order?"

"I think it a mighty fine way indeed," said Wendell.

"In that case," said Molly, well pleased, "we can but try the question."<sup>400</sup>

Despairing of any return on his insemination of a woman who is 'as mixed as a pack of cards' (a gambling trope which will have an analogue in the scene of his tryst with

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<sup>400</sup>R, p. 198.

Lady Bridesleep), Wendell ‘gave up with’ the topic of patrilineage, posing the question either as a last desperate stratagem or in a gesture of surrender, whereas he might have expected it to be the culmination and natural conclusion of his teachings on history, cosmology, hell and original sin. Wendell is silenced by Molly's imaginative reworking of these narratives, and even finds himself snared by her story-telling – initially testing her accuracy with dry superiority, he becomes absorbed in her tale ‘eagerly, forgetting himself’<sup>401</sup>. His recourse to sexual mastery is therefore less an imperious consummation of his desire than an act of symbolic suicide (‘Wendell gave up’ by means of this offer to father a child), though we could also read off from it the impulsive survival instinct of a frightened animal, completely maladapted to a disseminative force such as Molly who seems to have history, and perhaps even a trickster God, on her side.

It is a surprise to no-one except Wendell when, post-coitus, Molly announces with an idle yawn that there is ‘one thing which might make something uncertain of this certainty’: two nights earlier she had slept with ‘Dan, the corner policeman’, another representative of law, playing his part here in rendering the paternity of the child unknowable. Furthermore, Molly reduces Wendell's aggrandised image of himself as Father-of-All to a basic equivalence with any other actors in the market: both the policeman and the anti-bourgeois radical have essentially ‘the same idea’ in bedding Molly, which ‘only goes to show,’ she claims, ‘that one man's thoughts are not worth much more than another's.’<sup>402</sup> (A sobering discovery, and one which Barnes' aptly names ‘a *post-graduate* melancholy’ elsewhere).

Incidentally, in Barnes' text, which is mockingly faithful to Wendell's fantasy, sex always results in conception, save in two instances. Wendell's own birth bypassed copulation, resulting instead from the mystical union between his mother and the spirit of Beethoven, at least according to his mother's account, which Barnes gives us no grounds to dispute. Then there is his encounter with Lady Bridesleep, a figure closely associated with Wendell's mother, where sex leads to no conception and perhaps marks the point at which Wendell's self-unfathering is ‘consummated’.

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<sup>401</sup>R, p. 197.

<sup>402</sup>R, p. 199.



Still hoping to ascertain whether he has indeed fathered a child by Molly, Wendell enquires about its appearance to Dr Matthew O'Connor. The two men collide as Wendell comes to and Mathew from the delivery. The dialogue shifts from Molly and her child to 'Holy Inspiration', passing through the abstract question of heredity. Molly's liberal imagination has previously revealed heredity as no more or less than that, a theological notion which imposes (somebody's) order on the cultural dimension of social life. For Molly, Wendell's insistence on his version of knowledge is an unsanctioned appropriation ('You are always for taking away the divine privileges.'<sup>403</sup>), but it is O'Connor who now expounds systematically what in Molly's discourse figured as the privilege of pure play without rules, and in the prior narration of her means of production appeared as pure, distilled ideology, readable from her social role. Naturally then, O'Connor's disquisition on the topic of Holy Inspiration also bears on and redirects any discussion of authority, and its exercise and legitimation with the text.

Before their conversation shifts to the abstract, Wendell and O'Connor are initially concerned with the physiological-symbolic matter at hand, the paternity of Molly's child. Here we are still within the discourse of 'manhood' – fixed to a gold standard of physical attributes and attainments, as indexed by Floyd. But Wendell no longer seems sure of this symbolic organisation. Both men are uncomfortable standing at the threshold of Molly's property, O'Connor coming from it, Wendell going to (this aforementioned movement later provides the title of that decisive chapter in which Wendell snares himself in falsehood before the education authorities). Wendell asks the sex of the child 'with a touch of hesitation', and O'Connor, 'also looking preoccupied',<sup>404</sup> confirms that it is a girl. A short, tense discussion follows in which both men allude to physical similarities (or lack thereof) between Wendell and the girl. Then, as O'Connor is on the point of moving away, the two men suddenly discover a means to communicate plainly with each other when they shift to the topic of 'heredity', conceived (on O'Connor's terms) as a matter of faith as opposed to knowledge.

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<sup>403</sup>R, p. 194.

<sup>404</sup>R, p. 200.

“Wait a minute,” cried Wendell. “I’ll walk part of the way with you. Do you believe in heredity?”<sup>405</sup> Wendell seems to intuit that this will be the only route by which he can engage the doctor, though it may cause him great pain to go even part of the way along the doctor’s path. And so, his interest finally aroused, O’Connor is moved to give a lengthy account of heredity as ‘absolute and conclusive proof of God and the father’. For Caselli, his ensuing sermon is a significant demonstration of paternal authority’s ‘fail[ure] to be stable’ in that it

mixes the discourses of faith and biology [...] but rather than guaranteeing the existence of “God the Father” we have here the stark choice between either God or the father, an opposition which kindles Wendell’s competitive spirit and ultimately translates adultery into faith (a position in turn challenged by Molly Dance’s behaviour).<sup>406</sup>

This reading is sensitive to the queer authority of O’Connor’s rhetoric and the way in which it both elucidates and destabilises Wendell’s philosophy. Yet I think there is more to be said about the relation of this episode to the figure of Molly’s errant sexuality (for I am not convinced that the ‘behaviour’ of the latter is best characterised as a ‘challenge’ to the dogmatics of the former). We shall consider the stages of O’Connor’s argument, the manner and context of its presentation, and its resonances through the novel. His ‘absolute and conclusive proof’ develops over five stages:

- First, that the likeness of both God and the father is seen in all children, and that marital strife results when the baby bears more likeness to God than the father, since the husband peremptorily assumes this to be a sign of sexual infidelity.
- Secondly, that a man must be sure of God when he is no longer sure of himself.
- Thirdly, that it is impossible that one might conceive of another world without God since God is to be found wherever ‘man will be man’<sup>407</sup>, meaning wherever ‘you reach subtleties, and fine shades of conduct, [where] manners become still closer to the heart’s need’; wherever one has need of symbol and

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<sup>405</sup>R, p. 200.

<sup>406</sup>Caselli, p. 213.

<sup>407</sup>R, p. 201.

ritual, in other words.

- Fourthly, that sexual difference is secured in a differentiated relation to God, which is simultaneously a relation to knowledge: ‘women know there is God only, but man knows that there is God and the father’, a point which is substantiated in a lengthy comparative analysis of male and female suicides.
- Fifth and finally, that ‘the child’ exists as a third type, beyond and less than male and female in knowing ‘neither God nor father’, and that consequently that the death of a child is both ‘the worst death’ and the mysterious foundation of justice, which ‘lies in the grave with that infant’.<sup>408</sup>

To begin to elucidate the opaque crevices of his argument, and tentatively establish the degree of authority which Barnes accords his ideas within the text, we might again invoke wider contexts for the dialogue. The narrative contrivance of Wendell's fall, which we are allegorising as a naive attempt to radicalise a nineteenth century pioneering construction of male identity based on the heroic ideal of manhood which flounders on its own internal contradictions but primarily upon its anachronistic relationship to the emerging liberal market society in which the sovereignty of the father devolves to the invisible hand of the divine laws in an economic cycle of abstract and exchangeable values, going to and coming from without rest or reason. Pursuing such a totalising reading, we should be all the more attentive to the relational dynamics of Wendell and O'Connor, which are given as the contingent, local determinants of O'Connor's argument from universal and transcendental ‘proofs’. Wendell trusts in O'Connor's authority much as in psychoanalytic dialogue the importance of the transference lies in the analysand's (false) assumption that the analyst already possesses 'full' understanding of the analysand's 'true' being – this misapprehension is the condition for his/her symptoms to take on symbolic form. The idea that the analyst possesses such knowledge about the subject rests on a structural misunderstanding – that there can be an authentic knowledge of psychic trauma prior to its retrospective conversion into symbolic form during the course of the analysis – therefore it ‘is of course an illusion, but it is a necessary one: in the end only through this supposition of knowledge can some real knowledge be produced.’<sup>409</sup> What kinds of transferences

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<sup>408</sup>R, p. 204.

<sup>409</sup>Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 210.

are in play between the two men, and no less between Barnes' text and its reader, to produce the effect of O'Connor's disquisition on God and the father, its internal laws of sexual difference, somehow both essentialising and disruptive of Wendell's competing understanding of the same binary?

The previously mentioned physical awkwardness assigned to the two men, the hesitancy and terseness of their to and fro as they discuss Molly's child, does not obviously denote any discomfort in Wendell at O'Connor's embodiment or sexuality. Barnes has established earlier in the novel that Matthew O'Connor is a man whose desires do not follow the straight path of generation but that more disorientating alternation of 'to and from' which, we could say, Wendell learns to feign and betray before the state. It is to O'Connor's earlier appearance in the text which we now turn, seeking in it a precursor (that which *coursed through* the text beforehand, leaving its mark as desire lines), rather than a prototype or progenitor, of Wendell's significant drowning at the novel's close.

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It is in the chapter titled 'The Soliloquy of Dr Matthew O'Connor (Family Physician to the Ryders) on the Way to and from the Confessional of Father Lucas' that Matthew first reveals unambiguously that the objects of his desire are male; 'Yes, Father, and please you I've done it again, and this time it was with Fat Liz, him as keeps bar in a gophered boudoir cap'.<sup>410</sup> Nonetheless, this is a chapter that works especially hard to disrupt its own representations of sexual identity by means of a specific formal instability: it is presented in the form a religious confession and delivered in the mode of a dramatic soliloquy, or so its title promises (just as 'Fat Liz's' title promises and parodies a heterosexual object choice), however, the identities of addressee and speaker blur as a dialogue disseminates in which O'Connor sometimes appears to be admonished, comforted and forgiven by Father Lucas, while at other moments the voice of the homilist can only be read as belonging to O'Connor himself. The reader is confronted with the paradoxical nature of the address at work in both soliloquy and confession. 'Soliloquy', literally 'talking by oneself', is supposed to represent the interior life of the character in isolation from the social world of the other dramatis

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<sup>410</sup>R, p. 138.

personae, the 'truest' thoughts of the speaker, but, instead of respecting and reproducing an integral inner world, by convention the soliloquy is a highly stylised but efficient dramatic device for the quick and concise conveyance of information to an audience, often in the most elevated of rhetoric, while a 'confession' – supposedly the most intimate form of spiritual dialogue, more so than in prayer where the priest is little more integral than is the woman in the homosocial economy, merely the token of exchange between men (and God) – functions on the disavowed principle that one is really speaking only to oneself, i.e. to an internal interlocutor who already knows one's most obscene thoughts, one's most heinous crimes; the confessor does not need to communicate anything *to* the Priest, it is rather that he makes absolution possible by subjectivising his shame. The confession is the pure act of articulating, giving voice to one's guilt. And absolution does not come from the other per se, but from the symbolic place into which one's unspeakable acts and fantasies have returned. Is it insignificant that some of the pioneers of the stream of consciousness narrative mode were raised as Catholics (Proust, Joyce)? Or is it that it is only on the basis of an omniscient God that the idea of a stream-of-consciousness could be given credit within language? William James, who coined the phrase, was quite wrong to admonish that faith for its rigidly doctrinal concept of the oneness of God and its inadequacy to the flux, the going to and coming from, of consciousness:

Take God's aseity, for example; or his necessariness; his immateriality; his 'simplicity' or superiority to the kind of inner variety and succession which we find in finite beings, his indivisibility [...] candidly speaking, how do such qualities as these make any definite connection with our life? [...] What vital difference can it possibly make to any man's religion whether they be true or false?<sup>411</sup>

What James ignores is that without the assumption of the unity, consistency and aseity (independence, self-causation) of God's being, the 'variety and succession' to be found 'in' the consciousness of finite beings is reduced to the status of a soliloquy, to the formalised display of individual psychic contents for a presumed external audience. Only when we believe that a divine Father sees us in secret is there the sanction to

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<sup>411</sup>William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), p. 445.

explore a flow of consciousness outside of a social network. It is therefore perfectly fitting that O'Connor, the character whose sexuality is furthest removed from heteronormativity, should have an attachment to doctrinal religion and traditional ceremony which is as acute as his other passion which dared and enjoyed not speak(ing) its name. The connection between his (can we call it?) homosexuality and his passion for Christ is far more than the sublimation of former into latter; in the confessional-soliloquy, his intercourse with Fat Liz, another finite and mortal male, is portrayed concurrently as a sin to be confessed and a form of religious communion, a path to redemption in-and-for-itself:

And night long there was his soul and mine tossing and tossing, until the great wave came and receded, and there was nothing for it but to beach on our stranded shoals, says I, and both of us rolling our eyes and praying fast and thick and trying to scramble back into the grace of God, out of sight and mind come twenty minutes, and breathing like we had been pushing each other for all we were worth getting to absolution and control, please Father, Son and Holy Ghost, it was a terrible race! And us coming in neck and neck, looking for the score. Go, my child, [...] the earth rolling and plunging and tossing men into all kinds and sorts of postures difficult to recover from and puzzling to tell the good from the bad, and our minds milled and addled by the Devil, [...] for man, he says, is a twig in a whirlwind, and this goes past him and that goes past him, some stinking and some sweet, and his net frail and his soul torn, wherefore then should we judge thee? But, my child, try thou to stand in that gale and catch neither finch nor fledgling, neither bramble nor chaff, but cling to the pillar of righteousness, and shut thy mouth against the flesh of thy brothers whirled down the vortex of time, and lo! Thou shalt come to the peaceful lands where everything rises in still air, and the sun does not tremble and the planets are not mysterious, and the Word goes forth forever from His Heart in a single uncorrupt stream and returns not, nor knows seasons in its mercy.<sup>412</sup>

The message here, 'shut thy mouth against the flesh of thy brothers', which one must

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<sup>412</sup>R, pp. 138-39.

ascribe to the voice of Father Lucas, is reiterated late in O'Connor's soliloquy when he 'comes from' the confessional. The corruption of the message by the mediation of linguistic difference, the to and fro of meaning, affects not only the authority of the words but also their referents, as metaphoric and literal referents are fused awkwardly in pun. Coming from the lips of O'Connor and the pen of Barnes, 'shut thy mouth *against* the flesh of thy brothers' insistently suggests lips literally closing in the embrace of fellatio rather than in the metaphorical sense of foreclosing homosexual eroticism. Here what is refused in the Symbolic returns not in the Real, as Lacan put it, but in the unsilenceable polyphony of language. And as for the subsequent commandment to 'cling to the pillar of righteousness'... Elsewhere in this passage it is at the metaphoric level that homosexual acts are recorded in censor-evading tropes of religious ritual or sublime nature.

The way in which nature is (dis)figured, in this the only extended discussion of Matthew's sexuality, by a tangle of metaphors, voices and indistinct levels of reference, might profitably be read as a Late Modernist take on homosexuality as *the* Sublime sexual experience, beyond the secure normative frame of reproductive heterosexuality: the experience of the point of greatest tension between an unmediated, unbounded nature and an always finite system of representation. For it is truly evoked by 'nature in its most chaotic, boundless, terrifying dimension which is best qualified to awake in us the feeling of the sublime: here, where the aesthetic dimension is strained to its utmost, where all finite determinations dissolve themselves, the failure appears at its purest.'<sup>413</sup> As we saw in chapter 1, Žizek places great importance upon the break between the Kantian and Hegelian Sublime. While for Kant the failure of the imagination to grasp the Thing-in-Itself becomes a mediated presentation of that very impossible (sublime) object ('the place of the Thing is indicated by the very failure of its presentation'<sup>414</sup>), Hegel makes the essence of the Thing-in-Itself coincide entirely with the failure of representation: no longer will the failure of the imagination to grasp the Sublime Object furnish the negative proof of an ideal object existing beyond phenomenal representation, the sublime Object *is* that failure of representation; in Hegel 'the negative experience of the Thing must change into the experience of the Thing-in-itself as radical negativity.'<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>413</sup>*Sublime Object*, p. 230.

<sup>414</sup>*Sublime Object*, p. 230.

<sup>415</sup>*Sublime Object*, p. 233.

Do either the Kantian or Hegelian notion give us any purchase on the sexuality of Matthew, or the proofs of God and the father which he places before Wendell? Shall we treat Matthew's sexuality, his sexualised language, as sublime in its radical negativity, a corrective to Wendell's dreams of being Father to All Things as an example of that fanaticism which for Kant (and Zizek) lies in a desire to reconnect phenomena and idea in unmediated totality? Is Matthew's triangulation of knowledge – women know there is God only, men know there is God and father, children know (there is) neither – a *proof* of God and father or a proof against their positive appearance in and as Wendell's sexual adventures? Shall we venture into an interpretation through the Hegelian-Zizekian lens which would see in the Christian Incarnation and Crucifixion an overcoming of the notion of a 'transcendent Thing-in-itself as positive entity'?<sup>416</sup>

Having travelled to the point of identifying the disturbing and pleasurable textual effects of this chapter with Zizek's contemporary Hegelian-Lacanian project to understand contemporary ideological reality by a process of theoretical abstraction, *Ryder's* microeconomic flows pull us back from this conclusion as soon as we draw close to it. Since Barnes' text denies even a somewhat stable boundary or linear progression between literal and the metaphorical levels it is impossible to establish *if there has been* any failure to represent or grasp the object. We are not exactly left to enjoy a 'pure' play of surface effects either, since the novel does refer us back to bodies, acts and actors. Put another way, Barnes has fashioned her text such that it 'unfathers' any reader who would care to master it, but leaves us without other option than to throw ourselves in again regardless. For example, should a reader of the confession-soliloquy presume that the metaphoric allusion to Matthew and Fat Liz's sexual acts ends when the 'great wave came and receded' (which *would* be a pretty dull, heteronormative, restricted sexual narrative of tumescence, climax and resolution)? Or does it only really get going afterwards, when the two men appear to be repenting their sinful deed, 'rolling [their] eyes and praying fast and thick and trying to scramble back into the grace of God', and 'breathing like [they] had been pushing each other for all [they] were worth getting to absolution and control'?

Is the latter passage not more akin to a transgressive sexual encounter? The transgression inhering in the allusion to non-normative sexuality, but more profoundly

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<sup>416</sup>*Sublime Object*, p. 233.

engendered by the short-circuit Barnes creates between description of post-coital religious guilt and inscription of sexual pleasure. The ‘truest’ pleasure located not in an idealised moment of mutual physiological climax which transports the lovers into the domain of sublime nature (the ‘great wave’ of the drives, the ‘beach’ on which the lovers are washed up stranded as if upon the ‘Real of the Law, the rock of the castration’<sup>417</sup>), but in the spectral spectatorship of a fairly well-defined series of subjects which constitute the audience for their erotic tableau – God, Father Lucas, the audience (soliloquy calls out for a theatrical reception), the reader (since the soliloquy in fact comes to us as a chapter in a novel, and we are obliged to think of ourselves as readers pretending to be an audience pretending to be Father Lucas, representative of the will of God – phew!), and not forgetting the author (since we are given no reason to think that O'Connor is other than the 'creation' of Djuna Barnes, though apparently he has some basis in one of her friends, and one infers that the disorientation effects mentioned above are the results of her technical devices and artistic intentions). The chapter's own instances of the ‘to and from’ movement mean that we are unable to establish Barnes and the reader as stable participatory roles in its queer circuits of desire. Speaker/writer and reader/audience alternate in the positions of subject/object, confessor and spectator, transcendent God and disenchanting liberal subject.



Turning back, or forward, to O'Connor's discourse on the three types of death/suicide – those of man, woman, and child defined in their particular relation to God and/or the Father, we recall that ‘women know there is God only, but man knows that there is God and the father.’<sup>418</sup> Probably the most we can hope to account for here is their incommensurate quantification - the plurality of ‘women’ as opposed to the singularity of ‘man’. Let's say ‘Women’, being other than the humanist subject, do not require their sovereign decision to be present in and beyond the moment of self-cancellation, ‘neither making bargain nor asking for precepts and points of departure, nor platforms for philosophy’; such a total expenditure, without bargain or precept, perhaps recalls Bataille's General Economy of total expenditure and the analogues with Robin Vote's

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<sup>417</sup>*Sublime Object*, p. 51.

<sup>418</sup>*R*, p. 204.

spiritual inclinations in *Nightwood* (see above, chapter 2). This kind of expenditure is impossible for (any) man, says Matthew, because it threatens to break the specular identification characteristic of the Lacanian mirror stage, the impossible status of ‘man’ as the universal individual;

Say the young man is about to kill himself [...] He goes to his mirror. He looked into that mirror when he was a growing lad – in that room he was born – well, he looked into that mirror as a lad, and understood that face. What must it be, when he looks and sees a face he does not understand? Troubled – why? Because he cannot kill himself without including his will in that action. He knows he is the slave of that action, so with the soul of the slave he bargains, and makes great argument about a thing that not only has no base for argument but no way but the way including its will. He says to himself, 'I must abandon you. How shall I abandon you?' Thus, he makes for himself a pact. If I kill me, my corpse shall be, in my terms absolute, and by myself, myself made not myself – voilà!<sup>419</sup>

If becoming a (phallicised) subject means the ‘overwrit[ing]’<sup>420</sup> of the imaginary bounded ego with the symbolic, then it seems fairly clear that the underlying imaginary ‘I’ must be profoundly threatened when the symbolic subject has chosen its death. This is effectively an inversion of Lacan's definition of psychosis: whereas the psychotic has foreclosed the symbolic and therefore entertains a relation to language fixated at the imaginary level (so that language is understood merely by imitation of others rather than being anchored in the symbolic ‘I’), O'Connor's suicidal man, having become ‘slave of that action’ which will destroy the body that he specularly identifies as himself, can no longer fully accept equivalence between the ‘I’ who ‘wills’ and ‘bargains’ and the condemned bodily image. Two possibilities are then open to this singular, universal male subject, but the first is intolerable: to recognise in the newly troubled connection between the specular ‘I’ and the speaking ‘I’ a traumatic contact with the Real (in the sense not of reality but of ‘the fissure within the symbolic network itself’<sup>421</sup>) whereby the language which a moment previously had seem to shore up our

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<sup>419</sup>R, p. 203.

<sup>420</sup>Fink, p. 88.

<sup>421</sup>Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007) p. 72.

ipseity now reveals itself as the very form of the death drive (again, in the Lacanian sense), ‘an “undead” urge that persists beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death’.<sup>422</sup> The second possibility is also described, disdainfully, by Žizek: to perceive ‘the Real as the monstrous Thing behind the veil of appearances is the ultimate lure that lends itself easily to New Age appropriation, as in Joseph Campbell’s notion of the monstrous God.’<sup>423</sup>

I want to suggest that this ‘lure’ of God as the symbolic support of the individual’s true will, rather neatly describes the path taken to the very end by the Male Suicide. Furthermore, both Žizek and O’Connor turn to the economic register to account for this ruse by means of which the identity of man is preserved beyond the Real threat of dissolution.

