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On her mouth you kiss your own: Lesbian conversations in exile, 1924-1936

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On her mouth you kiss your own: Lesbian conversations in exile, 1924–1936

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University of New Hampshire, 1992
ON HER MOUTH YOU KISS YOUR OWN:
LESBIAN CONVERSATIONS IN EXILE, 1924 - 1936

BY

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DISSERTATION

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the Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

To Jean Kennard and Susan Schibanoff
for who they are and who they've been to me
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ABSTRACT

ON HER MOUTH YOU KISS YOUR OWN:
LESBIAN CONVERSATIONS IN EXILE, 1924 - 1936

by

Luita D. Spangler
University of New Hampshire, May, 1992

This dissertation examines the work of four American lesbian expatriate novelists living and writing in Paris in the years between the two World Wars. Altogether six novels are discussed: The Uncertain Feast (1924), The Happy Failure (1925), and This Way Up (1927) by Solita Solano; The Cubical City (1925) by Janet Flanner; The One Who Is Legion (1930) by Natalie Clifford Barney; and Nightwood (1936) by Djuna Barnes.

Guided by recent conjectures on the significance of sexuality and gender development proposed by such feminist theorists as Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig, this dissertation explores these six novels for evidence of shared imagery and communally evolving concepts regarding such issues as female autonomy, female friendship, lesbian identity, lesbian passion, and androgyny.

All three of Solita Solano's novels sustain an overt critique of heterosexuality; The Uncertain Feast offers a
background example of primary affection between women that may be recognized as a highly encoded model for lesbian relationship. In The Cubical City, Janet Flanner foregrounds women-identified love against a portrait of marriage as a formula for female surrender and submission.

Natalie Barney's The One Who Is Legion experiments with narrative form while proposing gynandry as the ideal human state. In Nightwood, Djuna Barnes advances the concept of lesbianism as an entirely alternative ontological stance in a narrative analysis that seems to anticipate the recent theories of Irigaray and Wittig.

This study acknowledges Nightwood as a conscious disruption of patriarchal authority and challenges conventional interpretations of the novel as "tragic." Images that recur in the work of Flanner, Solano and Barney are collected and developed to their greatest potential within the densely metaphoric language and structure of Nightwood. Barnes's novel is recognized as the culmination of lesbian literary modernism that evolved during the first half of the twentieth century and is regarded as a work that ultimately calls for the necessity of devising a language capable of expressing female, and in particular, lesbian, reality.
CHAPTER I

GLEANINGS FROM THE SHORES OF MYTILENE:
LESBIAN TEXTS, LESBIAN READERS

In *A Room of One's Own*, an essay based on a series of two papers read to the Arts Society at Newnham and at the Odtaa at Girton in October, 1928, Virginia Woolf suddenly interrupts the line of her argument:

... I am sorry to break off so abruptly. Are there no men present? Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Chartres Biron is not concealed? We are all women, you assure me? (141-142)

As Jane Marcus has pointed out in "Sapphistory: The Woolf and the Well," through this aside Woolf has involved her audience in an intricate "conspiracy," an "us against them" situation in which the implied "them," represented by Chartres Biron, the presiding magistrate in the British obscenity trial against Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, are the forces in society that seek to deny public recognition of lesbian representation in the arts. Here she equates all men with the reactionary forces of Chartres Biron, and "all women" as an audience who can hear the significance in her following disclosure, that, in the novel by her fictional author Mary Carmichael, "'Chloe liked Olivia' ... Do not start. Do not blush."

Her understated revelation posed against such an
anticipated violence of reaction is not only humorous, but also works on a number of levels to suggest first, by irony, the innocence of such a situation, second, paired with the association with Chartres Biron and masculine antipathy against lesbianism, that Chloe liking Olivia may indeed have a lesbian resonance, and thirdly, through her advice to her audience not to start or blush, that the situation of Chloe liking Olivia is normal, particularly among a separatist audience who can "admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen." As Marcus points out, by setting up an environment in which women-centered affection is a healthy norm, Woolf has created for herself, "at least symbolically," a lesbian audience.

What is the necessity of a lesbian audience? Apparently Virginia Woolf thought a lesbian environment, even one constructed by the text itself, was necessary to explore the ramifications of patriarchal authority and the need for women to absent themselves from their proscribed roles within that same patriarchy, to obtain a room of their own, in order to achieve full creative and intellectual integrity. More recently, certain feminist critics such as Barbara Smith, Bonnie Zimmerman and Gillian Whitlock have written on the need to create a body of lesbian literary criticism, to acknowledge a reading audience whose assumptions, points of departure, interpretations and final achieved meanings from texts are very different from those
of heterosexuals. Indeed, as in *A Room of One's Own*, the very accessibility of a lesbian audience may allow a writer certain freedoms that would not be otherwise obtainable. The absence of an openly lesbian interpretive voice has worked to diminish or distort the reception of lesbian texts: Susan Sniader Lanser has noted, for example, that published criticism of Djuna Barnes' *Ladies Almanack* which privileged a male heterosexual point of view has led to "gross misreadings" of a work that "was written for a lesbian audience and presupposes a homocentric view of the world" (41). Even offering lesbian readings of texts which are not overtly lesbian in origin or construct validates alternative interpretive possibilities: For example, by developing the idea of "lesbian narrative space" as a "primary presence" forged between women which disrupts a heterosexual narrative imperative based on dualism, Marilyn R. Farwell locates the "strength and core" of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, a novel of 876 pages, in a two page scene of ritual bonding between Morgaine of the Fairies and Raven, priestess of the Goddess. "I am not arguing," writes Farwell, "that *Mists* is ultimately a more transgressive novel than others . . . ,

but rather that in opening a new narrative space the reader can forge a subtext that explores female desire while the main text does not. The subtext gives us the possibility for a transgressive narrative that can be more fully realized in other narratives or that can be part of our readings of other texts that seem to reinforce the bonding between heterosexuality and the narrative. (102)
Any formal exploration of the possibilities of lesbian literary criticism runs immediately into the thorny problem of lesbian definition. What, exactly, is a lesbian? What, for that matter, is a lesbian reader? A lesbian text? What is literary lesbianism? And finally, what is lesbian literary criticism? Of course, any attempt at definition must keep in mind an admonition offered by Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow: "we must learn to 'avoid the homogeneity trap and to beware universalizing the term lesbian'" (5). Any definition must be regarded as a generalization, an equivocal explanation based on the nexus of that writer's individual experience, retrospect, and analysis. As if to acknowledge the elusive quality of this definition, Biddy Martin insists that lesbianism is not something as enduring and unmovable as an "identity," but is "a position from which to speak" (113). According to Martin, what those who speak from this position share is a sensitivity to, though not necessarily an understanding of, the "discontinuities between biological sex, gender identity, and sexuality" (85).

First of all, in a world in which heterosexuality is such a universally assumed point of view that its own need for definition is just as universally ignored, lesbianism is that which is not heterosexual. As the concept of "woman" in a patriarchal culture is recognized, linguistically and
otherwise, as "not-man," lesbianism exists as a mysterious Other which intrudes upon the texture of a heterosexual, male norm. But it is an Other which implies relationship with another Other, because at its most basic level, a woman's lesbianism is identified by her association with another woman. In "Zero Degree Deviancy: The Lesbian Novel in English," Catherine Stimpson defines lesbianism as specifically sexual; a lesbian is "a woman who finds other women erotically attractive and gratifying" (364). The "carnality" of this definition would presumably separate a lesbian relationship from one in which women simply like each other (as in the novel by Woolf's Mary Carmichael). Adrienne Rich recognizes lesbianism as the "primary presence of women to ourselves and each other" (Lies, 250), a definition which includes, but also seems to extend beyond, Stimpson's self-described "carnality." Rich's phrasing also introduces the possibility that a woman can have, in essence, a lesbian relationship with herself, that a woman's "primary presence" to herself is, in fact, lesbian in nature. By recently revising the "primary presence" of her definition to "primary intensity," Rich seems to be implying, through the inherent passion of the word "intensity," that the attention paid by women toward themselves and other women always carries elements of the erotic ("Compulsory Heterosexuality" 648). Monique Wittig, in keeping with her understanding of sexual difference as an
artificial series of constructs imposed by an equally
unnatural system of heterosexuality, perceives lesbianism as
a condition which lies outside of the dualistic,
mal/female, one/other categories of heterosexuality. In
other words, Wittig recognizes someone or something as
"lesbian" when it is not not-man (121).

Beginning with Catherine Stimpson's definition of
lesbianism, a lesbian text would be one in which women find
other women erotically attractive and gratifying. If this
definition is compounded with Adrienne Rich's suggestion of
erotic inevitability in any "primary intensity" between
women, a text is lesbian, or has within it "lesbian
narrative space" whenever women find themselves or other
women intensely attractive and/or gratifying. In turn, a
lesbian reader would be a woman who finds herself primarily
attracted to or gratified by the women in a narrative text.
Since the text may be based on a narrative heterosexual
norm, the lesbian reader's attraction may actually function
as a kind of interpretive distraction. In other words, the
lesbian reader herself may introduce the "disruption" of
conventional heterosexuality which forges "lesbian narrative
space." Moreover, a reader who adopts Wittig's concept of
lesbianism will be able to read as "lesbian" not only
individual characters in a text, but also entire textual
environments, so long as these environments seem to exist
outside of agonistic heterosexual dualism.
My particular approach will be using a selective conflation of all the above definitions. Like Adrienne Rich, I, too, perceive "primary intensity" between women to be lesbian in nature and always erotically charged. As a reader, I tend to pay primary attention to the female characters in a text, and while I may not find this textual attraction always gratifying, I do regard it as lesbian, and see myself as a lesbian reader. I believe that Wittig's idea of lesbianism is somewhat reductive and works to deny the dynamic elements of difference which always operate in a lesbian relationship. Even when a woman's primary lesbian relationship is with herself, the energy in this relationship is not only in its affirmation of a sense of sameness, but will also be found in the tensions of difference as she moves between such forces as her self and persona, her mind and her body, her intentions and her actions. But I believe that Wittig's idea of lesbianism as an environmental quality is useful, as is her insistence in lesbianism as something which exists outside of the bounds of pure opposition to a heterosexual norm. It is quite possible, however, that a text which is completely independent of cultural heterosexual primacy has yet to be written. The purely lesbian text may not yet exist.

As the above discussion makes obvious, my understanding of "lesbian," both as an operating concept and as a lived reality, is extremely subjective and flexible. This reveals
me to hold a "constructionist" view as defined by John Boswell in his recognition of the ongoing struggle between those who embrace an essentialist definition of homosexuality versus those who see sexual preference and its multitudinous resonances primarily as social constructs. According to Boswell, constructionists (sometimes known as "nominalists," "aver that categories of sexual preference and behavior are created by humans and human societies. Whatever reality they have is the consequence of the power they exert in those persons influenced by them." On the other hand, "essentialists" believe that people are "differentiated sexually. . . . The heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy exists in speech and thought because it exists in reality: It was not invented by sexual taxonomists, but observed by them" (19). As scholars have added their work to the rapidly enlarging field of gay and lesbian literary criticism, the problem of defining just exactly what and who a lesbian is has become extremely difficult. Who has the right or the resources to identify someone else as a lesbian? Is a writer a "lesbian author" if she is recognized as such by another lesbian? Are all of a lesbian author's works "lesbian" in nature, or just those specifically dealing with the subject of lesbianism? What happens when an author recognized as a "lesbian author" explicitly denies being a lesbian? Can heterosexual women write lesbian literature? These issues are particularly
pressing to a lesbian reader who is attempting to place what she recognizes as lesbian texts within the context of a still-evolving tradition. Nothing less than the paralysis of inquiry itself is at stake; as Boswell points out, too rigid adherence to an "essentialist" definition would needlessly narrow the field of cultural participants (eliminating such authors as Virginia Woolf and Colette from lesbian literary tradition because of their heterosexual behaviors). An overly "constructionalist" definition of homosexuality, however, would either render the recognition of gay and lesbian culture so recent as to deprive it completely of tradition, or would make the definition so broad and nonrestrictive as to be meaningless (20).

To further complicate matters, homosexual and lesbian cultural traditions can be seen as only recently sharing a relatively joined arena of overlapping social recognition, importance, and coherence. Although the word "homosexual" has appeared in print only since 1869 (it was probably coined by the Hungarian translator Karl Maria Kerbeny, the apparent author of two anonymous pamphlets on homosexuality published that year in Leipzig), and has been included in the Oxford English Dictionary only since its 1976 Supplement, erotic activity between men has been recognized, documented, represented, and morally condemned, tolerated, or extolled, throughout human cultural history. The etymology of the word lesbian, while clearly dating back
over 2500 years to the poet Sappho of Lesbos, has never carried with it an equally clear implication of just what "lesbian" behavior is. While homosexuality in men has always presumed the importance of its physical component, genital sex between women has often been regarded as an impossibility, much less a likelihood, according to current social attitudes toward women as sexually active human beings. The poet whose art celebrates her love for other women has been variously regarded as chaste, heterosexual, intellectually romantic and completely indiscriminate (see Joan DeJean's *Fictions of Sappho 1546 - 1937*); in turn, sexual activity between women has been also regarded as impossible, unlikely, unimportant and pathological, depending on the existing cultural level of misogyny, and the repercussions of this misogyny in female silence, invisibility, and repression.

Perhaps Luce Irigaray's theories on female sexuality as it relates to discourse can be helpful in understanding literary lesbianism. In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray notes that women have been, literally, "subjected" to a patriarchal discourse in which male "subjects" achieve meaning and definition through phallocentric projection against and into the matter or bodies of female "objects". With the very core of female nature universally interpreted in masculine terminology (particularly through such psychoanalytic theories as penis envy, Freud's insistence
that all women are shaped inevitably by their desire to possess, in one way or another, a phallus), Irigaray argues that women have been denied any way to represent their own integral sexuality, desire, and pleasure. Punning on Jacques Lacan's conception of discourse as the relationship between the masculine "One" and the feminine "Other" (in which the phallus functions as the signifier of desire), Irigaray maintains that male ideation of reality always reflects the specifically phallocentric nature of his sexuality, the "oneness" of his male organ. Furthermore, "In order to touch himself, man needs an instrument: his hand, a woman's body, language . . . And this self-caressing requires at least a minimum of activity."

As for woman, she touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity. Woman ".touches herself" all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself is already two—but not divisible into one(s)—that caress each other. (24)

Woman's sexuality is one of organicity and diffusion; a woman "has sex organs more or less everywhere." She is "indefinitely other in herself" (28), and as a result, her desire can not be expected to "speak the same language as man's; woman's desire has doubtless been submerged by the logic that has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks" (25). Implicit within this idea is the notion that any turning away from the reductive assumptions of
patriarchal heterosexuality is, by its nature, subversive, is a turning toward and reconstruction of this silenced language of woman's desire, is, in Wittig's sense of the word, lesbian.

The unique quality of woman's discourse, then, has been silenced by the overriding monopoly of patriarchal reference. As I see it, one of the initial steps towards dis/covering women's discourse is through the examination of texts written by women who seemed to experience their primary presence among other women, and who disrupted, at various significant levels, the heterosexual cultural narratives which otherwise defined and delineated their lives: works by lesbian authors. By limiting my investigation to the works of several authors who participated in a coherent lesbian community at a particular period of time, I want to recognize the fact that these texts function, not only as works in relationship with the prevailing patriarchal culture, but also as pieces of literary dialogue, as each author wrote in anticipation of and in answer to an audience of known lesbian readers: her friends. Lesbian culture, like female sexuality in general, is naturally diffused, and to me, examining lesbian texts in isolation is subjecting this culture to the same unnatural reductive forces that patriarchy has traditionally used to deny and/or distort female sexuality.
In 1928, the same year that Virginia Woolf published *A Room of One's Own*, 1,050 copies of Djuna Barnes's *Ladies Almanack* were privately printed by Robert McAlmon at the Darantier Press in Dijon, France. Although Barnes had planned the book to be distributed by Edward Titus, he was unhappy with certain financial agreements with the author, and withdrew from the project. The book was sold by Barnes herself to her other expatriate friends as they met at the Café Dôme. The book defies categorization; at its surface it is a sort of lesbian saint's life narrated through the twelve chapters of a monthly almanac. More than that, the book is an amazing literary experiment, written in a densely metaphoric prose which is full of bawdy archaicisms, neologisms, grammatical inversions and discordant fragments of formal literary structures, including the ode, the allegory, the ballad, and even scripture. Further confounding any easy comprehension of the book, it was conceived as an elaborate in-joke. As Susan Lanser puts it, "[i]ts readers were its own cast of characters: the circle of Natalie Clifford Barney, l'Amazone whose Paris salon was the center of lesbian culture in Europe between the wars" (39). Dame Evangeline Musset, the lesbian saint whose long life of sexual revelry and conquest the book celebrates, is actually modelled on Natalie Barney herself.

Jeannette Foster, a pioneer of lesbian literary criticism, recognized 1928 as a "peak" year in the
production of lesbian literary culture (279). It strikes me as appropriate, then, to regard Ladies Almanack as a work which appeared in the middle of a particularly active time in the ongoing lesbian cultural conversation. While it is beyond the capability of this present analysis to examine this cultural dialogue as a whole, I would like to use Djuna Barnes's work as a guide to isolate out one particular moment in this perpetual conversation in order to examine the nature of this lesbian exchange. I will be examining certain works by Solita Solano, Janet Flanner, Natalie Clifford Barney, and Djuna Barnes. These four authors were chosen because of their mutual friendship, their shared nationality, their lesbianism, their collective "participation" in Barnes's Ladies Almanack (Janet Flanner and Solita Solano appear in the book as a pair of journalists, Nip and Tuck), and, broadly speaking, their common literary genre, the novel.

Of the five requisites listed above, the characteristic of shared nationality is primarily a bow to current literary schools of scholarship. Certainly the American origin of these women informs their art, but they may have found their strongest commonality based on, as Bertha Harris has put it, the "more profound nationality of their lesbianism" (79). All four women were American expatriates living in Paris during a period of particularly rich expatriate culture, and each found her own greater or lesser niche within this
American community which existed in a self-imposed European exile during the first third of the twentieth century. As typified in Ernest Hemingway's first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, most of the American expatriates tended to cluster together, forming a distinct English-speaking continental subculture. In fact, Hemingway's portrait of the "lost generation" was self-perpetuating: According to Malcolm Cowley, the novel became an American "craze" and resulted in a wave of emulation: "[Y]oung men tried to get as imperturbably drunk as the hero, young women of good families took a succession of lovers in the same heartbroken fashion as the heroine, [and] they all talked like Hemingway characters . . ." (3).

But the American lesbians of Natalie Clifford Barney's Paris salon evidenced a more catholic taste: The pages of Barnes' *Ladies Almanack* are peopled with American, British, French, German and Italian acquaintances. The primary language of Barney's salon was French: In their works, all four women helped themselves liberally to the vocabulary of three languages; Janet Flanner was conversant in four. As for the geography of the *Ladies Almanack*, in its 1972 preface, Barnes refers to the book as "gleanings from the shores of Mytilene" (3). Mytilene, of course, is the current name given to the island once known as Lesbos.

It is my intention to regard the following novels by these four authors as "gleanings from the shores of
Mytilene": The Uncertain Feast (1924), The Happy Failure (1925), and This Way Up (1927) by Solita Solano; The Cubical City (1926) by Janet Flanner; The One Who Is Legion (1930) by Natalie Clifford Barney; Ladies Almanack (1928), and Nightwood (1936) by Djuna Barnes.

At least two of these works challenge the conventional definition of the term "novel" as signifying an extended, realistic narrative having specificity of place, time, and characters. The unorthodox nature of Barnes' Ladies Almanack has already been briefly described, while Eric Partridge, the publisher responsible for the private (560 copies, sold by subscription) edition of Barney's The One Who Is Legion, found the surrealist novel so obscure that he convinced the author to write a short afterword containing a plot summary and a descriptive list of characters which, on the fly-leaf of the book's jacket, he encouraged people to read first, before they attempted the novel itself.

Any attempt to essay a novel's sense of realism, however, is necessarily bound by the reader's subjective sense of realism, and a lesbian reality may be very different from a heterosexual reality. For example, much of the despairing tone of The Sun Also Rises comes from the frustrated love between Lady Brett and Jake Barnes, who has been wounded while fighting on the Italian Front during World War I, resulting in his inability to get an erection.
This physical impotence seems to preclude all possibility of their lovemaking:

"Don't touch me," she said. "Please don't touch me."
"What's the matter?"
"I can't stand it."
"Oh, Brett."
"You mustn't. You must know. I can't stand it, that's all. Oh, darling, please understand!"
"Don't you love me?"
"Love you? I simply turn all to jelly when you touch me."
"Isn't there anything we can do about it?"
She was sitting up now. My arm was around her and she was leaning back against me, and we were quite calm. She was looking into my eyes with that way she had of looking that made you wonder whether she really saw out of her own eyes. They would look on and on after every one else's eyes in the world would have stopped looking. She looked as though there were nothing on earth she would not look at like that, and really she was afraid of so many things.
"And there's not a damn thing we could do," I said."

(25-26)

As Cowley noted above, Hemingway's novel may have been compelling enough to inspire a generation of would-be expatriates to imitate its protagonists, but such physical paralysis between two people so obviously in love makes no realistic sense to someone who is not limited to this phallocentric sexual singlemindedness. Indeed, this relationship serves as a perfect example of, as Irigaray puts it, "pleasure . . . denied by a civilization that privileges phallomorphism" (26).

On the other hand, even the outrageous parody of Barnes's *Ladies Almanack* contains a great deal of lesbian reality, a fact which has been commented upon by its lesbian readers. Bertha Harris calls the book "a mirror image of
the psychology of Natalie Barney's intensely exclusive milieu" (81); Cheryl Hughes, speaking to George Wickes, Natalie Clifford Barney's biographer, "commented on Ladies Almanack at some length, pointing out that it gives a very complete portrait of the predominantly American lesbian circle of the 1920s" (234). Even Barney's novel, an orchestration of "those inner voices which sometimes speak to us in unison," as she explains in her "Author's Note" (159), may be read as an attempt to articulate the true "multiplicity of female desire" that Irigaray explains has been silenced by the language of the phallus.

This, then, is my intention: To explore narrative representations of lesbian reality, particularly as they pertain to the recovery and reconstruction of a uniquely female discourse, as outlined by Luce Irigaray. In other words, I want to glean from the shores of Mytilene the voices of part of a conversation in which I am only a new speaker, speaking a language which may not yet exist.
WORKS CITED


CHAPTER 2

AN OUTGROUP OF OUTSIDERS:
SOLITA SOLANO, JANET FLANNER, NATALIE BARNEY, DJUNA BARNES

One April day in 1930, Kathryn C. Hulme, a young American author just starting her Paris expatriate experience, arranged an introduction between herself and Janet Flanner at the Café Flore on the pretext of selling her 1928 Renault convertible. As she confirmed their appointment by phone, Hulme was excited to find out she would be meeting two other authentic writers ("I had never met a writer in the flesh," she confided in her memoirs). Her memory of the moment is quite striking:

We saw the three Americans before I stopped the car at the café curb. They were sitting in a row like three Fates beneath a slant of awning on the terrasse. They all wore black tailored suits, white satin scarves folded Ascot style and all three were hatless. Three pairs of white gloves and three martinis were on the marble-topped table before them. It was like seeing in triplicate the sophisticated chic that only years in Paris could produce.

Janet Flanner of the New Yorker arose and put forth her tiny hand, introducing herself, then her friend Solita Solano for whom the roadster was destined, then Djuna Barnes who had come along to see it. I looked at their faces and felt as if I had come home to my kind. (38-39)

Hulme's recollection of the three Greek Fates can be seen as more than just a happy metaphor. Each of these women had come to Paris as a way of reclaiming the direction and
quality of her life, in other words, as a way of seizing control of her own fate.

As a gesture of reclamation, the expatriate experience of Flanner, Solano and Barnes was similar to the experiences of many other American expatriate authors. When she called the generation of post-war exiles "a Lost Generation" (quoted by Hemingway, 29), Gertrude Stein implied that this group of writers would, being lost, be engaged in a strategy of discovery, of Finding. What, however, was found by this broad group of writers differed greatly, depending on the individual writer's lifestyle.

Many male authors emerged from their expatriate experience with a renewed sense of their own (masculine) American identity. Samuel Putnam and Malcolm Cowley, whose memoirs helped define and establish the "Lost Generation" as a significant movement in the development of the American literary canon, each suggested the importance of wartime experience in the formation of this particular American expatriate generation; according to Putnam, the success of Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* (1920) was because "it voiced the disillusionment many a doughboy who had fought the 'battle of Paris' felt when he saw his home town again" (21). The character of the American hero, albeit a hero often bewildered and alienated in the new and rapidly changing landscape of the twentieth century, emerges as a major theme in male American expatriate fiction, paralleling
the experiences of the authors. "[I]n the midst of their doubts and uneasy gestures of defiance they felt homesick for the certainties of childhood," explained Cowley. "It was not by accident that their early books were almost all nostalgic, full of the wish to recapture some remembered thing. In Paris or Pamplona, writing, drinking, watching bullfights or making love, they continued to desire a Kentucky hill cabin, a farmhouse in Iowa or Wisconsin, the Michigan woods . . ." (9).

For example, the Edenic "Big Two-Hearted River" that embraces Nick Adams at the end of In Our Time (1925) washes this American Adam clean from the grime and squalor of his European travels; in case the reader should miss the baptismal rebirth of the hero's fishing expedition, Hemingway ends the book with a brief image of European contrast; a nameless deposed king gardens and drinks uselessly within his palace grounds, forbidden to leave by the "revolutionary committee." "Like all Greeks," states the book's final sentence, "he wanted to go to America." The diminished artificiality of the king's empire, reduced to his palace's rose garden, reflects the king's own terribly constricted future. As he himself explains, the "great thing in this sort of an affair is not to be shot oneself!" (157) Despite his strangely cheerful mien, there is every indication in this brief piece that getting shot will, indeed, be his eventual fate. The book closes with
the word "America," ending on the open vowel of a word whose very sound reflects the opening possibilities of Nick Adams' "Big . . . Hearted" country.

The nostalgic, virile America recalled by these expatriated ex-doughboys contrasted itself against a country busy embracing both prohibition and a sterile commercial business ethic. In 1922, a symposium by thirty intellectuals entitled Civilization in the United States (edited by Harold Stearns) declared that the United States had become universally standardized, uncreative, given over to the worship of wealth and machinery. This environment of materialism symbolized a spiritual failure, which was, in turn, explained by "a fundamental sexual inadequacy." While businessmen expended their energy in compiling wealth, their wives took over the development of culture, resulting in the "extraordinary feminization of American social life" (135). According to Stearns, the nation's interest in intellectual inquiry, the "love of truth," had been abandoned, because "what women usually understand by the intellectual life is the application of modern scientific methods to a sort of enlarged and subtler course in domestic science" (144, 145). He concluded that any gifted American intellectual had no choice but to leave America for Europe, which he did, turning in the book's manuscript to the publisher right before sailing for Europe in 1921.

Women, of course, lacked the doughboy experience. The
female expatriate's process of disillusionment with her country tended to be very different from the returning doughboy's sudden encounter with his country's emasculated sterility. Women in post-war America were in the midst of New Womanhood, a flowering of promised opportunity in education, employment and politics, whose realization was seemingly guaranteed by national women's suffrage. Unfortunately, the very vision of opportunity helped reify the gap between promise and reality. While male American modernists felt profoundly alienated from the perceived "feminization" of their country, American women still experienced strict limits of social, economic and political freedom imposed on them because of their gender; for example, in his memoirs, Malcolm Cowley remembered that in the 1920's "many young women were arrested and charged with prostitution because the dicks had seen them smoking cigarettes in the street" (6).

Post-war Europe, while hardly free from gender roles, maintained a generally laissez-faire policy towards its expatriate guests, whose tourist dollars were extremely important to the depressed continental economy. This condition provided American women with the opportunity to experience some of the freedom from rigid gender roles that can accompany economic power. In This Must Be the Place: Memoirs of Montparnasse, Jimmy (The Barman) Charters described a confrontation between the manager of the Rotonde
and an American woman who was sitting out on the bar's terrace "quite hatless and smoking a cigarette with a jaunty air"; when asked to stop by the bar's owner, she refused and moved across the street to the Dôme, "taking with her the entire Anglo-American colony" (5).

As the voices of masculine anxiety grew more and more strident, the New Woman was vilified as "male-brained, male-voiced, male-imitating, and very often male-hating," a creature whose "inverted sex nature is obvious to the veriest tyro" (Henderson-Livesey, quoted by Gilbert and Gubar, 3). The equation here of the New Woman with lesbianism is quite obvious. Ironically, there is more than just a kernel of truth behind such statements. The issue of female autonomy was (and is) most immediately relevant to those women whose lifestyles preclude automatic dependence on masculine support, either emotional or financial. This population of women includes single and divorced women, widows, and lesbians. Interestingly enough, the very definition of the New Woman was largely influenced by the homosexual theorist Edward Carpenter who, in The Intermediate Sex (1908), explaining that "homogenic affection is a valuable social force, and in some cases a necessary element of noble human character," further commented that "the movement among women towards their own liberation and emancipation, which is taking place all over the civilised (sic) world, has been accompanied by a marked
development of the homogenic passion among the female sex" (72-73).

Although American women from a broad spectrum of lifestyles sought to fulfill the promise of New Womanhood through expatriation, the success of their endeavors varied widely, contingent to a degree on how independent they were from the inevitably sexist forces of masculine relationship. As a case in point, Samuel Putnam describes the elation he and his wife, Riva, felt upon their arrival in France as the "fulfilled longing of two Midwesterners to escape from the prairie flatness, the stockyards atmosphere . . . and the provincial smugness of American life as a whole" (50). However, while Samuel sang and drank wine on deck with the crew of their ship as it docked at Le Havre, Riva stayed down in the cabin with their baby. Kay Boyle, whose marriage to a French citizen "was going to be a confirmation of our impatience with conventions and our commitment to something called freedom in which we believed so passionately" (14), felt compelled to return to her mother and sister after she bore a child outside of her marriage. "I, who had always talked so madly, so foolishly, of the things in which I believed and the things I was certain I would do, stood in failure and defeat before them" (237).

Male American expatriates often regarded their female compatriots with patronizing amusement or, worse, open hostility. In an example of paired voyeurism, Putnam
recalled enjoying the sight of Harold Stearns in a bar "as, over his solitary drink, he studied the behavior of some girl or matron from the States engaged in losing her repressions" (29). While the American male expatriates may have been regretting the feminization of America, they regarded their temporary home as female, as matria: Paris was Putnam's "mistress," but to Robert McAlmon she was a "bitch," and "one shouldn't become infatuated with bitches" (125). These men, already uncomfortable in their relationship with their temporary "motherland," were equally uncomfortable with the enthusiasm with which many American women embraced unprecedented gender role freedom, particularly women who remained unattached to any male partners. William Carlos Williams grumbled to friends that France was rife with lesbians. His Autobiography includes a rather catty description of a visit to Natalie Clifford Barney's salon: "Out of the corner of my eye I saw a small clique of [women] sneaking off together into a side room while casting surreptitious glances about them, hoping their exit had not been unnoticed. I went out and stood up to take a good piss." Williams concludes his description with the story of a member of the Chamber of Deputies who, while visiting the salon, was upset by the sight of women dancing together. "Thereupon he undid his pants buttons, took out his tool and, shaking it right and left, yelled out in a rage, 'Have you never seen one of these?'" His readers may
be able to note a contextual similarity between the deputy and Williams himself (230, 229).

France may not have been rife with lesbians in the early twentieth century, but it is true that a significant number of American lesbians formed a noticeable, cohesive subgroup among the population of American expatriates as a whole. Recent work by such scholars as Shari Benstock, Mary Lynn Broe, Karla Jay and Jane Marcus have helped this group achieve a long-delayed critical recognition and study. While several of the expatriate American lesbian authors living in Paris in the first third of the twentieth century have received a degree of critical attention (for example, Gertrude Stein), in the past these women and their work have tended to be the focus of studies which minimized the artistic importance of their participation in an active and vital lesbian community.

By the start of the twentieth century, France had already been experiencing several years of a steady migration of British homosexuals who feared persecution in their native land. This exodus was prompted by the arrest, in 1895, of the popular author Oscar Wilde for violating the British Criminal Amendment Act of 1885, which made homosexual activity in private between consenting adults punishable by up to two years imprisonment with hard labor. Wilde was found guilty and given the maximum sentence, leaving prison in 1897 physically broken, bankrupt and
estranged from his wife and children. This event inspired the beginnings of a continental homosexual rights movement whose purpose was universal homosexual emancipation. As the British sexologist Havelock Ellis noted in his book *Sexual Inversion*,

The Oscar Wilde trial, with its wide publicity, and the fundamental nature of the questions it suggested, appears to have generally contributed to give definiteness and self-consciousness to the manifestations of homosexuals, and to have aroused inverted types to take up a definite attitude. (352)

While lesbians were not likely to face imprisonment and hard labor, those who congregated in a distinct expatriate population often shared the politicized "attitude" that Ellis recognized among homosexual men. In 1899 Natalie Clifford Barney settled in Paris to live openly as a lesbian and escape her father's pressure on her to marry. When he died in December of 1902, she inherited $2,500,000 of the family's railroad fortune, and she spent the rest of her life using this money to promote lesbian culture. Incensed at the refusal of the Académie Française to admit women, she started up an informal "Académie des Femmes" to support and publicize the work of her (primarily lesbian) friends. Her salon, a popular meeting place for educated and/or wealthy lesbian expatriates, was held regularly on Fridays so as not to conflict with the Thursday gatherings held at her friend Gertrude Stein's home.
By the end of the first World War, Natalie Barney functioned as a cultural magnet to lesbians from all parts of the world who sought a free and open environment. The women who befriended Barney tended to be privileged in a number of ways: often wealthy, invariably well-educated, frequently talented. As Pamela Annas points out in her essay on the American expatriate poet Renée Vivien, the lesbian who frequented Barney's salon was a member of a select "outgroup": "[S]he came to Paris to be inside and unalienated--to live as a lesbian, to write from that experience, to be read sympathetically" (13). The forthcoming artistic outpouring from Barney's lesbian sanctuary served the dual purposes of gratitude and spreading the news of this sanctuary's existence to those who might need it. Sometimes, of course, the encoded nature of this information was translated by a hostile heterosexual audience: The monocled, tuxedoed portrait of Una, Lady Troubridge, had to be withdrawn from Romaine Brooks' 1925 exhibition at the Alpine Club in London because the public was so scandalized at its overtly lesbian aesthetic (Romaine Brooks, who was praised for the "masculine vitality that propels from the canvases of this painter" (Usher, 46), was later remembered by Truman Capote for painting "the all-time ultimate gallery of all the famous dykes from 1880 to 1935 or thereabouts (Wickes, 257).

Without a doubt, the most notorious example of this
collision between lesbian encoding and social homophobia took place with the 1928 publication of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. At one level, the novel is entirely public; it is the story of a lesbian's struggle for love and acceptance in an extremely hostile world. At another, the book is extremely subtle; to an alert reader, it serves as nothing less than a manual on how to be a lesbian. It provides information on how to recognize lesbianism (in the world and in oneself), which sexologists provide theories on the cause and nature of lesbianism, how to behave as a lesbian, and finally, where to find other lesbians, generally (in lesbian and homosexual bars, which exist in large European cities) and, specifically, where to find the most active lesbian benefactor. Hall locates the novel's lesbian protagonist on Natalie Barney's street in Paris, and even appropriates Barney's home itself for her heroine's expatriate address. Hall also provides a portrait of Barney in the character of Valerie Seymour (the name itself carries the intonational echo of "Natalie Barney"), detailed enough so that her attentive readers could suspect the veracity of the portrait. Although she calls Seymour a "fanatic" (281), she also portrays this American heiress as a "charming and cultured woman" who was "a kind of lighthouse in a storm-swept ocean." Seymour's salon "created an atmosphere of courage; every one felt very normal and brave when they gathered together at Valerie
Seymour's":

She did nothing, and at all times said very little, feeling no urge towards philanthropy. But this much she gave to her brethren, the freedom of her salon, the protection of her friendship; if it eased them to come to her monthly gatherings they were always welcome provided they were sober. (404-405)

The appearance of The Well of Loneliness prompted James Douglass, the editor of the London Sunday Express, to denounce the novel as a "horror", a "pestilence" and a "plague" (his five column editorial was entitled, in inch and a half banner headlines, "A BOOK THAT MUST BE SUPPRESSED"). "I would rather give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel," puffed Douglass. The novel was seized under the Obscene Publications Act of 1857, which gave British magistrates statutory powers to order destroyed "any obscene publication held for sale or distribution on information laid before a court of summary jurisdiction" (Brittain, 86). Despite the fact that fifty-seven witnesses (including Bernard Shaw, Vera Brittain, Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, and H. G. Wells) offered to testify in favor of the book's decency and literary merit, the theme of the book and not its literary merit was declared to be on trial, and on November 16, 1928, Sir Chartres Biron, refusing to hear any witnesses, declared the book obscene, because its subject matter, lesbianism, was obscene by definition. The Well of Loneliness was eventually translated into eleven languages.
and by 1939 was enjoying an annual sale of one hundred thousand copies in the United States alone, but was not available for sale in England until after the second World War.

As exemplified by Natalie Barney and the frequenters of her salon, these American lesbians in Paris lived the condition of exile to a different degree than their male and heterosexual female colleagues. Shari Benstock points out in "Expatriate Modernism: Writing on the Cultural Rim" that

> For women, the definition of patriarchy already assumes the reality of expatriate in patria; for women, this expatriation is internalized, experienced from the outside and lived from the inside in such a way that the separation of outside from inside, patriarchal dicta from female decorum, cannot be easily distinguished. (20)

Natalie Barney chose to live in France literally to get away from her family's patriarch, her father. But by choosing to live openly as a lesbian in Paris, she was also forcing this internalized expatriation outward, making quite distinct her alienation from both her father and the country and conditions of her patria, her fatherland. But, in truth, any American lesbian who chose to live as an expatriate in Paris did not step from the clutches of the patria into the warm embraces of any kind of matria; Barney created the Académie des Femmes precisely because she understood that France was just as much a patriarchy as any other existing nation. In 1932, writing in a column for The New Yorker on the French Assembly's failure to grant women the right to
vote, Janet Flanner acknowledged that "no one would guess that the French sexes are in danger . . . of being equalized" (103). McAlmon's "bitch" of a country, Putnam's exotic "mistriss," was a terrain of their male imagination.

In an essay on the French lesbian author Monique Wittig, Namascar Shaktini describes Wittig's appropriation and use of Freud's "dark continent" metaphor (used to describe the "unknowable" sexual life of women) in the prose poems of The Lesbian Body:

"[T]he black continent" for Wittig is the phallog-centric gehenna we are trying to leave, the place to push off from as we embark for the lesbian islands. The movement against the phallic metaphor gives momentum toward the metaphorical "place" of lesbian metaphor.

... The island images evoke Sappho's island, Lesbos. (295)

For many expatriate lesbians, the island of Lesbos represented a kind of homeland. Unfortunately, it was a homeland available to them only through legend, myth, nostalgia, and a few fragmented texts by Sappho, often available only in bowdlerized translations which minimized or entirely eliminated any mention of lesbian love. Some women, including Natalie Barney, actually taught themselves Greek for the sole purpose of reading Sappho unobstructed by homophobic or incomplete translations. In 1904 Barney, accompanied by Renée Vivien, even went so far as to travel to the island of Lesbos itself, known since the middle ages as Mytilene. Here the two women intended to establish a
women's school of poetry, just as Sappho had done twenty-four centuries before. Both women were entirely shocked to find that Sappho's island of Lesbos no longer existed; to Barney, the imaginary terrain of Lesbos was emotionally so real, so necessary, that she called the current residents of Mytilene "Greeks made in Germany." "[O]ne cannot really judge them by what the real [Lesbians] may have looked like," she wrote in a letter to her mother (Quoted in Jay, 73).

In "Expatriate Modernism" (quoted above), Shari Benstock discusses the evolving idea of matria to women writers living in self-imposed exile. In this essay, Benstock contrasts Sandra Gilbert's definition of matria, developed in her analysis of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's life in Italy, with her own definition, conceived in her study of women expatriate modernists. According to Benstock, Gilbert's matria is

that which is repressed, rejected, colonized, written over, subjected, erased, silenced. The woman writer must discover her by peeling back the layers of patriarchy. The desire for this mother country is compelling, its discovery renewing, life-giving, passionate, transforming, and integrative. Matria, as Gilbert describes it, is the underside of patria, that which requires a risorgimento, a resurrection, a resurging, and a rising again up from under.

I would argue, however, that matria is not the underside of patria or a shadowy lost civilization that might be discovered through a stripping away of patriarchy, but rather an "internal exclusion" by and through which patria is defined. Patria can exist only by excluding, banishing matria; matria is always expatriated. (25)
Gilbert goes on to recognize a "relevance" between the two definitions in that both agree that "matria is the implicit negative element of patria without which patria cannot be defined. . . . The dream of matria--motherland and mother langue--can work only within the frame of the expatriated" (26).

When one considers the systematic, nearly total annihilation of Sappho's texts (out of the more than five hundred poems by Sappho, approximately seven hundred intelligible lines are still extant, pieced together from many sources), the idea of Lesbos as a kind of matria is very compelling. The works of Sappho were indeed "repressed, rejected, colonized, written over, subjected, erased, silenced" in three major convulsions of Church-inspired destruction. St. Gregory of Nazianzos, Bishop of Constantinople, first ordered the burning of Sappho's texts around the year 380 A.D. Eleven years later more of her poems disappeared forever when a mob of Christian zealots partially destroyed a major classical library in Alexandria. Finally, in 1073, Pope Gregory VII ordered her works publicly burned in Rome and Constantinople (Barnstone, xxi). Furthermore, one can recognize the "compelling desire" for this "mother country" in Barney's efforts to recover Sappho through language and place. Finally, the "internal exclusion" of the lesbians in Paris can be attested to by the fact that they existed in a condition of exile from both
their native and adopted countries.

But, recalling Monique Wittig's definition of the word, lesbianism is an organic, autonomous state of existence which rejects the duality inherent in heterosexuality: a lesbian is she who is "not not-man" (Wittig, 121, Spangler, 4). Gilbert's understanding of matria as "the implicit negative element of patria without which patria cannot be defined" necessarily requires this concept of dualism. Inevitably, the notions of patria and matria, fatherland and motherland, retain a heterosexual paradigm of agonistic opposition which is largely foreign to Wittig's described lesbian reality.

Perhaps this longing for Lesbos can be better understood within the context of Kathryn Hulme's feelings at the sight of the three American Fates who greeted her from the terrace of the Café Flore: "I looked at their faces and felt I had come home to my kind" (my emphases). The lesbian in Paris who sought her own "kind" among the Paris cafes, Barney's salon, and the words of Sappho's poetry, sought, not a motherland, but a homeland, not a mother langue, but a language of "kind" in the sense of one of the word's more ancient meanings: "natural," "in accordance with nature or the usual course of things" (OED).

Broadly speaking, theoretical models of the dynamics within the patriarchal heterosexual family are structured around the accepted primacy of the incest taboo, and
relationships within these models involve major dynamics of individuation and separation from the figures of parental authority. Those models of affectational development which originate outside of this heterosexual paradigm, however, are not focused on the prohibition of incest, and these theories foreground the importance of all expressions of affection, both physical and emotional, in strengthening the cohesion of individual kin groups. For example, Susan Cavin, in her book Lesbian Origins, suggests that "female homosocial relations form the original base and constant cement of society." She argues that "the first enduring social relation may be the female/female relation, e.g. mother/daughter, sisters, or cooperation between non-kin mothers for protection of young and/or food sharing. . . . If the first social relation is the female homosocial relation, then its corresponding sexual relation is lesbianism" (6, 42).

Perhaps the home that Kathryn Hulme sought was one in which the diffused passion between kindred women was seen as "natural," "the usual course of things." Certainly these American expatriates knew intimately what was not natural to them; before coming to Paris, Barnes, Flanner and Solano had each been married, and Barney had been engaged to be married several times. The foreign ground of heterosexuality was known territory, but "home" was not; "home" was a legend, a cultural alternative conceived from the fragments of a
silenced author and her ancient language. The members of this expatriate "outgroup" belonged to Virginia Woolf's imaginary "Outsiders' Society" in its profoundest sense. The female pacifist of Woolf's *Three Guineas* could reject any claims on her sense of patriotism because of the patriarchal basis of any country within which she lives:

"Our country," she will say, "throughout the greater part of its history has treated me as a slave . . . Therefore if you insist upon fighting to protect me, or 'our' country, let it be understood, soberly and rationally between us, that you are fighting to gratify a sex instinct which I cannot share; to procure benefits which I have not shared and probably will not share; but not to gratify my instincts, or to protect myself or my country. For," the outsider will say, "in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world". (165)

The lesbian expatriate living in Paris, neither wanting nor sharing the benefits of patriarchal heterosexuality, certainly "had no country." But, insofar as she knew it, the "whole world" was heterosexual, and in the truest sense, she was left wanting a country. Driven by her own sense of urgency, guided primarily by nostalgia and imagination, this woman sought to recreate some conception of Lesbos, a structured community to support a lesbian conversation. Not only did she have to recreate her home, she had to reinvent her language.
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CHAPTER 3

SOLITA SOLANO'S THREE UNCERTAIN FEASTS

Literary hindsight would suggest that no American author settled into the vital Paris expatriate community of the 1920's with more readiness to make an artistic impact than Solita Solano. When, in the fall of 1922, she moved into two rooms at the Hotel Napoleon Bonaparte, she already had made a name and a career for herself as a writer. Solano had extensive experience as a journalist; starting as an eighteen dollar a week reporter for the Boston Herald-Traveler in 1914, she was soon promoted to the post of drama editor, becoming the first woman in the United States to hold such a position on a major daily newspaper. The December 21, 1918 issue of Variety noted her arrival in Manhattan as the new drama editor for the New York Tribune; her struggles for editorial freedom on both the Herald-Traveler and the Tribune initiated correspondences with the likes of Alexander Woollcott and H. L. Mencken. By 1920 Solano included the Algonquin crowd among her acquaintances; she was appearing in Franklin P. Adams' widely read literary gossip column, "The Conning Tower," in the Tribune.

While living in Boston, Solano occasionally marshalled woman suffrage parades. When she moved to New York she became a charter member of the Lucy Stone League, an
organization which promoted the right of women to keep their own names in marriage (Born Sarah Wilkinson, after a failed elopement and marriage Solano discarded both her married and given name and adopted the name of her Spanish grandmother). In 1921 Solano seized on an offer from the National Geographic to send her on assignment, equipped with a camera, to Constantinople by way of Greece. The timing of the assignment was extremely fortuitous; while in New York Solano had fallen in love with Janet Rehm, a young, unhappily married, unsuccessful journalist. The relationship hit a crisis with the concurrent arrival of Janet's family from the west coast and an equally unwanted pregnancy. After Janet procured an abortion, Solano's insistence that her lover accompany her on the National Geographic assignment was "brutal" in its desperation (Wineapple, 53). The two lengthy articles that emerged out of this trip, "Constantinople Today" (June, 1922) and "Vienna--A Capital Without A Nation" (January 1923), both extensively illustrated with Solano's own photographs, were called "brilliant" by the magazine's editor (Wineapple, 57). Solano's feminist activity while she was living in the United States, coupled with her lesbianism, suggests that by the time she set out on her National Geographic assignment, she carried with her the "definite attitude" of politicized homosexuality that had been noted by Havelock Ellis in Sexual Inversion (382).
By 1923 the two women who, as Solano later recalled, had come to Paris "to learn all about art and write our first novels" (Broderick, 308), were doing just that. They had already been introduced to Natalie Barney, who lived literally around the corner from the Hotel Napoleon Bonaparte at 20, Rue Jacob, and through her, to the extensive Paris lesbian community. Through Solano's literary connections they met such expatriate notables as Ford Madox Ford, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Isadora Duncan, and Pablo Picasso. Solano's first novel, The Uncertain Feast, was published in 1924 by G. P. Putnam's Sons, to be followed in quick succession by The Happy Failure (1925) and This Way Up (1927). On April 1, 1926, The New York Times carried a small notice that "Mrs. Jannet [sic] Rehm, nee Flanner," had obtained a divorce from her husband, Lane Rehm. Janet Flanner's novel, The Cubical City, appeared several months later, also published by Putnam's.

Solano and Flanner maintained a relatively stable and reliable lifestyle, including conscientious work habits, while living at the Hotel Napoleon Bonaparte. Kathryn Hulme remembered that "[t]he narrow stairwell outside my door echoed the faint clackings of the typewriters three floors above where Janet Flanner and Solita Solano earned their current livings . . . " (Hulme, 52). Djuna Barnes, who slept in Solano's room "when in trouble" (Broderick, 311),
suspected that Flanner took her work less seriously than Solano: "I think she went out to parties and socialized while Solita stayed home and wrote" (O'Neal, 139).

Despite such a solid start to an apparently promising career, Solita Solano is only rarely mentioned in any of the memoirs by the Left Bank expatriate community. All of her written work is out of print, including her novels and a later book of poetry. During many of the years that Janet Flanner was achieving journalistic renown with her monthly "Letter from Paris" in the New Yorker, Solano maintained a parallel column for the Detroit Athletic Club News, a newspaper so obscure as to be unlisted in such basic references as the Union List of Serials in Libraries of the United States and Canada. Jane Heap and Margaret Anderson, publishers of that modernist standard of little magazines, The Little Review, still regarded Solita Solano as one of the central figures of the Paris expatriate community when the final issue of the magazine appeared in May, 1929, and Solano's photograph and replies to a Little Review questionnaire (including such questions as "What is your world view?" and "Why do you go on living?") were included. Solano published nothing under her own name, however, after producing her book of poetry, Statues in a Field, in 1934. After her death in November, 1975, her obituary notices, describing Solano as either a "prolific writer" (Variety, np) or "not a prolific writer" (Dictionary, 356), primarily
remembered her as someone who "lived with Janet Flanner, who writes for The New Yorker [sic] under the name Genet" (Times, 32).

Solita Solano's silence can be somewhat understood in light of her gradually all-consuming involvement with Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, a charismatic Russian mystic who came to Paris in the twenties and maintained a large group of disciples among the expatriate community. Many of Solano's closest friends regarded Gurdjieff as a fraud and an opportunist who preyed on rich women, who paid him for the honor of washing his floors and being insulted by him over dinner. Alice B. Toklas complained about friends who "went Gurdjieff" (Toklas, 208) and Janet Flanner refused to write an indorsement for Kathryn Hulme's 1966 memoir, Undiscovered Country, because "I do not belong in this volume, having been no Gurdjieffite" (Wineapple, 120). In spite her friends' skepticism, Solano went on to become Gurdjieff's secretary, carefully transcribing his afternoon pontifications shared among disciples at the Cafe de La Paix.