Perhaps O’Connor’s ideas therefore prefigure Žizek’s quip that if Lacan is right that ‘woman does not exist’ the best way to define a man would be as a woman who thinks she exists. And in a nicely post-Hegelian reflection on the aporetic power relations between master and slave (again cf. our discussion of the master slave dialectic in chapter 2), O’Connor goes on to claim that the man who no longer recognises the face in the mirror is compelled to desire his own erasure since ‘his will is the slave of that action’, but the appearance of choice, of sovereign decision, must be maintained; ‘he never lets the effect seal the cause, he reasons it out, he leaves notes, he says it was this, or that, or the other, in an endeavour to place himself on an equal footing with God.’<sup>424</sup>

Now this note, which ensures that the *true* relation of cause and effect remains hidden, reminds us insistently of the money fetish of advanced capitalist economies which Marx bequeaths to us in *Capital: Vol I* (1867) (a text which Barnes possessed, incidentally). According to Marx, the troubled relationship between the material/imaginary form of money (i.e. x quantity of gold as guarantee of value) and the requirement for money to act ‘as an efficient means of circulation’ logically necessitated the development of the credit system, and ‘the consequent relation between debtors and creditors opens up the [...] necessity [...] of capital.’<sup>425</sup>

Symbolic deadlock is a threat to the credit system because the fetishistic value

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<sup>422</sup>Žizek, HRL, p. 63.

<sup>423</sup>Žizek, HRL p. 72.

<sup>424</sup>R, p. 203.

<sup>425</sup>David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 56.

of the commodity (exchange value) can become dissociated as 'liquid' money if more currency exists than material productive outlets to invest this abstract value in; in such cases value is destroyed, because, while abstract, it must be continually passing through the commodity form in order to sustain and proliferate itself.<sup>426</sup> And this is *always* a danger. For while money must continually embody itself in material use-values, the commodity, once purchased is apt to 'fall out of circulation', as the new owner is content with its 'real' use-value. So the credit system facilitates vast and complex accumulations of value, but it cannot abolish capital's tendency towards symbolic self-destruction. Harvey recalls Marx's wry comparison of the ideological tendencies of the market to religious doxa. While the network of symbolic credit is functioning and the accretive flow of monetary value into and out of the commodity form is continuous, capitalists are apt to behave 'like a Protestant – they act on pure faith. When the crash comes, though, everyone dives for cover in the 'Catholicism' of the monetary base, real gold.' Unfortunately, Catholicism is a fatal position within the capitalist Symbolic because it is in these moments, when everyone takes refuge in the transubstantiated golden host, 'that the question of real values and reliable money forms gets posed.'<sup>427</sup>

Perhaps we could say that the preeminent Marxist lesson is that today's truest Catholics are Queer Theorists in search of an elusive AHRC grant. At any rate, it would be uncontroversial to say that Mathew O'Connor is a Queer Catholic. For him, man's bargain with himself, the 'credit' he accords to his own will, using the biological body, or the imaginary unity of that body, as security, enables the traumatic excess of the subject over itself to remain within the ordered, productive sphere of Restricted Economy, and God, rather than standing for the Real becomes the God of the contract, of the invisible hand guiding the fundamental beneficence of the market.

We might also assume that such a 'Man's death' would also be Wendell's lot, given his determination throughout the novel to submit to no codes but those he writes and continually rewrites for himself. For example, in the chapter 'Wendel Discusses Himself' he boasted that 'I name myself as I find myself, and, accordingly, I name myself as I find myself. What I would be, that I say I am, and thus, eventually, I

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<sup>426</sup>Harvey, p. 65.

<sup>427</sup>Harvey, p. 79.

become.<sup>428</sup> And he links this capacity for self-fashioning, becoming, multiplying, experimenting, to the practice of polygamy, ‘if [...] his character has been moulded by a multitude of beds, why a multitude of persons he will be, better as a father, better as a citizen, and better as a debtor’.<sup>429</sup>

Given Wendell's determination to become the Ur-Father for a new doctrine, a new aesthetic, even a new race, it is fairly surprising that Wendell tells O'Connor that he does not think his death will be that of a Man, “‘I,” said Wendell simply, “should die like a child, most terribly frightened.”<sup>430</sup>

Perhaps we must read this as a direct consequence of Wendell's sudden insecurity in the wake of the birth of Molly's *radically* illegitimate child. Certainly, Wendell confesses to O'Connor that the episode has left him with

“[...] for the first time, this taste of jealousy that you spoke of. Is God the only thing man may be sure of?”

“When he cannot be sure of himself,” said the doctor, “that's what he is there for.”

“I,” said Wendell humbly, “have never before had to believe. Perhaps that accounts for my lack of faith.”<sup>431</sup>

In O'Connor's view, which Wendell seems ready to accept (a rare case of dialogue in the text wherein he does not seek to convert his interlocutor), one comes to believe in God as an antidote to the awful realisation that, as Molly put it ‘one man's thoughts [seminal as they may be] are not worth much more than another's’.<sup>432</sup> Making paternity little more than a metaphor from which credit has been withdrawn, providing little security against the brutal symbolic determinations of Man as ‘citizen’ and ‘debtor’. If Wendell is unable to remain in the position of the Man, knowing that there is not ‘man’ as O'Connor's asymmetric system has it, but discontinuous ‘men’, he cannot be the symbolic head of the multitude but one point among many. Faced with this knowledge he seems to need the man's God in a way he has not hitherto, yet he says he will die as a child dies; which according to O'Connor means dying without (the

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<sup>428</sup>Ryder, pp. 164-165.

<sup>429</sup>R, p. 167.

<sup>430</sup>R, p. 204.

<sup>431</sup>R, p. 201.

<sup>432</sup>R, p. 199.

Protestant) God or the Father, with neither the certainty that the extinction of one's being is an act freely willed, nor that one's life at completion will be amortised and memorialised as an event in an enduring economy.

As for the dead child, it is a recurring image in Barnes' novel, which seems to gesture to the experience and/or symbolisation of total loss, what Derrida followed Barthes in calling 'total, *undialectical death* – so that what is mourned is a singularity that exceeds any proper name.<sup>433</sup> Early on in the novel, one of Wendell's children seems to have been stillborn, or to have passed shortly after parturition, but this death features more as a rupture than as an event within the narrative for which an adequate symbolic expression could subsequently be found: the text only intimates this death through a prism of narrative forms – surrealist dream sequence, lullaby, mock-Biblical exegesis – through which we are constantly thwarted in our attempts to secure a consistent figure of this child, from one chapter to the next the child's sex, race and (therefore) paternity are absurdly ambiguous and sometimes simply contradictory; the effect is unnerving, less shocking than numbing, since we cannot form a clear image of the tragedy which the text figures waywardly in chapters 19-22 and subsequently makes no direct allusions towards. We could say that Barnes has created a narrative which actually mirrors the dissociated state of trauma, but that would be one more attempt to specify and contain its effects. O'Connor had delivered that baby that died and subsequently the baby that lives without the proper name of a Father, and we may assume that Wendell's claim that he will die like a child is an identificatory reference to one or both of the children brought to term by the doctor. When O'Connor makes explicit the horrible significance of a child's death, i.e. that there is literally no significance, Wendell's sudden fury at the doctor's linguistic games gives way to a momentary understanding of the doctor's untimely and thoroughgoing Catholic faith.

“Then I have you!” exclaimed Wendell, rising up. “If there is neither God nor father for the child, where then is your justice?”

Said the doctor in a low voice, plucking at the grass, “It lies in that grave with that infant.”

“Why” cried Wendell, exasperated, “do you, of the Catholic faith, juggle so with words? Justice is a terrible, an irrefutable, and a colossal thing.”

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<sup>433</sup>Derrida, *Mourning*, p.17. My italics.

“Well?” said the doctor, and raised his eyes and looked at him.

“Oh,” answered Wendell, for a moment bereft of anger<sup>434</sup>

Note the third nomination, proper to the child's death: not the universal ('man'), nor the multiple or exemplary ('women', 'a woman'), but the deictically singular: 'that infant', 'that grave'. Also the *other than*, not of 'this' system but 'that'. The infant, then, prior to its entry into the God-given linguistic order, appears to be being itself, Being without Existence, the inassimilable *that*-ness of the brute reality of life. As such the child figures the crypt of justice – paradoxically inscribing the death of our fantasies of redemption and an assurance that justice ex-ists in the world, encrypted, secured. What kind of justice is this that O'Connor gestures towards, but is only able to communicate to Wendell in the moment when his silence gaze 'bereaves' Wendell of his anger?

For a possible if unsatisfactory answer we turn the pages of Barnes' text one more and move to the next chapter, and his tryst with Lady Bridesleep, the third, final and most shattering of Wendell's edifying encounters before his total renunciation of the long-held ambition to be Father to All and even of his legal compact to be father to his own officially recognised family.

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Collectively, Lady Bridesleep, O'Connor and Molly Dance discredit Wendell's status as an outlaw to bourgeois modernity and as the sovereign over his own (unbounded) household. Molly's excessive (hetero)sexuality, paradoxically combined with her strict imposition of market discipline and reifying insistence on the formal, exchangeable equivalence of the male generative organ, deconstruct and devalue the legitimacy of Wendell's faith in his own reproductive agency. O'Connor's homily, mete of a Queer Catholicism, which, with excessive ambition, we attempted to identify as an untimely (perhaps baroque) and radically materialist response to the destruction of abstract value in the money markets and the concomitant tendency of investors to revert to a 'Catholic' investment in physical embodiments of value and which, thus materialised, become sites where anxiety about the radical insubstantiality of exchange value is

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<sup>434</sup>R, p. 204.

available to experience with a blazing, almost unbearable directness. We have further suggested a certain connection between this experience, which O'Connor calls the Child's Death and Wendell readily believes will be his fate, and the encounter with the Lacanian death drive as the imaginary and symbolic dimensions of the self break apart leaving only the senseless, inhuman persistence of language beyond the biological death of the subject; arguably O'Connor's discourse merely brings into speech that unnameable anxiety of which Wendell displays symptoms at the start of the chapter as he stumblingly asks O'Connor to identify the paternity of Molly's baby, already indicating that Wendell is stripped of the possibility of the Man's Death, the purely symbolic bargain with one's self ensuring that biological death does not result in total dissolution.

Finally, then, we come to the elderly Lady Bridesleep's night with Wendell. She fully expects this to be her final affair. Unknown to himself, Wendell is going to participate in what O'Connor called Women's Death, since it leaves him not uncertain of having fathered any child (as with Molly), but fully cognisant that they have produced 'No Child' together. This would be adequate to O'Connor's definition of the Woman's Death,

With a woman, take what you like, the virgin in her nightshift, the mother in her maternity gown, the actress in her beaded buskins and ruff, the queen in her leg-o'-mutton sleeves, the peasant girl among her wheat, the shop girl among her percales, the market harridan in her filth and degradation, the whore in the stews, one and all commit in that act [of suicide], their body to death's custom, neither making bargain nor asking for precepts and points of departure, nor platforms for philosophy, because women know that there is God only, but man knows there is God and the father.<sup>435</sup>

We observe the fetishistic exemplarity of this field of femininity: from the virtue of the virgin to the abjection of the whore, noting that all of the approved female roles (virgin, mother, queen) are identified metonymically with a certain decorative or modesty-concealing costume, whereas the monstrosly commercial femininity of market harridan and whore are metaphorically equivalent to an abstract disseminatory

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<sup>435</sup>R, p. 204.

quality of depravity ('degradation', 'stews'); that the shop girl stands at the undecidable boundary of the two groups (her 'percales' possibly signifying the fabric of her dress, but equally evoking the temptations of luxurious bedsheets), while only the peasant girl is marked unambiguously in her unalienated relation to the product of her labour. All parties achieve formal equivalence in the moment of symbolic death, 'committing their body to death's custom', and press no claims for their own agency.

If the death of a Man includes God and the Father, and the child's death represents a pure absence of both, the woman's death could be called Queerest, since it breaks the equivalence between God and Father, establishing the former as it erases the latter. O'Connor believes of himself, or desires that, 'I should die like a woman.' We think again, irresistibly, of the shift from the Kantian to the Hegelian sublime object (of ideology): 'the negative experience of the Thing must change into the experience of the Thing-in-itself as radical negativity.'<sup>436</sup> The sublime object gives us knowledge of God (the transcendent Thing-in-Itself) but not the Father, since the Thing, as radical negativity, cannot provide 'platforms for philosophy', for 'bargain[s]', or 'precepts and points of departure' by which the transmission of patriarchal power can be guaranteed.

Barnes informs us that Wendell has 'placed a date upon his lying with [Lady Bridesleep], as good debtors give day for paying their bills.'<sup>437</sup> This simile gives further notice that Wendell, for all his radicalism, has not understood the nature of capitalist modernity in his reconfiguration of Fatherhood; for the circulation of/as capital relies on a complex structure of bargains and points of departure, ensuring that the gap between the promise to pay and the total resolution of debt is never closed – if all debts are paid, the symbolic collapses! Sure enough, Wendell finds he is soon 'divested of all but an argument', and that argument is simply this:

It is necessary that I should boast to you a little [...] I, my love, am to be Father to All Things. For this was I created, and to this will I cleave. Now this is the Race that shall be called Ryder [...] never one bourgeois or like to other men as we now know them, but at the fertile pitch of genius. For this was I created, and to this will I cleave.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>436</sup>*Sublime Object*, p. 233.

<sup>437</sup>*R*, p. 210.

<sup>438</sup>*R*, p.210.

In settling his debts, divesting himself of all capital but his own (God-given) power of language, Wendell positions himself for a last rhetorical last stand against bourgeois notions of property and propriety. Having (and hopefully needing) no assets but the mystical ‘creative’ force of genius, Wendell is arguably making one final attempt to commit a Manly suicide, he ‘cleave[s]’ to the idea that he will be capable of immortalising himself solely by his own ‘might and will’<sup>439</sup>, ‘bedding in all beds, and in bedding, sow[ing] no seed of doubt’.<sup>440</sup>

Wendell is elated by his boast; he wakes in the morning ‘crowing like a cock and most extraordinarily pleased.’<sup>441</sup> Presumably he is delighted by his sexual performance also, but Barnes gives no direct reference to their intercourse, beyond an elliptical suggestion of nudity (as well as destitution) in the line ‘By ten [Wendell] was divested of all but an argument’, and the prim allusion to/foreclosure of unmentionably dirty acts at the conclusion of Wendell's boasting, ‘and there was no more talk’ – at once a hypocritically bourgeois euphemism and, in this context, a quietly terrifying mark of signification's collapse.

When the triumphant Wendell asks, with an innocence that we might well call childlike, ‘What shall we call him?’, Lady Bridesleep's response shows that Wendell's fear of sowing ‘seed[s] of doubt’, while applicable to his trading relationship with Molly, is irrelevant here. The post-menopausal Lady represents the moment where the smooth flow of capital comes to an end, when rather than generation of doubtful origins, Wendell is faced with a determinate figure of non-reproduction.

“What shall we call him?” inquired Wendell with huge pride.

“Nothing and Never,” said Lady Terence sweetly. “He shall accomplish all the others leave undone. You need No Child also, my good man, all fathers have one. On him you shall hang that part of your ambition too heavy for mortal.” [...]

Wendell opened his mouth, but no sound came.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>439</sup>R, p.211.

<sup>440</sup>R, p.211.

<sup>441</sup>R, p.211.

<sup>442</sup>R, p. 211.

Whether Wendell stands allegorically here, for the systemic failure of a sovereign nation state, built upon the faultlines of capitalist creative destruction, or for abjected individuals – immigrant, gender-queer, disabled, racially other – who find themselves outside the circle of the 'universal' capitalist subject, discovering that freedom, democracy, and opportunity are contingent upon having something to invest... how could we decide this? Which reading would be more offensive?



As Benjamin realised, the allegorical text is intimately connected to the commodity form in that 'the meaning can be replaced for another at any time [...] Thus in the commodity the allegorist is in his element.'<sup>443</sup> The determinate plurality, the libidinal unreadability of Barnes' narrative is resistant therefore to what Barthes called the 'parsimonious plural'<sup>444</sup> of allegorical signification; to engage with her writing we require a hermeneutic distinct from both the 'certainty' of Wendell's arguments *and* the refusal of all systematic knowledge in Molly's digressions (which, contrasted to the strict rigor of her professional role as dog breeder, is revealed as pure ideology). On the one hand it does not legitimate any and all interpretations, indeed it short circuits almost every definitive statement we might make about meaning, allowing us rather to see the structural limits and the narcissistic fantasies to which even the mostly 'writerly' reader must succumb. It opens onto a separate economy of meaning, elucidated by O'Connor and practiced by Lady Bridesleep, one which we have referred to variously as the Hegelian Sublime and the General Economy (both ideas, in Žižek and Derrida, having to do with a certain utopian (im)possibility for post-capitalist sovereignty). In its critical and its utopian reflexes the text retains an ethical commitment to understand the codeterminations of symbolic credit and sexed agency, the relation of philosophical outlook to structural position within a network of productive relations.

My claim is that Wendell represents a Father who is disappointing in as much as he does indeed seek to 'master' his world as a sovereign individual; at a transitional moment in the shift from manhood to masculinity, and from pioneering liberal

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<sup>443</sup>Walter Benjamin, quoted by Miranda Joseph, Roundtable, p. 135.

<sup>444</sup>Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 86.

individuals to regulated corporate capitalist subjects, Wendell has tried to exist as an outlaw (from Church and King and capital and state) by refusing the bourgeois ethic of financial prudence, orderly productivity, and sexual reproduction within the bounds of monogamy, without realising that in stepping beyond the realm of regulated production he accedes to a dimension which he cannot confer positive social form upon by 'nam[ing] all things' 'Ryder'. The refusal of a libidinal economy of regulated productivity collapses into a psychotically unmediated encounter with reality, with 'Nothing and Never', the 'No Child [which] all fathers have'. This embodied lack, an empty place and an exception which is the condition of possibility for any symbolisation of totality, might recall Lacan, but Barnes' formal slipperiness makes the noble Lacanian aspiration of 'going through the fantasy' to the real kernel of enjoyment unrealisable. The text resists Fathers, but is animated by a profound and inescapable investment in them.

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Unable to take account of this Nothing within the restricted economy of his All and Everything, Wendell inevitably finds himself split by his final encounter with the state authorities: to deflect the accusation of polygamy he has to invent the story of an itinerant salesman to convince the State that he is not Father to All, but merely sheltering the wife and children of this commercial traveller. When the curtain has come down on his performance of respectability Wendell appears to have duped the scrutinizing gaze of the authorities, but we soon hear that 'the law does not believe [him]'.<sup>445</sup> Ironically, his imagination ceases to fool the Law at the point where he becomes invested in his own fantasy, for 'he so well liked his own story that it pained him greatly that it was a fabrication.'<sup>446</sup>

At the novel's close, he wanders lost amid the senseless mass of reality which he would have made 'common to the human' by his 'might and will',<sup>447</sup>

[E]verything and its shape became clear in the dark, by tens and tens they ranged [...] closing about him nearer, and swinging out wide and from him far,

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<sup>445</sup>R, p. 238.

<sup>446</sup>R, p. 220.

<sup>447</sup>R, p. 210, p. 211.

and came in near and near, and as a wave, closed over him, and he drowned,  
and arose while he yet might go.

And whom should he disappoint?<sup>448</sup>

Torn by an insupportable identification with a nomadic capitalist whom he had created to appease the demands of the state, and whose state of non-being he both fears and desires, Wendell Ryder's 'disappointing' fate presents, for us, the peculiar example of a Father caught between the manly sovereignty of the pioneer and the masculinity of market rationality: part *pater familias*, part market nomad.

Approaching Barnes' novel with a Queer Eye for the Ideological State Apparatus and a dialectical understanding of the overdetermined relations between sexuality and economy, we welcomed Wendell back from his fluid grave amid 'everything and its shape', wishing to believe that Barnes' novel might be read as a Queerly decommodified *bildungsroman* for the unwilling Fathers and Sovereigns of today's leftist intelligentsia, in the light of recent stirrings of active, organised dissent on university campuses, after many years in which pseudo-transgressive critical rhetoric has accompanied total formal acquiescence to the remodelling of campus life as bureaucracy-corporation. It seems vital that anti-bourgeois thinkers give up the pyrrhic security of principled critiques written proudly from the side-lines. If we are to avoid searching for new masters, Queer Fathers (of all sexes, ages and colours) must learn to fail again, fail better than Wendell did. In the next and final chapter a fatherly figure that might frustrate our investments more resourcefully will be our object –

Arise, while we might yet go!

Whom shall *we* disappoint?...

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<sup>448</sup>R, p. 242.



## **Chapter 4 – After the break, ‘Am I my father’?**

No longer just about unfathering family and literature as *Ryder* was, *The Antiphon* paradoxically *incorporates disintegration*.

(Daniela Caselli, *Improper Modernism*, p.255. My italics.)

AUGUSTA: [...] how do you understand it,

No son of mine has been so favoured

That he died in war?

JACK: In spite of progress, and free-enterprise?

AUGUSTA: In spite of everything.

[...]

JACK [*To Augusta, in a loud whisper*]: Not so much the bravery is welcome,

As the fortunate removal of the body?

(Djuna Barnes, *The Antiphon*, in *The Selected Works of Djuna Barnes* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1962), II. pp. 77-224 (pp. 135-36).)

### **1. The objective correlative and the ‘loud whisper’ of the patriarchal corpus**

In spite of progress and free enterprise, in spite of everything, the *misfortunes* of a substantial body must be entered in the ledger: on the Left, among the debits. In this, the final chapter, we concede to the common sense of linear accounting, so as to declare a profit on Barnes’ last fully-formed (if not ‘well made’) creative accomplishment, *The Antiphon*. We assert our stake in Barnes’ enterprise in and as an

apparently corporeal<sup>449</sup> holding, thereby consolidating a residual cluster of assets and liabilities derivable (by convention, at least) from senescent and intestate manifestations of the paternal substance: revolution and continuity, inheritance and dispossession, disintegration and reparation, and above all (for me, at least) the felt inevitability and the inevitable feeling of loss.

I present an account of Barnes' play which unjustifiably appropriates Caselli's insight that its structure (narrative, figurative, and scenographic) incorporates (gives body to, simultaneously denying and identifying with) the very movement and motive force of splitting, destroying, breaking apart. From this first theft I forge an illegitimate claim that such incorporation of disintegration might be read as, in *The Antiphon's* case at least, a specifically 'paternal' embodiment. To make matters worse, I shall conclude by invoking the work of (post!) Jungian theorist, analyst and activist Andrew Samuels, to imagine that *The Antiphon's* 'paternal' incorporation has an ambiguous erotic/aggressive charge, which is no less capable of passionate, strategically nimble political engagement, than it is of 'authoritarianism, the psychopathology of the patriarchal, heterosexual family unit, and the (sexual) violence of Nazism'<sup>450</sup>. Along the way I will be unnecessarily rude about Wendy Brown, among others.

A verse play in three acts, bearing oft-remarked thematic and formal similarities with the canonical Jacobean revenge tragedies (Kyd, Shakespeare, Middleton, and co.), almost wholly steeped in the lexis and syntax of the early modern period, Barnes' text nevertheless positions itself in counterpoint to dramatic and cultural trends of a late modernity in which corporate capitalism was widely thought to have cut the head off the patriarch. As Alex Goody observes, the play's 'interrogation of Jacobean revenge tragedy, particularly its violent mourning of the loss of male power', can be understood as antiphonal within the context of the post-

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<sup>449</sup> At root, the substance of the body would seem to be its appearance. "Latin *corporeus* 'of the nature of the body' (living or dead), from PIE *\*kwrpes*, from root *\*kwrep-* 'body, form, appearance,' probably from a verbal root meaning 'to appear'". *Online Etymology Dictionary* <[www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=corporeal](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=corporeal)>.

<sup>450</sup> Erin Carlston on the thematic concerns of *The Antiphon*, in *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 84.

war culture industry, and therefore as an attempt to ‘estrangle her audience from the familiarity of popular cultural violence’.<sup>451</sup>

In the year of *The Antiphon*’s first publication, 1958, Stuart Hall wrote of the erosion in the popular base of socialist resistance to the free market, and the part played in this by legal, institutional, and procedural changes which resulted in decathexis of the traditional objects of proletarian rage (e.g. industrialists or financiers) and spectralised incorporation of the fluid social relation known as capital into the supposed oblativity of (that legal fiction) the ‘responsible’ Corporation:

With the growth of the joint stock firm or corporation, the whole nature of private property has been revolutionised. It can no longer be identified or personalised in the shape of the single industrial magnate, the ‘robber baron’ or even the entrepreneur family. This does not mean to say that there are no rich men left. But their riches—their pieces of property—are held largely in the form of pieces of *corporate property*, shares in the anonymous, complex, modern industrial firms which spawn their way across the face of modern business. “Property” has gone underground, it has been institutionalised and incorporated, vested nominally in the person of an abstract company or firm. The maximization of profit has passed from the personal responsibility of the businessman or financier, and is now established as the institutional motive of the firm. [...] many young men, drawn into the lower ranks of management, feel that part of the responsibility, at least, is theirs: they ‘discover’ a responsibility to the firm itself, and, eventually, are drawn into the whole ideology of big corporation business.<sup>452</sup>

*The Antiphon*, as our opening quotation perhaps hints, refuses as it confirms this post-war conjuration of the corporate body. Set somewhere in the south east of England, in the fictional parish of Beewick, during first months of ‘Phoney War’ of late 1939, its

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<sup>451</sup> Alex Goody, “‘High and Aloof’: Verse, Violence, and the Audience in Djuna Barnes’ *The Antiphon*”, *Modern Drama*, 57:3 (2014) 339-63 (p. 348). See also Caselli, pp. 236-38, on the influence on Barnes of contemporary critics of theatrical Realism – Fluchère, Knight, Kerr et al – and of the play’s self-conscious *contra tempus* with current dramatic conventions.

<sup>452</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘A Sense of Classlessness’, *Universities and Left Review*, 5 (Autumn 1958), 26-32 (p.27).

stage acquires the tumbled form of Burley Hall: decaying country home, formerly a college of Chancery Priests, and for the last several centuries the ancestral seat of the Burley family, until ‘free-thinking’ American Titus Hobbs (now deceased) married into their ranks and, through a mixture of financial profligacy, religious and social heresy, and extra-marital breeding, caused them to be “‘opinioned” out of Beewick | consequent of all his proclamations – ’,

JACK: Free-love –

DUDLEY: Free-lunch –

ELISHA: Free everything.<sup>453</sup>

The familial resemblance between Titus and Wendell, *Ryder*’s picaresque protagonist, is obvious. But unlike Barnes’ earlier novel, the *ex post facto* time-frame of the drama makes for a playful fugue of traumatic returns, competing testimonies, impossible mourning, climactic violence, and the *apparently indifferent* denouement. Titus is long dead, while the surviving members of the family consist of two generations (a mother and uncle, three brothers and a daughter), but no-one under fifty, no heirs to continue the family line, and neither money nor social capital to reinvest – all gloriously wasted by Titus. ‘What shall they inherit now? | I’ve told them all the silver spoons are swallowed,’<sup>454</sup> frets Augusta, mother, widow and octogenarian relic of the English landed gentry.

Moments prior to the conspicuously final curtain, Augusta kills herself and her Bohemian daughter Miranda, this being an act of displaced revenge against the two eldest sons, Dudley and Elisha. We learn early in Act 1 that Dudley, the elder and dominant brother ‘*very much the executive, heavily set*’, is a manufacturer of clocks – signalling that the politico-economic divisions and definitions of the ‘lichen bridled face of time’<sup>455</sup> (productive, progressive, eschatological, revolutionary) will be a key site of contest throughout the belated action of the drama, amplifying its already troublesome formal and intertextual temporalities. Both ideologues of the free market (‘Look here, I say stand on your own two feet./ Down with sentiment, and up, by God,

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<sup>453</sup> A, II., p. 129.

<sup>454</sup> A, II., p. 118.

<sup>455</sup> A, II., p. 84.

with trade!<sup>456</sup>), the two eldest brothers deny themselves any tender feelings towards Miranda, she being ('[p]lainly out of patron and money.'<sup>457</sup>). They will have spent the first two acts tormenting, wearing down and fomenting hostility between the women, while cursing equities squandered by their father which should have been theirs, and murmuring in ominous asides about deadly plots to destabilise, dispossess and dispose of mother and sister so such family fortune as remains should pass to them ('Swing in my stability, Elisha. | The ground they stand on, let's uncover it, | Let's pull their shadows out from under them; | Let's get them over!'<sup>458</sup>). In the final act – the antiphonal confrontation between the mother and daughter ending in their deaths – Dudley and Elisha are a significant absence on the stage until, in the awful final minutes of the drama, the 'derisive'<sup>459</sup> Fordist sound effect of their car motor stands in for their off-stage departure. It signals the moment they take their free-enterprise and progress elsewhere, abandoning the two women to establish a meaningful existence after the market has dispensed with them as unprofitable stock, or else (as the drama in fact plays out) to consummate the final liquidation of the family.

In counterpoint to his brothers, it is the youngest son Jeremy who has called the family together to instigate a *collective* reckoning with their past, above all their complicity in the rape of Miranda at age fifteen (by a neighbour, but at the behest of Titus). To execute his plan, Jeremy arrives at Burley Hall alongside Miranda in a comically transparent disguise. As 'Jack Blow', coachman and strolling player, Jeremy metatextually inhabits the role of Shakespearean fool; somewhat after the manner of *Lear's* Edgar/Poor Tom or the feigned madness of *Hamlet's* tormented prince, he assumes the role of the true noble who knows that to reveal the truth and restore the natural order of the family he must inhabit another *dramatis persona* which can 'show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure'.<sup>460</sup>

In distinction from Edgar and young Hamlet, Jeremy does not see in his father a paragon against which the 'form and pressure' of the age ought to be rated. Consequently, 'Jack' blows his disguise every time Titus is mentioned, finding himself

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<sup>456</sup> Dudley, A, II., p. 134.

<sup>457</sup> Elisha, A, I., p. 101.

<sup>458</sup> A, I., p. 101.

<sup>459</sup> A, III., p. 222.

<sup>460</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. G.R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). III. 2. 21-23.

compelled to twist the knife into the dead man's reputation. For example,

BURLEY: [...] [*To the sons*] How do you see your father?

JACK: [*Off guard*] That old Ram! Cock-pit Bully Boy!

AUGUSTA: Our coachman is an orator!

JACK: [*Bowing*] At your service, madame.<sup>461</sup>

Furthermore, Jeremy/Jack's scheme retains but reifies the classic device of the revenge tragedy's central act, the play within a play which (in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and, most famously, in *Hamlet*) the protagonist manipulates to lend symbolic form to and thereby expose the guilt of the villain, on whom it imposes the role of audience. Here Jeremy brings on stage a doll's house (clashing Ibsen against the Elizabethans) peopled with effigies of the family members representing the scene of Miranda's rape. Instead of live actors performing an action which allegorises an unspeakable 'real' event, the 'real' is here reduced to a tableau of inanimate models.

Yet that tableau is endowed with vivid substance by the incestuously generative fetishism of Jeremy's pledge to his mother as she flings herself desperately over his construction; 'The eye-baby now you're pregnant with | You'll carry in your iris to the grave.'<sup>462</sup> Through his aggressive and sexualised violation of the mother's gaze, Jeremy creates himself in the semblance of his father's guilt. Here in this specular double ledger of incestuous identity, Jeremy is *both* tyrannical father and ill-omened child: in the 'eye-baby' he forces upon his mother, an audience must hear also an 'I-baby'. We shall see later that when Barnes' play references Oedipus directly it is to illustrate the specularity of the interior self, and moreover the act of gouging out the / $\Delta$ /.

Conversely, in those final moments of the play, when Jeremy finally walks the stage divested of his alter ego, drawn out of the wings by the deaths of Augusta and Miranda, he appears to appear unaffected by the tragic denouement of plot he set in motion. The dramatic irony of his final apparent indifference is self-evident (even if we will later have to debate the constructions we place upon the bare bones of this

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<sup>461</sup> A, II., p. 151.

<sup>462</sup> A, II., p. 185.

evidence): in character as Jack, it is Jeremy's self-apparent inability to appear indifferent that repeatedly undermines the verisimilitude that *he* must presumably intend.

We recall here that the timeframe of the play is presented as a fragment of post-history where 'everything's a little out of context',<sup>463</sup> and in which the personal-familial and the allegorico-political are as indissoluble as irreducible one into the other. We know the lost object, Titus Hobbs, (like Wendell Ryder, like Barnes' known descriptions of her own father) was a comic figure of idiot savant *oikonomos* ('manager' or 'treasurer', from the Greek *oiko-* 'house', *-nomos* 'rule, law'). We know that, despite wanting to redesign the world according to his own 'Grand Conception',<sup>464</sup> he has left only a trail of financial ineptitude, hollow rhetoric and picaresque sexual conquests. While 'self-appointed', he was far from self-sufficient, only able to fund his orgiastic excesses with the dwindling wealth of his wife's family. Titus is, *in absentia*, far more directly implicated in the sexual abuse of his daughter, Miranda, than was *Ryder's* protagonist. Seemingly he bartered her virginity to a middle-aged neighbour when she was fifteen: an event which biographers and critics generally agree has some correlative in Barnes' own adolescence.

In recent decades, critical debates have shifted from direct focus on the play's treatment of patriarchal sexual violence (de Salvo's much-cited and much criticised essay represents the play's 'antiphony' as an incest survivor's counter-narrative<sup>465</sup>, but most recent work broadly concurs with Taylor that the work's 'narrative complexity [is] irreducible to a straightforward victim's confession.'), towards more oblique explorations of this theme, mediated through questions about the position and role of its audience, and the potential of the play in performance. Altman asserted that the play's inclusion of a gallery within the proscenium arch, across which anonymous travellers wonder throughout, points to an essentially thematic reason for Barnes' choice of the theatrical medium, in that it allows her to specularise the 'deceptions and manipulations' of the family. Similarly, Taylor emphasises the importance of the audience as witness to a ritualised performance, but repudiates Altman's 'anti-

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<sup>463</sup> Elisha to Dudley, *A, I.*, p. 98.

<sup>464</sup> Dudley to Miranda, *A, II.*, p. 176.

<sup>465</sup> See Louise de Salvo, "'To Make Her Mutton at Sixteen": Rape, Incest and Child Abuse in *The Antiphon*', in *Silence and Power: A Revaluation of Djuna Barnes*, ed. Mary Lynne Broe (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: SIU Press, 1991), pp. 300-339.

theatrical' conflation of 'performance' with 'deception', and draws on contemporary work on performativity within Trauma Studies to explore the 'layered and complex responsibilities of a witness'<sup>466</sup> in co-establishing the 'value of the ritualised performance of affect'<sup>467</sup>. Elsewhere, Salvato has argued for the play as an (un)closet(ed) drama whose ambivalent 'resistance to theatricality'<sup>468</sup> is nonetheless linked to a complex commitment to the queer potential of the closet text in performance, whereas Goody's recent paper, based on an ongoing practice research project, seeks to settle in the affirmative the underlying question of whether *The Antiphon* is meant or fitted to be staged at all, rather than to be read privately as 'closet drama', or recited publicly, perhaps even, as Edwin Muir suggested, as a play for voices ideally suited for radio. Goody's conclusion is that *The Antiphon* is a critically-aware *continuation* of the dramaturgical tradition which it adopts; 'it is a drama that self-consciously stages actions and revelations and interrogates the dynamics that characterize both Renaissance and twentieth-century drama'.<sup>469</sup> Closer to Salvato on this issue, Caselli refuses the idea that the text can be invoked to *settle* this debate in either direction: its distinction lies in its uncanny indistinction – 'Queering the mutual exclusion [of closet drama or theatrical performance] [...] produces its inopportune quality, its savage nobility, and its necessary illegibility'.<sup>470</sup> Nevertheless, an audience/reader must take its bearings, and make what sense it can out of the inconsistent reconstruction of the pre-diegetic body of the narrative.

For the catastrophic remains of Titus Hobbs pass down to us in so far as they are claimed, contested, repressed, repudiated, questioned, attacked and revalued in assorted comments by the children and widow. They are also, as I shall argue further, objectified in the extravagant but worn-down disarray of the *mise en scène*, and in a narrative structure which Caselli cogently (but, for me, inexactly) describes as a 'final and fatal circularity'. She explains: 'the first act refuses to begin, the second act is retrospectively qualified as an end, and in the third act Jack, the deviser of the reunion, walks out with "what appears to be indifference"'.<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> Julie Taylor, *Djuna Barnes and Affective Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 69.

<sup>467</sup> Taylor, p.68

<sup>468</sup> Nick Salvato, *Uncloseting Drama: American Modernism and Queer Performance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 178.

<sup>469</sup> Goody, pp. 358-359.

<sup>470</sup> Caselli, p. 222.

<sup>471</sup> Caselli, p. 226.

I believe the view that this structure embodies a ‘final’ and ‘doomed attempt at undoing time’ calibrated to an inescapable stasis in which ‘birth [...] coincides with death’, perhaps understates the understated importance of the qualification that Jack’s exeunt, and the fall of the *Curtain* it announces, should ‘appear’ to have given up. The gap between ‘being’ and ‘appearing’ is not that between ‘truth’ and ‘falsity’ – whereby Jack’s ‘apparent’ indifference would signify its opposite; instead the persistence of *appearing* indicates the excess of ‘play’ itself *over* a closed circle of determinate form. If ‘his indifference at the end is apparent, potentially another form of acting, yet another form of digressing’,<sup>472</sup> it is simultaneously a *fixed point* of impossible, retrospective im-mediation between the statements that Jeremy is ‘the image of papa’<sup>473</sup> (whom no-one on stage is willing or able to recognise as such) and ‘Jeremy is Jeremy’.<sup>474</sup>

In this regard, Caselli perhaps does not follow through her above-quoted observation that the play ‘paradoxically incorporates disintegration’<sup>475</sup>, nor her implicit recognition that the third act disallows any schema as neat as a final circle; ‘At the beginning of Act III, Augusta claims “let us play, the epilogue is over”, implying that the first two acts were an ending rather than a beginning, and thus *casting doubts on the status of this last section*.’<sup>476</sup>

After the ‘epilogue’, instead of a circular movement returning to its starting point, cancelling the haphazard progress of desire, sense and form, we have an ambiguous(ly) final act – in which mother and daughter share the stage alone – brought forth as an inassimilable and unpredictable offshoot of the very objectification of total breakdown which came in Acts I and II.

The ever-evolving enigma of *The Antiphon* as literary or theatrical (non)event – what it *might* have meant and what effect it *could* have had – has always been a particularly contentious legacy for those few critics who have wanted to take it up at all. From the divergent, often internally-conflicted responses of the play’s first readers – notably, T.S. Eliot, who feared an uncomprehending audience would find it

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<sup>472</sup> Caselli, p. 238.

<sup>473</sup> Dudley, A, II., quoted Caselli, p. 238.

<sup>474</sup> Augusta, A, II., quoted Caselli, p. 238.

<sup>475</sup> Caselli, p. 226.

<sup>476</sup> Caselli, p.226. My italics.

‘tedious’<sup>477</sup> but also wrote to Barnes that in the final act ‘language disintegrates into some sort of primitive constituents of violent energy’,<sup>478</sup> and the reviewer in *Die Welt* who memorably quipped that it ‘will not fall into oblivion, it was written for oblivion’<sup>479</sup> – to the amicable disaccord between Caselli, whose queer transvaluation of Eliot’s critique celebrates the play as ‘the moment when drama collapses [...] explor[ing] the potential transitive exchange between a failed play and the turning of fatal failure into drama’,<sup>480</sup> and Goody’s residual commitment (as I read her, anyway) to ‘recovery’ and ‘renaissance’ as privileged hermeneutic terms for understanding the imaginative reinvention of older literary materials in the play, and as the defined goals of a project to ‘acknowledge[e] Barnes as a *substantial, rather than occasional or failed*, dramatist and [to] recove[r] the importance of *The Antiphon* for twentieth-century drama.’<sup>481</sup> As throughout this thesis, I will try to maintain and leverage the dramatic tension between voices which desire and seek out imaginaries of reform, renewal and revolution – reading variously and tendentiously for what Barnes makes possible – and those (equally invested in Barnes’ corporate stock) who decry any attempt to redeem and domesticate her savage, improper and inconsolable offerings.

Grounds for contesting the legation: Whether and in what admixture the play evokes consolation, stimulation, despair and grief. Whether it can be apprehended as a *substantial* contribution to twentieth century stagecraft, and if so, on what terms its impact is understood; as traumatic rupture, for example? Granting this, whether such rupture be consequent upon penetration by the lupine fangs of the extra-cultural, or occasioned by implosive pressure wrought, strategically or accidentally, upon internal contradictions – pertinently, those between ‘realism’ and spectacle, entertainment and art, testifying and acting. Further, would such a rupture be recognisable as such? In order to be familiar to us *as* a break with tradition, it would have to have taken its place in a now hegemonic or counter-hegemonic understanding of drama. In other words, wouldn’t any text which we can identify as disintegrative only be so from a historical perspective from which the break turned out, reassuringly, to have been a bridge?

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<sup>477</sup> T.S. Eliot, unused blurb for *The Antiphon*, quoted in Philip Herring, *Djuna: The Life and Work of Djuna Barnes* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 276.

<sup>478</sup> T.S Eliot to Djuna Barnes, 19 December 1954, quoted in Herring, p. 273.

<sup>479</sup> *Die Welt*, June 1967, quoted in Herring, p. 277.

<sup>480</sup> Caselli, p. 235.

<sup>481</sup> Goody, p. 339. My italics.

Tyrus Miller, for example, has characterised Barnes, from the perspective of a culture which recognises itself as post-modern, as an intermediate figure of Late Modernism. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 1, this is the nub of Caselli's disagreement with Miller; by staking his reading upon 'a solid – if anguishing – historical dimension', he falls short of the true threat of Barnes' work, the 'crisis of critical mastery' which ensues once the critic entertains 'doubts about the legibility of such illegibility'.<sup>482</sup> Yet for even a 'crisis of critical mastery' to be identified as such, we necessarily extrapolate a transcendental viewpoint from which Barnes' texts can be seen to have remained inassimilable to conventional determinations of formal identity, integration, recognition, succession, and legacy. If we further maintain that artistic and cultural traditions are legible as such only so long as these categories continue to exclude their own lacunae (be they historical or structural), can we *de jure* speak in the name of the disintegrative power of experimental writing?

Should we not ask whether such a conception of 'illegitimate' writing has sense only within and, more saliently, *between* specified paradigms, emblematically between Modernism's shock of the new and the dominant bourgeois Realism of late nineteenth century novels and drama? Can Barnes' work remain *perpetually* legible as 'queer', as unwelcome, uninhabitable, unprofitable from the perspective of a transcendently normative subject, assured of their own critical mastery? 'Investing in Barnes' stock *has never been* financially sound',<sup>483</sup> and consequently Never Will Be? If so, the only remaining task would be to police the boundaries between the safely proper, and the sublimely improper. A conjuncture around which cultural conservatives and radical theorists are often happy to coordinate their border patrols.

Without doubting the assurance that Barnes cannot be securitised, I am more interested in the *heritability* rather than the *security* of Barnes' assets and liabilities. For *no-one* with any feel for theatre believes in the safety of Securities, in these days when the Fukuyaman 'end of history' seems as contrived as any *deus ex machina*. Whereas, to quote a text which is directing the stagecraft of my own reading,

If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have

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<sup>482</sup> Caselli, p. 10.

<sup>483</sup> Caselli, p. 12. My italics.

anything to inherit from it. We would be affected by it as by a cause – natural or genetic. One always inherits from a secret – which says, ‘read me, will you ever be able to do so?’<sup>484</sup>

As I begin to press my own claim upon Barnes’ play, founding it upon a reading strategy which professes to attempt repair and reparation towards, on behalf of, and as a paternal figure (without necessarily aligning itself with the methodologies or intentions of the ‘reparative turn’), my appeal necessarily involves quasi-naturalising identifications of figure, scenario, agency, plus conventional determinations of egress and equitable forms of redress, *as well as* the disruptive pressures of illegitimate and illegible discourses, silences and counter-discourses (all of which can only arise as the unsayable only in the beyond of these determinate forms).

## **2. The ‘mew’ of reparation**

How then shall we figure the drama of reparation itself? Of what has become known as the reparative turn in Theory, Wiegman (among others) points out that the post-Sedgwick reparative mode too often neglects the ‘less salvic implications’ of Melanie Klein’s original psychoanalytic framework:

[L]ittle of the work that cites Sedgwick’s use of the reparative reflects on the way that, in Klein, the paranoid position is not the sole scene in which the subject encounters anxiety and aggression; both the paranoid and the reparative positions are responses to the same environmental conditions of ambivalence, risk, and dependence.<sup>485</sup>

Klein relates the achievement of the ‘depressive position’ – a figurative vantage point at which the infant has developed a capacity to sustain an ambivalent, integrated relation to a cathected other (primordially, the mother), without, as in the paranoid-schizoid position, splitting off ‘good’ and ‘bad’ aspects of the psyche into discrete

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<sup>484</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1993), p. 18.

<sup>485</sup> Robyn Wiegman, ‘The times we’re in: Queer feminist criticism and the reparative “turn”’, *Feminist Theory*, 15:1 (2014), 4-25 (p. 17).

phantasy objects. It is easy to privilege the depressive position, and its attendant drive to reach out ‘reparatively’ towards an object which one had previously failed to recognise in its full selfhood, had indeed (blinded by the paranoid perspective) ‘misrecognised’ as wholly bad and attempted to destroy. The depressive position appears as a rather deflationary experience of revelation wherein the scales drop from one’s eyes, fetishes are lifted, phantasy dispelled, and one becomes fully one’s human self through recognition of the complex, fragile humanity of the other. Intra- and inter-psychoic tensions may not disappear, but one works at them reparatively to avoid damaging (the relation to) the other, and to achieve creative and caring solutions to conflict.