But Solita Solano's distraction with Gurdjieff can only partially explain why she stopped writing. Gurdjieff himself died in 1949, and, except for a fragmentary memoir written in the late 1960's to accompany the Library of Congress' acquisition of the Flanner-Solano Papers, Solano maintained her authorial silence up to her death in 1975.
Any analysis as to just why, after such an energetic beginning, Solano stopped writing is certainly beyond the scope of this immediate work, and until more of Solano's biographical material is made available, would only be pure speculation.

In the decade before the world depression, however, Solita Solano was regarded by her peers as an important, active participant in the lesbian expatriate community. For example, the year before her interview in The Little Review, she appeared in Djuna Barnes' Ladies Almanack (along with Janet Flanner) as one of the "sisters Nip and Tuck, two hearty Lasses who claimed all of Spain as their Torment." These two "Members of the Sect" tell Dame Evangeline Musset (Natalie Barney) that "there is a Flail loose in the Town who is crying from Corner to Niche, in that lamenting Herculean Voice that sounds to us like a Sister lost, for certainly it is not the Whine of Motherhood, but a more mystic, sodden Sighing" (31). After Dame Musset dismisses this lost sister as "a pedant," she spots Tuck (Solano) "seated a little too close to History, or whatever it was that Bounding Bess [identified in the margins of Barney's copy of Ladies Almanack as Esther Murphy] radiated, and toying, in that brief Second, with minor Details that went as far back as the Fall of Rome."

She is, has been, and ever will be," said Miss Nip [Flanner], "a darling Detriment to Sleep and Sequence . . . for that Girl," she said pleasantly, "has in her a trifle of Terrier Blood, and must be
forever worrying at every Petticoat as ever dangled over a Hip in this our time!" (33)

Without a doubt, then, Solita Solano was a member of Barne's select "outgroup," a woman who had come to Paris to be "inside and unalienated—to live as a lesbian, to write from that experience, [and] to be read sympathetically" (Annas, 13). Up to the present moment, Solano's novels have received hardly any reading at all, sympathetic or not. In a footnote of, ironically enough, Genêt: A Biography of Janet Flanner (1989), Brenda Wineapple provides brief summaries of the reviews that followed the appearance of Solano's three novels, but otherwise Solano remains largely overlooked, even by feminist academics concentrating on the twentieth century American expatriate experience.

Solano's book The Uncertain Feast was the first English language novel to be published by a regular participant of the American lesbian expatriate community that gathered weekly at Natalie Barney's Rue Jacob address. Whether or not this novel has any overtly lesbian content, it was produced within a well-defined lesbian community and, in a sense, broke ground for other writers working within this environment. Hers was the first voice in an ensuing dialogue of lesbian-authored works; because she was the first, it should come as no surprise that today a lesbian reader, seeking the lesbian voice in her novels, finds these works inarticulate, groping in terms of both lesbian subject
matter and speech.

On one level, Solano's novels seem to be entirely focused on a series of heterosexual relationships. Each novel, adopting the point of view of the male protagonist, explores the initiation, decline and failure of a marriage. In each of these marriages, the husband seeks some sort of consolation with a woman outside of his marriage; in The Uncertain Feast this takes the shape of a one-night stand, in The Happy Failure the protagonist replaces his foundering marriage by moving in with a servant from his wife's family's household, and in This Way Up the "other woman," who pre-dates the marriage itself, ends up, in a sense, killing the book's protagonist (he has a fatal heart attack) with her ruthless and energetic capriciousness.

Solano offers examples of enduring marriages in her novels to contrast with the failing marriage; each of these "successful" marriages is, in various ways, as unattractive as the protagonist's doomed union. In The Uncertain Feast, for example, Daniel Geer, up and coming newspaper editor, marries Amy Fiske, a woman who finds him physically repulsive, who also has a six-pound baby barely six months into the marriage. Distinct from the marriage of Daniel and Amy Geer by their apparent durability is the marriage of his parents, James and Annie, and that of Daniel's sister, Ruth, and his brother-in-law, Andrew. "Ma" and "Pa" Geer, however, have been reduced within their relationship to two-
dimensional parodies of Grant Wood's "American Gothic."
Their only conversation consists of complaints about each other. Ma Geer, whose primary outfit is a "faded house dress fitted tightly over thin, stooped shoulders and show[ing] a nest of darns near the arm-holes" (58) protests to Daniel about "Pa," who "mopes around the house and goes to bed every afternoon" (33). When Daniel joins his parents for dinner, Pa tells his son, in front of Annie Geer, "I don't know what's got into your ma, Dan."

"She tries to aggravate me every way she can think of from morning till night. Suppose you pass that pie over here, Annie, and stop complaining of me to Dan."
Mrs. Geer cut the pie. Her face quivered and presently she pulled up her apron and sobbed into its stains. (58)

Ruth (who is "expecting again" and, according to Ma, "looks poorly but that's natural," 33) and Andrew also attend this dinner:

"How are you, Ruth?" He kissed her unpowdered cheek.
"How do, Dan?" Andrew gripped his hand in careless familiarity and enveloped him in the odor of onions that came unescapably from his wide mouth and wet flaring nostrils.
"Uncle Dan! Uncle Dan!"
He patted the three heads that bobbed about his legs.
"Come here, children," said Ruth. "Uncle won't want to kiss you until I wipe your noses." (62)

A lesbian reading The Uncertain Feast may understand that the lack of any kind of attractive heterosexual relationship may suggest a critique on Solano's part of the institution of heterosexuality as a whole. Although Barbara
Smith is willing to regard a text which critiques the "politics of heterosexuality" as lesbian (191), merely offering portraits of grotesque heterosexual marriages does not suggest any kind of positive alternative, and a work like this in itself does not comprise any sort of lesbian text. According to Adrienne Rich, lesbianism is "a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power" (657). Recalling Monique Wittig's view of lesbianism as that which is not "not-man," a lesbian reader may need to look beyond that which is "not-heterosexual" in Solano's novels, may need consciously to seek out the lesbian "source of energy" that can identify her books as lesbian texts. By paying primary attention to the female characters in Solano's novels, and by foregrounding the erotic component that exists in the relationships formed both between her female characters and between the female characters and the reader herself, the lesbian reader may successfully disrupt Solano's heterosexual narrative and uncover her novels' veiled "lesbian narrative space," following the example set by Marilyn R. Farwell in her work with Marion Zimmer Bradley's The Mists of Avalon.

Most of the women in Solano's novels have their lives defined and bordered by their relationships to men. This includes women whose masculine parameters of identity are very strong, like Annie Geer, mother to Daniel and wife to James. Even women whose male identification has been
disrupted in one way or another remain largely delineated by their recollected associations with men. In *This Way Up*, Anthony Cole spends all of his time in Europe pursuing an on-again, off-again love affair with the elusive Rosario. His father, who "had always reminded his son of Rip Van Winkle except that he had never done his family the favor of going away,"

passed his years pleasantly in lounging, talking, drinking whiskey and beer, being sent for by his wife, being taken home, being sick on the stairs no matter how long one waited for him to get it over with on the sidewalk. Mrs. Cole had prayed for him in the Methodist church around the corner from his saloon, but the only answer she received was Anthony. (69)

Although her husband is dead and her son is absent, Mrs. Henry Cole (the reader is never provided with her first name), never replaces them with any other human companionship. By the end of the novel, Mrs. Cole, telling herself that life with Henry and Anthony "had been the best days of her life, after all," is reduced to finding comfort in the sound of a clock: "Funny what company a clock was. It sort of talked to you all day" (295).

Solano's Mrs. Cole may be regarded as an excellent example of a woman who has experienced terrible emotional impoverishment through her reliance on a male-identified sense of self. By recalling Luce Irigaray's theories on the reductive "oneness" of a phallomorphized reality versus the naturally diffused, internal organicity of unimpaired female
reality, a reader may recognize Mrs. Cole as a woman who has, literally, lost touch with herself:

The only love she had ever felt was for her son. The only flesh she had never disliked was his. The only kisses her mouth had ever given she had brushed over his hair, his neck, his hands. He had possessed all of her except her tears. (71)

As a charter member of the Lucy Stone League, as a woman who had named herself, and as someone who had seen her lover go through the process of reclaiming her surname through the procedure of divorce, Solita Solano was a writer who had thought about the significance of names, of losing names, of recollecting names, of renaming. Mrs. Henry Cole, mother of Anthony, is a woman without her own name. Hating even her own flesh, Mrs. Cole represents a woman thoroughly sir-named, whose desire has been phallomorphized, has been gradually externalized and narrowed to the phallocentric "oneness" of her son. Offering her reader the perfect emblem of a life depleted through patriarchal reference, Solano closes This Way Up with Mrs. Cole's thoughts about her men: "Anthony would be angry when he came home to visit and found out about the monument she had just bought out of the money she had saved. . . . She thought of the stone she had ordered for Henry's grave, a tall expensive shaft" (297).

This has been an expensive shaft, indeed. Anthony is dead of a heart attack in France; the telegram bearing this news is in Mrs. Cole's apron pocket, but she is unable to
read French. The specter of Mrs. Cole's future of lonely solitude ends the novel, providing an admonishment of sorts to any woman reader whose emotional wholeness depends entirely on her relations to men. Certainly, the character of Mrs. Cole presents a fairly bleak image to a lesbian searching the novel for any sort of "potential springhead of female power." What a lesbian reader may discover, however, is that, although Mrs. Cole appears to be a woman without any interior source of female power, she has not arrived at this point entirely without resistance. Having pled to a patriarchal god to remedy the misery of her marriage, Mrs. Cole refused the irony of this god's reply by attempting to bring out the feminine in her son, by shaping, in a sense, a sort of female companionship:

Every day of his childhood he had received from her, like phonograph records played over and over, songs and words to keep him young. He had returned her love with love, her tenderness with pity as he grew to understand that her tragedy was that of a woman with great pride but with nothing to be proud of. For years she had kept him a sensitive child whom an early illness had made more like a daughter than a son. (71-72)

Luce Irigaray has described the relationship of a woman to her daughter as lesbian in a "primary" sense, and that erotic relations between adult women are "secondary" manifestations of lesbian love:

Given that the first body with which [women] are involved, the first love with which they have to do, is a maternal love, is a female body, women are always--unless they renounce their desire--in a certain archaic and primary relationship to what is called homosexuality. (Le Corps, 30)
In a later conversation, Irigaray maintains that this love is actually a prerequisite to all relationship:

> It's important that women discover that they also have love for other women. That doesn't per se have to mean that you actually make love, but you do whatever your desire inspires you to do. In fact, a woman can't love a man unless she loves other women, and her mother. (Amsberg, 197)

A lesbian reader of Solita Solano will notice that, consistently, any "springhead of potential female power" tends to exist primarily between the mothers and daughters of her novels. In both *The Uncertain Feast* and *The Happy Failure*, mothers are in apparent competition with their sons-in-law for the affection and loyalty of their daughters, and sometimes actually succeed in winning their daughters away from the men who have potentially usurped the love between the two women. In each of these novels mothers succeed in moving the young couples either in the apartment next door or actually in the same house; eventually their daughters actually leave their husbands to return to the company of their mothers.

Mrs. Fiske, a "distinguished" looking woman who speaks in a "modulated contralto voice" (168), looks at her son-in-law, Daniel Geer, with "scorn" when he objects to the fact that Amy and her mother have moved the couple into a new apartment while he was working: "You should have consulted me. I'm your husband. It's for me to decide where we shall live since I pay the bills" (169). After Amy leaves Daniel...
to move in with her mother, Mrs. Fiske tells Daniel of her pregnancy:

"Sit down and smoke. Give me a cigarette, too."

They sat down, she in a big chair, he in a smaller one that faced her. "I wonder you haven't guessed it for yourself," she began after he had held a match for her. "But of course men are very stupid." She threw back her head and studied his anxious face . . . "You don't look pleased, Daniel," she added. "That's too bad of you." (211)

Daniel regards his mother-in-law as "alien and pitiless" (215); she advises her daughter to "Make the best of what you have, dear child. Avoid arousing his temper and remember he is not modern" (223).

Certainly Timothy Doan, unsuccessful heir-apparent to the Doan's Stockings business and fortune, regards his mother-in-law as an immediate competitor for Erna's love, even masculinizing the woman in his apprehension. According to The Happy Failure's protagonist, Mrs. Swift is "A mother with a major-general's eyes and a will like a sword—a doting weapon, alert in its sheath" (130). Three months after the young couple's elopement, Erna responds to her parents' visit to their shabby apartment by flinging herself on to her mother's knees, crying, "I'm so glad! Oh, mother, everything will be all right now you've come!" (122) When Mrs. Swift, after discovering "bugs" in their kitchen, suggests that Timothy and Erna live with her, Erna accepts (in Timothy's absence) with elation:

"Isn't it wonderful? I'll have my old room—I adore my room—and you'll have the guest room on the third floor, mother says. And when she goes to
Palm Beach we'll have the whole house to ourselves. Now what do you say to that?" She put her face against his and kissed his ear. "Oh, I'm so happy!" (130)

By the time she goes to Palm Beach, however, Timothy has lost a fortune in the stock market, and Mrs. Swift takes Erna with her, after having first moved into her daughter's bed; as Erna explains to her husband, "She wants to be sure I won't have a baby" (206). Before the trip to Palm Beach, Timothy "gazed at the two profiles, Mrs. Swift's against the glass, Erna's lying against her mother's dark furs, searching for a resemblance to justify the intimacy of their flesh. There was none to be seen" (154). When Erna returns from Palm Beach, her allegiance is clear. Believing that Timothy is having an affair with Agnes, a family servant, she declares that "Mother is right. Men are all the same. Even you!" (245)

She fixed her look to him in calm assurance and for the first time, lifting his head, he saw her mother in her face, changed and chilled, with the premature calculations of a child who had been listening to worldly counsels. The hands he had thought of as belonging in a convent were posed on her hips. (249)

As in The Uncertain Feast, the relationships in The Happy Failure operate in the condition of competitive dualism that Monique Wittig sees as so antithetical to lesbian alliances and environments. Adopting Luce Irigaray's analysis of this situation, these relationships, taking place as they do within the contexts of the reductive...
constraints of patriarchy, inevitably "objectify" one of the participants into a phallicomorphic, constricted reflection of the other. Timothy's mother, whose subordination in her marriage has left her "vague and passionless" (348), is capable only of "diluted love" for her son (192):

His mother would stand behind his father. She always had. Apologetically sometimes, but in the end the apparent laxity of her words would be stiffened by habit into a prop for her husband's decisions. (157)

Erna's mother, on the other hand, is a tall woman who wields a sword-like will in her marriage while smoking Russian cigarettes "in a long green stem that seemed cut away from some hard flower" (149). Mrs. Swift can sheathe the evidence of her dominant position only with effort; her behavior, when within the boundaries of traditional female gender roles, is an act of self-conscious determination:

Mrs. Swift heaved a sigh. It sounded almost masculine in its control and depth. "Ah, well," she said, becoming feminine again. "Ah, well, my dear." (150)

Like Mrs. Doan, Mr. Swift, a "pink and moist-looking" little man (120), speaks only as a prop for the theater of his wife's will:

Mr. Swift kept finding his wife's gubernatorial eyes between sentences, a sycophancy of continuous deference, and her approval seemed to be reflected in the mirror of his pink bare head. (140)

The vitality of mother-daughter love is somewhat obscured since Solano's novels are narrated from the male protagonists' point of view, and the individuality of the
older women in both *The Uncertain Feast* and *The Happy Failure* is flattened under a patriarchal cultural convention of the interfering, overbearing mother-in-law figure. When viewed in the light of Irigaray's analysis, perhaps the stubborn maintenance of an antifeminist stereotype of the mother-in-law reflects a deep patriarchal anxiety over a potential alternative to the male-dominant heterosexual couple. Despite the strong mother-daughter bond that exists within *The Happy Failure*, Solano really offers no vital relationship alternatives in this particular novel to the heterosexual paradigm of dominance and submission, subject/object, masculine/feminine in this novel. Speaking as a daughter trapped within a mother-daughter relationship delineated by patriarchal models, Luce Irigaray has described how "[w]ith your milk, Mother, I swallowed ice. And here I am now, my insides frozen."

You've prepared something to eat. You bring it to me. You feed me/yourself. But you feed me/yourself too much, as if you wanted to fill me up completely with your offering. You put yourself in my mouth, and I suffocate. ("One Doesn't Stir", 60,61)

Caught between conflicting loyalties to her mother and her husband, Erna Swift Doan

stood apart, her face in her hands, frozen in her cold blue dress into a posture of premature despair, like a child stood in a corner for the fault of another. . . .

"Mother wants you to come with her, darling." Mrs. Swift's purposeful hand closed on her daughter's arm. The black velvet dress imposed itself on blue and silver, encompassed it, overcame its resistance,
escorted it across the room and through the door. (202)

One woman disappears into the other, and both ultimately become patterned objects, stripped of their individual humanity by a culture which requires conquest and defeat in all loving relationships. Writing rhetorically to her own mother, Irigaray laments that "[e]ach of us lacks her own image; her own face, the animation of her own body is missing":

... And when it's my turn, of my own disappearance? I, too, a captive when a man holds me in his gaze; I, too, am abducted from myself. Immobilized in the reflection he expects of me. Reduced to the face he fashions for me in which to look at himself. Traveling at the whims of his dreams and mirages. Trapped in a single function—mothering. ("One Doesn't Stir", 66)

Contemplating the future of his sons (daughters never seem to be regarded as a possibility), the newly engaged Timothy Doan ruminates on how

he had never thought about motherhood before. Mothers had seemed ready-made. . . . The opulence of women, then, began with what he and Erna would say to each other tonight. She would begin to grow under his first kiss. It was wonderful to think about such things when you understood them. (23)

When they do kiss, Timothy feels Erna's body as "hard, round, strong with sap, pressing against him with a desire to grow and force passionately and instinctively its roots far into fertility" (51). Erna, however, is "a twentieth century girl of a country whose women were free rather than fruitful" (34). Having noticed "how old all the girls seemed to get as soon as they had husbands" (83), Erna
floors Timothy when she declares that she doesn't want any children: "I don't want to be tied down--and old" (88). Although Timothy, who desperately wants Erna to be "pliant and in harmony with his affectionate flesh" (88), can acknowledge that "[a]ll girls in the service of an exterior domesticity were unhappy" (204), he is unable to imagine female misery within all patterns of domesticity. Erna, who carries the small breasted, short-haired "lithe reed-like body" (49) of a twentieth century flapper, has apparently made her choice between the apparent opportunities offered to the new century's New Woman: fruit or freedom. But this promise of freedom is as real as Erna's chances of avoiding old age. Erna is already "tied down" to a patriarchal culture in which partners devour one another, in which one person seems always reduced to a vague and passionless reflection of the other.

Both The Happy Failure and This Way Up advance a fairly comprehensive critique of patriarchal heterosexuality. But neither novel offers more than the slightest intimation of a way of being which is "not-heterosexual." Even if a reader interprets the connection between Erna and Mrs. Doan as an image, of sorts, of Irigaray's "primary" lesbianism, theirs is a love still modelled on the reductive "oneness" of phallocentric love, which renders Mrs. Swift grotesquely masculinized and freezes Erna into a permanently despairing child. Mrs. Cole makes a futile effort to create feminine
companionship with her son, Anthony, "[b]ut at adolescence his father had come between them. His qualities had developed in the boy like secondary sexual characteristics . . ." (72). As Irigaray laments to her mother, ""the one doesn't stir without the other. But we do not move together. When the one of us comes into the world, the other goes underground" ("One Doesn't Stir," 67). The "springhead of female power" that Adrienne Rich identifies as lesbian in nature remains only a scarcely suggested potential within these two novels, barely perceptible even to the most attentive lesbian reader.

By foregrounding the dynamics which may exist between Mrs. Cole and Anthony, Mrs. Swift and Erna, and Mrs. Fiske and Amy, a lesbian reader can recognize possible situations which reflect that which is not heterosexual. The defining word remains "heterosexual," though, and these alternative relationships, by opposing the norm of a heterosexual reality, become, in fact, mirrors that reflect this very same reality. A reader seeking a relatively unimpaired lesbian authenticity in Solita Solano's novels must look to relationships existing between women that seem to bear out Monique Wittig's idea of lesbianism as entirely non-oppositional to heterosexuality, as that which is not not-man, that which is not not-heterosexual.

By looking carefully, a lesbian reader may find Solita Solano's portrait of lesbian authenticity in her first
novel, *The Uncertain Feast*, within the somewhat shadowy figure of Elizabeth Corning, Amy Fiske's "old friend" (108) and roommate. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf successfully constructs, "at least symbolically" (Marcus, 167), a lesbian audience for her argument. Solita Solano does not seem to privilege a lesbian reading of her novels, although certainly she provides ample opportunity for a lesbian "disruption of heterosexual narrative space."

Solita Solano does, however, describe the changing nature of Amy Fiske's pregnant body in a way that would seem to assume an audience of readers intimately familiar with the processes of the female body.

A reader acquainted with the biological details of pregnancy can trace the evolution of Amy Fiske's pregnancy through a number of casually mentioned details; after one month of marriage, Daniel Geer remarks to himself that his wife is "looking tired out. Drawn and white every morning. No breakfast for two weeks. Can't eat with me in the morning . . ." (178). Four months into the marriage, Daniel Geer's admiring gaze at his wife's body "dropped, grew sustained, sharp, concerned."

"I had no idea--" He made a blind gesture toward her body. "I hadn't noticed before--it's quite distinct, isn't it?" (218)

These kind of details did not remain unnoticed in book reviews. One critic complained that "Miss Solano writes for the sophisticated, omitting no amorous or even obstetrical
details . . . [F]or those whose sensibilities are acutely Puritan and whose taste is delicate "The Uncertain Feast" may be anything but uncertain and certainly not a feast at all" (Brickell, 4). These obstetrical details may define, at least to a degree, a female readership, and may also suggest the acute attention that should be paid to otherwise backgrounded material. In this way Solano may be preparing her readers to recognize the understated significance of Elizabeth Corning.

Even at her introduction in the novel, this "tall thin woman with keen eyes" (111) sets up a subtle disruption of heterosexual assumption; Daniel Geer is so confounded by the fact that Amy Fiske's telephone is answered by another woman that he has to concoct a safely neutral persona for this entirely unknown voice:

". . . Amy! Someone for you. . . . . No, not your mother. It isn't long distance. It's a man."
Daniel's hand was shaking. Why did she say that? Perhaps she will guess who and won't come. Old meddler maiden aunt. Not long distance but a man. Same tone she'd use to say ogre. (84)

Daniel Geer is entirely convinced by his device of the "meddler maiden aunt," so much so that he actually makes reference to this fictional aunt to Amy. When Amy asks Daniel "Tell me--why did you think I had an aunt?" he can only make "a confused and awkward gesture. . . . 'I don't know why I invented an aunt,' he said" (108).
Obviously, Daniel Geer needs to invent a "maiden aunt" because the idea of two adult, unrelated women sharing an apartment is somehow deeply disturbing to him. By making this woman an "aunt," Geer successfully introduces the notion of an incest taboo to counter any unconscious anxiety about sexual relations between the two. This taboo is further reinforced with the word "maiden" which, in its usual patriarchal twentieth century context, effectively renders its modified object clear of sexual experience. Even thus neutralized, though, the idea of two women sharing their lives is still so frightening to Daniel that he must assume that this "maiden aunt" is nevertheless "meddling" and one who equates men with ogres. In Daniel Geer's world, single women who live with other women are the actual ogres. By living independently, undefined by relationship to men, these women are innately subversive to heterosexual patriarchy, are, in Daniel Geer's eyes, anti-male, unnatural monsters.

In truth, though, Elizabeth Corning is not anti-male, but indifferent to men. When Amy Fiske marries Daniel Geer, she receives two telegrams: "Mamma sends her love and Elizabeth Corning tells me our cat has run away" (144). As the Geer marriage begins to disintegrate, Elizabeth Corning "cheerfully" tells Daniel Geer that "I want Amy to get her life settled. Either be married or--get a divorce" (243). This indifference sets her friendship with Amy Fiske apart.
from the other purely reactive non-heterosexual models of relationship that exist in all three of Solita Solano's novels. Elizabeth Corning's feelings for Amy Fiske are not bordered by heterosexual mores; because she is not a player, she disdains the role of competitor.

Elizabeth Corning's character fits in with Monique Wittig's non-oppositonal definition of lesbianism. This is a stance which is not common within the competitive heterosexual world in which "all's fair in love and war," and the action she eventually takes to preserve the Geer marriage may be confusing to a lesbian reader who may not recognize how profoundly distinct her character is from an otherwise purely heterosexual narrative. But while hers is both a home and a friendship into which Amy Fiske can temporarily escape, Elizabeth Corning recognizes her old friend's heterosexuality and the resulting limits on their own relationship. As she admits to her friend's husband, following one rupture in the marriage, "I am unable to give her any cheer, although I have done my best. Do come up to see her--with appropriate flowers--and carry her off to dinner" (240). When she effects their final reconciliation, she tells Daniel Geer, "You know, I'm very fond of Amy. I want her happiness. And I think you can make her happy. . . . The last thing she said to me was 'Elizabeth, I want Daniel.'" Even while she shares this information, though, she maintains her absolute indifference to Daniel. "Her
expression remained impersonal. In the dry explanatory
voice of the lecture platform she went on" (332).

Clearly, then, Elizabeth Corning represents a woman
whose "fondness" for her friend must concede to the demands
of a heterosexual environment. Solano hints at the cost of
this concession when she describes Elizabeth Corning's
posture. The woman's body is repeatedly described as
"stiff." She sits "stiffly upright." She doesn't just
walk, she "marches" as "stiff as a marionette" (331). As
interpreted by Daniel Geer, she has "the erect carriage of a
spinster who does not wish to give anything of herself to
her gait." Even her drawing room is "stiff" (243).
Elizabeth Corning is a woman literally stiffened by the need
of a constant, unrelenting resistance to heterosexual
imperative. At the end of the novel when she tells Daniel
Geer that "There's no one but you in her life, Daniel. Come
back with me now and see how she'll cling to you!" (333)
even Daniel can see, for a moment, the price of such an
admission:

He raised his eyes and glared at Miss Corning.
She had turned her head and was dreaming out of
the window, her face pinched and sad, her sensitive
mouth telling of a life of mental pleasures and
stern denials of the flesh. (334)

The closest Daniel Geer comes to understanding
Elizabeth Corning is when he tells himself that "She doesn't
understand my emotions. They are like theorems to her"
(334). When Geer decides to return to Amy, his emotions may
illustrate those heterosexual theorems of defeat and ownership that Elizabeth Corning finds so baffling:

Miss Corning moved in her chair. "You'd better decide to come with me," she said. "For your own happiness--and Amy's. She's waiting for you."

He met her eyes. Amy is waiting. Perhaps not with love. But with helplessness, remorse and gratitude for my coming. One thing is sure, by God! I'll know the next baby is mine!

"Well?" Miss Corning smiled at him--a tight dry spinster smile. "Good. I have the car down stairs."

Mary Daly, writing in Gyn/Ecology, explains that the word spinster is commonly used as a deprecating term, but it can only function this way when apprehended exclusively on a superficial (foreground) level. Its deep meaning, which has receded into the Background so far that we have to spin deeply in order to retrieve it, is clear and strong: "a woman whose occupation is to spin." There is no reason to limit the meaning of this rich and cosmic verb. A woman whose occupation is to spin participates in the whirling movement of creation. She who has chosen her Self, who defines her Self, by choice, neither in relation to children nor to men, who is Self-identified, is a Spinster, a whirling dervish, spinning in a new time/space. (3)

Elizabeth Corning is, indeed, "spinning in a new time/space"#, but this new time/space has not arrived within the pages of The Uncertain Feast. While she is modelling a species of Self-identification, she can choose to do so only by maintaining an attitude of rigid, albeit passive, resistance to the heterosexual norms of her time and place. The spinster Elizabeth Corning is largely a "Background" figure who must, in fact, be "retrieved" by a reader alert to the significance of her "fondness" for Amy Fiske. The final sentence of The Uncertain Feast closes the book with
an image of Daniel Geer "hurrying to catch up with Miss Corning, already on her way down the long corridor" (336). She is the last named figure in the novel, possibly Solano's clue to her reader that hers is a more important character than first appears. The best that Daniel Geer can do is to try to "catch up" with Elizabeth Corning; more than likely her "bright, penetrating eyes" (333) have observed alternative modes of relationship that render questions of paternity entirely moot.

Amy Fiske's "old friend" may represent Solita Solano's one fictional representation of the "source of energy," the "potential springhead of female power" that Adrienne Rich recognizes as lesbian. But while Elizabeth Corning may be a "source of energy" to a careful lesbian reader, her "female power" in the novel remains largely potential. She may have the power to sustain, possibly even to have caused, the marriage in which she hopes her old friend will be happy. But, at least in Solita Solano's fiction, the birth of a fully articulated lesbian character remains merely a potential; Elizabeth Corning is well down the corridor, but she still has far to go.


---. *Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère*. Montreal: Editions de


CHAPTER 4

AN ADVENTURE IN ILLUMINATION:

JANET FLANNER'S THE CUBICAL CITY

Forty-six years after exchanging New York and her
husband for Paris and Solita Solano, Janet Flanner told John
Bainbridge, in an interview for a book he was writing on
American expatriates:

You know, there's no education like discovering
who you are, whatever you are. Walden Pond was,
for Thoreau, a very fine place for him to under­
stand who he was. I am glad that I was able to
understand who I was, within my limited self­
knowledge, and that it came to me in this beautiful
foreign city. (24)

This "limited self-knowledge" that Janet Flanner had come to
understand in Paris remains enviable. Through her
pseudonymous "Letter from Paris" appearing regularly in The
New Yorker from 1925 on, Flanner had developed her own style
of subjective journalism, distinguished by a point of view
which is at once intelligent, ironic, urbane and ethical; it
is a style which remains a New Yorker standard. In 1948 the
nation of France recognized the passionate anti-Fascism of
Flanner's pre- and post-war columns by making her a knight
of the Legion d'Honneur; she wore the Legion's ribbon on her
lapel for the rest of her life. In 1955 Janet Flanner was
awarded an honorary doctorate in journalism from Smith
College; a collection of her "Letters," published in 1965 as

Such acclaim must have seemed a remote possibility to the miserable young woman who abruptly left a failing marriage and career in 1921. "Youth," remembered Flanner, "was not becoming to me at all" (McCarthy, 90). In her interview with Bainbridge, although Flanner admitted that she left New York "to begin anew," she gave "pure aesthetic selfishness" as her reason for settling on an expatriate lifestyle. "If I had been born in a prettier part of the country than I was born in, which was flat and cornland, I probably wouldn't have been so eager to appreciate the beauties of Europe. . . . I wanted beauty, with a capital 'B.' I hadn't had any in Indiana" (15-16). However, in a letter to Natalia Danesi Murray, Flanner was much more forthright. She described how she regarded another writer's appetite for experience in New York of the 1920's as "more penetrating and observing than any I recorded at that time of my New York life."

But then, I was married, and so at sea in my disappointment in not being in love as I had been with
women that I had no sense of recording any veracity of any sorts, my emotional push toward my lesbic approach to all of life being so dominant that if I did not have it so vibrant a permanent problem in my daily life, I had nothing at all to replace it.

(486)

Although Flanner may have completed the discovery of "whatever" she was in Paris, like Natalie Barney, she "began anew" through her knowledge of and identification with ancient Greece, and Sappho. Janet Flanner and Solita Solano spent the summer of 1921 together in Greece; their entire first day in Athens Flanner refused to look up at the Acropolis, because "I wanted the great excitement of seeing it at first glance, in the marble white moonlight."

This was rather theatrical, but I think well-chosen on my part. I wanted the best that I could obtain, with the greatest accumulation of both nature and creation.

When, later that night under a full moon, the two women stood outside the temple, Flanner was so overcome with emotion that she couldn't bring herself to enter the building. "Next morning, in the bright hot sunshine, I went up again, and this time I moved slowly inside the precinct" (Bainbridge, 18). Fifty years later, upon seeing a postcard of the Acropolis, Flanner wrote to Solano, thanking her "for Greece, my first great adventure in illumination" (Wineapple, 56).

While in Greece Flanner was discovering a new voice for herself through poetry; she was also beginning a novel. One surviving poem, "Lament in Precious Shape," is strongly
influenced by Sappho in both its simplicity, form and
subject matter. Written in a series of quatrains, the poem
elegizes an ancient love lost in the present:

I am a cold empty urn
That was once well cherished
By a girl with moving hands
With her gifts have perished.

... 

Fill me with her faithless dust:
Never was flesh whiter.
She who loved life, let her feel
Still my form delight her.

(Wineapple, 58)

In 1929, possibly influenced by the wild flights of time in
Virginia Woolf's Orlando (she had been introduced to Woolf's
work four years earlier by Nancy Cunard), Janet Flanner
confessed in the last issue of The Little Review that
"Synchronization is an ideal I have not attained. My tomb
if any will read, 'Hic jacet, 600 B.C. Greece; 1100 A.D.
France and Italy; 1700-1800 England'" (32). The Grecian
date, of course, coincides with Sappho. Six years earlier,
in a more earnest mood, Flanner had drafted her first will,
instructing her family to place her ashes in a Grecian-type
urn which should bear a translation from Sappho's
"Anactoria": "But I must dare all, since one so poor . . ."
(Wineapple, 60).

Janet Flanner learned that trying to ignore the
"vibrant problem" of her lesbianism had left her with
"nothing at all." In her book On Lies, Secrets and Silence,
Adrienne Rich characterizes female intellectual ingenuity as innately lesbian. It is "the lesbian," she writes, "in every woman who is compelled by female energy, who gravitates toward strong women, who seeks a literature that will express that energy and strength. . . . It is the lesbian in us who is creative . . ." (200). Rich also points out that the price of dishonesty, particularly a duplicity born of a desire for convenience and safety, is paralysis and "unutterable loneliness" (191). Janet Flanner's experience seems to bear out Rich's theories. Living the lie of her marriage to Lane Rehn had nearly silenced her; self-deception, even so unsuccessful an attempt, had exhausted and demoralized the young author to the degree that she found herself unable to record "any veracity of any sorts." Indeed, Flanner's rather theatrical preoccupation with death and dissolution that emerged within the context of her trip to Greece may have been inspired by her near-brush with artistic death. Flanner's reclamation of her own kind of veracity resulted in the recovery, faltering at first, of her personal creativity.

Furthermore, Janet Flanner's view of her lesbianism seems to have anticipated the passionate energy implied in Adrienne Rich's definition of lesbianism as a kind of women-centered "primary intensity"; in the same letter to Murray quoted above, she described her "erotic emotions" as being "like an emotional nearness, constantly pressing me into the
company of some woman who excited and charmed me . . . " (486).

Flanner's description of her lesbianism as encompassing her "approach to all of life" seems to suggest that, at least by the age of eighty-three, she had come to understand her sexuality as something that went far beyond a simple "carnality." Like Monique Wittig, Flanner seems to have understood lesbianism to be as much environmental philosophy as sexual preference; the "push" of her erotic emotions towards that which was, in Wittig's words, "not not-man" kept her aware of an alternative, albeit largely unspoken, to patriarchal discourse.

This awareness is reflected in the note of gender-conscious irony and political skepticism which runs as a constant throughout her New Yorker columns. For example, in a profile of Adolf Hitler written in 1935 as a sequence of four Paris Letters (later called "extraordinarily prescient" by Time magazine [98]), Flanner describes Hitler as a "small, dominant man," "chief of a political party which doctrinally enforces the domestic submission of women to 'men's natural rule as illustrated by the Wagnerian heroes like Wotan and Siegfried.'" Characterizing Germany as "masculinized," Flanner suggests that its leader, rumored to have been "wounded genitally in the [World] war . . . belongs to the dangerous, small class of sublimators from which fanatics are frequently drawn" (Uncollected Writings, 80).
Throughout her *New Yorker* career, Flanner also consistently brought up women as important and accountable actors and activists in the world. Her profiles of individual women are never offered with the condescension of sexist simplifications; her columns on Coco Chanel, appearing in 1925 and 1926, acknowledge Chanel as France’s most important economic commodity who, despite starting out herself as a day laborer in fashion workhouses, still maintained a cheap labor pool of women working long hours in terrible conditions. Flanner frequently reminded her readers that women were equal, if unpublicized, participants in international events. Sometimes this reminder appears as a barely visible subtext; in 1927, covering a national exposition of lacework, Flanner wrote:

Real lace was not made in France until the seventeenth century, when Louis XIV imported thirty female Venetian laceworkers in the hope of saving governmental expenses on his previously imported cuffs and cravats. Today’s superb collection of French lace at the Grande Maison de Blanc, and incidentally the French Revolution, are both indirect results. (33)

Other times her reminders are quite graphic, and she balances women as both universal and gender-specific figures of journalistic symbolism. For example, in 1943 Flanner published a sequence of three letters focused entirely on the heartstopping escape of an anonymous woman from occupied France: "In 1942, after two years of the German occupation,
she was among the dozen or more diehards, all women, left over from that colony of about five thousand Americans to whom Paris, during the twenties and thirties, had seemed liberty herself" (Uncollected Writings, 63-64). From the start, this woman is presented not only as one of a timeless parade of political refugees, she also represents women's reluctant surrender and retreat from the exploded promises of political and social freedom implicit in the climate of expatriation. Two years later, Flanner began her coverage of post-war revelations of Nazi outrages with a quietly enraged letter focused on female victims of the war:

[T]he first contingent of women prisoners arrived by train, bringing with them as very nearly their only baggage the proofs, on their faces and their bodies and in their weakly spoken reports, of the atrocities that had been their lot and that of hundreds of thousands of others in the numerous concentration camps our armies are liberating, almost too late. . . . They arrived at the Gare de Lyon at eleven in the morning and were met by a nearly speechless crowd ready with welcoming bouquets of lilacs and other spring flowers, and by General de Gaulle, who wept. . . . Of the three hundred women whom the Ravensbruck Kommandant had selected as being able to put up the best appearance, eleven had died en route. . . . In a way, all the women looked alike: their faces were gray-green, with reddish-brown circles around their eyes, which seemed to see but not to take in. They were dressed like scarecrows, in what had been given them at camp, clothes taken from the dead of all nationalities. As the lilacs fell from inert hands, the flowers made a purple carpet on the platform and the perfume of the trampled flowers mixed with the stench of illness and dirt. (Paris Journal 25-26)

Certainly Flanner's "limited self-knowledge" of the "whatever" of her lesbianism gave a vibrancy, a moral passion, to her accounts of the world's "veracity" as she
had come to understand it. Her awareness of the "theater" of gender roles confers a hard edge of irony to her insights: Desperately ill survivors of a holocaust are met with bouquets of lilacs. Yet she still saw her "lesbic approach to all of life" as being a "permanent problem in my daily life." As a journalist, Flanner spent her life uncomfortably balancing her very public American persona with an equally private personal life, lived mostly in Paris. Mary McCarthy described her lodgings as resembling "a burrow in which a shy, anxious, secretive animal has holed up, glaring out into the light from its hiding place" (5). Flanner's friends remembered her as being extremely "circumspect"; her biographer, Brenda Wineapple, characterized her life as "eminently a private one, devoted to concealment, not revelation, and the conscious crafting of an identity" (267). That identity was Genêt, the androgynous pseudonym assigned to her (without her knowledge) in 1925 by the New Yorker's Harold Ross, to accompany her first "Letter from Paris." Using the figure of Genêt as a sort of mask, Flanner was able to elevate her personal interests into news, to promote the work of her friends, and to enjoy seeing her views endowed with the aura of uncontested truth as a (ungendered, and thus presumed male) reporter/spokesman. "Genêt placed Janet inside history because she was there," notes Wineapple, "as well as outside it, as an American in Paris, a woman, a spectator"
Flanner also enjoyed the ambiguity of a chatty letter from an unknown correspondent: "Letters, of course, are the most intimate form of printed correspondence," she told Bainbridge, "But I have never used the first-person pronoun. I never say "I" (22).

Janet Flanner's life was not, in truth, entirely "devoted to concealment." At times she enjoyed publicly pushing the limits of her gender role; in 1932 she had herself photographed in profile, monocle in one hand, copy of *The New Yorker* in the other, posing as Eustace Tilley, the high-hatted male fop who still graces the magazine's annual February issue. In a sense, Genêt "came out" as Janet Flanner in 1940, with the publication of her first collection of essays from *The New Yorker*. A review of *An American in Paris* in *Time* magazine evidences a clear uneasiness with the revealed androgyny of Flanner's professional persona: "Her sophistication outwardly evident in a billowing grey mop and man-about-town monocle, Francophile Janet Flanner still has a certain girlish naivete" (97).

The photograph of Flanner that accompanies the *Time* article does not show the monocle itself, but the ribbon by which it hung is evident; one must assume that Flanner wore the monocle at the time the publicity shot was taken. As Marjorie Garber has pointed out in her book *Vested Interests*, the monocle acted as a heavily symbolic
"signature piece" for economically privileged lesbians and gay men. It was a part of "transvestite high style" in the period after the Great War, one of the "most recognizable and readable signs of the lesbian culture of Paris." As a portion of the costume of the male dandy, the monocle functioned as a "detachable . . . floating signifier of gender" which was also "powerfully ambivalent"; as a fashion affectation, it rendered men effete and women virile (153, 154). It was also extremely public, appearing in its full gender ambivalence not only on the cover of The New Yorker, but also in the cinema, worn by luminaries like Marlene Dietrich and Betty Grable, in the portraits of her friends by Romaine Brooks, and in literature, including Colette's Ces plaisirs (1932, republished in English as The Pure and the Impure) in which she describes "mannish women":

They never seemed ridiculous to me. Yet some of them wore a monocle, a white carnation in the buttonhole, took the name of God in vain, and discussed horses competently. . . . They tried to render intelligible for us their success with women and their defiant taste for women. The astonishing thing is that they managed to do so. (73, 74)

Sometimes Janet Flanner's own apparent attitude toward her lesbian "veracity" seemed as unsettled as the attitude evidenced by the unnamed author of the article in Time. Flanner claimed to disapprove of public displays of overt homosexuality, although at times, dressed in the "transvestite high style" described by Marjorie Garber, she
herself provided this display. When Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* opened as a play in Paris, Genet roasted the performance by contrasting the fashionably constructed lesbian appearance of Wilette Kershaw as Stephen Gordon with the play's heavily compromised attitude toward lesbianism itself:

> Miss Wilette Kershaw made a curtain speech in which she begged humanity, 'already used to earthquakes and murderers,' to try to put up with a minor calamity like the play's and the book's Lesbian protagonist, Stephen Gordon. However, she made up in costume what she lacked in psychology: dressing gown by Sulka, riding breeches by Hoare, boots by Bunting, crop by Briggs, briquet by Dunhill, and British accent - as the programme did not bother to state - by Broadway. *(Paris Was Yesterday, 71)*

Four years earlier, in 1925, Janet Flanner had had herself photographed by Berenice Abbot in a top hat, black velvet jacket and striped trousers. In one photograph she sits on the floor staring coolly into the camera, one hand held loosely to her face, a ring on her little finger (a recognized symbol to the international homosexual subculture) in clear evidence. She looks like a very elegant, very lesbian, Uncle Sam. Ned Rorem remembered Flanner at a party in her sixties; while she looked at him "reproachfully through her monocle, resembling a hip and handsome Amazon disguised as George Washington playing Greek tragedy," she criticized Rorem for publishing his "pornographic diary" *(Setting the Tone, 134).*

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Janet Flanner also seemed conflicted in her attitude toward the most openly lesbian American expatriate, Natalie Clifford Barney. To Barney's biographer she described her old friend as "a perfect example of an enchanting person not to write about" (260), presumably because any biography would have to discuss Barney's (and that of her friends) lesbianism. Yet she did indeed discuss Barney, for several hours, in so delightful an interview that George Wickes included a partial transcript of their conversation in an appendix. Although she protested to Wickes that "I never felt that I knew [Barney] at all well, really" (261), Flanner proudly and publicly acknowledged "her" character in Ladies Almanack, Djuna Barnes' bawdy burlesque of Natalie Barney's circle of friends.

Sometimes Janet Flanner's lesbianism seems clearly apparent in her writing, at least to readers willing to consider, perhaps even seeking, that possibility. One of the rare times Flanner adopted the use of the first person pronoun (as well as her own byline) is in a 1974 New Yorker "Profile" on Margaret Anderson, creator and publisher of "the famous vanguard magazine The Little Review." In the article's first paragraph, Flanner recounts how Anderson's "visible beauty enveloped a will of tempered steel, specifically at its most resistant when she was involved in argument, which was her favorite form of intellectual exercise, as I, who knew her for many years, can attest"
(44). After having established herself as a member of Anderson's closest group of friends, Flanner goes on to recognize, framed by an account of Anderson's passion for art and literature, Anderson's three successive "strong relationships" with women: Jane Heap, Georgette LeBlanc, and Dorothy Caruso. Flanner's text is encoded, but barely so. For example, while covering the second volume of Anderson's memoirs, Flanner tells her reader:

She writes on the classifications of love, on the varieties of love, on romantic love, on amity, on perfections of friendship, furnishing an extremely interesting and rare analysis of these states of feeling. In a section subtitled "The Art of Love," she remarks, with aphoristic felicity, "In real love you want the other person's good. In romantic love you want the other person." In her long years of devotion to Georgette LeBlanc, she combined or separated categories of love with the fluidity of mist or rain or sunshine, like climates of the heart. Georgette was the most important and influential of all Margaret's emotional friendships. (59,61)

Although it is certainly possible to read this passage without investing the term "emotional friendship" with anything akin to lesbianism, Flanner has given her reader a clue by literally leaning Anderson's "carnal" description of romantic love against her "long years of devotion to Georgette LeBlanc."

A lesbian reader seeking some pattern to Flanner's lived and literary excursions in and out of the closet may notice Flanner's life-long reliance on a sense of delineated community; in other words, she aimed both her life and her
work at what was apparently a limited audience. At its inception, The New Yorker announced that it would not be "edited for the old lady from Dubuque": "[The New Yorker] hopes to reflect the metropolitan life . . . [I]t is not of that group of publications engaged in tapping the Great Buying Power of the North American steppe region . . ." (2). Advertisements for the magazine reached out for a well-educated audience unshackled by the prejudices of a provincial morality, an audience whose sense of moral judgement would be tempered by a measure of self-mockery:

Do you know it is just as easy to be au courant as it is to be a Baptist? By devoting twenty minutes each week to The New Yorker, you become witty and conversant with practically every subject there is. You not only understand what the best plays mean, if anything, but you actually know the names and numbers of the more prominent actresses and head waiters. (quoted in Wineapple, 99)

Even the ruffled dandy, peering delicately at a butterfly through his monocle, who appears annually on the cover of The New Yorker, seems to forbid the magazine to a readership too wedded to the strictures of rigid gender roles.

Protected by an environment of such carefully developed elitism, Flanner may have felt somewhat safe in her posture as Genêt/Eustace Tilley, both in the pages of The New Yorker and the photograph by Horst Bormann. Nevertheless, it was a tenuous safety, as Flanner learned during the repressive years of McCarthyism. When she testified in Kay Boyle's defense at Boyle's loyalty trial in 1952, she received a
cable from the editor of *The New Yorker* telling her that she had "jeopardized the reputation of the magazine" (Wineapple, 227).

The years preceding her conversation with George Wickes had seen the publication of homophobic biographies of women Janet Flanner had known; John Lehmann called Virginia Woolf "sexually retarded" (15), Meryle Secrest suggested that Romaine Brooks's lesbianism was caused either by "a disturbance of the endocrine glands" (213) or a pathological longing for "[e]motional incest with the mother" (214), and Lovat Dickson claimed, in his biography of Radclyffe Hall, that "the sexual practices of lesbianism [induce] some gynaecological woes of an unhappy kind for which the medical treatment can be protracted and painful" (107). Flanner's initial caution with George Wickes seems to have been justified by the lurid choice of photograph adorning the book's dust jacket (one of a series that Flanner remembered as "really quite painful. She's acting like a dryad and she peeks from behind tree trunks in the Bois. You know how bad taste was at that time" [266]); a naked Natalie Barney is shown draping herself over a rock in a forest. Obviously, the world Flanner spoke to was one still prey to fads of bigotry, sensationalism and fear. Perhaps the one candid representation of Janet Flanner's "lesbic approach to all of life" is in Berenice Abbott's photograph, in which the viewer can see Flanner staring into the eyes of the
photographer, another lesbian expatriate "to whom Paris, during the twenties and thirties, had seemed liberty herself."

Janet Flanner began her first (and only) novel at a time in her life when she had yet to immerse herself in even a moderately safe community of liberty-seeking expatriate women. Flanner began outlining the plot of The Cubical City while she and Solita Solano were in Greece, and the audience Flanner may have been addressing, within both her poetry and her inchoate novel, was one both illuminated and reconstructed within the theater of an imagined Lesbos. Thinking back on the novel nearly fifty years later, Flanner explained that "[l]ike most authors of a first novel, in mine I fell back upon the people I knew best, my family, as my characters" (Cubical City, 431). The novel's protagonist is based loosely on Flanner herself; when the plot of the work is examined as a discussion and critique of the conventions of female heterosexuality, Flanner's intended readership must also have been herself, as she looked back from a growing distance to make sense of her marriage.

As a piece of lesbian literature, the novel that eventually emerged is recognizable to a careful lesbian reader. Like Solita Solano's work, The Cubical City fulfills Barbara Smith's minimal criteria for a lesbian novel in that it offers an overt political critique of heterosexuality. Furthermore, while Solano's novels all
feature a male protagonist, Flanner locates the book's "primary intensity" within the "undomestic, healthy, even magnificent" (18) person of Delia Poole. Certainly the work is still tentative in that it concentrates on a critique of heterosexuality rather than a detailed construction of any alternative. At least the alternative is overtly acknowledged, however, and, as opposed to the friendship between Amy Fiske and Elizabeth Corning in Solano's The Uncertain Feast, the lesbian reader is not required to decode, to foreground and embellish a possible love relationship separately from the manifest plot of the novel.

The Cubical City, published by Putnam in 1926, focuses on the struggle of Delia Poole, a young, successful commercial artist from the midwest living alone in New York City, to live the twentieth century's promise of economic and social freedom offered to a new generation of New Women. As the novel explores the eventual failure of Poole's vision of personal independence, it examines the inherent contradiction of individual freedom for women within a patriarchal structure. The Cubical City eventually reveals the twentieth-century New Woman to be a mirage, and Delia Poole's dream to have actually been a cruel hoax.