Complicating this cursory, but widely accepted, gloss on Klein, Wiegman’s argument recognises, in this shift from paranoid to reparative relating, a transformation as opposed to an amelioration of the demand which ego places upon object.

To read the negotiation at stake in the ‘anxiety-mitigating achievement’ of the reparative position less reparatively, we might say that the very desire to protect the mother – or any other object – is bound up in the drama of self-definition; to love her is to repair damaging versions of the self.<sup>486</sup>

Far from dispelling phantasy, the reparative mode must negotiate a no less fictive construction of self-consciousness, in which the other will not be attacked or idealised but is invested with certain enduring notions of underlying-identity-through-change. Though it is not the direction that Wiegman’s analysis takes, one possible consequence of misdescribing such a complexified dynamic of reciprocity in terms of a shift from (paranoid) illusion to (reparative) realism, is that the object – reimagined as *really* concretely there, and also therefore as a substance which can be conceptually held in mind when absent from the sensory field – takes on greater mutability, *and* an absolute indispensability.

That no action should threaten the viability of the object relation, is an ethical precept absent from paranoid functioning, in which the absolute loss of the object is not only entertained but repeatedly experienced. One could, speculatively, redescribe

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<sup>486</sup> Wiegman, p. 17.

Bataillean sovereignty (discussed above, chapter 2) as a *momentary* reversion to the paranoid-schizoid position; the destruction of one's sustaining relation to the world is actively embraced – but not as the climactic third act of a well-made phenomenological drama. No empire falls, no monarch's head hits the basket on cue. There is only the flickering sense of absurdity, of the nullity of one's worlds.

When such a sensation breaks the surface of consciousness, it risks enslaving itself all the more thoroughly if that moment of self-shattering is incorporated as a privileged critical position of (non-)mastery (see, for example, Lee Edelman's *Sinthomosexual*); the most the sovereign moment can do is to open a crack in the hegemonic notion of good object relations – into which space alternative imaginaries can be poured, counter-discourses cemented in, pointed, sustained.

I have said that I find Caselli's idea that *The Antiphon* 'incorporates disintegration' crucial to this negotiation of rupture and repair. To incorporate, to take inside the body, but also to give body to that which is by definition anti-corporate. To mourn loss itself, to become the lost object. Even to 'buy up' failure in general – and once we can speak of Disintegration Inc., the proprietorial rights to a determined legal body are at stake. Forced to use technical terms and culturally specific tropes to cover the very exceptions which other imaginary communities have generated, the threat and possibility are fully in play, fully apparent. Are the improper and unprofitable to be tamed, defused and hypocritically disseminated, or is the notion of assignable literary value itself going to break down? This brings us back to the art of dramaturgy – and to T.S. Eliot's Gold Standard of dramatic worth – as we ask if we can speak of an 'objective correlative' which would give form to the paranoiac breakdown of the intentional object?

As noted above, Caselli reads *The Antiphon's* appropriation of the verse forms, tropes and thematic preoccupations of Jacobean revenge tragedy against Modernism's 'residual nostalgic recuperation of the past'<sup>487</sup> (such as caused Eliot to laud both *Nightwood* and *The Antiphon* for their antique qualities, calling the latter 'the nearest thing written in our time, to the grimmer and grislier masterpieces of Jacobean tragedy'<sup>488</sup>). For her it neuters the queerness of Barnes' play if we identify in its figures

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<sup>487</sup>Caselli, p. 223.

<sup>488</sup>Eliot, quoted in Herring, p. 276.

of dislocation and distemper ‘an early modern conception of unnatural time to be redressed (in which, for instance, the chaos and confusion produced by the death of a sovereign will eventually be restored to order by the legitimate heir)’.<sup>489</sup> The non-sovereignty of the play would then lie in its queer angle, in the way it ‘moves across genres, across public and private, across present and past; it undoes property and propriety by questioning the strange relationality of the family’,<sup>490</sup> in sum ‘leav[ing] no moral certitude untainted and refus[ing] the reversed decorum implicit in the notion of subversion’.<sup>491</sup>

And in contrast to this reading, where the past is not a resource with which to revision a world, only to ‘undo’ any sense of the ‘familiar’, we have Goody arguing that to recreate Barnes’ motives for the anachronistic choice of a Jacobean dramatic mode and verse form we ought to assume her willingness to *invest* value in this structure. Indeed, she insists that Barnes’ aesthetic strategy cannot be understood merely as a parodic dislocation of Eliot’s paternalistic influence. Rather, ‘the form and strategies of this archetypal revenge tragedy provide Barnes with a version of an objective correlative, an established “formula” (125) to express “emotion in the form of art” (124) to a theatre audience.’<sup>492</sup> In the tragedies of Kyd, Middleton et al, exhumed in the Modernist period by Eliot’s influential, nay seminal essays, Barnes’ found a tradition from which she sought to inherit:

Barnes found Early Modern precursors that suggested forms and strategies which could encompass her themes of revenge, violence, and tragedy; communicate them in the public theatrical space; and provide an objective correlative that could resist both an excess of personal emotion and the reductive demands of “exact likeness.” Her play is not written in an anachronistic or mock-Elizabethan mode; rather she attempts, like Eliot, to utilize the relevance of Renaissance drama for a modern world.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>489</sup>Caselli, p. 226.

<sup>490</sup>Caselli, p. 222.

<sup>491</sup>Caselli, p. 223.

<sup>492</sup> Goody, p.345

<sup>493</sup> Goody, p. 347.

However, Eliot's use of the term specifies that when the artist fixes upon an adequate form and scenario to embody the intensity they would convey, the work may thereby be judged an artistic success. 'The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. If you examine any of Shakespeare's more successful tragedies, you will find this exact equivalence [...] The artistic "inevitability" lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet*.'<sup>494</sup>

He derides *Hamlet's* enduring appeal as lying in its fascinating failure, not the brilliance of its artistry, failure which results from Shakespeare adopting the Revenge Tragedy genre from Kyd to a theme – the 'disgust [which] is occasioned by [Hamlet's] mother' – which it cannot fully embody, 'his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her', with the result that 'Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear.'<sup>495</sup>

As Caselli describes it, T.S. Eliot found Barnes' play specifically *excessive*, for not only had Barnes' not provided her audience with any recognisable formula for the extremes of sensibility it puts into play, but as critic, editor, and fellow poet-dramatist even he 'was unable to portray the kind of reactions the play provoked in him.'<sup>496</sup> And, as Curry and Taylor (among others) have pointed out, with each draft of her play Barnes' references to the sexual violation and exchange of Miranda's adolescent body became less and less clearly delineated – though I tend to agree with Taylor, as against Cole, that the redrafting indicates not censorious editorial pressure but a 'shift in emphasis [which] moves us from the realm of the revelatory – from the constative narrative of 'what happened' found in the [deleted reference to the] hay-hook scene – to the realm of the suggestively performative.'<sup>497</sup>

Barnes' play strategically exploits the ambiguities in its belated, reconstructed plot and its central thematic preoccupations. It would not *appear* then to utilise the

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<sup>494</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Hamlet (1919)', in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp.45-49 (p. 48).

<sup>495</sup> Eliot, p. 48.

<sup>496</sup> Caselli, p.255.

<sup>497</sup> Taylor, p. 46.

conventions of Revenge Tragedy to provide an *adequate formula for the equivalence of action and emotion* as Goody seems to be suggesting. Therefore, what analytical purpose might be served in forcing the semantic reach of Eliot's term to cover a play which, in fact, would apparently violate the principle he sought to establish? This is not merely a rhetorical question, it touches on the philosophical underpinning of 'equivalence', prior to any calculable ratio of exchange values.

Nonetheless, I want to endorse and amplify Goody's idea that *The Antiphon's* return to the rhythms, themes and syntax of the sixteenth century is a manner of objective correlative, a specifically formalised adequation of ritual mourning to the Father's material and symbolic bodies. In making such a claim I am incorporating Barnes' text, and Goody's, into my own thematic obsessions. An *act* of critical mastery, perhaps, but one which is very self-consciously performed.

How does one continue speak of an object adequately correlating to an affective state, once one has abandoned Eliot's presumption of the 'inevitability' of certain formulae which supposedly underpin the equivalences. I recall at this point Derrida's reading of Marx's critique of commodity fetishism. Avowedly indebted to the Marxist tradition, Derrida credits Marx with a profound understanding of the 'spectrality' of exchange. Derrida's Marx declares:

It is so disconcerting, this commodity-thing, that one has to approach it with 'metaphysical' subtlety and 'theological' niceties. Precisely in order to analyze the metaphysical and the theological that constructed the phenomenological good sense of the thing itself, of the immediately visible commodity, in flesh and blood<sup>498</sup>

Faced with this revolutionary image of the object-as-spectre, Derrida's Marx then performs a shaming retreat. He redeems the originary, indivisible substance of use value, also the promissory full presence of a post-revolutionary future, where the spectres will have been banished; 'If one keeps to use value, the properties (*Eigenschaften*) are always very human, at bottom, reassuring for this reason. They always relate to what is proper to man, to the properties of man'.<sup>499</sup> This Marx

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<sup>498</sup> Derrida, *Spectres*, p. 188.

<sup>499</sup> *Spectres*, p. 188.

identifies the spectrality of exchange and the logic of equivalence it assumes, a fetishism which, trusting the evidence of its own eyes, invests objects with human values. He wants to assure himself that prior to, and beyond, the fetish lies the true measure of properly human (use) value, '[he] believes enough in the dividing line of this opposition to want to denounce, chase away or exorcise the spectres.'<sup>500</sup>

Far from questioning the equity of Marx's corporation of actually existing human labour, Derrida is heavily invested in tracing the theatrical mode in which Marx convokes, in the opening gesture of *Capital*, the fetish object and/of the 'ordinary, sensuous thing':

*Coup de théâtre*: the ordinary, sensuous thing is transfigured (*verwandelt sich*), it becomes someone, it assumes a figure [...] Marx must have recourse to theatrical language and must describe the apparition of the commodity as a stage entrance (*auftritt*). [...] [B]efore the *coup de theatre* of this instant, before the "as soon as it comes on stage as a commodity, it changes into a sensuous supersensible thing," the ghost had made its apparition, without appearing in person, of course and by definition, but having already hollowed out in use value, in the hardheaded wood of the headstrong table, the repetition (therefore substitution, exchangeability, iterability, the loss of singularity itself, the possibility of capital) without which a use could never even be determined.<sup>501</sup>

Notwithstanding that his understanding of the econo-theatrics of equivalence is rather different to Eliot's, Derrida also takes *Hamlet*, most celebrated and eccentric of Revenge Tragedies, as the exemplary form of and exception to the 'sensuous, supersensible' object of equivalence. Exemplar *and* exception because with the entry of the Father's ghost, the fetish object is 'out of joint' with itself. 'A spectral asymmetry interrupts here all specularity', but this is an original asymmetry 'of the order of generation' without which there can be no inheritance, nothing to inherit, no-one to inherit from. No exchange, no gift, no 'self, subject, person, consciousness, spirit'.

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<sup>500</sup> *Spectres*, p. 58.

<sup>501</sup> *Spectres*, p. 188,189, 202.

The one who says “I am thy Father’s Spirit” can only be taken at his word. An essentially blind submission to his secret, to the secret of his origin: this is the first obedience to his injunction. It will condition all the others.<sup>502</sup>

It is, I think, one of the non-fungible use-values of productions such as *Hamlet*, and *The Antiphon*, that they force us to think the spectrality and the theatricality of value in its atemporal priority over the Father (as objective correlative) who appears (in order) to underpin it. The trouble is that in thinking that we are thinking that originary discord we are also incorporating it as one more heritable asset. ‘What costs humanity very dearly is doubtless to believe that one can have done in history with a general essence of Man, on the pretext that it represents only a *Hauptgespenst*, arch-ghost, but also, what comes down to the same thing – *at bottom* – to still believe, no doubt, in this capital ghost.’<sup>503</sup> Like Horatio, we scholars only reaffirm belief in the Father’s ghost, whether we demystify it, or apostrophise it in barely-noted acts of ‘strategic essentialism’. We must (and herein lies the tragic anti-heroism of *The Antiphon*’s Miranda and of Hamlet’s antic disposition) find means of speaking with the ghost, in good faith, letting Him speak through us without wholly succumbing to the identification.

Miranda does not ask, as Jeremy does, ‘Am I my father[...]?’<sup>504</sup>, nor worry like Dudley and Elisha that they may be ‘our father’s blasphemy’,<sup>505</sup> instead she offers up several marvellous figures of paradoxical or ambiguous disintegrative incorporation. My favourite, very close to the beginning of Act 1, comes as she and Jeremy guide the audience’s attention around the ‘cloistered waste’<sup>506</sup> of the Great Hall. She observes of her surroundings;

The world is cracked – and in the breach  
My father’s mew.<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> *Spectres*, p. 7.

<sup>503</sup> *Spectres*, p. 220.

<sup>504</sup> *A*, III., p. 223.

<sup>505</sup> *A*, I., p. 100.

<sup>506</sup> *A*, I., p. 82.

<sup>507</sup> *A*, I., p. 83.

‘Mew’. Various: the ‘characteristic cry’ of a cat; ‘an exclamation expressing derision’; a place of ‘confinement’, ‘concealment’, ‘retirement’ or ‘a breeding cage’ (acceptations which would almost all allow us to read the genitive as expressing ownership, habitation, or both). That most of these meanings are *obsolete* only makes their presence felt the more strongly in Barnes’ idiom.

Does *The Antiphon* turn the stage into a prison or a breeding cage, or is it merely a disembodied cry of derision directed at any audience which seeks a concealed meaning in it, or even just a hospitable habitation for their fantasies? Many early reviewers judged it bleak, obscure, and structurally flawed in varying proportions. Out of joint, without doubt. Famously in his capacity as Barnes’ editor, Eliot so disapproved the play’s eccentric form that his original blurb for the Faber and Faber edition adverted to her as a writer damnably blessed with a poetic brilliance for which she lacked the complementary skill to make the work cohere: ‘Never has so much genius been combined with so little talent.’ In affronted reply, Barnes wrote to him that she must refuse to accept any ‘blurb [...] so tailored to a jacket that so resembles a shroud’.<sup>508</sup> In fact, it is the very imagery of her rebuke which calls forth the sense of suppression/internment that it superficially contests, and critics still disagree about whether or not she had been greatly minded to prevent her play’s quiet burial. Even before the final draft was completed, she wrote in correspondence that ‘[u]nless superbly played I really don’t think I care to have it given at all.’<sup>509</sup> However, O’Neill, Herring, Goody and others point out that she continued to correspond with theatrical producers in Europe and America throughout the sixties and seventies. Furthermore, she claimed to the end of her life that it was her best work, and privately mounted a firm defence against Emily Coleman’s harsh appraisal of its demerits as playable theatre. To Coleman the play was a ‘failure’, ‘quite false’ and written, she suspected, ‘to please some highbrows’ when the proper thing is to ‘write a play to *move an audience*’.<sup>510</sup> Confronted by Coleman’s accusation of brittle elitism, Barnes’ eschewed agency, portraying herself as an artist gripped by internal necessity, simply indifferent to the actualisation of whatever transitive value the text may hold *in potentia*.

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<sup>508</sup> Quoted in Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism, Volume 1: Women of 1928* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 141.

<sup>509</sup> Barnes to Allan Ross MacDougall, 14 July 1956, quoted in Caselli, p. 221.

<sup>510</sup> Emily Coleman to Djuna Barnes, undated but written late 1950s. Quoted in Caselli, p. 178.

I was aware that the style is not “popular”, I also know quite well that it is not written as the “well-made drama” is written, I did not intend it to be “staged” – that is, unless someone wanted to stage it [...] I quite simply (the T/L/S critic said I could not have fashioned a more “obtuse failure” if I’d tried) wrote it as I had to write it, for “nothing” and “nobody” (for those who wanted it, if any).<sup>511</sup>

Written to move an audience which was perhaps only an empty space, a fictional construct to sustain the testamentary logic upon which the dramatic text relies. Written for ‘no-one’. For the empty seats into which anonymous publics pore, only to disappear into the darkness of the auditorium. To date the play has not filled out its formal legation with very many living, breathing bodies, save in Sweden at the beginning of the 1960s, where it secured its sole theatrical residency at Stockholm’s Royal Dramatic Theatre, in a translation co-written by Karl Ragnar Gierow and Dag Hammarskjöld. Of this production, Ivar Harrie, a contemporary Swedish reviewer, wrote the following, which seems to confound Coleman’s judgement that the play is not written to affectively engage its viewers, while also offering a disturbing (lack of) insight into the dynamics of its spectacle:

After the first act people were very awed, and a little afraid of showing how lost they felt. The second act had a bewildering, but inescapably exciting effect. The third act – which contains the specific antiphon, the antiphony between a mother and daughter – broke down all resistance: there was no alternative but to surrender to the dramatic poem... One of the Dramaten's great performances.<sup>512</sup>

The lexis of trepidation, resistance and surrender, is indubitably sexualised, unnervingly implicated in the play's complex articulation of abuse, trauma, and witnessing. Harrie’s tropology of fear and excitement, confusion and eventual capitulation, suggest that to enjoy the play is to submit, ‘surrender’, and confess to

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<sup>511</sup> Barnes to Coleman, 23 August 1958, quoted in Caselli, p. 221, Goody, p. 340.

<sup>512</sup> Quoted on the dust jacket of *The Selected Works of Djuna Barnes* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1962).

being stimulated by a forcible breach of one's boundaries. His review, abbreviated and excerpted by the publishers to provide an endorsement for Barnes' product, performs a reversal at the very point where the viewer's surrender is articulated: suddenly one's agency as witness is retrospectively supposed. The spectator *chooses* to affirm the triumph of the performance – shifting their subject position from that of the vanquished, ravished and overrun victim, to the expert witness, whose critical faculties are called upon to actively appraise the significance and the value of this unfamiliar spectacle.

As Harrie's review declares and invests in the aesthetic triumph of the play, so for Freud the use value of the fetish object is as 'a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it.'<sup>513</sup> His review was perhaps chosen to adorn the jacket of Barnes' *Selected Works* because, in precise Freudian terms, it makes a fetish object of an otherwise unbearable body of words. A trauma (which *The Antiphon* does not re-present but archly repeats *as if for the first time*<sup>514</sup>), is given symbolic recognition, and that symbolisation immediately offers itself as a defensive stand-in for the lost sense of security and power that it momentarily presaged, just as Freud claimed that the object form of the fetish is generally determined by objects which 'crystallize the moment of undressing, the last moment in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic.'<sup>515</sup> Thus this very spectacle of theatrical production, as the 'objective correlative' of the unknowable trauma(s) which inform its creation, actually serves to *rephallicise* the anti-patriarchal dynamics of Barnes' aesthetic – in triumphing, *The Antiphon* is securely reintegrated into the harmonic whole of the dominant liturgy.

The apparent inversion of the gender power dynamic is a crucial element in the seamless ideological conjuncture that the Harrie review enjoins. As a prominent male critic whose role is to stand in judgement over the work of a near-forgotten female writer without recognised theatrical pedigree, a work whose arrival has already passed unnoticed in its native language, Harrie writes that this play, and particularly the third act's 'antiphony between a mother and daughter' has 'broke[n] down all

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<sup>513</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism' (1927), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-31)* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), pp. 152-57 (p. 154).

<sup>514</sup> As Caselli has noted, Barnes was delighted by one line in a (hostile) notice in the *Partisan Review* 'They [an audience] would have to know the play by heart to hear it – that is to see it – for the first time.' Lionel Abel, *Partisan Review* (1958), quoted in Caselli, p. 222.

<sup>515</sup> 'Fetishism' p. 155.

resistance'. Including his own? 'Dr Ivar Harrie, distinguished Swedish critic' (for so the dust jacket describes him, without clarifying whether he is distinguished *by* his Swedish-ness, *in addition* to it, or whether it is for his remorseless dissection *of* all things Swede that he is so exalted) writes of an effect upon an audience which, as critic, he is both part of and apart from. Like everyone else in that audience. And like the Hegelian phenomenon of negativity which Bataille parodied, mimicked and exceeded (discussed in chapter 2 relative to *Nightwood*). Dr Harrie's 'distinguished' position means that his gamble on dissolution is most obviously disingenuous, for his structural role ensures the minimal support needed to convert the loss, bewilderment, excitation and breakdown back into the currency of conventional aesthetic appreciation. Such equivalence having been decreed – 'It was one of the Dramaten's great performances' – and stamped as *exergue* upon its reverse side, *The Antiphon* might well have become a sound investment. It could yet.

Clearly then it will make a difference which figures undergo this sovereign experience of self-shattering, and how they are then reincorporated. Julie Taylor argues it is one of the work's 'powerful and enabling' strengths that it 'encourages us to experience – rather than to resolve – affective and narrative ambivalence.'<sup>516</sup> Indeed. However, I find it problematic that this approach to the play deliberately locates these effects outside of 'a gendered dichotomy of power',<sup>517</sup> in a break with readings of the play (and indeed readings of its relations of production) which have placed too much 'emphasis on the violation of penetrating the textual body, [...] a particular kind of sex-negative politics [...] which *The Antiphon* in fact opens up for critique'.<sup>518</sup> While she convincingly refutes a view that Barnes was forced to tone down and obscure the rape imagery by her male editors, to the detriment of the final form of the play, I find it unfortunate that Taylor's reading thereby underplays the *aggressive* erotics of Barnes' stagecraft and the ways in which these work within, while frequently exceeding, gendered dichotomies of violence and power.

On Taylor's reading 'Barnes's theatricality relates [...] to her recognition of performance as an appropriate means of testifying to and witnessing hurt.'<sup>519</sup> She

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<sup>516</sup> Taylor, p. 38.

<sup>517</sup> Taylor, p. 42.

<sup>518</sup> Taylor, p. 42.

<sup>519</sup> Taylor, p. 50.

therefore suggests that Harrie's review is 'cited frequently because it conveys a common experience in those who value Barnes' play [...] his comments suggest that one is not affected by *The Antiphon* because one fully comprehends the narrative, but rather that feeling might, in some unexpected way, stem from bewilderment.'<sup>520</sup> In the generosity of her own 'reparative' orientation, she tactfully overlooks the way in which affecting affective surrender to the object of study can, for some 'distinguished' figures, be the most judicious strategy to sustain one's distinguished and distinguishing role *vis-à-vis* the work's ongoing circulation – for having surrendered fully to the sublime object, who then could be better qualified to champion it?

We proclaim the artistic triumph or failure of a play defensively; as a perfectly receptive, yielding witness we simultaneously estrange and objectify the spectacle. A double movement which seems inescapable whether we declare *The Antiphon* a triumph or a travesty, baptise it or bury it. Somehow it is necessary to respect the body of a work without paying our respects to it. Which I am trying to do by engaging it in aggressive play, a sure sign that I have designs on it myself. Men!

Wiegman is onto something, I think, in associating the wide enthusiasm for the reorientation in today's academy towards positive and enabling affective responses, with the financial, structural and (above all) epistemic shocks of neoliberalisation:

This revision is more than a professional renewal of the value of critical practice by scholars negotiating university environments increasingly engulfed in the insecurity and ambivalence of neoliberalisation. It is also *a compensatory tactic aimed at redeeming the critic's self perception* in the twilight of the hermeneutics of suspicion, where one of the most potent remnants of its critical habits can be found in the repeated accusation that the declining significance of the humanities is the critic's own fault. As this accusation goes, whole generations of critics abandoned the love of their objects, turning away from the artefacts of culture in both their formal density and their social complexity to luxuriate in the superiority of their own authorship [...] *the critic at war with his discipline has succeeded in undoing himself*. One does not have to look much further to be reminded of how powerful are beliefs in self-invention, as this narrative repeats the thesis of

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<sup>520</sup> Taylor, p. 46.

neoliberal rationality that gives full agency for individual and historical outcomes in a time of institutional retrenchment to subjects themselves.<sup>521</sup>

True enough, the resulting relation to the object is not one of critical mastery, for no-one has pressed a rival claim of author-ity upon the text. Instead, the reparative reader, whatever their private stake in the enterprise, aspires to occupy a position of symbolic power akin to a departmental manager in any corporate institution (the contemporary university comes to mind). The tenured academic will be allowed to command a disproportionate share of value-added on the questionable premise that she or he brings unique individual skill and knowledge to the job of monitoring and facilitating excellence in others' collective (and ipso facto, usually underpaid) labour. It is understood, though, that one shall not abuse one's position of responsibility in the corporation by continuing to press critical questions upon the role of artistic and intellectual production in prevailing relations of power, exploitation and control. To do so can be redescribed as a sign of paranoid-schizoid immaturity. Henceforth, teaching Marx, Kristeva or Foucault to undergraduates is akin to singing 'The Red Flag' at the Labour Party conference – we inherit a legacy shorn of any unmanageable responsibilities it could entail. Quote selectively for effect, but you'll be laughed out of the committee meeting if you behave like the spirit of the words matters.

Having given up the notion of culture as a battleground of meaning, the worry which 'haunts' today's reparative readers is that we still seem not to have secured the ongoing care and attention of a good (fetish) object; the world towards which we extend our reach does not feel that it requires us to correlate its value.

[C]ritical practice as a tactic of everyday living is an alienating option for those unmoved by approaching the world as a test – or playground – of interpretative skills. This, it seems to me, is what haunts reparative reading as it works to reassemble interpretation's value while believing it has sidestepped the sovereign agencies and mastering hermeneutics that it pins on paranoid reading alone.<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> Wiegman, p.18. My italics.

<sup>522</sup> Wiegman, p. 19.

### **3. I, Oedipus, object: 'Be not your own pathetic fallacy'**

MIRANDA: Yet who knows, when Oedipus grubbed out  
The luggage of his sight upon a pin,  
For what in-caverned vision then he mined?  
They say that he who digs far down for love  
Brings up the brightest burning coal.  
Be not your own pathetic fallacy, but be  
Your own dark measure in the vein,  
For we're about a tragic business, mother.<sup>523</sup>

Caselli notes that some early reviewers, pre-eminently Nemerov, viewed the play as an attack on mimesis, and she traces Barnes' aesthetic commitments to anti-realist theatre critics of the 1950s, based on archival evidence that Barnes was reading and annotating such work at the time of *The Antiphon*'s composition<sup>524</sup>. She singles out a passage underlined by Barnes in Henry Fluchère's *Shakespeare and the Elizabethans* in which he declares that only if there were 'a frank acceptance of poetry's sovereignty' could the 'prestige of false realism be destroyed'<sup>525</sup>. My disagreements with her reading, which are by no means total, hinge on the fact that the emphatic delineation Barnes' poetics as anti-redemptive, anti-transcendental, and anti-futurist causes her to foreground Barnes' disruptive qualities and minimise the degree to which Barnes figures the role of the poet/artist *as sovereign*, with responsibilities including the care, maintenance, and the delimitation of possible *relations to familiar objects*, a critical move which I think vitiates the injunction that we 'refus[e] the reversed decorum implicit in the notion of subversion'.

Assuming there is Oedipal conflict at work or on display in the drama, it must surely be this which could justify her comment that *The Antiphon* 'explores the potential transitive exchange between a failed play and the turning of fatal failure into

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<sup>523</sup> A, III., pp. 204-205.

<sup>524</sup> See Caselli, p. 237.

<sup>525</sup> Fluchère, quoted in Caselli, p. 237.

drama'.<sup>526</sup> For Oedipal tragedy, in Miranda's speech above, is an apologue specularising the blinding failure of the objective correlative. Oedipus functions as an indexical figure for an excess of affect over a maternal object with which it is identified, the rupture which sustains and threatens reparative relation. 'Grubb[ing] out the luggage of his sight', this Oedipus confounds the ideal object *of* sight, the noetic-noematic structure of phenomenality of perception itself, with the obscure *nonpareil* which the visibility of the object appears to withhold.

The metatheatrical admonition with which Miranda's fable concludes, 'Be not your own pathetic fallacy,' addressed from daughter to mother, further suggests the short-circuit here between humanist essentialism and anti-foundational performativity – in the dramatics of subjectivity to which Barnes' requires our witness, the two generations are held together through their strained object relations, but, 'object relations' being logically prior to the subjects that emerge from their commerce, we must still think their familiarity within the spectral-transcendental drama of communion between inert bearers of abstract value.

Let us reflect upon the luggage of sight which Barnes' text sets before our gaze. Each Act is set in the great hall of Burley Hall, ancestral home of the family since the late seventeenth century, now in ruins. Stage directions therefore require: 'paneless Gothic window', 'tumbled wall', 'a ruined colonnade'.<sup>527</sup> In its decrepitude, the space is to be lent colour by jumbled objects of pageant and play, 'flags, gonfalons, bonnets, ribbons and all manner of stage costumes' which hang above the heads of the dramatis personae over a central balustrade. There should be a table, stage centre, 'laid in formal order'. Standing stage-left (framed by the broken Gothic window), 'a dressmaker's dummy, in regimentals, surrounded by music stands, horns, fiddles, guncases, bandboxes, masks, toys and broken statues, man and beast'.<sup>528</sup> The human drama of the play is grounded in ruins, but ruins teeming with enough objects and bodies to indicate that something survives in the heavy atmosphere: decked out in 'regimentals' and secured by an arsenal of imitative supplements for Man – 'toys', 'masks', 'a dummy', 'statues', 'costumes'... These too are broken, but still suffer to stand proud as what Leo Bersani calls 'monumental' art works: 'edifying and petrifying' cultural

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<sup>526</sup> Caselli, p. 235.

<sup>527</sup> *A*, I., pp. 81-82.

<sup>528</sup> *A*, I., p. 81.

tokens which are characterised '[i]n Freud, and particularly in Klein' as products of culture's 'unceasing effort to make life whole, to repair a world attacked by desire', and ultimately to 'redeem the catastrophe of history' hypocritically and aseptically, in his view, because at the expense of 'the absolute singularity of human experience'.<sup>529</sup> (And one might therefore think that in the binary he constructs Bersani is fortifying, against the monumental object, an indigenous, vigorous and unmediated human experience, one expression of this being unalienated artistic production, 'a mode of excitement that, far from investing objects with symbolic significance, would enhance their specificity and thereby fortify their resistance to the violence of symbolic intent'.<sup>530</sup>)

The stage is decked out to suggest the point of monumentality's final collapse, a visual threat to tear down whatever remains of virtue and decorum in a 'self-divestiture [...] enacted as a wilful pursuit of abjection, a casting away not only of possessions but also of all the attributes that constitute the self as a valuable property.'<sup>531</sup>

The solidity of a socio-symbolic body tumbled, broken down before Barnes' play even gets moving, provides the unchanging *environment* within which Barnes' family drama elaborates its themes. I take 'environment' here in roughly Berlant's desultory sense: 'a scene in which structural conditions are suffused through a variety of mediations, such as predictable repetitions and other spatial practices that might well go under the radar or, in any case, not take up the form of an event [...] occasions that frame experience while not changing much of anything.'<sup>532</sup>

Caselli paints the set as a more robustly and recognisably melancholy structure. A stage to be peopled by incorporeal spectres, 'theatrical revenants who [...] haunt but refuse to progress [...] melancholically returning to [...] [t]he ruined hall/abbey [which] refuses to be a home, to even *be* a place [...] reproducing the play's stubborn refusal to move on, to breed progeny.'<sup>533</sup> For me, it is the *unheimlich* capacity of this simulated space of wear and tear to supply corporeal form to such questionable, crumbling concrete-abstractions as 'home', 'property' and 'legacy' (even after modern

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<sup>529</sup>Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 22.

<sup>530</sup>Bersani, *CoR*, p. 28.

<sup>531</sup>Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 126.

<sup>532</sup>Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 101.

<sup>533</sup>Caselli, p. 243.

drama has shown all of these notions to be structurally unsound), and to enable the fateful conjuration of Titus and his relations, that might actually warrant Goody's reference to an objective correlative. It would be an object correlated to inner experience, but in a manner akin to Freud's classic account of melancholia as the *refusal* (or wilful failure) to create a *realistic* representation of the death of an ambivalently cathected lost object, with the consequent regression (one could equally say, phenomenological or dramaturgic reduction) of the self to a persecutory identification with its object, on the cannibalistic model of early oral object relations. In sum, an I-as-object narcissistically nurturing, devouring and destroying itself, deprived of a reality effect which is cultivated and grown through interpersonal commerce of normative object-cathexes.

This might be one way to begin to respond to Sara Ahmed's critique of the power relations behind the diagnostic appellation 'melancholic' where it serves to assign loss to particular figures and individual bodies, and perhaps to co-opt Caselli's idea of *The Antiphon's* scenography as melancholic frame. Writing of Freud's collocation of melancholia with the loss of *familiar* objects, Ahmed recalls that 'for Freud the melancholic is never sure what has been lost, even when the loss is itself affectively registered on and by the body.'<sup>534</sup> And that therefore the political stakes are raised with reference to

the status of the object itself, the "it" that we do or do not get over. In Freud's essay, whatever grief aims for, one thing is not in question: that we are speaking of a loss in history, a loss that is real, or given in or to history, even if what is lost can be uncertain or abstract. [...] The object must be recognized as dead for death to become real. [...] I do not want to assume that the love or loss of an idea or ideal is simply a displacement of a more primary love or loss in quite this way. I would argue that the loss of an abstraction *borrow its certainty as loss* by being imagined as a displacement of the loss of a beloved.

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For Ahmed the conversion of the lost abstraction (she gives the example of

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<sup>534</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 140.

<sup>535</sup> Ahmed, p.139, p. 140.

‘fatherland’) into the hard currency of a beloved figure is a supremely political move, in which ‘The diagnosis of melancholia would thus involve an ethical injunction or moral duty: the other must let go by declaring the objects that we declare dead as being dead in the way that we declare.’<sup>536</sup>

In restoring the father’s body as a figure for so many lost verities – subjectivity, law, statehood, duty – aren’t I also securing and closing down a potentially open-ended, polysemic process of signification within a fundamentally reactionary imaginary? On the other hand, we are the reading *The Antiphon*’s visibly torn and broken statuary, toys and theatrical accoutrements, its three act structure which ‘refuses to begin’, and the artificial and anachronistic language of its *dramatis personae* as a refusal to mortgage the self using the property and the body of the *oikonomos* for collateral – may we not say, defensively, that the Father who haunts the play is a special category of object from which it is impossible for abstract values to ‘borrow’ with patrician ‘certainty’?

Having written my way into this dilemma, from which my thesis will not escape, I am at least well positioned to read Jack/Jeremy’s vacillating identifications (‘the image of Papa’, ‘Jeremy is Jeremy’) with sympathy. In his very first soliloquy, wryly announced as such (‘They say soliloquy is out of fashion | It being a kind of talking to your betters’<sup>537</sup>), he sits on half of a Gryphon-shaped seat which his father had divided, and tries to decisively separate out these two partial figures of the lost father and decide in which, if either, he must recognise himself. As she did with O’Connor’s confession/soliloquy in *Ryder* (discussed above, chapter 3), Barnes plays upon the limits of the device to unsettle the very idea of interior-character (of a content-Jeremy contained within the form-Jack) which such a linguistic performance assumes and dissembles.

JACK: Esau's heel trips every man his running.

Jack – not running – disinherited?

Do I move under like the pilot-fish?

Am I a cow-bird, shill, or Judas goat,

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<sup>536</sup> Ahmed, p. 141.

<sup>537</sup> *A*, I., p. 93.

Gaited to walk on other people's pools  
As the skating fly who skips on sleeping water?  
[...] Or do I so entirely slip from custom  
That I sprawl in any place a king?  
Why then, so be it.  
If crouching on a throne's called sitting  
I'll sit this out.<sup>538</sup>

Here Jeremy manages a sovereign decision, cementing a constative 'I am a [sprawling] king' from a happy performative, 'Why then, so be it.' But in so doing he notes that being a 'disinherited' son actually creates the condition of possibility of his speech act. Furthermore, the spatial scheme developed in this speech establishes, curiously, that the various non-human specimens he invokes are somehow closer to the human realm than the sovereign (and by implication here, the father who disinherited him), since they have not 'entirely slip[ped] from custom' as must the king.

Esau, elder son of Issac, was born with his younger brother Jacob clinging to his heel, lost his right of inheritance to this brother through a combination of his own excessive appetite (he exchanges his birthright for a bowl of his brother's stew!) and his brother's deception (he receives their father's blessing by disguising himself as Esau), and was restrained from taking revenge only as long as their father lived ('the days will come of the mourning of my father, and I will kill my brother Jacob'<sup>539</sup>). The animals Jack mentions are parasitic (cow birds lay their eggs in other birds' nests) or symbiotically dependent on a more powerful host (as is the pilot-fish to sharks). 'Shill' seems the imposter in Jack's bestiary, having no discernible meaning except the North American slang term for the salesman's accomplice who poses as a rapt customer; it is also one of a number of contemporary Americanisms with which Barnes adulterates the Middle English lexicon and loosely Shakespearean syntax of her dialogue. 'Judas goat' straddles human and non-human cultures, while retaining the theme of deceit and betrayal (it being trained by animal herders to lead sheep to the slaughterhouse), and introducing a variant on Jack's opening biblical reference.

One sees in this speech the complex patterning of Barnes' language, as well its

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<sup>538</sup> *A*, I., p. 93.

<sup>539</sup> *Genesis*, 27. 41.

intentional pressure towards disintegration into confusion and obscurity. Most salient to our analysis, at this early point in the play, Jeremy here distinguishes the sovereign as that which is even further from man than are (these) animals. The imagery also creates a lacerating twist on the idea of sovereign decision: He 'slips' more entirely than would any human analogue to a parasitic animal, recalling the image of Esau born with usurping brother dragging at his heel, and this only faintly suggests 'slip from custom' in the sense of *escaping* it (i.e. sovereign as being-above-the-law). This distinction is telling, since throughout the play, as elsewhere in Barnes' oeuvre, images abound of the intimacy between the bestial and the sovereign, anticipating Derrida's seminar on the 'troubling resemblance' between the 'being-outside-the-law' of the Sovereign as 'being-above-the-laws' and Beast as 'being-outside-the-law'. In the convoluted histories of these figures as they appear in politics, literature and philosophy the two entwine in an 'obscure and fascinating complicity, or even a worrying mutual attraction, a worrying familiarity, an *unheimlich*, uncanny reciprocal haunting.'<sup>540</sup>

The sovereign may 'sprawl any place a King', but Jeremy's ironic meditation highlights that same obscene truth which Barnes had put into the mouth of *Nightwood*'s O'Connor: that 'A king is the peasant's actor [...] scandalous in the highest sense [...] set apart as the one dog who need not regard the rules of the house; they are so high that they can defame God and foul their rafters.'<sup>541</sup> Here though, the king who 'crouches' on the throne not only hints at an act of defecation upon the seat of power, but also the precarity and vulnerability of a king, whose birthright is always an open question.

Jeremy's 'so be it' terminates on another apparently passive decision to 'sit out' the play's unfolding theatricals, but the verb 'to sit' has also slipped from custom to the point that it can equally mean 'to crouch', a transformation which not only foreshadows the revelation of Jack/Jeremy's agency in the family reunion, but also unveils the activity which goes into maintaining the apparently natural, neutral dominion of the King. Echoing the promiscuously anachronistic language of the play as a whole, Jeremy's self-given licence to resignify the meaning of words is both an

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<sup>540</sup>Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume 1*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 17.

<sup>541</sup>*N*, pp. 37-38.

active assumption of power *over* the symbolic and a passive acceptance of his exile outside the protection of law and custom.

The son's dilemma, the ambiguous state of his agency, identity and responsibility, reappears in the distressingly weary coda to the shattering catastrophe of Act 3. The family relation has finally disintegrated; Miranda and Augusta fallen to their deaths beneath the collapsing curfew bell. When 'the ringing has ceased', the antiphonal call run silent, Miranda's uncle Jonathan steps out onto the balcony, as does 'Jack', stage-right, from behind the remains of the outer wall. Jonathan unmask Jack Blow with the greatest economy; his line simply, 'What's done, Jeremy?' Jeremy is similarly laconic in reply, the lifted mask revealing only silence and further unanswered questions.

JACK: Ah, then Miranda knew. What's done? Why, everything's done, uncle.

Barnes helps matters none by giving no stage direction at this point to indicate any affective charge to the scene, or even the lack of one. An actor in performance would perhaps have to read backwards from the single direction given at the close of this exchange between the men, and of the play itself, '[BURLEY watches in silence as JACK, with what appears to be indifference, leaves the stage]'. Burley's reserve is at least in keeping with the presentation of the character throughout the play; aged embodiment of a genteel, moderately eldritch, English decorum. Jeremy's unmasked, apparent indifference is, as discussed above, is both ironic and, in context, far more disturbing.

One man's silence, the other's indifference. Is *this* the antiphonal response of patriarchy to the impassioned, agonistic dialogue of mother and daughter? As we have seen elsewhere in Barnes' work, Jeremy does not, straightforwardly, identify with or enjoy privileged access to the power and status which modern society continued and continues to accord (certain) men. Deflecting the guilt which Jonathan attaches to him in asking 'Why did you do it?' Jeremy protests that he is not the man that his father was and is thus not responsible for the deaths of the women, even though he recognises his use of the doll's house to recreate the scene of Miranda's violation in the rising action of the tragedy. He stands unmasked before the audience to claim that he is not the man to settle accounts now the action is complete, but can only plead his incapacity

and his non-identity with their father in the interrogative mood. Titus is, at the end of a play which has yet to begin, a rhetorical figure, evoked to establish a distinction (son *is not* father) which would absolve and decide responsibility if it could take some form other than a suspended question:

JEREMY: Why?  
Do I carry the ensign of the Medici?  
Am I my father  
That I should know what price the token price  
That cashing in the utmost treasure would exact?  
This is the hour of the uncreate;  
The season of sorrowless lamenting:  
Say then,  
'Jeremy, thou fool, thou soul of no abiding!'  
As the slayer snuffling 'round the kill,  
Breathing his contagion out before him,  
Draws up the victims with his steaming nose –  
So I, who thought to medicine contumely  
With a doll's hutch – that catches villains! –  
Find I've breathed up disaster and myself.  
Say I was of home so utterly bereft,  
I dug me one, and pushed my terror in.  
Stand back, uncle.

At which point exit with indifference, curtain. This speech is fascinating in the way it pursues the Father, actual and symbolic (the ensign, or emblem of one of history's greatest political families) into a denegation of responsibility and a *heimlich* burial ground for 'terror': it was 'done', everything's done through my intervention, but to infer from this that I am responsible is going too far, since that would position me as the father or sovereign, He whose deed is its own interpretation and justification; in reality, you should speak of me as if I were but a predatory animal surviving on instinct outside the familial embrace of society.

Shall we say that the *sign* of the Father, on which Jeremy stakes his indifference, convokes the Sovereign as its *signifier* and the Beast as its *signified*? In the first published edition of 1958, ‘the trefoil of the Cenci’<sup>542</sup> stood in place of ‘ensign of the Medici’ as the patriarch’s material signifier. Referencing both the historical family which came to denote the very worst figure of Patriarchal tyranny and Percy Shelley’s play which itself helped to enframe that historical image (an obvious intertext: Shelley’s *The Cenci* is also a verse drama, rarely performed, which details murderous revenge taken by the mother, and children against their Father, whose financial mismanagement has ruined the family and whose brutality and corruption culminated in the rape of his own daughter). The substitution Barnes makes in the 1962 edition, of ‘Medici’ for ‘Cenci’, is consistent with her tendency throughout the writing process to displace clear and literal references to sexual trauma. As Taylor has convincingly argued, this is not to say that Barnes has censored herself psychically or publicly, nor had censorship forced upon her by the editorial interventions of T.S. Eliot, but indicates an aesthetic based less upon ‘the transmission of personal narrative’ than on the generativity of ‘performance, where formal regularities are guiding principles, [...] to convey, and indeed transform her own feelings, and her relationships with other bodies’.<sup>543</sup> The substitution has other resonances. Within Barnes’ own oeuvre it seems like a meta- or ur-textual repetition of the chapter in *Ryder* where a detailed genealogical breakdown is performed upon the bedroom wall to which Wendell’s mother Sophia attaches images of personal significance. As Tyrus Miller notes,

The walls of her bedroom, on which she hangs pictures, prints, and eventually newspaper clippings, form the image of a historical process in which tradition is effaced and scattered by the rise of information. Barnes recounts in order the images matting Sophia's walls. First are the women of history and culture she admires<sup>544</sup>

Whose ranks include Beatrice Cenci, abused daughter, sentenced to death for her parricidal revenge. Paragraphs later, after a discontinuous series of intellectual and

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<sup>542</sup> Djuna Barnes, *The Antiphon*, III. (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), p. 127.

<sup>543</sup> Taylor, p. 58.

<sup>544</sup> Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p.131.

passionate preoccupations have overlain the original images, the wall is ultimately plastered over with ‘that last tide, clippings from newspapers’,<sup>545</sup> signifying, one might assume, ‘the cultural canon [...] definitively submerged by the tide of information, mass culture, and journalism.’<sup>546</sup> Barnes’ narration refuses this interpretation even while confirming it, metaphorically excavating a particular tradition which, though submerged, recurs as an afterimage in which the degraded culture industry appears as a ‘pastiche of degraded fragments, selected and arranged idiosyncratically, and connected only by their spatial contiguity.’<sup>547</sup> Barnes’ history of this woman’s wall halts, then, at a line and a submerged trace that serves to anchor and define the contingent majesty of the arrangement:

all in a conglomerate juxtaposition, and under all, smiling in forlorn inevitability, Beatrice Cenci, Shakespeare and the Divine Dante.<sup>548</sup>

If Barnes first mentions Beatrice Cenci as one amid a lengthy list of historical women, she concludes her description by retroactively assigning her the singular, originary moment of Sophia’s cultural tradition.