In her essay on the two generations of "New Women" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has noted a crucial difference in feminist philosophy that guided the two separate generations of
women. The middle- and upper-middle-class New Women maturing between the late 1850s and the early 1900s, educated, ambitious, and frequently unmarried, resisted public scrutiny and social condemnation while working for rights and privileges customarily accorded only to white middle class men by forming intense bonds of female friendship and relationship:

[They] constructed a uniquely female discourse and an alternative mythic female figure and identity. Interweaving the Enlightenment's belief in the individual's right to self-fulfillment and a Victorian insistence on women's higher morality and sexual purity, they infused these two divergent discourses with a third--the new optimistic, nondeterministic science of the Progressive Era. (267)

Recognizing the political threat implied by cohesive communities of women independent of male approval, a generation of what Smith-Rosenberg calls "New Men" replied by riding a crest of scientific determinism and pathologizing female relationship:

The New Woman who, while standing outside of conventional institutions and socially acceptable roles, had proudly boasted of her sexual purity had lied. She was a secretly and dangerously sexualized figure. Her social liminality was rooted in sexual inversion. She belonged to an "intermediate sex." She embodied the unnatural and the monstrous. She was a "Mannish Lesbian." (268)

The older generation of New Women, having matured within a culture which regarded women as naturally asexual, literally lacked a context within which to form a reply to this political attack. “[H]aving eschewed men sexually, they
had no language in which to conceive of their erotic relations with other women as sexual; they could not construct themselves as sexual subjects" (273). The New Woman of the 1920s was attracted by a vocabulary that offered her at least some erotic existence and was, in turn, distracted by the successful accomplishment of some immediate feminist goals, like the vote:

For these later New Women, sexual autonomy no longer meant freedom from material oppression, but, rather, the right to sexual experimentation and self-expression. Radical New Women who, a generation earlier, had joined women's settlement houses, now flocked to Margaret Sanger's sex-education lectures. (273)

As Smith-Rosenburg points out, the seduction of a language that finally recognized women as sexual beings was felt by all women, including those who loved other women. Lacking an alternative language, the Lesbian "New Woman" accepted the "New Man's" sexual discourse, although it rendered her perverted and degenerate, and categorized her sexuality into a hierarchy of four ill-defined and contradictory levels, ranging from "psycho-sexual hermaphrodites," women who were "responsive" to the sexual approaches of other women, to the condition of "gynandry," the "extreme grade of degenerative homosexuality." Like the other three categories of female sexual inversion, gynandry was not codified by any type of sexual behavior, but by role conformity; among the distinguishing symptoms of the "extreme grade of degenerative homosexuality" in women
was the disdaining of "perfumes and sweetmeats," the preference of science over art, and "painful reflections" on the "consciousness of being a woman and thus to be deprived of the gay college life, or to be barred out from the military career" (Krafft-Ebing, 336, 399).

At the opening of The Cubical City, Delia Poole seems to embody the culmination of the successful twentieth century heterosexual New Woman. She has grown up with the new century, leaving the "virile fields, procreative and breastless" (137) of Excelsior, Ohio, for the promise of economic independence and sexual autonomy in New York. Confessing that "I don't like supervision, interference," Poole admits that "I left home to be free. And I won't give that up--until I have to." To herself, however, she thinks, "Free. What did it mean? She wasn't sure" (366).

As a second-generation New Woman, Delia Poole lacks an easy answer for her question. Described as "[r]ather ignorant of feministic history" (28), she views the definition of freedom in the entirely personal terms of individual opportunity as she has seen it operate in her culture. This means that men have been her models for liberty; in adopting male prerogatives in her quest for freedom, she has also adopted certain modes of behavior which are gender identified. This aspect of Delia’s character did not go unnoticed in the reviews that greeted the publication of The Cubical City. A review appearing in
New York Times Book Review describes the life that Delia chooses to live as "not unlike that of a young gentleman in Restoration or Regency England" (26). In another contemporary review, the Boston Evening Transcript calls Delia Poole a "strong, sure woman": "Everything she has ever gained has been won by her own hands. Consequently her hands have become strong and almost passionately masculine in their desires and feelings" (6).

Held to a male standard of independence, Delia seems eminently successful. While she has abandoned the "virile fields" of Ohio, she has replaced them with the equally virile environment of Manhattan:

In her part of the country were to be found only intestinal states--those organic ones west of the neckbone of the Alleghanies. Here in this city was their head. All else in the land should be covered from sight and shunned as consisting of incivil torso and vulgar loins. But this, like all capitals, was the country's flaming provoking face. Here one stared. Here was a young male visage, inventive, violent, spoiled, the face of a nervous, handsome and clever only son. (45)

At one point in the novel Delia's "wide and grey" eyes are described as looking "androgynous" (16). In a sense, their manner of seeing is androgynous as well; as she looks out on the "young male visage" of Manhattan, Delia Poole perceives a reflection of her own apparently limitless opportunities. To Delia, Manhattan is not a bastion of national patriarchy in which she is an automatic outsider by virtue of gender, but the capital of a "mechanical century where skyscrapers
rose as consistently as equal rights" (29). At night, Delia's apartment provides her with a panorama of an apparent land of prosperity and opportunity:

Squared by her window rose her view of the electric flame and feathers of the colossal cock on the Heckscher building—neck arched in space, comb blazing, claws tightened to his nest of high lights gawdy above Fifth Avenue. (3-4)

This "colossal cock" is Delia's vision of inspiration; at the sight of this "bird flashing like a weathervane mounted in the marketplace" Delia feels all her "provincial emotional enthusiasm for Manhattan" run through her "like quicksilver" (45).

Poole typifies Smith-Rosenburg's second-generation New Woman in that her "magnificent appetite for healthy liberty" has guided her to at least one component of the meaning of freedom:

There had always been a void between every generation and its offspring, of course, but certainly it seemed uniquely broad now. Broad enough, for the European war to have come between, killing a few of the younger American generation and setting all the rest free. Free for what? And as though it were an art peculiarly distinguishing their decade, sex had suddenly blossomed into a renaissance. (139-140)

Delia Poole regards her heterosexual appetite as healthy and natural: "I'm hearty, I like love" (363). "Passion is natural," Delia explains to her friend, Nancy, "And yet as near as I can observe, for thousands of years the concentrated aim of society has been to cut down kissing" (366). The heartiness of her sexual appetite for "a series
has set her apart irreconcilably from her mother, who regards sex as "malignant": "Poor mother, Delia thought, compassionately. She has no appetite for flesh. She doesn't even like to eat it, let alone touch it" (140, 141). She is also isolated from "society," including other women; she is quick to identify women who never "had had love" as lacking courage, and "[s]he despised women without courage" (115). Delia also "despised celibacy and virginity, seeing in them some plaintive timid evasion of energies everyone felt and should share."

Because Delia's active heterosexual appetite is so intrinsic to her perception of her own health and liberty, she has segregated herself from anything that might dim her vision of individual opportunity, including the "bloody trail left by ubiquitous males" which makes up so much of "feministic history" (28):

Delia saw men as merely the necessarily opposite sex. Strong herself, to her they were not egotists who had for centuries left in their conquering wake embittered ladies whose existence had been slow tragedies punctuated by quick births. Delia was unconscious of all these resentments, these old truths, these old lives . . . (28)

"Unconscious" is an excellent word to describe Delia's character. Her choice to ignore the "old truths" of "feministic history" leaves her apparently untouched by the mandate of cultural precedent; she meets "each new question or event in a fresh rain of surprise" (16). Delia has assumed many of the rights and privileges pursued by the
first generation of New Women, but without allying herself in any way with women as a group. For example, at one point in the novel Delia tells herself that "[s]he would never understand women" (17). At another, Delia's close friend, Nancy Burke, tells her "without flattery" that "[y]ou're just like a man" (28). By being recognizably "männisch," although Delia is not a lesbian, she still seems to function as a sort of socially threatening "intermediate sex." In other words, she is a perpetual outsider. She is an independent, sexually active woman; in an ironic sense, she embodies the condition of "gynandry" without the condition's required "consciousness of being a woman."

Because she exists without a historical or community context, although she has a vocabulary within which to locate her individual heterosexual appetite, she is nearly silent about everything else: she lacks the "physical deftness for speech" (25). Described several times in the novel as "primitive," she avoids self-reflection: "In her state of ruddy health, glands and ethics were the same thing" (300). She has made a successful career for herself as a set and costume designer for the lush extravaganzas of Goldstein's Review, but even her art, like herself, is primitive, inarticulate. The drawings on her easel are "smudged with unsettled areas of tentative color and a cluster of inferential black lines" (5).

Each line of it, each angling scratch of charcoal which, for Delia, would never stay sharp, each blotch
of color or tip of sultan's pimpled dome showed the
deep volume of her physical talent and demonstrated
her inability to draw. After years of success, Delia
could not draw a bird or a milk pail without having
the models set in a good north light. (14)

Good light of any kind is largely absent from The
Cubical City; the action in the novel takes place almost
entirely at night. Delia's Manhattan apartment is described
as a"large ill-lit room" (9), a place of "spectacular
disorder" (189), full of the "deciduous clutter of stale
papers, journals, notes, addresses, filed after Delia's
fashion on the carpet" (190). The novel opens in the
evening, with Delia seated "drawn up in the darkness on her
high stool" before her easel. "Her face was turned toward
the far end of her big room where the wall seemed pushed
back by shadows, giving space for her expectations in the
dusk" (3).

As Delia stares toward the "lunar, vague" face of "a
clock in the shadows," "[h]er hand reached toward a lamp by
her side and from its conical hood a glare aimed down on her
long figure and head, leaving the rest of the room untouched
and unserved" (4). There is an irony in this sudden act of
illumination. As Delia sits in her own spotlight designing
theater sets, she is effectively isolated by its glare, not
only from the lunar light of the clock face, but also from
her own spacious, unformed expectations. As anyone who has
stood on a stage in a darkened theater knows, a spotlight
illuminates its target to a watching audience. It also
blinds the actor to that same audience. In Delia's case, her audience is the "young male visage" of Manhattan whose expectations for female behavior are not spacious in any way.

The men whom she perceives as "merely the necessarily opposite sex" react to Delia with a great deal of anxiety; although they are frequently unable to relate to Delia as an individual, they make no mistake about her gender. Men in the novel tailor their reactions to Delia according to their perception of her as virgin, wife or whore, three traditional gender formulae available to women in a patriarchal society. Goldstein, for example, is so invested in her as "virgin" that, after seeing her passionately kissing her lover, Paul, he can still tell her, "God, you probably think babies come from saxophones. Even your pretty Paul knows more about life than you do. At least he's a man" (123). On the other hand, Compton Keith, an ex-lover, regards her as a whore, telling her:

I ought to be glad to marry you, if you'd have me, and yet there's something in me that won't let me change my ideas. Men aren't like women, I guess, Delia. And I'm a man. I would never marry a woman if I had been her lover. (287-288)

Throughout The Cubical City, Delia is subjected to reductive, sometimes contradictory insights regarding the "nature" of men and women, and always in relationship to one another, never by virtue of their own human integrity. According to Paul, "Men don't stay in women's rooms" (52),
"Nice girls cost money to entertain" (65), and "Women always seem luxurious to a man. Any woman to all men" (93). Goldstein tells her that "Women are women. They give though maybe they never get. That's right" (118). On the other hand, "Men ain't governments paying out pension money to ugly widows they don't love. They buy what they want" (252). Furthermore, to Goldstein, a woman is always one of "two kinds": "You either wanted to marry her or you knew damned well you didn't have to" (392-393). Sex between men and women is "something she don't like but can't help, something men have always done while the woman thinks of something else" (396). Keith tells Delia that "usually it doesn't matter to a man what a woman is. A sweet dull blonde or a sweet dull brunette" (283). According to Delia's mother, "Men were always doing women harm. Men never thought" (228). Nevertheless, "It's a man's duty to protect a woman, not expose her" (304).

Unmarried, Delia is seen as a perplexing, even frightening unknown variable in all of these patriarchal formulae. Goldstein tells Delia to marry because

"If you don't, you'll get into trouble, you might even---" She might what? She didn't know. He broke off, what he imagined frightening him beyond speech. (122-123)

What is frightening Goldstein is the specter of a woman who is resisting what Luce Irigaray calls the "dominant phallic economy" (This Sex, 24). Within this economy, a woman "will
not say what she herself wants; moreover, she does not know, or no longer knows, what she wants."

Within this logic, the predominance of the visual, and of the discrimination and individualization of form, is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Woman takes pleasure more from touching than looking, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies . . . her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation. (25-26)

As evidenced by the theatrical spotlighting at the start of the novel, Delia is, without doubt, an "object of contemplation." According to Irigaray, women subjected to patriarchal discourse, who have been objectified through patriarchal contemplation, are reduced to phallomorphized reflections of a male subject who requires an "instrument" to "touch himself," to know himself. Within a "phallic economy," which privileges a visible, singularity of form, a woman's "sexual organ represents the horror of nothing to see."

This organ which has nothing to show for itself also lacks a form of its own. And if woman takes pleasure precisely from this incompleteness of form which allows her organ to touch itself over and over again, indefinitely, by itself, that pleasure is denied by a civilization that privileges phallomorphism. The value granted to the only definable form excludes the one that is in play in female auto-eroticism. The one of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning . . . supplants, while separating and dividing, that contact of at least two (lips) which keeps woman in touch with herself, but without any possibility of distinguishing what is touching from what is touched. (26)

Delia may be an object of contemplation, but she resists any accompanying reduction into a "definable form."
The only "form" that Delia chooses to identify are her own appetites; even her art is the indefinable process of "imagining color and line in magnificent unschooled unions" (15). In this way Delia represents what Luce Irigaray calls "the mystery that woman represents in a culture claiming to count everything":

She resists all adequate definition. Further, she has no 'proper' name. And her sexual organ, which is not one organ, is counted as none. The negative, the underside, the reverse of the only visible and morphologically designatable organ. (26)

Though contemplated, Delia remains stubbornly indeterminate; she is a woman whose lifestyle is the practice of "never being simply one" (This Sex 31). As a result Delia is horrifyingly "unseeable" to Goldstein. What may be even more terrifying to him is the experience of his own lack of reactive definition when he is around Delia. Toward the end of the novel Delia actually tells Goldstein that she will not fit into his schemata of female roles: "I'm just what I've always been. The same person. ... Your opinion of me may have changed. I've not. I've had lovers. If I'm nice or not nice it has nothing to do with my having been in love" (392). This knowledge leads him to burst into tears: "He found his silk handkerchief and sounded his nose, a long, brutal masculine blast like a war trumpet which no female would ever play" (391). He proposes to her, propositions her, and finally, weeping "What'll I do?" he
leaves, shouting "Marry someone. Settle down and stick, Delia. Promise it. Promise it," as he shuts her door (398).

The pressure on Delia to marry is unrelenting, even when those around her understand that marriage would inevitably compromise her lifestyle. At one point Paul, acknowledging that "You earn more than most men I know," wonders "what any man could offer that would be sufficient for you to change your life" (58). Delia's doubts about marriage, however, "aroused in [Paul] an animosity, a belligerence." "'But of course you'll marry,' he cried. . . . 'You're a beautiful woman. You'll have to marry'" (75).

Women, too, join in the chorus of voices urging Delia to marry, although women consistently see marriage as a concession, a purchase of some sort of safety. According to Delia's mother,

> Whatever marriage failed to offer women . . . at any rate matrimony stood for one of the big hopes in human life and in their disappointment women's lives were filled by items that substituted for happiness and kept loneliness for old age. (352)

At her own wedding, Delia's friend Mercy tells her to "Go do likewise. You'll have to sooner or later. One can't go on leading one's life forever. You'll see what I mean" (348). Watching the rector as "he placed his back to the fragile alter as a fighting man uses the wall," Delia ruminates on
how church weddings "clarified the mortal's momentary confusion," caring for "the incoherence of the individual" on the "big occasions" of "birth, mating and death" (344, 345). Clearly, the church wedding is, in a phallic economy, one wall of a patriarchal fortress offering "clarity" against "incoherence," "items" for independence.

Marriage, however, exists throughout the novel as a motif for female catastrophe, as the crucial moment when a woman's dreams of independence collapse beneath the agenda of the American patriarchy. Delia, who flatly declares six times in the novel that "I don't want to marry" (18, 41, 73, 74, 286, 396), regards marriage as "a profession for which she had neither talent nor love" (425). In the one marriage that actually takes place in the novel, the bride wears black, explaining that "[t]he rest of the women wear it because it's smart but I wear it because I'm in mourning" (347). Marriage (and its sexual consequence) is that formal moment when a woman's integrity "is disrupted by a violent break-in: the brutal separation of the two lips by a violating penis, an intrusion that distracts and deflects the woman from [the] 'self-caressing' she needs if she is not to incur the disappearance of her own pleasure . . ." (This Sex, 24). In a scene that eerily mirrors Irigaray's philosophy, Delia confronts Compton Keith at Mercy's wedding:

"You're just the informer I wanted to see. Should I marry?" she asked. Her lips parted
broadly. He looked the perfect, the waiting bridegroom. (350)

As she marries, Mercy's "mind . . . was still with Delia intact. What would happen to her for instance? Would she--" (349). Like Goldstein, Mercy's anxious question regarding Delia's undefined situation remains unfinished, as she encounters the boundaries of the "unseeable," a female existence unmediated by a masculine agenda. But unlike Goldstein, Mercy has at least considered that which she cannot even frame in words:

Mercy had been more drawn to Delia, drawn as if with a bond of intimacy and lusty tenderness that united them, than toward anyone she had met in years. Had indeed loved her. But loving women, to Mercy, was not practicable. (349)

Loving Delia is not only "not practicable" for Mercy, it is a relationship which doesn't "have enough shape." As she marries, Mercy abandons the idea of "leading one's life forever," including the shadowed, unshaped potential of loving women, for the reductive "oneness" of being a man's wife.

Safe within the shadowy environment of her own apartment, Delia's dispersed presence seems to illustrate Irigaray's theory of natural female diffusion. Her art, her easel, all join in the "deciduous clutter" of her room. Even Delia's body contributes to her "spectacular disorder"; when she sits, she sits with her "limbs sprawling" (361). As Delia's friend Nancy observes, Delia "always drifted to
the center of her blatant room" (14). Delia forms the living heart of an environment which is neither entirely one with nor separate from her being; she embodies Irigaray's image of a woman who "enters into a ceaseless exchange of herself with the other without any possibility of identifying either" (31). Nancy, who innately understands this quality, "disliked it when Delia was not part of [the room's] furnishings. Then it seemed dead" (32-33).

Nancy, too, is part of the "furnishings" of Delia's life. She is a "familiar spectacle," "efficient, critical and devoted, busying herself about the studio" (30). When the two women talk, Delia "drifts" to "the center of the studio where light gleamed like a core," while the "darkness in the outskirts of the room made a black ring on whose edge [Nancy] sat, watching with a white face" (10). When Nancy removes her hat, her "red hair was like another small lamp in the room" (16). The illumination that Nancy provides replicates the impression suggested by the "lunar" face of the clock eclipsed by the "strong solar glow" (10) that spotlights Delia.

When the novel opens, Nancy and Delia have been close friends for seven years. At the beginning of their friendship the two women chose to protect their feelings from the world by taking a "grand continental tour" (80), but theirs has never been an affection explicitly acknowledged between them, because "Confidences embarrassed
Delia": "Her isolated friendship with Nancy had been conducted without Nancy's ever verbally inferring anything or Delia's ever denying it" (16). The parameters of emotional expression have been set and defined by Delia; the "dry years" of their friendship have been ones "in which, according to Delia's reactions, it was perfectly natural they had never even exchanged what could be properly called a kiss" (219).

Delia's is a "helpless affection she always gave Nancy, in her sparse embarrassed way" (207), but after seven years, Nancy's "glamorous affection for Delia" (27) has become "more than she could bear" (12). Throughout these years of friendship, Nancy has complained that Delia's succession of male lovers "were not ripe nor fine enough for her Delia,—calling aloud in derision that these were all weak men" (25). After seven years, Nancy has transferred her protective loyalties from Delia to Paul, whom she sees as being innocent and victimized by her philandering friend. Delia recognizes that "[t]heir amity had been diminishing ever since Paul had arrived to make it a triad" (312).

Although she declares her love for Paul, complaining that Delia "spoiled Paul for anyone else," Nancy's primary complaint seems to be related to the "whatever" that she perceives Delia becoming:

"What are you?" She stiffened herself in her chair as if her contempt were organic, something which could only rise to her lips from a straight free passage of bile. "All these years I've been
standing in the backyard of your glory, do you think I haven't finally got a notion of what you are? I loved you at first. I adored you. You were worth it then. And I sat to one side watching you give yourself so often for nothing—for a whim, for a moonlight night, for feelings that didn't count—that I saw you finally become worth just what all free things are worth—nothing!" She snapped her fingers. "Just nothing." (362-363)

While Nancy may believe that Delia has given herself away for "nothing," that is, a series of "weak men," Nancy has given herself away to the idea of loving Paul, a man she identifies as "a stable marrying kind" (17). "You and I were friends until you fell in love with Paul," Delia tells Nancy. "And when you fell in love with him, you began hating me . . ." (365). For Nancy, however, this has not been simply a process of falling in love with Paul, but has included a complex mechanism of identifying with his feelings for Delia. Telling Delia that she's interested in Paul "because of pity," Nancy admits that "I'm sorry for him." "'He's never heard of a person like you,' she cried with contempt and admiration. 'He'll give you everything he's got and then he'll—he'll be just like me . . .''" (25).

In a sense, Nancy has translated her feelings for Delia into the only cultural language available to her, and, as a result, regards Delia with all the moral outrage of a wronged husband. At first Delia can only examine the dissolution of their friendship "in a haze," can only remember "confused kaleidoscopic patches" of the years of their friendship" (313). Eventually, though, even the
inarticulate Delia can admit to herself that "Nancy picked from the three graded female emotions (wife, mother, friend) all the essences, all the follies and threw them on Delia without any of their proper rewards" (314).

Once, she thought, Nancy loved me better than anything in the world. She reddened a little. But it was true. Love was the only accurate word. Love had given a peculiar intensity to what otherwise would have been Nancy's mere affection and friendliness. (312-313)

Divided by the presence of Paul, each woman seeks an available, mutually exclusive "whatever" to shape the confused kaleidoscope of their friendship. Nancy's use of a "stable," heterosexual model of relationship has, in the end, physically reduced her to a narrowed, rigid cartoon:

Animosity and secrecy had distributed their expressions until Nancy's ability to look like herself had in some way been lost. She had paled and flattened as if, no longer equipped with her usual affection for Delia, the surface of her face had fallen a little as a consequence, leaving the nose and cheeks in hard critical relief. (358)

Delia, on the other hand, retreats from the idea of Nancy's love that has caused her to blush so. As soon as possible, Delia shapes this love into the simplified forms that conform to a women's role in a patriarchy. Right after Nancy has admitted that "I loved you . . . I adored you," Delia tells her "You haven't got an ounce of passion in your whole make-up. You're as chaste as a tea-cup" (364).

"I don't know why you felt so maternally for me," she added. . . . You should never have dreamed of trying to act like my mother. You lacked nine months preparation for it twenty-
five years ago." (365-366)

Without a doubt, the primary emotional crisis in the novel is clearly located in the moment when the relationship between the two women irreparably disintegrates. Janet Flanner is careful to foreground this crisis ultimately away and apart from Delia's relationship with Paul:

'It's over, Delia thought. Not between her and Paul. There might be a struggle or trouble but she never thought of losing him. She was thinking of Nancy.' (311-312)

At this moment, "with a rare choice in comfort," Delia sinks into "a large breast-like chair" and thinks over their friendship. It is while she is surrounded by the uniquely female environment of the chair that Delia can finally admit that "Love was the only accurate word" to describe Nancy's feelings for her. Isolated temporarily within this chair from the "young male visage" of New York, she can also understand that

Outside Delia's window in the gathering electrical effulgence that was New York's protest against the demoded restrictions of night, were certain lamps, probably not too brightly glimmering, by the bed-sides of certain chorus girls. They too, when Delia first came to New York, first came to Goldstein, had offered affection that could have been intense.

Remembering an occasion when she abruptly left a "Russian singer with the pearl earrings, boy's jackets and short hair" sitting alone in her cab, Delia remembers telling Goldstein, "Why should I talk to her? You know I don't speak any French."

She had never arrived at stating the truth any
more exactly than that nor had the theme ever been mentioned between Nancy and her. (313-314)

To eliminate any remaining doubt about the importance of this emotional rupture, Flanner describes Delia's heart as breaking:

[N]ow while Nancy was not there to hear a sound, in the region of her heart Delia felt a wrenching as if something that had been lifted out had left its roots that could lament and wave in the inner cardiac air like mandrakes crying on a field at night because they have been cut. (316)

This, then, is the moment of "primary intensity" between women that Adrienne Rich describes as definitively lesbian. Flanner's introduction of the "large, breast-like chair" offers a distinctively organic, "carnal" female narrative space whose significance is underlined by a series of revelations which have been otherwise impossible under the eclipsing "solar glare" of a masculine New York's artificial lights. Ironically, then, the moment in which the women's friendship crumbles is the moment that most clearly identifies The Cubical City as an overtly lesbian text. The failure of patriarchal language to give expression to Delia and Nancy's love, Mercy's admission to herself that such relationships are "shapeless" within a heterosexual context, recalls Monique Wittig's theory of lesbianism as an entire environmental quality, neither to be found within nor in opposition to heterosexual dualism.