Echoing this retroactive pre-history of the Barnes family fiction, Jeremy’s rhetorical question, ‘Do I carry the trefoil of the Cenci?’ hazards the taint of refused similitude in its desire for (distance from) that specifically sexual, and unambiguously abusive, power of the Father. The trefoil of the Cenci would connote only the most degraded aspects of power, and as such Jeremy’s remark too strongly (violently) refuses the imputation that he, as his father, is liable for the outcome of the play’s ‘tragic business’. Posing the question with the alternative figure, ‘Do I carry the ensign of the Medici?’, mints and circulates an image of Patriarchy which is more capacious and ambivalent – encompassing a dynastic lineage implicated in commerce and banking, the art and architecture of Renaissance humanism, and religious, monarchic

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<sup>545</sup> *R*, p. 14.

<sup>546</sup> Miller, p. 131.

<sup>547</sup> Miller, p. 132.

<sup>548</sup> *R*, p. 14.

and political power. It is a legacy and a common currency from which is as hard to divest as it is to fully capitalise upon.

This reading would appear to endorse Caselli's assertion that the play questions the underpinning of classical economic and political notion of ownership through a disenchanting examination of familial dynamics. In a restricted sense I do agree that it 'undoes property and propriety by questioning the strange relationality of the family', so long as this 'questioning' of the familial relation is not taken to indicate defetishisation or disaggregation in any obvious sense. For it is with this questioning ('Am I my father [...] ?') that the play's putative recourse to objective correlative (understood as ideal adequation of matter and spirit which also and necessarily discloses the 'spectral assymetry' of the properly human) reanimates the sensuous supersensible object relations which people the stages of human commerce.

If the patriarch is seen to have underpinned the property relations which in their different modes fixate both Augusta (for whom they ought to still represent imputable value), and Dudley and Elisha (for whom value 'swings in the stability' of market prices), it would nonetheless be a misreading to imagine that that such conventionally defined propriety cannot survive the antiphonal dispute which resounds in the father's derelict place. In Acts I and II there is vigorous competition over what is inherited, by whom, and through what mode of transmission – but, through this, the dual possibilities of total loss and of redemption through transmission (of debt and of promise) are neither destroyed nor secured. Are we setting a trap for ourselves to say they are liquidated?

[Deleuze, in *Cinema I*, connects 'liquid' perception to the assent of process, movement, becoming, over the fetishized solidity of the bourgeoisie. The normative 'regime of passion' of *solid* perception entrains the viewer to 'dominat[ion] by commodities, the fetish, the partial object and the memory object',<sup>549</sup> whereas the fluid movement of liquid passing 'through or under the frame'<sup>550</sup> creates the possibility of defetishised vision: 'the proletarian or worker reconstitutes everywhere [...] the conditions of a floating population, of a sea people, capable of revealing and

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<sup>549</sup> Giles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), p. 79.

<sup>550</sup> *Cinema I*, p. 80.

transforming the nature of the economic and commercial interests at play in society.’<sup>551</sup> Yet, rather than indicating a spectacle akin to Deleuze’s liquid perception, we perceive in the *liquefying* dramatic arc of Acts I and II that ‘becoming liquid’<sup>552</sup> is merely an occasion for technocratic determination and apportionment of assets and liabilities.]

As Augusta complains, and Elisha affirms:

AUGUSTA: Glory used to be the aim – now it’s possessions<sup>553</sup>

ELISHA: When I see a thing I cannot rate, | I rate it!<sup>554</sup>

Elisha’s credo is a more complex statement than his mother’s, and not such a secure pledge as its emphatic form suggests. Here again, the extreme ambiguity of Barnes’ lexical choice invites us to hear all permutations in the senses of ‘rate’, at both points in the antanaclasis. Choices without exact combinatorial limit, including: to rebuke; to drive away through heavy censure; to place in a certain class or rank; to think much of; to assign a certain value in relation to monetary standards; to ratify.<sup>555</sup> Whether Elisha would cause the object to depart, esteem it highly, monetise it, etc., is undecidable, the only certainty being a syntactical relationship between the two instances of the same term. On the other hand, possible meanings of the action of the second phase are constrained (though not fixed) by the value assigned to the action of the first, and vice versa.

In contrast to the *semantic* opacity here and throughout, the line is very easy to parse grammatically. The clarity of aspect, tense and mood is not untypical of *The Antiphon*’s dialogue, and suggests to me that it is not relationality that is being tested through Barnes’ virtuoso linguistic displays, but the contestable *senses* that a fixed relation between units can sustain. Senses which are, like the veritable infant whose universal predicament Miranda relates to her mother, ‘wrapped in metric, hugged in discipline, rehearsed in familiarity reprov’d’.<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>551</sup> *Cinema I*, p. 78.

<sup>552</sup> *Cinema I*, p. 80.

<sup>553</sup> *A*, III., p. 172.

<sup>554</sup> *A*, I., p. 98.

<sup>555</sup> *OED*.

<sup>556</sup> *A*, III., p. 213.

Relationality *is* being questioned, then, but the familial drama is surely ‘reproved’ primarily in the sense indicated by this semantic chain of ‘maternal holding’ – ‘wrapped [...] hugged [...] reproved’. ‘Reproved’, that is, in an act of censure which prohibits an unlimited intimacy, an act without which the familiar becomes the undifferentiated, and in terms of which the familial becomes the primordially lost object of undifferentiated being. That primary differentiation is crucially sustained and resisted by other, anachronistic senses of the word,

To reject, to forsake or cast aside. *Obs*

To rebut or contradict (an idea, statement, etc.); to prove (something) to be false or erroneous; to disprove. *Obs*

To prove again (in various senses).<sup>557</sup>

Three acceptations, two of which are in disuse, two of which are mutually exclusive, all of which take on equivalent value in the context of Barnes’ play and within the frame of Miranda’s climactic rhetoric. They are also collectively subordinated to the sense of ‘reproach’ – subordinated in a differentiation between denotation and connotation that is purely and only structural. For taken opposed-together, they form a density of connotation which enriches the ‘reproach’ denotation just as surely as it denaturalises it. We are close to the familiar exercises in semiotic defathering which arguably issue from Roland Barthes’ seminal remark that

[D]enotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the last of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and close the meaning)<sup>558</sup>

But let’s consider whether we could speak of denotation (in this sense) with relation to either of the phrases over which we have quibbled. In Elisha’s case, one is bereft of the fiction of the primary meaning – the two ‘rates’ can take on any sense the

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<sup>557</sup> *OED*.

<sup>558</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Blackwell, 2002), p. 9.

reader/audience chooses, just so long as the chosen meanings avoid contradiction – such is the bounded rationality of *homo oeconomicus*. In Miranda’s case, there is clear primacy: there is a denotation and therefore something of a realism effect – but that denotation can signify very different things, can be contested at the level of connotation. None of the (obsolete or ill-fitting) connotations can supplant the denoted meaning, but they can entirely alter its sense – the reproach could be received as an act of reparation or paranoid repudiation. Taking these two speech acts as paradigmatic of two dramatic voices – the trader and the poet? – we might claim that Elisha’s approach to ‘semantic’ value is wholly pragmatic in its operation; hence his inability to realise value in a theatrical mode where, as he quickly notes, ‘[e]verything is a little out of context.’<sup>559</sup> Miranda’s poetry, though often more densely allusive and syntactically compressed than Elisha’s (or Dudley’s), retains something of Barthes’ denotational effect – a privileged *terminal connotation* which in its quasi-theological manner takes on a substantial form, ‘establish[ing] and clos[ing]’ a relation to an object. As a further example, consider Miranda’s insistence in the face of her mother’s hysterical refusals of loss, that for her death (in a Sadean, absolute sense) provides just such a fixed horizon against which a form can take on a ‘rate’ which transcends a given temporal context;

[Death] is the rate in everything I do.

It is the matter that I turn upon.

It is the hub that holds the staggered spindle<sup>560</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the pragmatic determination of value upon which Elisha insists is minimally indexed to a liberal individualist ‘I’. In the divided shape of Elisha and his brother, this ‘sensuous supersensible’ I enters furtively upon the stage under conditions of seemingly free trade:

DUDLEY: Look here, I say stand on your own two feet.

Down with sentiment, and up, by God, with trade!<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> A, I., p. 98.

<sup>560</sup> A, III., p. 218.

<sup>561</sup> A, II., p. 134.

An enterprising spirit which plays out here as a classical master-slave dialectic rigged from the first act against the spectre of absolute loss, as that ‘self-consciousness [which] becomes laughable at the moment when it liberates itself by enslaving itself, when it starts to *work*, that is, when it enters into dialectics.’<sup>562</sup>

DUDLEY: Swing in my stability, Elisha.

The ground they stand on, let’s uncover it

Unlike the stability of Miranda, bounded by the sovereignty of death, Dudley is to be the index of himself. This is possible only on the basis of an essentially paranoid individualism, exemplified by Elisha (the ‘smarter’<sup>563</sup> brother, and the servile consciousness ‘swinging in the stability’ of his dominant elder<sup>564</sup>) in a pseudo-Hegelian vision of recognition: ‘A saying has it, each man in the other’s eye | Rides game, and hunting upside down | Grapples his spectre to his ghost; | You won’t tear that commitment from itself.’<sup>565</sup>

The spectre here is surely that of Titus Hobbs. In Act I the brother’s express a fear that they may be an embodiment of his transgressions,

ELISHA: Is it possible we’re father’s blasphemy?

DUDLEY: By my Jove – I wonder.<sup>566</sup> (Act I, p.100)

The conceit is picked up and developed by Miranda in Act III when she links and counterpoises the brothers’ ‘commitment’ to capitalism and its self-sustaining ‘creative destruction’ with Titus’ failed revolutionary bid to supplant the symbolic and institutional pillars of the bourgeois family with his own authority, and his hubristic failure to notice that his own ‘rate’ also depended upon those same figures.

[Titus] [s]hook his rattle over Pendry, crying:

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<sup>562</sup> FRGE, pp. 322-23. See chapter 2 above.

<sup>563</sup> A, I., p. 97.

<sup>564</sup> A, II., p. 97.

<sup>565</sup> A, I., p. 99.

<sup>566</sup> A, I., p. 100.

‘Down with church, with schoolroom, and with King!’  
And had himself precisely where he quailed [...]  
And all his sons rolled in the marketplace –  
But hands up, bidding on destruction!<sup>567</sup>

All of which is to say, something seems to emerge from this unredeemable setting, through Miranda’s attempts to decrypt the melancholy memory of the Father, reinscribing into the familiar frame an authority whose value draws upon its posthumous immediacy as spectre.

Shifting the ground momentarily, the better to conceive my object, I want to think lost and incorporated forms, in relation to political movements. We are justly wary of acting out Oedipal conflicts in the theatre of politics. Wary of acknowledging them at work, and of working them through, in our own politico-economic analyses. At the time of the last great revolutionary moment in the memory of the European Left, an aging Lacan famously interpreted his young students’ rebellion to them as their demand for a new master, and declared that any significant revolution in the economy of desire requires a move 'beyond the Oedipus complex'. As Russell Grigg describes, from the late 1960s Lacan came to downgrade the Oedipus Complex as a 'dream' of Freud's, the manifest content of which unfortunately displaces the radical impossibility of symbiotic relations between the sexes and the inevitability (as a consequence of our entry into the Symbolic) of castration;

If we reject the thesis that the father's murder has any role to play as a historical event, if we consider that its status is that of a myth, and, further, if we also consider castration to be a real operation of language, stemming from the symbolic, then the question arises of what role the father's murder plays in Freud's work.

Lacan, who raises this question in *Seminar XVII*, gives as his response the thesis that the father's murder is set in place as a myth in order to cover up the castration that institutes *both* the law *and* fantasy, which is a consequence of the law. There is a fundamental fantasy at issue here, that of the father who

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<sup>567</sup> A, III., p. 208.

enjoys—and, in particular, who enjoys all the women.<sup>568</sup>

Fantasies akin to the father of the primal horde presumably bode ill for the Left, since they resolve themselves in the constant objects of property and primogeniture, ambivalent acceptance of the privilege of the father preferred to the Real of castration, sweetened with the promise that one will inherit the prized role eventually, or become the object of the patriarch's desire. So in the last years of his teachings Lacan relegated the Oedipus Complex to the position of historically specific fantasy, constructed in bad faith to 'save the father'<sup>569</sup>. More precisely, this was a fantasy created reactively by Freud 'in response to his encounter with hysteria'<sup>570</sup>:

[F]ailing to recognise that what the hysteric desires is a desire that is unsatisfied [Freud's] search for an object of the hysteric's desire always ends up coming up with something that is forced or in one way or another rejected by the patient. [...] Freud's solution to the woman's lack was motherhood, and this solution keeps insisting in his treatment of hysteria.<sup>571</sup>

Henceforth, Lacan would claim that the Oedipus Complex is 'strictly unusable' in any analysis since it cannot confront the hysterical subject with the truth of 'her' fundamental fantasy, and therefore drags the analysis down 'the path toward an ever-increasing eluding, in favor of demand, of what is the dialectic of desire, metonymic sliding when it is a question of assuring the constant object.'<sup>572</sup>

In chapter one I argued that Lacan's shift of focus away from the Oedipal problematic of the *non/m du père* achieved only a passive revolution, producing an analytic less responsive to the themes of power and desire than the thinking it came to supplant. Ironically this turn away from the paternal imago accompanied his own elevation as founding father of the Lacanian school of analysis and theory, marked by the first publication of his collected *Écrits* (in 1966) and the solitary, authoritarian

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<sup>568</sup>Russell Grigg, 'Beyond the Oedipus Complex' in *Jacques Lacan and The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII* ed. Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg, (London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 50-68 (p. 59).

<sup>569</sup>Grigg, p. 58.

<sup>570</sup>Grigg, p. 62.

<sup>571</sup>Grigg, pp. 62-63.

<sup>572</sup>Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York and London: WW Norton and Company, 2007), p. 99.

figure that he cut as he founded the *Ecole Freudienne de Paris* in 1964 ‘alone as I have always been in my relation to the psychoanalytic cause’.<sup>573</sup> We have followed a slightly different path away from Oedipus, knowing full well it could wend its way back to him, in a move which shares Lauren Berlant’s conviction that one does not supplant a power relation by dispossessing oneself of a sustaining fantasy frame – for that very frame exerts its own disruptive pressure:

*Pace Zizek*, the energy that generates this sustaining commitment to the work of undoing a world while making one requires fantasy to motor programs of action, to distort the present on behalf of what the present can become.<sup>574</sup>

Just so, Oedipal fantasy might turn out to be a legacy with gauche value, a possible grounding for radical sovereignty. Laius, the Father whom Oedipus kills, means in Greek ‘left-sided’; his father’s name, Labdacos, ‘lame’; Oedipus himself, ‘swollen-foot’. In Levi-Strauss’ famous structuralist account of the myth it is crucial that the fatal identity between son and father is marked, within the wider pattern of symbolic significance, by this common nominal trait – ‘the surnames in Oedipus’ father-line [...] refer to *difficulties to walk and to behave straight*’.<sup>575</sup> Heritable queerness. One could argue that the ongoing desire to expel Oedipal dynamics from the radical *polis*, merely fulfils the Delphic prophecy anew, just as Laius’ confirmed and capitalised the symbolic identity between himself and his son in the very acts intended to keep it off the books – the expulsion of Oedipus from his kingdom, and the pinning of his infant feet, the better to ensure he never sidle awkwardly back.

Wendy Brown, in the persona of affective diagnostician, has characterised leftist political formations as having fallen into a melancholic desuetude that will not begin to shift until we mourn historical losses and ‘learn to walk again, on ground once secured by the now lost object, a process that makes palpable how contingent firm and level ground always is.’<sup>576</sup> Though the thrust of her essay is that those who self-

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<sup>573</sup>Quoted in Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 55.

<sup>574</sup>*Cruel Optimism*, p. 263.

<sup>575</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, ‘The Structural Study of Myth’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, 68: 270 (1955), 428-44 (pp. 433-34).

<sup>576</sup> Wendy Brown, ‘Feminism Unbound: Revolution, Mourning, Politics’, in *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 98-115 (p. 100).

identify as 'The Left' need to mourn, she begins by defetishising the object of mourning in a prophetic-proleptic parenthesis:

Something has died but we argue over what the body is (there will turn out not to be a body). A unified Left? Reason? Social totality? Marxism? Belief in the Good, the True, and the Beautiful? Hope? Grand narratives? Utopia? The promise of the twentieth century? Love of the world? Modernity? Humanity? Is radical transformation itself no longer imaginable, or is it the fantasy of human control over human destiny that has vanished? Or are we stymied at conjuring postcapitalist, postpatriarchal, postcolonial social, economic, and political forms that could emancipate and satisfy all and each? Is it a postrevolutionary vision that eludes us today?<sup>577</sup>

If the work of mourning remains to be accomplished, or even begun – isn't it premature to declare that there will have been no body to mourn. Doesn't the future anterior beloved of postmodernism constitute here an intentional refusal of the very process it rhetorically enjoins? Perhaps that is the very dilemma to which Brown wishes to alert us through her diagnosis of post-revolutionary melancholia.

The death of a promise is like no other because *a promise is incorporeal*; there is *no body to claim, to bid farewell, to bury* (which is why the Left argues incessantly over what the body is). In mourning a dead promise, a promise that no longer is one, we mourn “the disappeared”; this is a perpetual and ungratified mourning that reaches in vain for closure. *The very object that we mourn—the opening of a different future, the ideal illuminating that future—has vanished*. So we cannot even see or say what we mourn, gather at the site of its disappearance, weep over its remains, hold its lively embodiment in our memory as we must if the mourning is to come to an end. This is a mourning that inevitably becomes melancholia—as the loved and lost promise becomes nameless and unfathomable in a present that cancels and even mocks it, *its disappearance is secured by this loss of a name and so also is our inconsolability*. Melancholia too because if we experience the promise as not

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<sup>577</sup> Brown, p. 100.

simply dead but betrayed, we are divided against our love for it—*love betrayed but not given up is love that literally does not know where to house itself.*<sup>578</sup>

Either way, she connects our inability to mourn the past, and our past futures, with a protracted cycle of denial, anger, bargaining and depression throughout which ‘the impulse to blame and complain tends to displace any impulse to develop strategies for the assumption of power.’<sup>579</sup>

On the one hand, only by stumbling, only by feeling what one depended on before and with what one can now replace that dependency, does a mourning being begin to discern possibility in loss, in being free of an object that seemed like life itself. If we are without revolutionary possibility today, we are also free of revolution as the paradigm of transformation: what new political formations might be born from this moment? On the other hand, avowing our loss allows us to cultivate the memory—and with Benjamin, ignite that memory—of the utopian imaginary of the revolutionary paradigm and so make that imaginary part of our knowledge for working in the present, not just a lament about the unrevolutionary present.<sup>580</sup>

Brown counsels a level-headed acceptance that there never was a substantial body which could or should have substantiated our utopian impulses, in order that we hold true to an instinct for justice that cannot succumb to fundamentalism. Ultimately though, that also seems to mean an instinct which continues to float free of a vital accompanying ‘impulse to develop strategies for the assumption of power.’

Our task would seem to be that of prying apart an exuberant critical utopian impulse from immediate institutional and historical solutions so that the impulse can survive stumbling, disorientation, disappointment, and even failure and so that the impulse remains incitational of thought and possibility rather than turning fundamentalist. [...] A radical democratic critique and utopian imaginary that has no certainty about its prospects or even about the

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<sup>578</sup> Brown, p. 104.

<sup>579</sup> Brown, p. 113.

<sup>580</sup> Brown, p. 115.

means and vehicles of its realization, that does not know what its imagined personae will be capable of

[I interrupt to note that at this late stage in Brown's essay it has turned out that *there is a body after all*, and perhaps several. *Mutatis mutandis*, the semblance, or prefiguration of such figures. Trafficking in such theatrical personae, leftist praxis might look to risk tentative, experimental locomotion on the groundless ground of post-revolutionary times. Brown doesn't seem able to be done with bodies or figures, yet when the body operates on the stage, when it revs up and appears to perform – she prefers to deprive it of automatic proprioception rather than chance it falling into the booted sickle-swing of a Red Army 'consciously and unitedly marching into battle for the peasants land, for the rule of the workers and peasants, for Soviet power',<sup>581</sup> and (which amounts to the same thing) to pre-empt a fear that our post-revolutionary child has already been thus disinherited by a history beyond our control. Unless of course her stumbling figure indicates that the Left should attempt to jam the cogs of global finance with the well-rehearsed appearance of innocent maladministration, econometric glitches, or technical failures. This maladroit legacy would be no less of a *Modern* endowment than the figure of the dogmatic partisan of history. Brown's seemingly disoriented impulse has arguably modelled its haphazard, comedic gait upon Chaplin, who tramped such an iconic series of 'incitational', meticulously choreographed and skilfully executed pratfalls across the *mise-en-scène* of industrial capital back in *Modern Times*. This ought to remind us that a politico-aesthetic investment in the productive forces of stumbling, dislocation and failure is both haunted and underwritten by the alienated technologised civilisation, the scenic backdrop of which lends such gestures their uncanny commercial value and psychotherapeutic effectivity as reassuringly 'human' signifiers. Indeed, I would speculate that it is more than merely accidental that 'pratfall' itself tumbles into the America lexicon around 1930, at a point where Fordist productive efficiency had become the preeminent signifier of American hegemony. As Laura Mulvey reminds us

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<sup>581</sup> V.I. Lenin, 'An Appeal to the Red Army', speech recorded March 1919, transcript available at <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/mar/x06.htm>> (accessed 07/07/15).

Throughout the 1920s intellectuals and cinephiles had commented on the way that Chaplin's performance style captured the spirit of modernity and its relation to the machine. Victor Shklovsky thought that the essence of the comic in Chaplin was his mechanical movement, its development into a series of passages ending with a full stop, a pose.<sup>582]</sup>

– this would seem to be the left political sensibility that could give our mourning a productive postrevolutionary form.<sup>583</sup>

Incidentally, the 'pratfall effect' is the name given in social science to a phenomenon whereby interpersonal attraction is said to be enhanced by the humanising effect of the pratfall. This specifically *humanising* effect is generally considered to be contingent upon the 'prat' being otherwise perceived as routinely effective and technically proficient; 'A pratfall did not significantly affect liking for the *incompetent* stimulus person.'<sup>584</sup> There is unquestionably something reassuring, even stabilising, for Leftist movements when we recognise ourselves in any visibly gauche historical tableaux. While, conversely, the maladroit posturing of the Blairite social democrat must be rejected with all the paranoid-schizoid aggression we can muster. Nevertheless, in a war of position, Brown's precariously embodied personae seem unlikely to derange the more properly adroit undertakings of the entrepreneur. So where are the forms on which a counter-hegemonic movement can draw? Can such a utopian imaginary object make its presence felt in the sensible hear-and-now of use-value, rather than remain safely 'suspend[ed]' as Brown recommends 'in a different temporality *such that it could fuel rather than haunt* left political life in our time'<sup>585</sup>? Is it sensible to demand it appear to be one thing or the other?