The price that Delia and Nancy pay within The Cubical City reveals the necessity of constructing an alternative,
articulate, lesbian environment. By the end of the novel, Nancy is rigid, hard, reduced; even her "white face" is "hardened like china in the process of baking" (361). Delia's final act as a twentieth century "New Woman" is full of bitter irony; so as not to alienate her mother, she proposes to Paul:

"Will you marry me?" She did not look at him. He did not answer. But without waiting for them to be alone, his hand covered hers, his fingers clinging, setting her rings deep in the ornament of her flesh. For a moment she tried to think what she had done by her demand. But it was too late. She looked at her mother. It was the only way. Slowly Delia closed her eyes, her head sightless, erect, and yellow, holding its distance from the shadows that spread around her in her chair. (425-426)

Having made her decision, Delia closes her eyes, unwilling to see "what she had done." While in Greece, Janet Flanner had also experienced the difficulty of seeing "what she had done" in anything but "the bright hot sunshine." As she stood outside the Acropolis in the moonlight, paralyzed by her choice of "the best that I could obtain, with the greatest accumulation of both nature and creation," this "first great adventure in illumination" had impressed her with the emotional difficulty of envisioning the unseeable. Equally, though, she had come to understand the necessity of the attempt, of thinking about what she had done, of speaking, at least to herself, lesbian. Delia, too, has had a "great adventure in illumination," and, in a sense, has provided an answer to the question she posed to
Goldstein: "Why should I talk to her?" Language gives form and permanence to our moments of illumination; conversation within the parameters of this language creates community. Unfortunately, the lunar light provided by Nancy's "white face" has been eclipsed by the cubical city's discourse, has been entirely overwhelmed by the bright artificial sunshine of patriarchal Manhattan, neither created by women, nor natural.
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When Albert Clifford Barney inherited his father's railroad fortune, he immediately sold his interests in the Barney Car Works to the Pullman Sleeping Car Company and retired for life on the resulting fortune. He was around thirty years old. At his death, in 1902, his daughter Natalie also retired on her inheritance. She, however, was not retiring from the world of business, but from the world of compulsory heterosexuality. She was twenty-six years old.

By the time of her father's death, Natalie Clifford Barney had been evading marriage for eight years. Born in Dayton, Ohio, Barney moved with her family to Washington, D. C. when she was ten years old; her adolescence was punctuated by lunches at the White House, picnics with the Vice-President's daughters, private tutoring with a French governess, European tours, music lessons, and her obligatory presentation and circulation at Washington's debutante balls. When she made her official debut in Washington, she was described in the press in what one of her biographers, George Wickes, admits is essentially an advertisement:

Miss Barney is very fair, with quantities of golden hair dressed always in the latest Parisian style.
Her features are pretty, her figure dainty. She is a girl who appears in fluff and frills, jewels, floating draperies, and who is picturesque in every costume she wears. Miss Barney speaks several languages, having been educated abroad. She plays the violin and mandolin, having studied the former with one of the great European instructors. She rides and drives admirably, dances gracefully and is a witty conversationalist. (36)

Barney actually became engaged to marry several times. One engagement was broken off by her fiance because he was unwilling to agree to her conditions of a strictly nonsexual partnership. Another was with Alfred Lord Douglas, Oscar Wilde's former lover; this arrangement was vetoed immediately by her father.

While Barney was postponing what appeared to be the inevitable, she was also watching her parents' own marriage fail. Alice Pike Barney took herself seriously as a painter, surrounding herself with artist friends and models, and traveling to Europe regularly to take master classes from such notables as Whistler and Sargent. Albert Barney reacted to his wife's independence and absences by drinking, taking on mistresses and, on at least one occasion, trying to convince his daughters to commit suicide with him.

At Albert Barney's death, the two Barney daughters each received an inheritance of two and a half million dollars. Natalie Barney used her inheritance to settle permanently in Paris and live as unimpeded a lesbian life as possible. At twenty-six, she had already been aware of her sexual preference for more than half her life: While in her
eighties, Barney told a friend that "at twelve, I knew exactly what I liked and I firmly decided not to let myself be diverted from my tastes" (Chalon, 9).

When she found herself finally free from the expectations of marriage, Barney had already been involved in at least three significant lesbian relationships. At sixteen Barney had become involved with her friend Eva Palmer, who introduced her to the translated works of Sappho while their families were on vacation in Bar Harbor, Maine. Barney initiated her second relationship with Liane de Pougy, a famous Parisian courtesan, partially motivated by a desire to help Liane and other women to escape from a lifestyle Barney called "unworthy," to find their true selves and "become what they really were" (Quoted in Jay, 3). At this point Barney was already using Sappho and the myth of Lesbos to create, at least in her mind, an alternative homeland for herself and those she loved. In 1899 Barney wrote de Pougy:

We'll find each other again in Lesbos, and when dusk falls, we'll go deep in the woods to lose the paths leading to this century. I want to imagine us in this enchanted island of immortals. I picture it as being so beautiful. Come, I'll describe for you those delicate female couples, and far from the cities and the din, we'll forget everything but the Ethics of Beauty. (Quoted in Chalon, 44)

At twenty-three Barney was already constructing the parameters of what Janet Flanner came to call a "Lesbic approach to all of life," more a life philosophy than just a
matter of sexual preference. In other words, by the time Barney was in her mid-twenties, she already regarded her lesbianism to be more than just a sexual preference, to be, in fact, a vehicle toward living a life of greater female integrity and fulfillment. For Barney, lesbianism was the practical, daily expression of a spiritual, physical and intellectual ideal, whose parameters she continually explored in her own writing and in her support of the work of other lesbian authors; it was with her third lover, the poet Renée Vivien (born Pauline Tarn), that Natalie Barney actually learned Greek to read Sappho in the original, and went to Mytilene to re-create a colony of women writers on the original island of Lesbos.

When Natalie Clifford Barney published her short novel, *The One Who Is Legion*, she was almost fifty-five years old. By 1930, Barney had been living a determinedly expatriate life in Paris for twenty-eight years, refusing to leave even during the Great War. Her emotional breach with America had been cemented when she had been confronted in Washington by a "friend of the family." As she wrote in her unpublished *Autobiography*:

The friend of the family came to tell me what they are saying about me: Things so repugnant that one has to pity the minds that have conceived them. Our feelings and our acts are cheapened by publicizing them and it's hard to restore our pure intentions once they have passed through certain brains. To call them by their name seems to make them anonymous. The world is a distorting mirror which makes us appear unrecognizable.

When the family friend set out again, having ful-
filled his "painful duty" and I found myself alone, I considered myself without shame: albinos aren't reproached for having pink eyes and whitish hair, why should they hold it against me for being a lesbian? (Quoted in Chalon, 47)

This confrontation led Barney to decide to "find or found a milieu that fits my aspirations":

a society composed of all those who seek to focus and improve their lives through an art that can give them pure presence. These are the only people with whom I can get along, and communicate and finally express myself openly among free spirits. (Quoted in Chalon, 47-48)

Like Janet Flanner, who left New York for Paris to "pursue Beauty with a capital 'B'," Barney decided that "the love of Beauty will be my guide" (Quoted in Chalon, 47).

The love of Beauty led her to settle in Paris at 20, rue Jacob, in a small, eighteenth century house, complete with a neoclassic "Temple of Friendship" in the back yard. Here she created a milieu for a highly select group of "free spirits," a multi-lingual, international collection of the intellectual, cultural and financial elite who gathered every Friday afternoon four months out of every year to hear and discuss the works of such diverse authors as Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, Colette, Radclyffe Hall and Ernest Hemingway. Occasionally there were recitals by George Antheil or Virgil Thompson. Mata Hari danced at least once, nude, to a woman-only audience.

Women, particularly lesbians, formed the cultural core of Natalie Barney's salon. As Truman Capote remembered,
"Miss Barney's circle was not limited to lesbians . . . although certainly all the more representable dykes in town were on hand" (Garland, 119). Sylvia Beach recalled that "At Miss Barney's one met the ladies with high collars and monocles, though Miss Barney herself was so feminine" (115). As a reproach to the exclusively male Académie Française (whose first woman member was admitted in 1980), Barney founded an "Academie des Femmes" in 1927, in which women writers were recognized for their work. As Karla Jay notes in *The Amazon and the Page*, one of the major beneficiaries of the Académie des Femmes was Djuna Barnes, "whose *Ladies Almanack* was published thanks to donations and subscriptions undertaken in the Academy" (33).

Barney also tried to establish an annual poetry award in memory of Renée Vivien, who died in 1909 of pneumonia, complicated by alcoholism and self-induced starvation. In spite of the optimistic tone of her self-chosen name (which translates into something like "reborn alive," or "born anew"), Vivien filled both her poetry and her life with images of decadence and decay, apparent in such poems as "Invocation," translated by Catharine Kroger:

    Our eyes turned forever towards past splendors,  
    We evoke the fear, the pain and the torment  
    Of your kisses, softer than hyacinth honey,  
    Lover who arrogantly pours  
    Like one pours valerian and balm and myrrh  
    Before Aphrodite, Mistress of Love,  
    The tempest and lightning of your lyre,  
    Oh, Sappho of Lesbos!

    . . .

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O perfume of Paphos! Oh Poet! Oh Priestess!
Teach us the secret of divine sorrow,
Teach us longing, the relentless embrace
Where pleasure weeps, faded among the flowers!
Oh languors of Lesbos! Charm of Mytilene!
Teach us the golden verse stifled only by death,
    With your harmonious breath
   Inspire us, Sappho!

(Vivien, 58-59)

Vivien's apartment in Paris maintained the same fin de siècle atmosphere of suffocatingly morbid sensuality that one can read in her poetry. Colette recalled Renee Vivien wandering "not so much clad as veiled in black or purple, almost invisible in the scented darkness of the immense rooms barricaded with leaded windows, the air heavy with curtains and incense" (81). Romaine Brooks also described what she called the "clap-trap" of Renee Vivien's carefully constructed surroundings:

There comes before me the dark heavily curtained room, overreaching itself in lugubrious effects: grim life-sized Oriental figures sitting propped up on chairs, phosphorescent Buddhas glowing dimly in the folds of black draperies. The air is heavy with perfumed incense. A curtain draws aside and Renee Vivien stands before us attired in Louis XVI male costume. . . . During the meal Renee Vivien leaves us to bring in from the garden her pet frogs and a serpent which she twines around her wrist. (Garland, 102)

Two years before Vivien died, Eva Palmer married a Greek poet, a relative of Isadore Duncan, whom she met through Natalie Barney. Abandoning her own studies of Sappho, Eva Palmer Sikelianos spent the rest of her life helping her husband in his attempt to revive, as
authentically as possible, the art of classical Greek drama, both in Greece itself and in the United States. In 1904, the courtesan Liane de Pougy told Barney:

I still need eight thousand pounds before I can stop. Then I shall cable you; come take me. Darling, I could do so much better, I know it and you do too. Afterward, we'll really live. We'll dream, think, love. (Quoted in Chalon, 40)

Six years later she wrote to tell Barney that she was marrying Prince George Ghika, "who only wants the good that is left in me and, furthermore, who wants to cure me."
(Quoted in Chalon, 96)

*The One Who Is Legion*, written decades after Barney's first three lovers abandoned, in their own fashion, the "enchanted island of immortals," is her attempt to come to terms with the failure of these women to "become what they really were," and the part she herself may have played in this failure. The novel also confronts, to a degree, the seductive promise of spiritual salvation offered by the Catholic Church, a promise which lured Renée Vivien into a death-bed conversion, and led Liane de Pougy to enter "a third order under the name of Sister Marie-Madeleine de la Penitence" after the death of her husband (Chalon, 182). Barney briefly explained her purpose for writing the book in the "Author's Note":

For years I have been haunted by the idea that I should orchestrate those inner voices which sometimes speak to us in unison, and so compose a novel, not so much with the people about us, as with those within ourselves, for have we not several selves and cannot a story arise from their conflicts and har-
monies? (159)

The prevailing view of Natalie Barney, as expressed recently by Shari Benstock in Women of the Left Bank (1986), is of a woman who, protected by extraordinary wealth and privilege, "existed entirely apart from certain aspects of Western culture, escaping the pervasive guilt from which most of her generation suffered" (268). Barney's novel, however, reveals a profound ambivalence regarding such elements as sexual and spiritual passion, gender roles, religion and twentieth century technology. It also contains a deep vein of anger at heterosexuality, which the novel portrays as a condition of mutual exploitation and emotional bankruptcy, and at women, for voluntarily embracing this lifestyle.

The One Who Is Legion made its appearance before a very select readership; only five hundred sixty copies were printed. It was Barney's eighth book; she had already published one novella, two books of poetry, two collections of short epigrams and one book of memoirs. All but the novella had been written in French, the only language in which she could "think poetically" (Chalon, 51). Barney's first book, Quelques portraits-sonnets de femmes (1900) so scandalized her father with its overtly lesbian content that he bought up all the copies he could from the publisher and destroyed them, along with the book's original plates. Barney's mother responded to the situation by calling her
daughter a "horror," and telling her that her lesbianism was worse than murder, "for that is an impulse perhaps--and it has not the horror that this has" (quoted in Jay, 4). Although by 1930 Barney's work was certainly beyond the threat of paternal seizure and destruction, the lesson that Barney culled from this episode seems to have involved retaining tight control over both her audience and her material. Nearly all her written work was either privately printed or remained in manuscript, and as a result, although Barney is frequently mentioned in memoirs and histories of the twentieth century American expatriate experience in France, most of her actual written material is extremely rare.

Most readers have found The One Who Is Legion to be difficult to read, and even more difficult to classify. George Wickes calls the novel "strange," a "weird tale" (150); although Meryle Secrest admits that "the book contains some beautiful passages," she also complains that other passages "skid off the mind like chalk across a blackboard."

[I]t is written in such a disjointed and aphoristic style that the reader finds himself asking, "Who?" "What?" and going back again and again in an attempt to pick up the thread. The writing befuddles the mind like a drug. (330)

Even the publisher, fearing that the book's unusual style would daunt potential readers, suggested on the cover fold of the dust jacket that "the Author's Note be read first," a
note that Barney apparently wrote under protest: "For those who would have our obscurities brought into opera-glass focus shall we, as in the theatre, condense our argument?" This is all a bit ironic, since Barney herself admitted little patience with arduous styles of writing, as she confessed in a playful "Foreword" to the Yale edition of Gertrude Stein's As Fine As Melanctha: "[I]t is hard not to resent a method which allows its author to write so many dull pages on purpose" (xvi).

Actually, the plot of The One Who Is Legion is neither disjointed nor particularly hallucinatory, although it does require a careful reading to assemble an accurate picture of its component parts. Barney's summary of the novel, provided in the "Author's Note," is quite concise:

A.D., a being having committed suicide, is replaced by a sponsor, who carries on the broken life, with all the human feelings assumed with the flesh, until, having endured to the end in A.D.'s stead, the composite or legion is disbanded by the One, who remains supreme. (160)

In Barney's list of "Dramatis Personae" (a list which includes "A.D.'s Horse), the "Legion" is described as "Low characters, spirits--a hierarchy of selves." In the novel itself the "Legion" is composed of such "selves" as the "Sensualist," the "Heart," the "Blood," "Discrimination," "Insight," "Hope," the "Passions," the "Philosopher" and the "Poet."
Potential reading difficulties with the novel begin with the problem of placing, first of all, the narrative voice, and secondly, the narrative point of view. The novel opens at night in the Bois de Boulogne, opposite the Longchamps racecourse, in a graveyard "where the nuns of Longchamps were buried after the destruction of their abbey" (9). The description that lingers over images of neglect, overgrowth and decay are extremely Gothic, though perfectly understandable. The narrator is revealed as "I, the most faithful of dead shadows," who is hovering over the grave of its "master-mistress' urn": "This is our tomb-stone with an engraved urn--the double of the urn in which their ashes are mingled and sealed together" (11). The singular "I" of the shadow already represents the unison of two voices, the "master-mistress" couple who presumably have died together.

This narrative voice is further complicated when a reader is knowledgeable (as most of the novel's original readers would have been) about Natalie Barney's use of the words "master" and "mistress" to represent more active and passive roles in a sexual relationship than the actual sexes involved (She identified herself as "rather a lover instead of a mistress" in her unpublished Autobiography--Chalon, 64). Thus the "I" that opens the novel already represents a plural point of view whose gender possibilities are entirely up to the reader's imagination. Of course, as Barney reveals in her "Author's Note," these various narrative
stances are ultimately her own, an "orchestration" of her "inner voices." The actors, too, represent her "several selves," which means that all the characterization also represents, in the end, herself; the novel is an extended self-portrait of the author, offered from many concurrent angles.

The shadow and the angelic "One" merge to reanimate the lifeless form of A.D., whose gender is also left unspecified throughout the novel. The "I" of the shadow then becomes "We," but the "One" remains as a voiceless, passive observer until the very end of the work. The resurrected A.D. is born without memory, although the body retains traces of emotional recollection, which the shadow senses and reacts to. The person of A.D. therefore becomes a complex of perception, a fictive consciousness that, as opposed to Henry James's narrative "center of consciousness," peers out of one house through several windows at once.

Natalie Barney's narrative style, as well as her elusive narrative personality, further sabotages a reader's attempt to rely on traditional narrator authority. Barney demonstrates the amnesic A.D.'s analysis about the rediscovered world through the use of rapidly posed, unanswered questions and brief, incomplete statements. For example, upon hearing a horse, A.D. thinks:

The whinny of a horse in the uncertain light. A nightmare, or the stable-call of a horse? A staggering towards or away from reality? In the hall the empty standing boots; or was
the invisible owner there? A dawn-shape rising
from them? (31)

These questions ultimately move the narrative line forward,
but the reader is frequently obligated to provide answers to
the questions, or abandon the subject of the question or an
offered solution as unimportant or incorrect. In A Room of
One's Own Virginia Woolf suggests that a woman sitting down
to write a novel may discover that "there was no common
sentence ready for her use" (132). In The One Who Is
Legion, Barney seems to be recommending the interrogative as
the consummate lesbian sentence.

The novel's theme of spiritual androgyny is introduced
in an epigraph whose source is identified as Paradise Lost:

"For Spirits, when they please
Can either sex assume, or both; so soft
And uncompounded is their essence pure,
Not tied nor manacled with joint or limb,
Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,
Like cumberous flesh; but, in what shape they choose,
Dilated or condensed, bright or obscure,
Can exercise their airy purposes,
And works of love or enmity fulfil." (v)

What is not revealed is the fact that this quote is taken
from Milton's first book of Paradise Lost (lines 423-431);
as the newly fallen angels, now transformed into demons,
gather on the shores of the burning lake of Hell to listen
to their leader, the poet names them off, identifying them
with the pagan gods and goddesses of past religions, and
reminding his reader that

For those the Race of Israel oft forsook
Thir living strength, and unfrequented left
His righteous Alter, bowing lowly down
To bestial Gods . . . (I, 432-435)

Taken out of context, weighted with the authority of the poem's title, this epigram can easily be taken by a reader as making reference to a heavenly ideal. The quote is carefully chosen, however, and places The One Who Is Legion into a literary framework as an elaboration on spiritual essence, without necessarily allying the novel to Christian notions of good or evil, since this characteristic of "Spirits" is presumably true for all angels, fallen or otherwise. Barney's use of Paradise Lost can be seen as an example of lesbian resistance to Judeo-Christian culture; she has employed the model without accepting the morality. Her choice of Milton is particularly notable; having had her own words once literally seized and destroyed by her father, Barney manages to appropriate and manipulate the words of this exemplary literary patriarch.

Barney also gives a nod to literary precedent when, two thirds into the novel, she includes a brief poem which acknowledges her debt to Balzac:

A double being needs no other mate--
So seraphita-seraphitus lives:
Self-wedded angel, armed in self-delight,
Hermaphrodite of heaven, looking down
On the defeat of our divided love. (100)

Balzac's Séraphîta (1835) has been described as the "crowning achievement of the Philosophical Studies, the twelfth part of The Human Comedy " (Gauthier, 695, my translation). In this novel,
Seraphita-Seraphitus is offered as the ideal model of humanity. This singular being, mid-way between the natural and the divine, in whom converges the material and the spiritual, exemplifies the alliance of a double nature, human and angelic. (Gauthier, 719-720)

Balzac's work is actually a meditation on the philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg, and the character of Seraphita-Seraphitus is offered as an example of the potential for human divinity, an androgynous being whose will for divine love and understanding of divine wisdom leads to a culminating unification with the presence of God. When Seraphita-Seraphitus dies and enters into heaven, she/he leaves behind her/him Minna and Wilfrid, each of whom has loved and courted the heavenly human as one of the opposite sex and who, at Seraphita-Seraphitus' death, turn to each other for love. As Wilfrid tells Minna on the occasion of their beloved's ascent:

"We have glimpsed the High Mysteries, we are, each to the other, the only beings here below with that which makes joy and sorrow comprehensible; let us pray then, we know the way, let us take it."
"Take my hand," said the Young Woman. "If we always go together, the way will be less hard and long to me." (859, my translation)

Barney's poem contains a strong note of irony, since the "divided love" on whose defeat the "Hermaphrodite of heaven" looks down is described in her novel as divided primarily by rigid heterosexual gender role behaviors and attitudes that are exemplified by the characters of Wilfrid and Minna in Balzac's novel. Balzac himself declared that
the purpose of his novel was to offer "the perfect being in the conditions called for by the rigidly applied laws of Swedenborg" ("Preface", 505, my translation). As a lesbian reader, however, Barney locates the critical purpose in Séraphîta not in the consummation of Swedenborg's philosophical ideal, but in the disruption of heterosexual dualism. Barney described the protagonist of Balzac's novel as "a being complete in her duality [who] seduces both members, but doesn't wish to form half of a couple."

Seraphita-Seraphitus, having disturbed both the young woman and her fiance, leaves them to one another to partake of some metaphysical heaven of which she bears the secret. She animates terrestrial love and surpasses it to become an angel again--such is the double being she is. (Quoted in Jay, 100)

For Barney, Seraphita's power is subversive rather than inspirational; she is a figure who seduces, disturbs, and abandons her heterosexual admirers.

The action that takes place in The One Who Is Legion is fairly straightforward. After the shadow and the One have merged and entered A.D.'s body, a car drives up to the cemetery where A.D. is lying and a woman, accompanied by two men, breathes life into A.D. again. A.D. is helped into the car and driven home, a small house in Paris with a separate temple in the back yard, whose description is identical to Natalie Barney's own home, even to the white cover on A.D.'s bed. There A.D. discovers various love-letters written to A.D. by different women, and The Love-Lives of A.D., a book
that reads with "an anguish as distinct as a cry." The Gothic style that initiated the work is reintroduced when A.D., pleased with the leather binding of the book, examines the grain and discovers with horror "that the smoothness of either side-cover, when bent back to leave a hollow between them, had once been a human breast" (29). The cover is made from skin stripped from A.D.'s own chest. "Asphyxiated by the fumes that rose from so condensed a life, the working of so complex a hurt," A.D. makes a vow on the book to "make good the failure" of A.D.'s life (30).

A.D. resumes a relationship with the woman, the "Glow-woman," who is described in the "Author's Note" as "A Beauty of the flesh that we have only met in the flesh" (160). Gradually A.D. becomes disgusted with the purely physical nature of this relationship, as well as the woman's ongoing relationship with the two men, described as her "Boy-husband" ("who only exists through others") and "Duthiers," the woman's chauffeur/lover/butler, who is "A third person in all situations" (160).

Eventually A.D. discovers that the original act of suicide was prompted by the death of the beloved and ethereal Stella, "A beauty of the spirit that we have met in many ways, and loved and lost, and loved and found again in loving" (160). While in Stella's deserted apartment, which is in an abbey and shares a wall with a church, A.D. experiences an "illumination":

136
Our heart caught fire and burned as a sacred lamp within us, and the light shone through in that it might guide us to her. And our lover's arms stretched out to her, wider than the crucified arms of Christ: and we were joined together, and two lovers became one angel. (149)

The One stands "resplendent, a sphere of separate air about the head, high above the legion, in angelic oneness, a star distinct," and for the first time, asserts, "I am I":

No longer receptive, but radiating, I escape from the Satanic plural, and its multiple conditions of existence. I escape with my single soul, incorporated in the light, indistinguishable, from the colours of the light. (150)

The voices of the divergent Legion argue and interrupt each other before they, as well as the shadow, are simultaneously dismissed by and integrated into the transcendent One. At this moment the "sponsor" has fulfilled the pledge to "make good the failure" of A.D.'s life. On "the third day after death, the day of consummation," A.D.'s body is ordered back to lie on Stella's tomb: "As the act of violence, of disintegration, had already been committed, you have only to ratify it" (58).

It is possible to identify the primary "act of violence, of disintegration" that A.D. has to overcome as one of self-division, a separation of the innately human whole into a series of contradictory, artificially constructed components that end up diminishing any possibility of physical or spiritual fulfillment. In a chapter that appeared as a separate piece in Dial magazine
three years before the novel was published, Barney locates one of the progenitors of this lethal state of self-division as literary tradition itself. As the resurrected being examines A.D.'s library, a vertical ordering of the books by subject matter is discovered; works of "superhuman vision . . . evolved beyond the ego" are placed highest, poetry arranged "a little above the eye level," followed by "the confessions of lovers" and "books of cold observation."