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<sup>582</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death at 24x a second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p. 176.

<sup>583</sup> Brown, p. 114.

<sup>584</sup> Robert Helmreich et al, 'To err is humanizing—sometimes: effects of self-esteem, competence, and a pratfall on interpersonal attraction.' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 16:2 (1970), 259-64, (p. 259). My italics.

<sup>585</sup> Brown, p. 114. My italics.

#### **4. Filtering the father**

For over four decades Andrew Samuels' writing on psychotherapy, culture and politics has been informed by a rogues gallery of double-identities and unconventional investments; above all there is his membership of and leading role in the community of analysts and academics which he himself baptised as the 'Post-Jungians', a group which has sought to put the analytic psychology of Carl Jung into dialogue with currents of post-structuralist theory and broadly leftist political activism, challenging the classic theory's essentialist suppositions about history, gender, culture, race in a modality of the *post-* which intends 'a connection to, and a critical distance from' the great man.<sup>586</sup>

I am dubious of certain gestures of affiliation which the post-Jungians perform. For me it is unremarkable that Jung's system should contain within it a certain deconstructive logic, as post-Jungian theorists such as Christopher Hauke and Susan Rowland have claimed<sup>587</sup>, since *différance* presupposes that any metaphysical system must, in both senses, 'contain' potentialities which could set in flux all that seemed fixed and certain. In Jung's writings the sliding between archetypal image and archetype-in-itself, and the consequent tension between his relativism and his essentialism, is indicative less of the proto-deconstructive orientation of Jungian metapsychology than of the struggle within any closed system to police the terms of the transformative dialectics of the encounter with the Other. Arguably.

Also, I would contend that to take Jung seriously, to take the erotics of an encounter with Jung seriously, we ought to admit into our own thought those very aspects of Jung's project which seem most Other, most unwanted, in contemporary theory, rather than trying to assimilate an appropriately modified and corrected version of his ideas into an archive of theory which takes its bearings from Lacan's Freud. Jung does not always haunt the Post-Jungians – the healthy aspects of his work seem to have been wholly introjected as an important but unproblematic historical precursor, while those troubling excesses of his work are rationally externalised, decathected,

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<sup>586</sup> Andrew Samuels, 'New developments in the post-Jungian field', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, ed. Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 1-15 (p. 8).

<sup>587</sup> See Christopher Hauke's *Jung and the Post-Modern: Interpretation of Realities* (London and Philadelphia: Routledge, 2000) for a general overview, and Susan Rowland's *C.G. Jung and Literary Theory: The Challenge from Fiction* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999) for an application of this approach to literary criticism.

surpassed. If what is said to be ‘deconstructed’ is thereby removed to a safe distance from a writer and reader who are presumed to know already that Jung’s racism, his stereotyped view of the sexes, and his unidirectional tendency to psychologise political antagonisms without politicising archetypal imagery, are sundry errata, problems to which are confident we already have the answers, then such a procedure is not ‘deconstruction’ in the most challenging and vital sense.

Samuels’ work is not completely immune to such criticisms. His book *The Political Psyche*, from which I shall draw for my concluding reflections upon *The Antiphon*, is to date the fullest statement of his ongoing project to bring transformative politics to depth psychology as a challenge to the latter’s preconceived clinical neutrality, its proclivity for presenting political antagonisms as pathological material to be treated by means of a pre-existing psychoanalytic vocabulary. One reviewer claimed that, admirable as its intervention was, his book amounted to a total methodological break with Jung’s ideas masquerading beneath continuity with his terms; ‘When Jung spoke about difference during the 1930s, it was in regard to the high value he placed on cultural form [...] the direction Samuels takes towards treating difference appears to be closer to Foucault and postmodernism’.<sup>588</sup>

However, while the necessity of critiquing Jung along the axes of gender, race, etc. forms a large (and necessary!) aspect of his writing,<sup>589</sup> he also embraces the riskier task of keeping Jung’s most troubling ideas in play. This has been a consistent aspect of his work since his first monograph, the influential *Jung and the Post-Jungians*, in which he presented a threefold argument for retaining the key term ‘archetype’. Firstly, because with it Jung had anticipated post-structuralist theories of signification (hmmm.....). Secondly, because its sense can be clarified and its therapeutic worth ratified by the ascendant disciplines of semiotics, deconstruction, etc. (well, yes, but....). And finally, he says, (and here I am more sympathetic) because the very mystifications that the term generates are potentially transformative, allowing us to blend, reimagine or differentiate personal factors, structural determinants and (as he will later emphasise) socio-cultural ones, in response to the exigencies of the moment.

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<sup>588</sup>James M. Glass, 'The Political Psyche by Andrew Samuels' reviewed in *Political Psychology* 17:2 (Jun 1996), 391-394 (p. 392).

<sup>589</sup> See for example his path-breaking essay on Jung’s anti-Semitism, in Andrew Samuels, *The Political Psyche* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 283-312.

Sometimes it will be important to ‘amplify’<sup>590</sup> the affective pull of an image as well as to deconstruct it:

Plaut (1982) objects [...] ‘are we not using “archetypal” as a power word, i.e. in order to lend emphasis to observations which we wish to highlight?’ (p. 288). One can hardly dispute that ‘archetype’ has become a word shrouded in associations, value-judgments and auras; these are therefore reasonable questions.

My own feeling is that it is worth retaining these words. First, because Jung’s development of these ideas precedes most of the parallels. Second, because archetypal theory and its language is well-suited both to cultural analysis and to be the clinical variant of structuralism. Third, for a paradoxical reason: one problem with the innate, with structures, is, as we have seen, that the personal element is brought in, not as a factor of equal weight, but rather as a by-product or concomitant. *Archetype theory is useful because of the space and importance it accords the personal dimension.* I refer to the ease with which personal and structural elements may be seen to be blended or delineated.<sup>591</sup>

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<sup>590</sup> ‘Amplification’ is an important feature of Jungian analysis. It is a synthetic, accretive approach to the analysis of dreams and other fantasy images that draws on parallels in myth (and increasingly in pop culture too), suffusing often fragmentary images with deeper shades of meaning in order to suggest directions in which the dream may be leading the dreamer. It is this aspect of Jungian work which most offends Lee Edelman, and he is right to suspect that the perpetual game of interpretation and association can become an avoidance of the limits of meaning and selfhood (see Edelman on Samuels, in Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or The Unbearable* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 96-97). Yet my own experience of working with a post-Jungian analyst was that he would often stymie me when I fled into interpretative overdrive; in one very early session with Carl I spent around thirty minutes narrating a dream in precise detail, dredging up personal and cultural associations, and playing with various interpretations – I was showing off and enjoying my interpretive mastery, while he mostly sat in silence, only cutting in towards the end of the session to point out that I had been talking to keep him at a distance (I *had* avoided his eye throughout), but he was here and wasn’t going anywhere. My anxiety in relation to the presence of an interlocutor, and my use of interpretation as a mechanism of regulation and control became the focus for much of the work we did thereafter – bearing out a pluralist approach to the therapeutic encounter such as Samuels’ advocates. ‘If analytical psychologists look solely for impressive, archetypal, numinous material, then they will be tempted to be over-active and over-suggestive. [...] [However] a theory of development is just as likely to over-organise the patient’s material, if it is misused, as adherence in an unselective way to a myth based approach.’ (Andrew Samuels, *Jung and the Post Jungians*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), p. 161.)

<sup>591</sup> *Post-Jungians*, pp. 36-37.

It is this third, paradoxical element of his relationship to Jung which makes his work distinctive and important, I believe. To explore further what he may mean by the 'space and importance' of the personal dimension in archetypes, we shall focus in on his work on the Father.

Samuels' 'Father' values the blurred divisions between the metaphoric and the material which inhere to archetypal theory. Thinking archetypally about the indissoluble coexistence of embodied experience, psychological relation and cultural fantasy, he often tries to shift the prevailing metaphor of the castrating patriarch/law giver to explore more subversive potentials in the figure, as well as the Father's potentially supportive role in contributing form (shape) and substance (spirit) to alternative social movements. Drawing on clinical material, personal experience and cultural myth, he argues that instead of the familiar account in which 'He' functions primarily as the third term to break up the imaginary dyadic relation of mother and child, we might explore the father's direct erotic and aggressive engagement with the child as 'His' pivotal contribution to the infant's development.

Where the relation called Father has lacked a particular kind of forceful quality, Samuels' suggests that the expressive range for the aggressive drives and the capacity for erotic passion are both compromised. The 'called response' of the developing persona is unable to take on aesthetic quality or shape;

[T]he father-son aggressive relation provides the possibility of there being transformations within aggression. This means that antisocial, sadomasochistic, unrelated aggression can be transformed, by the physical and non-physical agency of the father-son relationship, into socially committed, self-assertive, related aggression.<sup>592</sup>

Now then [raises fists]. The heterosexist assumptions of this are readily apparent: Aggression is a male quality. Aggression is properly transmitted from father to son in unbroken lineage. If that transmission takes place unsuccessfully, or not at all, the pathological outcome is socially delinquent youth. We also seem to be crediting a pre-social interior self which is available for further enrichment through exchanges with 'good enough' parents. Surely, post Lacan, post Feminism, post LGBT critique, such a

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<sup>592</sup> *Political Psyche*, p. 154.

formulation is at best naively reactionary, and everything we would expect of a Jungian. Opaquely authoritarian at best, crypto-fascist at worst?

Samuels is clear about the exclusionary network of associations which he is deploying. While arguing that it is possible to imagine a father-of-whatever-sex, and indeed to see single mothers and LGBT parents embodying the role creatively and successfully, he recognises that in contemporary societies there often remains ‘a kind of literalism and essentialism in play in which a woman can never fulfil any of the functions we associate to “father”’,<sup>593</sup> and that this is never more true than when we come to elect our symbolic Fathers. His answer to this that we cannot only prise apart the association between political power and the Father, but must also sensitively cultivate the developing sense of what fatherhood means, if we are to imagine and restructure leadership forms which will no longer be the birthright of the white, heterosexual, able-bodied, patrician males.

We do not appear to be able give up the fantasy of the Father. He identifies it in an attitude towards recent leaders which by turns idealises their heroic virtues, and denigrates them either as impotent, tyrannical, or aloof. Yet it is perhaps an equally grandiose fantasy to think that one can be done with such projections of power and authority. Non-hierarchical, collaborative models of leadership are ‘appealing and sometimes usable’, but place too vast a demand upon citizens if applied universally. Besides, collaborative forms of organisation are also imbued with (though not reducible to) a primal fantasy support, ‘a kind of metaphorical sibling model of leadership’,<sup>594</sup> which does not transcend the Father but incorporates him as a spiritualised essence, over whose token the siblings fight bitterly. Perhaps only in the presence of an agreed figure of a Bad Father can these non-hierarchical groups function as an effective collaborative opposition. Therefore, whether heroic fathers or egalitarian fraternities to dominate the political imaginary, for Samuels the most important task remains to *work upon* the fantasy. Eschewing a patronising (and patriarchal) psychoanalytic rectitude which tirelessly points towards the traumatic roots of paternal fantasy while keeping its hands out of the dirt, his theorising is a forceful though always provisional intervention upon the expression of the fantasy, ‘advocat[ing] [...] a positive account of the father that does not stupidly build him up

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<sup>593</sup> Andrew Samuels, ‘Transforming Aggressive Conflict in Political and Personal Contexts’, *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 6 (2009), 283-299 (p. 288).

<sup>594</sup> ‘Transforming Aggressive Conflict’, p. 285.

to an unrealistic degree [...] makes it much more difficult for our old-style political leaders to masquerade as the only kind of fathers that there could be.<sup>595</sup>

In making this argument he opposes himself, fraternally, to what he believes is the Lacanian reflex to ‘divorce the literal and the metaphorical’ and thereby to ignore ‘the interplay between the father's concrete, literal presence and his metaphorical function’.<sup>596</sup> Personally, I think this caricatures the often subtle ways in which Lacan teased out dynamic tensions between the paternal metaphor and the flesh and blood creatures that flounder on the hook of that subject position. Nevertheless, I am drawn to the suggestion that a less formalised approach to this interplay could yield an approach to father figures which is more pliant to changing social forms and radical political visions.

We require an approach to the father that is simultaneously literal and metaphoric if we are to shift his particular reproduction of the social order. As I admitted earlier, this will indeed have to be a confused approach. In order to communicate despite the confusion and to pay heed to the ‘filters’ on our theorizing, I have decided to retain a culturally conventional framework.<sup>597</sup>

Does this willingly confused approach help to shift the terms of social reproduction? Can it possibly justify recapitalising the dead father that everyone from Foucault to Brown and Ahmed has exorcised, in theory at least? Do Samuels’ refusal of conceptual clarification and his avowedly ‘pluralist’ approach lead to intellectual evasiveness? In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson warns against the ‘pluralist’ apostasy:

[I]t must be clear to anyone who has experimented with various approaches to a given text that the mind is not content until it puts some kind of order in these findings and invents a hierarchical relationship among its various interpretations. I suspect, indeed, that there are only a finite number of interpretative possibilities in any given textual situation, and that the program to which the various contemporary ideologies of pluralism are most

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<sup>595</sup> ‘Transforming Aggressive Conflict’, p. 287.

<sup>596</sup> *Political Psyche*, p. 136, p. 135.

<sup>597</sup> *Political Psyche*, pp. 144-45.

passionately attached is a largely negative one: namely to forestall that systematic articulation and totalisation of interpretative results which can only lead to embarrassing questions about the relationship between them and in particular the place of history and the ultimate ground of narrative and textual production.<sup>598</sup>

It's hard to imagine Samuels acceding to a language of the 'ultimate ground', but I would suggest that his pluralist approach is actually *very likely* to generate such 'awkward questions' about the relationship between history and archetypal fantasy in so far as it refuses to idealise or detoxify what he calls the paternal filter. He remains committed to the critical position that '[t]here is no unsocialized and ahistorical essential sexuality, no "archetypal" sexuality that is innocent and individual prior to its acceptance of the role of serving society's economic, political, and reproductive needs.' And, furthermore, that '[m]any homosexual relationships, despite being marginalized and condemned, have this secret, dissident, queer power to destabilize and interrogate the so-called "normal" at the center.'<sup>599</sup> But to understand and cultivate this destabilising effect, he argues, the different ways in which females and males, of varying class, cultural and sexual backgrounds, come to take up and transform the term 'father' is as important as the ways in which they critique and/or refuse the term; indeed, in the latter case they confirm their exclusion from the 'centre', while in the former they generate a gender trouble which has less to do with parodic resignification and more to do with an improvisatory working out of identity and sociality for which the extant terms come to seem necessary and insufficient.

I often continue to use the terms 'father' and 'mother' and, if the confusion generated leads to questions about the limits of anatomy and biology when it comes to parenting, so much the better. What is more, such confusion challenges the primacy of heterosexuality as the overall frame in which these kinds of subjects are discussed. *Paradoxically, by working it through in a form of words that reflects the influence of biology and heterosexuality, one is forced*

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<sup>598</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: narrative as a socially symbolic act*, (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 16.

<sup>599</sup> Andrew Samuels, 'From Sexual Misconduct to Social Justice', *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 6 (1996), 295-321 (pp. 311-12).

*to consider the limits of biology and heterosexuality.* [...] I stay confused because there is something of value in the confusion, in having to work through the mixture of tradition, cultural overlay, modern aspiration and psychological theory that is the current gender and parent-role state of affairs. I do not want to settle important problems on a facile, terminological level.<sup>600</sup>

The Father as ‘filter’ holds open an uncertain interzone between, among other things, a social function, a cultural tradition, and a bodily experience. Simultaneously, the *object* of this space would be a ‘recognition of the positive, direct, physical, affirming father-infant relationship’,<sup>601</sup> an accumulation of ‘social and political factors as these impact on psychic reality’,<sup>602</sup> and an articulation of a ‘possible place for a subversive and radical account of the father’.<sup>603</sup> Inhabiting this figural mode, or modal figure, he is able to explore cultural themes that remain historically yoked to images of Father and in a manner which holds open possibilities for change and revolution within the term, or beyond it, without simply refusing the power of the Father to personify themes which, for better or worse, still hold a considerable share in the cultural unconscious. The ‘filter’ then is not a reification or master term. It is a place holder for a master term which never comes, since the necessity of there being *a* filter on the wondrous chaosmos of multiplicities, becomings, and unrestricted excess is checked by the insufficiency of any given filter to the complexity it seeks to direct. If such a characterisation places it within the familiar thematics of indeterminacy, its operative value is closer to what Derrida passingly called the ‘visor effect’ of the Father’s ghost than to the more fully developed deconstructive logic of the differed ‘trace’. If the ‘unmasterable graphic ambivalence’<sup>604</sup> of the ‘trace’ is taken for granted in Samuels’ writing, what is aimed at is an agitative reconception of identity, relation, influence, etc. in consequence of their displacement.

The person who stalks contemporary culture, and who is trying to return to its politics, has always been a decentered subject, an actor playing many roles in

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<sup>600</sup>*Political Psyche*, p. 129.

<sup>601</sup>*Political Psyche*, p. 138.

<sup>602</sup>*Political Psyche*, p. 138.

<sup>603</sup>*Political Psyche*, p. 137.

<sup>604</sup> Michael Naas, *Taking on the Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 46.

many scripts, characterized by lack, somewhat faded as well as jaded, jerky, marginalized, alienated, split, guilty, empty, Imaginary. [...] In a way, the contemporary critique of the person requires its own psychological critique. Is the specter of naive individualism really so threatening that it calls forth such iron-hard defenses? [...] Why are dreams, fantasies, narratives and memories full of people? It could be said that all these people are metaphors and I certainly would not disagree with that. But [...] at the core of the metaphor lies something that has an ongoing life of its own. When the psyche empowers images of persons, it cannot stop the various qualities of those persons as persons from shining through.<sup>605</sup>

In *The Political Psyche* the Father relation is explored as cultural filter for incestuous fantasy (via the father-daughter relation) and aggressive impulse (via the father-son competition). In line with his approach which deliberately maintains the heterosexist cultural frame in order to push it beyond its limits, incestuous desire is not assumed *a priori* to be an issue limited to male fathers and their female children, but his claim is that where incest happens between – for instance – mother and son, our capacity to understand such a dynamic will provisionally take its bearings from the archetypal male parent-female child configuration. ‘So if one is trying to discuss incest, it is more or less inevitable that the dynamics of the father-daughter relationship will intrude into the discussion even if the incestuous relationship being discussed is that of mother and son.’<sup>606</sup> Similarly, with erotic playback and transformative aggression the father’s role will always exceed the two heteronormative dyads that he describes in its embodied performance:

*The father’s erotic playback is also required by his son and his transformation of aggression by his daughter. If we do not make this acknowledgement, then, just like many of our patients, we are ensnared by the delusion of gender certainty.*<sup>607</sup>

And this is because the archetypal cultural forms which are expressed through the filter

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<sup>605</sup> *Political Psyche*, p. 199.

<sup>606</sup> *Political Psyche*, p. 145.

<sup>607</sup> *Political Psyche*, p. 65.

of paternal and maternal imagery are not *anchored* in biology, so '[m]others [also] do what fathers do' while 'the father's penis stands for a breast on occasion.'<sup>608</sup> But where, for example, the penis obligingly 'stands for' the breast, are we truly speaking of 'gender uncertainty' when the metaphoric structure clearly designates Father as figure, mother as ground. Like the Lacanians, and indeed object relations analysts, Samuels sometimes appears to treat the father as the first wholly cultural relation (in the infant's eyes at least), while the relation that is mother is, in part, one of biological continuity. However, we are asked to keep in mind that a relation-called-mother *as* biological continuity is also a, secondary, cultural imposition, dependent upon the imposition of Father-as-culture. Thus, his preference for thinking the Father as a both a mode of relation and a materialisation of cultural themes; linked to and through the *bios* and the *socius*, but in a manner that is only determined by the prevailing balance of forces. Indeed, his strongest claim is that, whatever else it may be, the paternal persona is the supersensible substance whose *entitlement* to break with his own sensible forms is recognised.

[The paternal] cannot be approached via absolute definition; it is a completely relative and situational matter. Once this is accepted, then a new judgment is required concerning what sometimes seems like hopelessly idealistic attempts to change the norms about the father's role. The father's role can change because, written into the definition of the father's role is the power to refuse absolute definition. This refusal is possible because of male power and because of the cultural construction of the father relation and, hence, its historical mutability. *The archetypal element is that there is no father archetype.*<sup>609</sup>

As Avital Ronnell writes, speaking of fathers and other authorities (in particular the university), 'I know too well that I'm rigged to be grateful for the fact that traumatic invasiveness, with all its identificatory passes, is also in the end structuring.'<sup>610</sup> To structure my own reading of *The Antiphon*, I have felt the need to reprove others'

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<sup>608</sup> *Political Psyche*, p. 64.

<sup>609</sup> *Political Psyche*, p. 140.

<sup>610</sup> Avital Ronnell, *Loser Sons: Politics and Authority* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 36.

readings, not least Julie Taylor's emphasis on '[p]erformative subject positions, theatrical and stylised ritual, affective complexity, narrative ambiguity and a structure of witnessing'<sup>611</sup> in any consideration of Barnes' treatment of trauma, which for me echoed Wendy Brown's denegation (there will not have been a body!) in its asseverations that 'a performative understanding of subjectivity, the loss of the core authentic self, did not result in aesthetic or affective bankruptcy for Barnes.'<sup>612</sup> To the contrary, *The Antiphon* is fixated upon the fate of the family economy after the rupture in circulation caused by Titus' 'default', and upon the possibilities for a drama in which everything seems already played out. Miranda summarises the crux of the drama thus:

Where a man so lauds himself, and blows  
So full a gale of women all before him,  
Then defaults, what then?  
He, who for fear, denies the called response,  
Denies the singing, and damns the congregation.<sup>613</sup>

The 'default' connects Titus' failure as *paterfamilias* to the eponymous antiphonal chorus. As those Titus left behind now ritually perform their response, any reparative orientation towards to family is 'damned' because the supposedly coherent subject fell short of his own claims to mastery.

In their divergent ways, Elisha and Dudley, and Augusta, confer the blame for Miranda's ruin, and the ruin of their once noble family, upon the an-economy of their father, the financial and managerial recklessness which extended so far as to barter Miranda's virginity (without hint of a marriage contract!). Yet, the brothers repeatedly *identify* Miranda, the impecunious writer, with Titus, holding her responsible for the decay of the creative promise which he had embodied, and for the unchecked proliferation of his destructive effects on the family's good name and stability. Miranda, despite widely-noted artistic talents, has indeed reached middle-age having failed to secure a position for herself within the cultural establishment, and furthermore, she has disdained the financial (in)dependence which an advantageous marriage might have bought her. This, above all, damns her in her brothers' estimations

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<sup>611</sup> Taylor, p. 37.

<sup>612</sup> Taylor, p. 14.

<sup>613</sup> A, III., pp. 208-09.