"The novels, treating of the affairs of the heart, at the place of the heart. Erotic anthologies joined them below this vital region." "Documentary pamphlets and other statistical swindles," as well as "encyclopedias big with inexact precisions, and volumes of philosophy, records of the successive errors of the human intelligence" are "abandoned" at foot level (94, 95). Deducing that "most were written through some disease" (93), A.D. determines that "What books produced you? might be asked as conclusively as--Who are your parents?" (95)

Books are not the only products of cultural disease that A.D. encounters while becoming reacquainted with life. The people encountered by A.D. all seem somehow diminished or deformed by their relationships with one another. Heterosexual men are "standardised," with only "a gorilla variance of hair on the chest, back and legs" (61). To A.D., the Glow-woman's "boy-husband" (who remains unnamed, and whose given appellation is only once capitalized, as
"Boy", 20), seems "half alive, and never the right half" (60). A.D. notices that when people find his wife beautiful, the boy-husband "gloated over the general admiration, taking it to his loins" (67). Nevertheless, he confesses to A.D. that he and the Glow-woman are bored with each other, and see A.D.'s company as a sort of aphrodisiac:

"The Glow-woman and I are fixed beyond our reach, nothing gets hold of us. You see her with fresh, sparkling eyes. I am so drugged that, without you, I no longer see her at all. You know our situation. We expect you to renew us--make us over, we no longer feel our love for each other; wake us up to our good fortune." (72)

Both the boy-husband and Duthiers "seemed to have no interior radiance of their own but rather to borrow it from the woman" (17-18). As Duthiers explains to A.D., "I belong to a race in which fire has become extinct, but to get fire is my great preoccupation" (107). Like the boy-husband, Duthiers (who reveals himself to be the deceased Stella's husband) is also described as halved; he has no full face to speak of, but rather two slices of profile joined together by a crooked smile that slid in joining, giving an asymmetric aspect to a duplicate of identical features. The higher of the eyes was also distinguished by a piece of round glass. (18)

As a chauffeur (he also pilots a biplane), Duthiers is divided from his own humanity; he seems to be a "superior piece of self-willed machinery" (57) who is "only at his best when coupled to a machine" (140). Duthiers' relationships with women are heartless and predatory; he has
found "the hunting of women at least as diverting as riding to hounds" (108).

Heterosexual women are described as "male-saturated" (35), "man-inhabited" (119), "ascetics, ardent to save not their souls, but their figures--with which they find so little to do", who retain their youth through "[p]etty tortures self-inflicted daily" or are "[b]ig with child, yes, perhaps, sometimes, by accident" (62). The figure of the wife is merely a "dupe to repetition without variety--asphyxiated with virtue, a fainting figure, receptive of her husband only--the help-mate feeding on her vitals according to his appetite, and he will not even help about the leak in the stove" (119). Eventually A.D. sees each of these women as "existing mostly as men appraised her" (120). "One man's as good as another;" A.D. silently reflects. "Why are women always trying to forget so consoling a fact?" (61)

Although the Glow-woman is a powerfully erotic figure (it is her kiss that give A.D. the breath of life), she, too, is "man-inhabited," and can only conceive of relationships conducted within the parameters of appropriation, violence or blind habit. As she confesses to A.D., she remains "half virgin to pleasure" (119). Because she is so reliant on patriarchal patterns of relationship, A.D. regards the Glow-woman's sensuality with enormous suspicion and ambivalence, calling her both a "slave to sexual habits, functioning absent-mindedly and in silence"
Trapped within unhealthy patterns of heterosexuality, when the Glow-woman attempts to seduce A.D. with visions of lovemaking, she can only offer scenes of historical decadence and decay:

La Grande Chartreuse--After closing hour we can bribe the anti-clerical guardian to allow us to spend the night in one of the monastery's ten thousand lust-haunted beds. Or in Madame de Waren's replete eighteenth century moth-eaten alcove at 'Les Charmettes,' to which Rousseau walked back from Switzerland to find himself replaced by the gardener, and signifying no more to his hostess than a cherry in the time of cherries. . . . (115)

A.D.'s "celestial ardour" put to "physical service" with the Glow-woman is an internal "civil war" for the resurrected being, a "continuous battle without victory," a "destructive tempest of ill-spent lightning" (80). As A.D. becomes more and more disgusted with her corrupt vision of sexuality, the Glow-woman confesses, "No love has fired me as this new hate of yours." Her excitement culminates in a desire to die; holding A.D.'s hands around her neck, she whispers, "Make me, kill me, take me, kill me" (133).

Even the unearthly Stella has been subjected to a "man-inhabited" life. In a letter to A.D., Duthiers admits that "Husbands are only half-men, they cannot prevent but only spoil" (109). As Stella's husband, Duthiers has successfully "spoiled" the love that existed between A.D. and Stella through

a misunderstanding--a misunderstanding I found it easy to bring about and perpetuate. Proud natures
believe anything that gives sufficient pain, so I
was able to destroy a happiness which I was unable
to win. (107)

Duthiers suggests that this "misunderstanding" resulted in
Stella's actual death, and reminds A.D. that "after Her
illness, you came in a demented state to my official door
and were told by the butler: --"Madame vient de mourir."
. . . As She died according to my wishes, you may have found
Her again according to yours" (108). This is an interesting
detail, in that it reproduces exactly the manner in which
Natalie Barney discovered that Renée Vivien had died. As
Barney herself recalled in 1960:

I learned that Renée was ill "of a malady traversed
by agonizing crises and that she no longer wishes to
see anyone." However, that same evening I went to
ask news of her, a bouquet of violets in my hand.
Half-opening the door, a butler that I had never
seen replied: "Mademoiselle just died." This
announcement was made in the tone of "Mademoiselle
just went out." (57)

In the course of Lucie Delarue-Mardrus'
autobiographical novel, L'Ange et les pervers (1930), the
character based on Renée Vivien (whom Delarue-Mardrus knew
well) becomes pregnant. Even this fictional license
elicited horror from Barney: "Renée pregnant! Only Lucie
could imagine something like that!" (Chalon, 158-159)
Vivien, too, had written an autobiographical novel, Une
Femme M'Apparut (1904), in which she offered her opinion of
heterosexual relations: "I can hardly conceive of such a
deviation of the senses. Sadism and the rape of children
seem more normal to me" (53). Natalie Barney also appears in Vivien's novel, as the icy Vally, who is "incapable of loving" (84). Over fifty years later, Barney was still angry enough to react, "I, who have never been capable of anything but that!" (66) Blaming Vivien for surrounding herself with "false mysticism" and for making "spleen" the "leitmotif of her life and her work," Barney complained that Vivien's novel left her with the "painful impression of having posed for a bad portraitist" (66).

With this background in mind, Barney's decision to endow Stella with a husband, particularly such a lethal one, is somewhat perplexing. Without a doubt, many of her intended readers would have known Renee Vivien personally, and would have had as strong a reaction to her fictional husband as Barney had to her equally fictional pregnancy. It is important to remember, though, that while many aspects of Stella are modelled on Renée Vivien, ultimately Stella represents one of the "several selves" (159) of the author. Duthiers, too, is one of Barney's "inner voices" (159), an inner self who regards loving women to be "the chase of rare game" (108), and who admits to being A.D.'s "silent and conventional oppressor" (107). Duthiers, then, is the "lethal husband" who exists in every lesbian, an "inner voice" of the patriarchy who estranges women from themselves, who destroys women through the easily perpetuated "misunderstanding" of misogyny.
A.D.'s observation of the rediscovered world leads the resurrected being to conclude that "Unapparent but drastic reasons regulate the functioning of all these people" (64). The "unapparent but drastic reasons" are the regulations of strict gender roles, which, operating under the conditions of compulsory heterosexuality, infect and impoverish even alternative love relationships. People strike A.D. as only "accidentally perfect--but not allowed long to remain so": those who seem "perfect" are only glimpsed at passing moments of self-completion. One rare example of this ideal is spotted while A.D. is at the shore with the Glow-woman and her two "habitues" (121). This is a woman "at the opposite end of the beach, fairer than all, demanding neglect as others sought approval--she alone seemed aloof, free. Join her? She needed no joining! Complete unto herself and self-sufficient" (63).

The One Who Is Legion seems to offer stark advice to its readers: To be free is to be alone, "self-wedded," "armed in self-delight." Karla Jay suggests that A.D. "became completely enslaved by the physical side of the self and finally committed suicide. It is A.D.'s new self, the narrator, who, by putting aside carnal love, becomes gynandrous" (102). Jay is mistaken, however, in believing that A.D.'s "new self" has completely "put aside carnal love." At one point in the novel A.D. and the Glow-woman make love, but the experience is upsetting for A.D., who
feels "manned" by desire, and "strong as a male multitude" (80). A.D. regards the sexual urge as "A need with men. And what for women?" (38) The world that A.D. has rediscovered has evidenced overt, albeit violent, patterns of sexual behavior for men, but women, who function "absent-mindedly, and in silence," remain "half-virgin" not only to pleasure, but to their own sexual natures.

Sex seems to divide, rather than unite A.D. and the Glow-woman, as each falls readily into gender-based polarities of sexual behavior. The result is a "battle," in which the Glow-woman and A.D., "too excited to choose a gesture" for their desire, find "no issue to each other." The Glow-woman faints after an unsatisfying orgasm, an "unwilling pre-nuptial ecstasy" (81), leaving A.D. "Uncoupled, left alone in our throb":

The love-rapture, with its fall into and rise from the physical, its humiliating sequence, seemed an inadequate substitute for some supreme communion confiscated and sought for through the limited vibrations of flesh. (82)

The One Who Is Legion does offer its reader a paradigm of sexual "communion" which is more accessible than A.D.'s final "illumination," with Stella, in which "two lovers became one angel." Throughout the novel, A.D.'s ruminations on gender behavior recall the Miltonic ideal of the androgynous angel, who "Can either sex assume, or both": "Angels are hermaphrodites, self-sufficient. No marrying in heaven" (38). A.D. does seem to consider this angelic
manifestation as an earthly possibility:

On earth they often appear with woman's body and a man's desire, or vice versa. Two needed--No one entirely a woman or a man? Infinite variety of couples and couplings.

(38)

Only one person in the novel fits this description, seen soon after the "aloof, free" woman at the "opposite end of the beach." This is a "mannishly dressed woman with a fortune, and a mistress in her own right," who is "managing the difficult table question with the abstract power of her renowned tips, ordering the waiters about as no man would dare" (66). Barney's readers would have recognized a cameo appearance by Romaine Brooks in this description, a woman who provided two illustrations for the novel, who was Natalie Barney's lover for over fifty years, and whom she called "Angel".

To Natalie Barney, the "most beautiful life is the one spent in creating oneself, not in procreating" (Chalon, 93). She also believed that a well-constructed life was, in fact, the ultimate art form, that the true artist would be one who chose to "write with one's life" (Chalon, 165). The One Who Is Legion attempts to envision a natural existence untouched by gender limitation, untouched, in fact, by all reductive conceptual division. In The Cubical City, Janet Flanner spotlights Delia Poole in her darkened apartment to suggest that the principal actor in the performance of Poole's life
is herself, and, like an actor improvising on an open stage, her performance may be limited only by her skill and creativity. To Barney, life itself is, in the end, performance art, in which the audience melds with the artist. The Glow-woman is merely a "verbal erotic" because her words and actions remain separate; the true language of sexuality as conceived by Barney is inclusive of both experience and examination.

The One Who Is Legion can be seen as one lesbian's attempt to create an alternative language for desire, to, in Luce Irigaray's terms, "dig down very deep indeed to discover beneath the traces of this civilization, of this history, the vestiges of a more archaic civilization that might give some clue to women's sexuality" (25). Barney's use of technology as a symbol of Duthiers's patriarchal behavior suggests her own apprehension that the clue to individual freedom will not be found in the future. As Barney wrote to Liane de Pougy in 1905, "The past is such a subtle thing. In the end, nothing else exists. Everything is made of the past, even the future. . . ." (Quoted in Chalon, 75). A.D. experiences the most liberation near the ocean, or in Stella's archaic apartment, which is next to, but significantly, walled apart from, an old church.

Needless to say, the freedom to "write with one's own life" is one which rests on economic and social privilege, a privilege which is available to an elite few. Bertha Harris
has described Barney as belonging to a select, monied world
which "perceived humanity as being quite naturally divided
into rigid class systems, with 'aristocracy' and its
privileges extended to the talented; especially if the
talent were gay: to be upper-class was at its finest to be
also gay."

From Paris to Capri, [this] little world floated
back and forth on its substantial bank accounts, in-
tent on pleasure, intent on disguising serious work,
serious anger, with frivolity; cushioning rejection
with flamboyant luxury—all in the manner of the last-
of-the-line aristocrat: life itself, in extreme in-
stances . . . became vulgarity; passion was honed to
its keenest cutting edge and turned inward. (35)

Ultimately, the artists, as well as the audience, of
Barney's consciously constructed "beautiful life" were as
innate and as rare as the human albinos she once compared
herself to. Once, when a housekeeper packed a needle,
thread, and extra buttons in with Natalie Barney's luggage,
she paled with anger, telling the woman, "There are people
for that sort of thing" (Chalon, 148). Her attitude of
entitlement was born out of such a hermetically sealed
lifestyle, a lifestyle which sheltered Barney from the
ultimate moral consequences of such elitism. During World
War II, while less privileged homosexuals were dying in
concentration camps, Barney refused to leave Europe for the
United States, choosing instead to stay in Fascist Italy,
where she felt safest from the bombs.
In *The Cubical City*, Janet Flanner's protagonist Delia Poole has surrounded herself with doubtful antiques, which she cynically calls "Hoboken Louis Quinze" (175). The one authentic piece of the past owned by Poole is a section of a thirteenth century tapestry:

The weaving showed young girls to be riding on white jennets through a blue and yellow forest. A greyhound with a scarlet tongue barked at every girl's side. Genuine Beauvais, the shopkeeper had cried, standing on a quai of Paris, contentedly counting her banknotes. Made in the thirteenth century, he had added, at the time of the Courts of Love. (70)

A.D. also encounters a tapestry, in a detail that may very well have been suggested by Flanner's novel, which Barney had read. When A.D. and the Glow-woman go swimming, they find "A dimly-coloured pageantry lay in pomp, pavilion lifted, on the bed of the stream. It was no illusion."

Powdered ladies and gentlemen, their curved backs leaning on consoles; a sceptered queen on a mussed bed-like throne, with a progeniture of cupids caught in the draperies; against a forest of threads, a pastoral scene with lambs; a shepherdess with hooped skirt buoyant with water or uptilted by her shepherd, pretty as a girl, his one hand on her dove-escaping breasts, the other bent on a deeper undoing. . . . [T]he manor's tapestries spread out to be cleansed by the current? . . . Why had we not sworn allegiance to the secret world below . . . remained on that bed where queens were more varied in threaded blushes than in this world of setting suns? (78-79)

Delia Poole's tapestry points to an idyllic past, but also offers a future, should she choose to "read" it. Her tapestry is, in fact, a lesbian revision of a masculine text, elliptically eluded to by the shopkeeper who sells it. Andreas Capellanus' *De arte honeste amandi* (*The Art of
Courtly Love), written between 1170 and 1174, is a pivotal text in the establishment of a rigid Western convention of heterosexual behavior. The laws of this sexual doctrine simultaneously entrap women in a conceptual ideal of chaste passivity and glorify their unrelenting pursuit and capture by men, even to the point of sanctioning rape, as long as the man is significantly wealthier than his victim. Poole's tapestry completely rewrites this theme. Women are vital, physically active natural participants in harmony with a nonviolent natural world; men are completely absent in this twelfth century vision. Weaving is a traditional women's art form; Delia Poole's tapestry may be an authentic lesbian text.

A.D.'s tapestry also portrays an idyllic past, but in heterosexual patterns which have extended into, and failed, the present. This piece of weaving portrays the "Court of Love" as it evolved from Capellanus' book. Women passively receive the attentions of their masculine pursuers; the apparent pastoral calm of the scene is abundant with the "deeper undoing" of masculine ideology. Both tapestries recall common literary conventions, and are compelling examples of the power of art to offer strong cultural ideals for human behavior. One tapestry uses the mythic past to imply a profoundly changed future. A.D.'s tapestry, however, is an invitation to drown.
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CHAPTER 6

NORA REINVENTS THE WORD:
DJUNA BARNES'S NIGHTWOOD

In an interview conducted for the pioneering documentary, "Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community," Harry Hays sought to describe the international urban subculture of people who lived on the "fringes of society" that emerged and solidified in the years between the World Wars:

That whole society would have been known as the gay society, or the world of the demi-monde, the world of twilight, the world of night. And so all the people who had to deal with that area were always considered totally disrespectful. And therefore of very questionable morals. This would be the world of dance, this was the world of the artist, this was the world of the people who flitted around the parks and forests at night. . . . The people who would be out at night wandering around loose without going specifically from one place to another were obviously there for no good purpose. And this is known as the world of the demi-monde, this is the twilight world as it was known in the earliest twentieth century, and it is the world of the gay people. (Stonewall, 15)

Djuna Barnes's novel, Nightwood (1936), has been regarded as a "cult guide to the homosexual underground nightworld of Paris that Barnes shared with her lover, Thelma Wood" (Benstock, 235). Barnes wrote Nightwood after 1931, when she had become an exile from her own Paris expatriation, in exhausted recovery from the end of her twelve-year relationship with Wood. Most of the novel was written in
London, while Barnes was living as a houseguest of her close friend Peggy Guggenheim, who often offered her home to recovering American expatriates. For a decade after she left Paris, Barnes traveled around Europe, lived in London and New York. In 1941 she finally settled into a one-room Greenwich Village apartment, where she would live for the next forty-one years as a social recluse, until her death at ninety.

During one of her initial trips to New York, Djuna Barnes tried, but failed, to find a publisher for Natalie Barney's *The One Who Is Legion*. Her attempts to find a publisher for her own novel were almost as unsuccessful; the novel was rejected by seven publishers before it was finally published by Faber and Faber in 1936, heavily edited and with an introductory essay by T.S. Eliot. Djuna Barnes's novel has remained in print almost consistently since its initial appearance, always accompanied by T.S. Eliot's introduction, which solidly frames this portrait of "the world of the night" with the point of view of the day. According to Eliot, the reader should be prepared to find "a quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy" within the world of Barnes's novel (xvi). He is careful to caution "anyone reading the book for the first time" that "the book is not a psychopathic study."

The miseries that people suffer through their particular abnormalities of temperament are visible
on the surface: the deeper design is that of the human misery and bondage which is universal. (xv)

Of course, an introduction which cautions against reading for pathology invites exactly that. Accordingly, the reviews that met the book's publication described its plot as one built "around five characters who walk in the twilight of a world divorced from the normal" (Feld, 4). Philip Horton called the characters of the novel "plainly and obtrusively psychopaths" (247); Clifton Fadiman warned the readers of Vogue that "Nightwood is definitely about not-nice people: their sexual habits are somewhat unusual, their speech is strange, their lives seem to have little relation to yours or mine" (90). Theodore Purdy decided that Djuna Barnes "fittingly conveyed the sufferings of the Night People, elsewhere called 'permanent mistakes.' At its best her prose is eloquent and moving, at its worst no more tortured than the characters" (11). Alfred Kazin concluded that "Sooner or later the thought must occur to any reader of this novel that its characters are freaks" (6). When the book appeared in paperback, Raymond Walters, Jr. described "Miss Barnes' story" for the readers of The New York Times Book Review as "not a very pretty one, about a psychopathic woman who destroys the sick souls closest to her" (56). Walters's phrasing apparently caught fire; Nightwood as a study of a "psychopathic woman who destroys those who love her" was mentioned in Barnes's obituary in The New York
Times, Newsweek, and The Washington Post. All three of these articles highlight T.S. Eliot's introduction to the novel, as do most of the reviews; several of the reviewers actually began their columns with T.S. Eliot's name.

Certainly the appearance of Nightwood created a critical stir, albeit one stimulated by the canonical benison endowed by T.S. Eliot's introduction. There was a general consensus that Djuna Barnes was a writer of some significance, although how much and for how long remained an open question. Mark van Doren told the readers of The Nation that "for brilliance and formal beauty few novels of any age can compare with it." Nevertheless, he finally dismissed the novel as "mouse meat" because "great fiction is more ordinary than this, and ultimately more nourishing" (383). Janet Flanner called the work "remarkable," but admitted that "It is a difficult book to describe, since the only proper way of dealing with its strange, nocturnal elements is to have written it in the first place, which surely no one but Miss Barnes could have done" (37, 35). Other reviewers called Nightwood "a work of genius" (Feld, 4), "extraordinary" (Purdy, 11); Roger Shattuck called Barnes's language "as far-ranging as Shakespeare's" (10).

Several contemporary reviewers seemed to regard Barnes as a kind of literary upstart, blaming her for daring to be great as much as they acknowledged the success or failure of her effort. Theodore Purdy, for example, called Nightwood
"coterie literature in spite of its imaginative scope and occasional verbal felicity. Such a book has value as an interesting literary sport, aptly conceived to convulse the Bloomsburys of the world" (11). One of the longest and most laudatory reviews to greet Nightwood was written by Clifton Fadiman for The New Yorker, in which he anticipated the kind of condescending and reluctant praise offered by such critics as Purdy, and hoped that the novel would not "be visited with a succès de snobisme or served up as caviar to the general. The portents, however, are dire . . ." 

[1]t its pitiless concision may make it seem obscure, and therefore destined only for the lofty-browed; its language is on the occasion scatological; the central character is a homosexual, and the three female characters are dominantly sapphic. Only by a miracle, it would seem, can "Nightwood" escape the affectionate, destroying hands of some twittering literary cult. (103)

For a while Fadiman's fear seemed to be realized. As Nightwood gained a tenuous entry into the world of academic scholarship, reviews greeting the republication of Djuna Barnes's material were sometimes openly snide: In 1980, Anatole Broyard called the novel "plucky in its pretensions," but warned that "Nothing ages so cruelly as unconventionality." Proclaiming Nightwood an "avant-garde romance, which is to say that two people are inexplicably determined to make one another unhappy," Broyard complained that the work demonstrates "that peculiar worship of neuroses, as if it was a thrilling new style of being, that
characterizes so many novels of the 20's and 30's" (19). In the same year William Boyd gave total credit for the novel's survival to T. S. Eliot's introduction, "thereby assuring [Barnes] of the attention of Eliot scholars and at least a footnote in the annals of that astonishingly fecund period" (984).

By 1983 Stephen Koch was calling Nightwood a "cult novel": "This means it is a work kept in print by the passion of its readers rather than by a position in the liberal arts curriculum of English Departments, which is how American books ordinarily achieve the status of classics and universal fame" (3). The most passionate of Nightwood's readers were those who considered themselves citizens of "the world of the night": While T. S. Eliot's introduction may have been preserving Nightwood in the more obscure footnotes of literary scholarship, the novel itself was remaining vital and alive through the enthusiasm of the reading communities of gay people. The journalist Michael Bronski credits this marginalized audience for preserving "the artifacts of queer culture":

While in his early twenties, my lover had older lesbian friends who collected and hoarded anything that was "gay". . . . Growing up in the '30s and '40s they had come to realize how important every little manifestation of homosexuality was, how every photo or book was a strike against invisibility and societal denial. (4)

This past decade has witnessed the formal growth and maturation of lesbian scholarship, particularly evident in
the increasing body of distinctly lesbian literary criticism. Among a notable number of academics, *Nightwood* is no longer dismissed as a "cult text of high modernism," but is recognized as an enormously significant lesbian novel, "in which language and its possibility for figuration is as potent and explosive as it is in Shakespeare or Joyce" (Marcus, 222).

In an interesting irony, Djuna Barnes herself maintained an extremely uneasy relationship with both *Nightwood* and its primary readership. In a particularly shrewd observation, Janet Flanner made note at the novel's appearance that "Miss Barnes's verbal talent at times goes into a trance" (37). As she aged, Djuna Barnes came to regard *Nightwood* as the product of a transient, transcendentally inspired consciousness which was separate from herself. At one point she confessed that "I know it is very, very good but at times I cannot understand how I could have been good enough to have written it" (O'Neal, 54). She also appears to have measured her very existence with the measure of the book's creation, telling a friend, "Don't think for a minute this is the real Djuna Barnes. The real Djuna Barnes is dead" (O'Neal, 40).

Barnes distrusted her novel's most passionate readers, calling them "foolish, mawkish lesbians" (O'Neal, 40). She particularly resented the "'weeping lesbians' who called to her from [her apartment's] courtyard or even in her hallway"
(O'Neal, 105). As she grew old, she even seemed to disown her own lesbianism, announcing, "I'm not a lesbian. I just loved Thelma" (Field, 101). This short phrase, though, resonates with multiple levels of irony in meaning and inference. Her use of the word "just" simultaneously discounts and underscores the importance of this love; it belittles its significance while implying its uniqueness. What biographical evidence exists seems to indicate that, while Djuna Barnes was involved with both men and women, all her other relationships paled in both length and passion to that with Thelma Wood: She may have "just" loved Thelma.

At one point in Nightwood, after her lover Robin Vote has left her for another woman, Nora Flood explains that "It was me made her hair stand on end because I loved her. She turned bitter because I made her fate colossal" (156). In the late 1960's and throughout the 1970's, as American lesbians gained political cohesion and visibility through the resurgent women's movement, Barnes found herself being "loved" by this audience, who had changed from quietly collecting and hoarding anything that was gay to publicizing her as a "colossal" figure in the emerging lesbian politic. Bertha Harris's important, early essay, "The More Profound Nationality of their Lesbianism: Lesbian Society in Paris in the 1920's," published by Times Change Press in 1973, typifies a point of view that Barnes might have regarded as romantically reductive, even "mawkish":
When I was not at my $55 a week job I was . . . waiting for Djuna Barnes to take her afternoon walk and, with all discretion, follow her—moved the way she moved, turn the way she turned, hold my head like her head. . . . The name she made up for me was my real name; and it was that name she used when, in my fantasy, she would stop and take my hand to thank me for all the flowers I daily stuffed into her mailbox in Patchin Place and then tell me how it was to be a dyke in Paris, in the Twenties.