– ‘A strolling player indeed! Without Protector, | Husband, son or bank-account.’<sup>614</sup> To Elisha, she is impudently ‘riding out the Grand Conception, | Which father’s lack of guts, left in your corner’.<sup>615</sup> Similarly, at the climactic moment when she brings the curfew bell down upon them both, Augusta intones with every blow she strikes against her daughter; ‘You are to blame, to blame, you are to blame - | Lost – lost – lost, lost.’<sup>616</sup> (SW, p.223), suggesting that the mother shares with her sons the incapacity to bear, contain or accede to loss-itself, that heritable indisposition around which Miranda’s poetry, like her love, takes on its form (‘the matter that I turn upon [...] the hub that holds the staggered spindle’). For Augusta, loss is an unbearable narcissistic wound, which must on no account be allowed to signal castration, so attached is she to the myth of a masculine potency which would restore elusive glory if it could only *amount* to something.

In Samuels’ view, without the erotic and aggressive playback between father and child it is not that the subject remains in imaginary fusion with the maternal body, nor that she or he entertains a psychotically external relation to language, it is that aggressive and erotic responses will remain brittle, underdeveloped and fearfully unexplored. In particular, a characteristically paternal filter on infantile aggression is distinguished from a Kleinian ‘maternal’ role. A ‘mother’ contains destructive attacks on the bad object, surviving the infant’s aggressive fantasies ‘she’ facilitates the recognition that aggressive fantasy is distinguishable from reality, therefore making space for both creativity and an awakening reality principle. Whereas, ‘father and son take it in turns to be victim and aggressor [...] this is not the same as managing aggression by containing it or a parent proving to a child that aggression is not always toxic by surviving the child’s onslaught.’<sup>617</sup>

The image of the father is, perhaps, a less containing one and hence represents the warring simultaneity of stability and fluidity, which is why I argue for the father as carrying a pluralistic charge. We will see repeatedly that father imagery and personal experience of the father reflect this tension-rich

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<sup>614</sup> A, II., p.168.

<sup>615</sup> A, II., p. 176.

<sup>616</sup> A, III., p. 223.

<sup>617</sup> *The Political Psyche*, p. 156.

simultaneity: A constant sense of identity, coherence and contained stability—and, at the same moment, a tolerant fostering of a community of selves, constructive abandonment of the reality principle, ambiguity and fluidity.<sup>618</sup>

I suggest that those aspects of Barnes' play which do put propriety and property in question, might appropriately be read as 'fatherly' in their own 'tension-rich simultaneity'. Just as the Father in Samuels' metapsychology may be the mercurial element which stimulates (rather than containing) the self's capacity for difficult and bewildering affect, so Barnes' play is generally agreed to achieve a level of intense communication which destabilises, without divesting from, the symbolic exchanges of the theatrical form. Readers from Eliot to Caselli agree on the 'explosive' effect of Barnes writing: for Eliot the climax of the play rends language itself; Caselli opines that 'the explosion of the safety distance between on stage and off stage results in a form of desperate affect', 'test[ing] the limits of the genre [...] at the price of a constant threat of self-annihilation'<sup>619</sup>. Slovenian Lacanian critic Miklavž Komelj's 'Text as Explosion: Djuna Barnes' *The Antiphon*' suggests that what is exploded is 'the phantasmatic frame in which the project of "liberation" takes place' since 'close examination of the play reveals the emerging of the patriarchal and fascist-like violence from out of the very strategies of supposed liberation and subversion (the utopic project of the deceased Titus Higby Hobbs)'.<sup>620</sup> This is the generally accepted hyperbole, *The Antiphon* as symbolic suicide pact between reader and author, homologous to the entwined deaths of mother and daughter at the narrative's close. It captures what is disorienting about Barnes' play, but without attending to the 'warring simultaneity of stability and fluidity' in her writing which keeps the audience/reader from fleeing the theatre/burning the book to repress all memory of its bewildering/exciting effect, and from reparatively mortgaging their critical faculties on its artistic riches.

A plausible analogue for Barnes' method, plucked from the early history of queer theory, might be Teresa de Lauretis' idea of narrative art as an ambivalently 'subversive support', both for 'a woman', i.e. woman subjectified as symbol/symptom

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<sup>618</sup> *The Political Psyche*, p. 125.

<sup>619</sup> Eliot to Barnes, 19 Dec 1954, quoted in Caselli, p. 255; Caselli, p. 247, p. 255.

<sup>620</sup> Miklavž Komelj, 'Text as Explosion: Djuna Barnes' *The Antiphon*', conference paper delivered at *Art As Commitment* (December 7 2013), Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, Maistrova 3, Ljubljana.

of patriarchy, and for 'a-woman', that in women which exceeds such symbolic capture. Drawing on Paul de Man's work on the relation of rhetoric to grammar, she argues for a feminist/anti-patriarchal poetics which contests by returning to narrative, with all its Oedipal tendencies.

The relation of women to woman, as well as the female subject's relation to narrative (cinema), seems to me to be graspable in that contradictory, mutually subversive, and yet necessary or coexisting relationship of grammar and rhetoric [...] a process of reinterpretation and retextualization of cultural images and narratives whose strategies of coherence engage the spectator's identification through narrative and visual pleasure and yet succeed in drawing "the Real" into the film's texture.<sup>621</sup>

It seems to me that Barnes' play pushes the 'mutually subversive' interplay of dramatic structures which encourage identification-interpretation and the unbounded play of rhetoric: the latter tends to undermine the capacity of the former to masquerade as the Real, while the former provides 'the constant sense of identity, coherence and contained stability' which allows the spectator to engage with such testing of its boundaries. Samuels' father, unlike Lacan's, can be both a grammarian drilling us in the necessary structures of Symbolic and a rhetorician covertly initiating us in strategies for playing-off Semiotic pleasure against Symbolic order for our own profit, for a greater good, or maybe just for kicks: the value and the danger of any such fatherly communication lies in the impossibility of saying for sure which is which.

Likewise, having described the father's role in terms of sexuality and aggression, the 'tension-rich simultaneity' of Samuels' paternal crucially always *includes* the shadowy aspects of the patriarch against which anti-phallogocentric theories position themselves:

[T]he pool of images out of which we construct our experiences of good and bad fathers is the same pool no matter whether the judgment is positive or negative. It follows that, in order to stay with positive images of the father, one

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<sup>621</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 114-16.

has to stay with the negative images as well. This is somewhat different from having both extremes in one's mind at the same time, working across a positive-negative range of options. There is a seductive illusion that there is a spectrum of imagery divided by the midpoint of the range. [...] any description of the positive father that does not employ the very language and imagery of the negative father is going to be unrealistic and stunted. *Sex and aggression constitute the good father as well as the bad father.*<sup>622</sup>

Hearing the full harmonic range Barnes' antiphonic theatre entails this sense that the dramatic form of the work and the patriarchal violence, exploitation and betrayal which it puts on show are drawn from the same 'pool of images'. Or, if you prefer, its aesthetic of noble failure is inseparable from the depicted shortcomings of the father whose legacy is the ruined ancestral home and the 'disinherited' offspring.

This would, I think be a *valuable* position (as opposed to a reparative or a paranoid one) for feminist engagements with the text to work from. As Caselli argues the play 'is both a resource and a problem for feminism' as it 'offers an uncompromisingly ruthless analysis of sexual politics' without any alternative vision, thereby 'frustrating' critics who hope for a 'reformist agenda'<sup>623</sup>. On my reading *The Antiphon* is a reproving depiction of patriarchal violence which also comes back to and appropriates such violence, marking out a poetics that registers a female experience of patriarchal abuse through a kind of *écriture masculine* – a repetition of the paternal which neither reduces to parodic resignification nor *Wiederholungszwang*, but performs an engaged and antagonistic exchange across sexual and generational boundaries. From such a position, ambivalently generative readings of the play come into focus, readings that do not tame the affective and literary complexities which Caselli renders as 'collusion', but still understand its political imagination to expand beyond a desire to disillusion.

In the third act, there is a utopic trace when Augusta implies that Miranda had appeared to embody a revolutionary figure in the household who 'stood up' against the tyranny of the father, then ultimately failed to repair the 'economy' of the family in the way her gesture seemed to promise it could.

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<sup>622</sup> *The Political Psyche*, p. 133.

<sup>623</sup> Caselli, p. 247.

AUGUSTA: [...] That man your father. I said his acts to me

Were never gentle, fond, nor kind;

Nor he never held nor stroked me anywhere;

And you stood up, as in a lost equation,

As you had mended such economy.

MIRANDA: And so I should indeed, had I been able,

But metempsychosis not for asking:

And between us stands the argument.<sup>624</sup> (CW, p.212)

Miranda's reply acknowledges that she desired the role, but 'metempsychosis not for the asking', the female child was in no position to displace the *paterfamilias*. One could plausibly imagine, however, that at the terrible climax of the Act, Miranda is better situated to 'mend such economy' – metempsychosis suddenly seeming possible ('I'd lay you in the journey of your bed | And un-bed you, *and I could*, in paradise'<sup>625</sup>); Wendell dead, the antiphony of 'loves [...] common clamour' has finally 'wrung out the chaste economy' from what remains (of him).<sup>626</sup> At which point

*[A sudden derisive blast of the car-horn announces the departure of Dudley and Elisha. Hearing it, Augusta seizes the curfew-bell, beating about Miranda its loud toll.]*<sup>627</sup>

One might feel obliged to hear this linkage of car horn-curfew bell tolling for the final defeat of this 'chaste economy' beneath the fiscally responsible weight of her brothers'

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<sup>624</sup> A, III., p. 212.

<sup>625</sup> A, III., p. 222.

<sup>626</sup> A, III., p. 214.

<sup>627</sup> A, III., p. 222.

economic calculus. Especially as, recognising their loss, the opinion of the mother seems to swing decisively back to the sons, who she had introduced in Act II with an aristocratic reluctance ('I dread my sons, and love them bitterly [...] Both of them, as you observe, successful'<sup>628</sup>), and against whom she could not help but measure her daughter:

AUGUSTA: [*With admiration*] You almost amounted – once. I've said it.

MIRANDA: [*with bitterness*]

But, by my heaven, not the money-wink?

That drawbridge to a safe economy,

That hooded glare the condor turns on the quarry,

That eyelid that absolves him of the kill?<sup>629</sup>

Such a reading assumes that a 'chaste' economy would be one 'absolved' of any taint; whereas Miranda's speeches repeatedly figure the purity of her economy as a surplus, produced when the 'money-wink' does not foreclose the Oedipal desire to pierce its own I/eye. The curfew bell, when Augusta brings it crashing down from the gallery, provides a visual equivalence for the brother's car horn, but the play itself enfolds the discord between the destructive 'common clamour', of the Fordist's car-horn and the self-immolating aristocrat's curfew-bell, in a broader and more profound economy which 'amounts' to more than the aestheticisation of failure – that 'drawbridge' to Leftist academia's own 'safe economy'. The call and response of the sons and their mother combine in an aesthetic pattern which echoes across the framework of Miranda's 'regime of passion'<sup>630</sup>.

Earlier we spoke of the play's coda, where Jeremy's apparent indifference (plus the apparent fulfilment of his prediction at the end of Act I that he need not 'betray' Miranda since 'she is her own collision [...] she will undo herself, | Meeting

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<sup>628</sup> A, II., p. 120.

<sup>629</sup> A, III., p. 209.

<sup>630</sup> *Cinema I*, *ibid.*

herself but totally unarmed.<sup>631</sup>) certainly provokes a more fatalistic reading of the play. ‘Indifference’ is granted the final word, but is it the seal of closure and of authority? Again, the ‘familiarity reprov’d’ between Miranda and Jeremy demands that the audience, as legatees of the piece, hear and respond to both voices as they carry beyond themselves. Jeremy’s sense of an ending is also articulated in the opening exchanges of Act 1, ‘There’s no circulation in the theme, | The very fad of being’s stopped’,<sup>632</sup> ‘The scene is set but seems the actor gone [...] In short no audience at all.’<sup>633</sup> But it is articulated, and only articulable at all, in response to Miranda’s line, ‘Here’s a rip in nature’,<sup>634</sup> with which the play gets under way. And though Jeremy thinks that his declarations conform to Miranda’s, she is quick to contest the assumption that a tear in the scenery of nature means that the performance cannot go on. When she states, ‘The world is cracked – and in the breach | My father’s mew’,<sup>635</sup> it is in called response to the paradoxical assertion (since delivered by an actor apparently acting the part of an actor, who we soon realise is actually acting the part of a man merely acting the part of an actor) that actor and audience have always already deserted the stage. Miranda’s attempts to inhabit, inherit and mend the cracked world of the Father are, if not *vindicated* (after the manner of the happily suicidal hero of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*), certainly still in circulation at the close of Act 3.

To conclude then, whereas for Taylor, Barnes’ fiction shows us that ‘feeling may arise where authenticity and coherent subjectivity do not’, I believe that Barnes’ writing, and *The Antiphon* above all, demands of its audience an admission of mutual insolvency, a situation in which enriching encounters between reader/audience and text is only possible to credit if formally underwritten by the not wholly welcome traces of the father’s property.

Substance, as Derrida famously pointed out, is never the property of the son (nothing is property of the son, except promissorily). It is the father who is substance, though only insofar as ‘the father is always suspicious and watchful toward writing’,<sup>636</sup>

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<sup>631</sup> A, I., p. 114.

<sup>632</sup> A, I., p. 82.

<sup>633</sup> A, I., p. 83.

<sup>634</sup> A, I., p. 82.

<sup>635</sup> A, I., p. 83.

<sup>636</sup> ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 76.

and the son (who is always writing far too freely), takes it upon himself, retroactively and on his father's behalf, to set down the father's word in the solid tablets of law. 'Logos *represents* what it is indebted to: the father who is also chief, capital and good(s). Or rather *the* chief, *the* capital, *the* good(s). *Patēr* in Greek means all that at once.'<sup>637</sup>

*Logos* is a son, then, a son that would be destroyed in his very *presence* without the present *attendance* of his father. His father who answers. His father who speaks for him and answers for him. Without his father, he would be nothing, in fact, but writing. At least that is what is said by the one who says: it is the father's thesis. The specificity of writing would thus be intimately bound to the absence of the father. Such an absence can of course exist along very diverse modalities, distinctly or confusedly, successively or simultaneously: to have lost one's father, through natural or violent death, through random violence or parricide; and then to solicit the aid and attendance, possible or impossible, of the paternal presence, to solicit it directly or to claim to be getting along without it, etc.<sup>638</sup>

'Without his father he would be nothing, in fact, but writing.' Derrida's writing, at its most airily mythopoetic here, concretises something about my own relationship to the written word (whether it be the property of Derrida, Barnes, Caselli...) In reading groups and seminars I often enter into dialogues with a freedom and relaxation which evaporates when confronted with the void of a white screen and 26 black keys, the manipulation of which commutes my voice to channel, commune, and communicate between dead, undead, and yet-to-be-born. Faced with the uncanny mechanics of writing, can we help but fall back, however unconsciously, on the paternal presence: on the sense of *I*, writing for *you*. And if *you* are wishing that *I* had come to the point, made something definite of my work, and stopped dwelling in fantasy, indecision and verbose abstraction... Well, that might be because I am always writing to you, Dad. [While I will never solicit my 'real' Dad (still living as I type this) to read a single line,

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<sup>637</sup>Plato's Pharmacy', p. 81.

<sup>638</sup>Plato's Pharmacy', p. 77.

‘it is the father's thesis’ and more particularly *my* father's invaluable thesis that I’ve been attempting to defend and destroy simultaneously here.]

CURTAIN.



## Conclusion

‘This thesis needs no introduction’. An arrogance beyond belief to take that empty phrase, with which seniority and experience is routinely introduced by its acolytes, and apply it to a rather messy and imperfect work by a PhD candidate who has compulsively avoided opportunities to ‘make a name for himself’, in large part out of fear that he might not like the names that were offered.

This thesis needed no introduction. It’s done, over now, and it’s not going anywhere where it will need calling cards. I want it encrypted in an unmarked online depository.

Can I say anything here though which could justify the lack of a formal introduction? Which could, or even should, make that absence less *sorely felt*. Perhaps by reasoning from first principles about the rhetorical and epistemological functioning of the prolegomenon, reviewing its ideological determinants in a tradition of liberal education wherein knowledge (it might be demonstrated) is valued above all as discrete, substantial, accretive and transmissible? Alternatively, could I invoke Bataille’s acéphalic man (whose physiognomy betrays his obvious family resemblance to the singular acceptations of Bataille’s term, ‘Sovereignty’, in the latter’s relation to impossible acts of pure expenditure) to legitimise my sacrificial offering of a headless thesis – in particular, a headless thesis which claimed it was not altogether done with the symbolic efficiency of the ‘head’ of the *oikonomia*?

I could quote Hegel to the effect that the dialectical *process*, not the abstract aim, methodology or final result, is where absolute knowledge is to be comprehended:

The aim by itself is a lifeless universal, just as the guiding tendency is a mere drive that as yet lacks an actual existence; and the bare result is the corpse which has left the guiding tendency behind it. Similarly, the specific difference of a thing is rather its limit; it is where the thing stops, or it is what the thing is not. This concern with aim and results, with differentiating and passing judgement on various thinkers is therefore an easier task than it might seem [...] To judge a thing that has substance and solid worth is quite easy, to

comprehend it is much harder, and to blend judgement and comprehension in a definite description is the hardest thing of all.<sup>639</sup>

Alas, though, Hegel wrote that in an interminably long Preface (he hadn't even come on to his Introduction yet). And, anyway, the concrete lesson of the citation might be that it is the terror of 'differentiating and passing judgement' – which all lifeless introductions and bare conclusions entail – that has caused me (to cause you) much grief and frustration and determined my work as barely comprehensible, insubstantial.

Notwithstanding whatever apologies I might offer you: it is true, I confess. I *have* cut off the head of the sovereign. The act *is* sorely felt. I have (across the distended chronotope of this part-time, part-object PhD) *père* severed.

I forced my thesis to be its own introduction, an impossible de-delegation. Whether through negligence or self-abnegation, I have been a terrible father. Yet it now behoves me as its author to at least engrave a brief closing remark over its corpse, encrypting the remains (the 'bare result') such that they may later appear to have been a 'substantial' and 'original' object.

Firstly, my thesis did not state plainly whether it thought that '[w]hat is inalterable, what will continue to traverse History, is that there is, or that there *be*, *something of* a family, some social bond organized around procreation'<sup>640</sup>, and whether this in turn would permit one to say that there will always be *something of* the authority of the Father underlying a social bond. I do not pretend that the thesis would have been capable of responding to that question, even if it had been willing to address it. I will merely say, again reassuring myself by adapting a dead man's words to my own purpose, that 'the passage beyond [the Father] does not consist in turning the page of [the Family] (which usually amounts to Fathering badly), but in continuing to read [Fathers] in *a certain way*'.<sup>641</sup>

Secondly, the final word on Djuna Barnes. I make minimal claims for what these readings contribute to extant research in the fields of Modernist, American, Feminist or LGBT literatures. I have only fleetingly and inconsistently situated

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<sup>639</sup> *Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>640</sup> Jacques Derrida and Elizabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow... A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 36.

<sup>641</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), pp. 351-70 (p. 364).

Barnes' productions in these wider contexts, and have barely engaged with Modernist scholarship beyond that which also treats of Barnes' writing. What place has she occupied for me, and how do I justify putting her there?

On employing 'feminist autobiographical writing' in her theorisation of the specificity of 'maternal' subjectivity, Lisa Baraitser writes that she utilises it,

[A]t times to illustrate, at times to contradict, inform and dislodge the theoretical investigations that form the main body of this work. In doing so, I try to maintain something of the indigestibility of maternal experience by leaving these small, unintegrated and perhaps undigestible nuggets of maternal writing within the more formal academic reflections, as well as using them to interrupt myself, or, as much as possible, throw myself off subject – especially my own tendency to be drawn back towards the relative safety of theory.<sup>642</sup>

Can I claim to have exploited Barnes' labours for similar purposes in my evocations of the paternal? Her 'melancholic corpus' is not the direct object of my thesis, though, as the gerund in my title suggests, I do 'incorporate' it (as complement) into my encounter with the Father. One must hear any juxtaposition of 'incorporation' and 'melancholic' in terms of an internalisation which is heightened and haunted by the refusal to avow its desire for the object; I think this more or less describes the ambiguous, 'undigestible' status which her work maintains: not quite a research object, not quite a critical interlocutor, something of both, as well as a testing ground for my ideas, and a persistent symptom of what cannot quite be domesticated within an internally cohesive argument. If I have eschewed 'autobiographical' writing it is because I believe that the issues of the *patri-* with which I concerned myself were explored more cogently in the operation a self-reflexive power struggle rather than in any 'auto-' evocation of lived experience. For the record, few memories, dreams or

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<sup>642</sup> Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 13. I am grateful to my partner, Harriet Cooper, for directing me to Lisa's work, as I am for so many other things which I will not attempt to articulate in a footnote, nor even in an Acknowledgements section!

reflections have a greater capacity to disrupt, unsettle and animate me than does the word on which *The Antiphon* ends, ‘indifference’.

What else has this thesis failed to digest? Arguably, too little consideration has been given to the specifics of race, class, physical embodiment, sexual orientation and other divisive ideological elements that are graven into the image of the universal Father. More precisely, while I have addressed these exclusionary articulations (most saliently in the discussions of anti-semitism and intersubjective recognition in chapter 1 and through critical engagement with the ideal of ‘intersectionality’ in chapter 3), at no point have I fully satisfied the objection that by writing in defence of, or even in the place of, the Father I am perpetuating (or pining nostalgically) for a privilege to which (as white, middle-class, British male) I possess greater access than the majority of bodies on the planet. I respond to this (self-) reproach with various arguments across all four chapters. Yet, above all, such a damning objection should not be discredited, even if it needs to be challenged or refined to some degree. For, at root, this thesis wished to bear shame and to recognise loss in a form which might yet be empowering.

Has anything of substance and solid worth been achieved? My abstract aim was to establish the ‘necessity of *en-tirpatory* aggression’ – the active laying down of roots, protocols, taboos - in the letter and the force of a discourse. The guiding tendency of the first three chapters was the drive to comprehend a repressed wish for the Father’s ‘Right’ as it is displaced in and between some of ‘Left’ academia’s canonical discourses (those of Lacan, Derrida and Foucault, and Marx respectively). Chapter 4, however, attempted a slightly different approach to the same object. Hopefully remaining critical and vigilant regarding its own significant investments in the underlying issues, it ultimately made a positive case for the Father as a resource for erotic and aggressive exchange, capable of establishing boundaries as well as refusing or subverting them. Crucially, it did so without any binding Guarantee that these actions may be judged or comprehended as *either abusive or enabling*. This is as it must be. Breathe out. *Caveat semen!*<sup>643</sup>

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<sup>643</sup>The Latin *semen* (*semin-*), whose basic meaning was [...] the seed of a plant [...] could also mean the seed of animals, “race”, “child”, “descendent” or even “origin”.’ (Robert Fortune, *The Words of Medicine: Sources, Meanings and Delights* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher Ltd, 2000) p. 111.)



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