Djuna Barnes may have resisted being labelled a "lesbian writer" and seeing her novel regarded as a "lesbian novel" because of the artistic consequences of marginality. Eight years before Nightwood appeared, Barnes published her Ladies Almanack, an openly lesbian text. In fact, as Susan Sniader Lanser has observed, Barnes's Ladies Almanack can be read as a strongly gynocentric revision of Radclyffe Hall's tragic lesbian novel, The Well of Loneliness, which was published in the same year. There is no doubt that Barnes was very much aware of the British and American obscenity trials which followed the publication of Hall's enormously reticent novel, and of the British judgement that the novel was obscene, because the very subject of lesbianism was deemed obscene by definition. Because of the book's notoriety as a cultural taboo, Hall's novel became an instant best-seller; as a piece of literature, it went practically unnoticed.

As a lesbian text, the Ladies Almanack avoided the problem of scandal because it was offered to a very select audience; its intended and actual readers were its own cast.
of characters, who were delighted with the book throughout their lives. In 1962 Natalie Barney told Barnes that she found the work to be a "constant joy to me," and in 1967 Solita Solano wrote to tell Barnes she had "reread Ladies Almanack and had nearly forgotten how charming and amusing it is" (quoted in Lanser, 167).

Nightwood, however, was composed for a universal audience. According to Hank O'Neal, "Barnes lived for Nightwood; it had made her literary reputation" (105). As Monique Wittig has noted, "Writing a text which has homosexuality among its themes is a gamble":

It is taking the risk that at every turn the formal element which is the theme will overdetermine the meaning, monopolize the whole meaning, against the intention of the author who wants above all to create a literary work. Thus the text which adopts such a theme sees one of its parts taken for the whole, one of the constituent elements of the text taken for the whole text, and the book become a symbol, a manifesto. . . . Taken as a symbol or adopted by a political group, the text loses its polysemy, it becomes univocal. (62-63)

Wittig theorizes that Barnes "dreaded that the lesbians should make her their writer" precisely because of the risk that her work would be reduced to the one dimensionality of perversion or polemic (63).

Despite her eventual discomfort at being publicly labelled as a lesbian, there is little doubt that Djuna Barnes wrote about lesbian participation in the "nightworld" of Paris from the informed point of view of an insider. Her Ladies Almanack has been particularly recognized as a joyous
celebration of lesbianism. As vigorous as it is playful, the book is full of ribald puns in both the language and in Barnes's illustrations. Although Karla Jay has called Ladies Almanack "vicious" (185), "venomous" (186), a "reductionist vision of Barney as a conscienceless nymphomaniac" (189) and evidence of "Barnes' sexual alienation from other members of [Barney's] circle" (191), Barnes herself claimed that the work was "written as a jollity" (Quoted in Lanser, 164). Jay's point of view that the work is evidence of Barnes's alienation from this lesbian expatriate community is simply not borne out, either by the consistently delighted reactions of "the circle" to the book, or by the intimate affection in the text itself.

Jay is willing to note that the narrative voice of Ladies Almanack "occasionally uses 'I' and 'we'." In spite of this observation, Jay maintains that Barnes "manages to mention, if only in passing, almost all the members of Barney's intimate circle during this era except herself" (192). One of Djuna Barnes's "occasional uses" of the first person pronoun is throughout the second chapter (or "February") of the Almanack, which is illustrated by a drawing of the almanac's heroine, "Dame Musset," based on a photograph of Natalie Barney taken in her early fifties. In this Valentine month, the narrator offers "a Love Letter for a Present," declaring:

My Love she is an Old Girl, out of Fashion, Bugles at the Bosom, and theredown a much Thumbed
Mystery and a Maze. She doth jangle with last Year's attentions, she is melted with Death's Fire! Then what shall I for her that hath never been accomplished? It is a very Parcel of Perplexities! Shall one stumble on a Nuance that twenty Centuries have not pounced upon, yea worried and made a Kill of? Hath not her Hair of old been braided with the Stars? (15)

This language, written by a woman who had, in fact, briefly been one of Natalie Barney's lovers, is anything but "venomous," and the sexual dilemma here is certainly not one of "alienation."

Unfortunately, the gamble that Djuna Barnes took in producing overtly lesbian material for a general readership has, until very recently, resulted in the very critical diminution of which Monique Wittig warns. Even a work of obvious complexity and texture as Nightwood has been reduced by homophobic response, and even by readers who identify themselves as feminists. In 1985, Phyllis Rose wrote that "Djuna Barnes's writing is certainly not everyone's cup of tea," because

She hides more than she tells. Anyone turning to Nightwood for a graphic treatment of a lesbian love affair would be better off with Lisa Alther's Kin-flicks. Nightwood opens with a lengthy portrait of a character who turns out to be utterly peripheral--a tactic designed . . . to distract attention from the supposedly shocking love story. (30)

What Rose absolutely fails to understand is that the supposition that the love story that underlies Nightwood is at all shocking is not Barnes's, but is largely due to what Julie L. Abraham calls the "burden" of T. S. Eliot's
introduction, which offers suggestive references to "freaks," "horror," "doom" and "tragedy" (402, n.13). The attitude that translates into an insistence on obligatory lesbian tragedy may explain Karla Jay's need to see something like Barnes's "jolly" *Ladies Almanack* as "heartless" (190).

Other feminist critics, fortunately, have demanded a radical reconsideration and reevaluation of Barnes's material. Erika Duncan, for example, observes that "The writings of Djuna Barnes, filled with the dissonances of a deteriorating age, the undertows of ugliness that haunt us all, call for a serious redefinition of the concept of beauty, and of the value of intensity . . ." (179).

For considering the stark literature to which we have grown accustomed, the bleak everyday world of the realists, the desolate vision of the existentialists, and the unredeemed vulgarity of the pornographers, it seemed rather incongruous to find reviewer after reviewer, . . . unable to question Djuna Barnes's brilliance of style, railing at her "uncompromising bitterness," her "comfortless vision," the "decadence" and "perversion" of her world views, not noticing the passion underlying her prose, not noticing that *Nightwood* is one of the most moving love stories in Western literature. (181)

As more and more feminist readers seek to reexamine the "parcel of perplexities" that makes up Djuna Barnes's work, a far deeper appreciation of her radical revisioning of literary perception has emerged, an appreciation which was impossible while the majority of her readers were distracted by reductive agendas of "graphic" or "doomed" lesbian love
Elizabeth Pochoda has noted that Djuna Barnes uses experimental narrative techniques in Nightwood to break down traditional conventions of characterization and relationship through a process of "de-evolution," and that the novel "eventually turns its back on history, on faith in coherent expression, and finally on words themselves. The novel bows down before its own impotence to express truth . . ." (180).

Monique Wittig, defining gender as "the linguistic index of the political opposition between the sexes" (60), claims that "Djuna Barnes cancels out the genders by making them obsolete. . . . That is the point of view of a lesbian" (61).

What is most lesbian about the narrative point of view of Nightwood is the fact that Barnes cancels out, not only the social edicts of gender, but all presumption of symbolic discourse based on binary opposition which forms the basis of heterosexual ideology. Nightwood can be seen as a novel embodying the culmination of lesbian modernism, an evolved conflation of the lesbian strategies suggested by the work produced by the members of Djuna Barnes's expatriate lesbian community which preceded Nightwood's publication.

Nightwood is not a particularly long work, although it is densely structured. The action in the novel involves the love of one man and two women for a young American woman, Robin Vote, with all three relationships observed and
commented on by an unlicensed homosexual gynecologist. Each of the first four chapters concentrates on one of the four primary characters; the book only has a total of eight chapters. Certain fictional elements used in the work of Solano, Flanner and Barney reappear in Nightwood, recognizable to an informed reader, but enormously transfigured in depth, complexity and interdependence.

The absolute indifference of Elizabeth Corning to masculine ideology in Solita Solano's The Uncertain Feast (1924) suggests in of itself the possibility of a woman-centered actuality which remains equally separate from the heterosexual "war of the sexes." Elizabeth Corning represents a woman who has completed the individual process of turning away from patriarchal dictates, who has made her separate peace within but apart from the "day" world of heterosexuality.

In The Cubical City (1926), Janet Flanner uses the relationship existing between Delia Poole and Nancy Burke to clarify and build on Solita Solano's highly encoded alternative. Flanner also constructs an atmosphere of possibility within an environment of night and shadows, the twentieth century's urban wilderness into which Delia Poole reaches for her expectations of personal independence. Delia Poole's Jewish theater manager, Goldstein, is described as "an alien, a unit from a wandering race apart" (394) who has who has struggled against a bigoted society to
achieve financial prosperity. Described in one review of *The Cubical City* as "the triumph of the book" (*TLS*, 948), and in another as "a stock Jew-with-a-heart-of-gold" (*Mellow*, 9), Goldstein refuses to diminish the fact of his difference, and speaks consciously from the outsider's position of scrutiny and contrast: At one point, he tells Paul's miserly uncle,

I've heard all about love one another and turn the other cheek since the first time I got mud throwed on me by guys on the East Side. Oh, you're kind and charitable. Free with your cash, aren't you--you are not! Say, when it comes to good wages, helping a friend out, lying for 'em a little if necessary, . . . gimmie a plain old Jew. That's me." (332-333)

In *Nightwood*, the evening environment of New York has evolved into the complicated, international nightworld of Paris, in which all the rules of social convention are subject to exaggeration, violation and indifference. Delia Poole and Nancy Burke have been transmuted into the lovers Robin Vote and Nora Flood. Delia's animal vitality, aimlessness and difficulty with language have evolved into Robin Vote's feral silences; when she does speak, it is in "the pitch of one enchanted with the gift of postponed abandon" (38). In her eyes lies "the long unqualified range in the iris of wild beasts who have not tamed the focus down to meet the human eye." She is "a woman who is beast turning human," whose very image brings as insupportable a joy as would be the vision of an eland coming down an aisle of trees, chapleled with orange blossoms and bridal veil, a hoof raised in the economy of fear, stepping in the trepidation of flesh
that will become myth . . . (37)

The domestic, severe devotion of Delia Poole's friend Nancy Burke has, by the time of Nightwood, developed into the passionate, interrogating love of Nora Flood. This is the character in the novel most closely modelled on Barnes herself, a fact recognized even by such critics as Lynn DeVore who, calling Barnes "strictly heterosexual," sees it as "troublesome . . . to view Barnes in a homosexual role" (88). Although Nora Flood is closely allied to the author, she also seems to combine elements of a proletarian Natalie Barney. Like Barney, Flood presides over a salon, the "strangest 'salon' in America":

It was the "paupers" salon for poets, radicals, beggars, artists, and people in love; for Catholics, Protestants, Brahmins, dabblers in black magic and medicine; all these could be seen sitting about her oak table before the huge fire, Nora listening, her hand on her hound, the firelight throwing her shadow and his against the wall. Of all that ranting, roaring crew, she alone stood out. (50)

In her youth, Barney was known in Paris as the "wild child of Ohio" (Chalon, 54). Once again, like Barney, Nora Flood "was known instantly as a Westerner" (50). In a further parallel to Barney, Nora Flood has a "decaying chapel" in her back yard, recalling Barney's slightly decrepit "Temple of Friendship" in the back yard of her home in Paris.

Goldstein, too, has left his radically altered tracings on the novel Nightwood. A decade after The Cubical City, Robin Vote's husband, Felix Volkbein, has become the
representative "unit from a wandering race apart." This sham baron, born of an Italian Jew and an Austrian Gentile, is as alienated from his Jewish background as he is an alien to the European aristocracy he worships. Sustained by the knowledge of seven languages, a false coat of arms, and the life-sized portraits of two eighteenth century actors purchased by his father as "an alibi for the blood," Felix wanders through Europe, hunting down "his own disqualification" with the fury of a fanatic. He seems perpetually from somewhere else, "some country that he has devoured rather than resided in, some secret land that he has been nourished on but cannot inherit, for the Jew seems to be everywhere from nowhere" (7).

From the mingled passions that made up his past, out of a diversity of bloods, from the crux of a thousand impossible situations, Felix had become the accumulated and single—the embarrassed. His embarrassment took the form of an obsession for what he termed "Old Europe": aristocracy, nobility, royalty. . . . He felt that the great past might mend a little if he bowed down low enough, if he succumbed and gave homage. (8-9)

While resonances of earlier work by Solita Solano and Janet Flanner run through Nightwood, the influence of Barney's The One Who Is Legion on Djuna Barnes's novel is quite strong. This influence has been noted by at least one critic: In his relatively early book-length study of Djuna Barnes's work, The Art of Djuna Barnes: Duality and Damnation (1977), Louis Kannenstine finds "certain resemblances" between Nightwood and The One Who Is Legion to
be "suggestive." In particular, Kannenstine notices that the two novels share a "preoccupation with forms of dual being," as well as a "dissatisfaction with the traditional 'realism' of the novelistic form."

In both novels, then, outer reality is seen to dissolve, only now and then to return in partial focus, thereby creating a sense of being beyond time and spatial boundaries. (109)

Kannenstine even claims that Barney's "Afterword" to her novel, in which she states that "Mystery remains the invisible link between what is outworn by knowledge, and the unborn reality" (159), could stand in itself as an epigraph to Nightwood.

There is no truly "peripheral" character in Nightwood, but Jenny Petherbridge comes close to that description, although she is not the character referred to in Phyllis Rose's complaint. Described as "a 'squatter' by instinct," she can be recognized as an enormously degraded version of Barney's man-inhabited Glow-woman. Jenny Petherbridge is so inhabited by the values of patriarchal culture, she is without an interior; she is a total parasite on the emotions and experiences of others:

When she fell in love it was with a perfect fury of accumulated dishonesty; she became instantly a dealer in second-hand and therefore incalculable emotions. As, from the solid archives of usage, she had stolen or appropriated the dignity of speech, so she appropriated the most passionate love that she knew, Nora's for Robin. (68)
The language Djuna Barnes uses in this chapter is unadorned and ruthless; she eviscerates this character in the novel in a pattern of short sentences that offer description and consequence. Jenny "was nervous about the future; it made her indelicate. . . . She wanted to be the reason for everything and so was the cause of nothing" (67-68). She is "one of the most unimportantly wicked women of her time" (67) because everything about her is entirely derivative. Even an "unimportantly wicked" woman, though, is not peripheral in a work which questions the very relevance of such a designation. Nightwood is an examination of a subculture in which the oppositional concepts of One/Other, Man/Woman, Jew/Gentile no longer firmly hold; all the characters of Nightwood, including even Jenny Petherbridge, are residents of this twilight world, and are "peripheral" by day world definition.

Nightwood and The One Who Is Legion are most profoundly linked, however, by their authors' shared vision of an "unborn reality": the lesbian reality described by Monique Wittig, a cultural economy completely separate from one founded on the "outworn" oppositions of patriarchal heterosexuality, which has gender as its most basic representation. Natalie Barney offers her alternative vision from the point of view of a sexual and economic essentialist, however. To participate in the birth of her "unborn reality," one must be born lesbian and wealthy; both
conditions are required to write the full text of a lesbian life. Just as Nightwood's Nora Flood can be seen as a proletarian translation of Natalie Barney, the novel itself explores a more "proletarian" translation of Barney's philosophy. In Djuna Barnes's novel, Nora Flood is neither innately rich nor lesbian: She does "advance publicity" for a circus (18), and she enters into her first lesbian relationship at the age of twenty-eight.

T. S. Eliot's "Introduction" to Nightwood initiates the assumption that the world of the novel is set irrevocably apart from the world of the "normal" (heterosexual) reader. He also offers his own reading of the work in the "Introduction," a reading that has deeply influenced critical interpretations of Nightwood ever since. In particular, in a critical perception that went unchallenged for years, Eliot's "Introduction" privileges the character of Dr. Matthew O'Connor, the unlicensed homosexual gynecologist, as the novel's central personality:

When I first read the book I found the opening movement rather slow and dragging, until the appearance of the doctor. And throughout the first reading, I was under the impression that it was the doctor alone who gave the book its vitality; and I believed the final chapter to be superfluous. I am now convinced that the final chapter is essential, both dramatically and musically. It was notable, however, that as the other characters, on repeated reading, became alive for me, and while the focus shifted, the figure of the doctor was by no means diminished. (xii-xiii)
This analysis has been supported by such critics as Wallace Fowlie, who acknowledges Nora Flood as the "hero" of Nightwood while calling Matthew O'Connor the "most important character" in the book (142).

As early as 1953, Dell Hymes recognized that, in Nightwood, Djuna Barnes "attempt[s] to dignify inversion by making it symbolic of human relationships in general" (50). Much of the homosexual point of view in the novel comes from Matthew O'Connor, who functions throughout the work as prophet, observer and commentator. His words come out in a torrent of linguistic complexity; he offers his audiences a densely woven fabric of prediction and analysis, framed within intermingling personal histories and imaginative fictions, all told within a Catholic and homosexual cast. As Donna Gerstenberger points out, the very volume of Matthew O'Connor's speech leads the reader to experience his words as narrative:

The novel inscribes him by story and narrative act, . . . whose stories often seem to exist for their own telling, glancing blows off the side of his real subjects but nonetheless inscribed within Barnes' narrative purpose. The attentive reader is surprised that the doctor is described as a "small" man at the beginning of the second chapter, "La Somnambule," because he has seemed as large as his language, as commanding as his fictions, as fertile as his imagination when first we see him in "Bow Down." (136)

Matthew O'Connor's words command narrative authority in the novel by their very volume; he employs the same strategy within the narrative itself; "he got his audience by the
simple device of pronouncing at the top of his voice . . . some of the more boggish and biting of the shorter early Saxon verbs--nothing could stop him" (15). As a self-appointed author of meaning, O'Connor also voices certain dilemmas of authorship, which serve in turn to further align his voice with narrative authority. At one point, he tells Nora Flood, "I have a narrative, but you will be put to it to find it" (97). At another, he complains, "Is there no one who knows anything but myself? And must I, perchance, like careful writers, guard myself against the conclusions of my readers?" (94) In truth, Matthew O'Connor combines both the role of author and reader; as an observer, he has accepted the task of "reading" the text of his nightworld and spinning out the results in prophesy and story.

_Nightwood_ portrays Nora as she is entering into her first lesbian relationship, heavily burdened by the rigid conscience of American Calvinism. Her temperament is one of "an early Christian; she believed the word" (51).

Looking at her foreigners remembered stories they had heard of covered wagons; . . . with heavy hems the women becoming large, flattening the fields where they walked; God so ponderous in their minds that they could stamp out the world with him in seven days. (50,51)

Natalie Barney's early recognition of her lesbianism, and her decision and financial ability to "find or found a milieu" in which she could explore the parameters of lesbianism as a cultural ethic, allowed her early
citizenship in the "twilight world" with minimal (though not insignificant) internal conflict. On the other hand, Nightwood captures Nora Flood in the very act of wrenching herself away from the world of the day as she examines the ultimate significance of her love for Robin Vote.

Nora first meets Matthew O'Connor at a dinner party: "He was taking the part of host, the Count not yet having made his appearance, and was telling of himself, for he considered himself the most amusing predicament" (14-15). As a practicing Catholic, O'Connor frequently takes the part of host, and offers himself and his view of his nightworld predicament up for sacrifice and consumption to other members of his nightworld congregation. As a father confessor, he is a strangely traditional figure of authority and comfort, and in such a role he receives the "confession" of Nora Flood's misery after Robin has left her. As a co-participant in the nightworld, O'Connor is also invested with the authority of his own vulnerability: When Nora Flood, surprising him in bed wearing a blonde wig, makeup and a woman's flannel nightgown, tells O'Connor, "Doctor, I have come to ask you to tell me everything you know about the night," he answers, "You see that you can ask me anything" (80).

Nora can ask him anything; consequently, Matthew O'Connor can tell her anything. Throughout much of the novel, this forms the basic pattern of their communication.
In *The One Who Is Legion*, Natalie Barney offers the interrogative as the paramount lesbian sentence; it is a standard that Djuna Barnes continues in *Nightwood* with Nora Flood. Although she is introduced to the reader as a woman who "believed the word," the novel portrays Nora Flood in the process of questioning and eventually rejecting the authority of any external "word" which has inscribed its meaning on the experiences of her life. Nora is Matthew O'Connor's audience, but she is never an uncritical one. Even when they first meet, her first sentence is to question his role as the final authority on the nightworld. As she listens to O'Connor talk to Felix Volkbein, she asks him if he is "really saying what you mean, or are you just talking?" (18)

His answers to her describe Nora as the tragic hero, guilty of hubris; she has considered herself apart and beyond the reach of the nightworld. "You are full to the brim with pride," he tells her. "You were a 'good woman,' and so a bitch on a high plane" (146). When Nora complains that "I never thought of the night as a life at all--I've never lived it" (82), O'Connor describes night as a universal experience, as the speculative life conceived beyond existing language, particularly the life lived in sleep, which is unknowable by the reductive labels of the day:

We wake from our doings in a deep sweat for that they happened in a house without an address, in a street in
no town, citizened with people with no names with which to identify them. Their very lack of identity makes them ourselves. For by a street number, by a house, by a name, we cease to accuse ourselves. Sleep demands of us a guilty immunity. (88)

As an "early Christian" by temperament, Nora has had "the face of all people who love the people--a face that would be evil when she found out that to love without criticism is to be betrayed" (51). "[Y]ou are of a clean race, of a too eagerly washing people, and this leaves no road for you," he explains (84). As her penance, he suggests that she "think of the night the day long, and of the day the night through" (84).

O'Connor's insights are informed by his recognition of "the peculiar polarity of times" (80) and that the "peculiar polarity" of a heterosexuality culture may not be the only possible frame of reference. When Nora realizes that "I, who want power, chose a girl who resembles a boy," O'Connor describes this "power" as a racial memory of androgyny, culturally translated into romantic visions of love which are, in fact, realized in homosexuality. This "miscalculated longing" has been coded in our cultural myths, has been "spoken of in every romance that we ever read," in dense textures of disguised gender transgression. In these fairy tales of romance, what O'Connor calls our culture's "sweetest lie," "in the girl it is the prince, and in the boy it is the girl that makes a prince a prince--and not a man." "[W]hat is this love we have for the invert,
boy or girl?" he asks rhetorically:

It was they who were spoken of in every romance that we ever read. The girl lost, what is she but the Prince on the white horse that we have always been seeking. And the pretty lad who is a girl, what but the prince-princess in point lace--neither one and half the other, the painting on the fan! We love them for that reason. We were impaled in our childhood upon them as they rode through our primers . . . (136-137)

Unfortunately, as a Catholic, Matthew O'Connor functions within an ontology of salvation and damnation, and as a homosexual, he can only offer damnation as the final spiritual conclusion to his insights. As he himself points out, "The Bible lies the one way, but the night-gown the other" (80). To Nora, O'Connor can acknowledge the necessity of creating new texts, even of creating a new language with which to write these texts:

Yes, we who are full to the gorge with misery should look well around, doubting everything seen, done, spoken, precisely because we have a word for it, and not its alchemy.

To think of the acorn it is necessary to become the tree. And the tree of night is the hardest tree to mount . . . (83)

In the end, Matthew O'Connor will not be the one to write this new text, because he has already been permanently inscribed with another. Recognizing this, he exclaims, "Haven't I eaten a book too? Like the angels and prophets? And wasn't it a bitter book to eat?" (127)

Even as a homosexual, O'Connor, has succumbed to a reductive reasoning which demands "the one of form, of the individual, of the male sexual organ, of the proper name, of
the proper meaning" (Irigaray, 26). For O'Connor, the dogma of Catholicism has become, quite literally, the "instrument" he uses to "touch himself" (Irigaray, 24): At one point, he exposes himself in church, whispering "What is this thing, Lord?" and "crying because I had to embarrass Tiny like that for the good it might do him" (132).

As Matthew O'Connor surrenders the task of creating new cultural texts, Nora Flood begins to write letters to Robin, explaining to O'Connor, "If I don't write to her, what am I to do? I can't sit here for ever--thinking!" (125) Nora's new role as author makes O'Connor anxious and angry, as he recognizes his own textual authority beginning to erode: "Can't you be done now, can't you give up? Now be still, now that you know what the world is about, knowing it's about nothing?" (124) But the world is not about "nothing" for Nora. Her persistent questions bear proof to her belief that achieving some level of personal truth is possible, that recognizing the given "word" as empty does not diminish the importance of seeking to speak.

Nora becomes an unbeliever, both in O'Connor's vision of "Terra damnata et maledicta" and in him as "god of darkness" (125, 126) as she gradually gains authority in the new environment of her lesbianism. As she probes her own entrance into the nightworld, Nora learns that, ultimately, lesbianism is an experience without cultural precedent:

"There's nothing to go by, Matthew," she said. "You do not know which way to go. A man is another
person—a woman is yourself, caught as you turn in panic; on her mouth you kiss your own. If she is taken you cry that you have been robbed of yourself."

(143)

This is Nora's moment of lesbian insight, when she perceives what Luce Irigaray calls

the mystery that woman represents in a culture claiming to count everything, to number everything by units, to inventory everything as individualities. She is neither one nor two. Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two. She resists all adequate definition. Further, she has no "proper" name.

(26)

Matthew O'Connor is finally destroyed by the "oneness" of his Biblical text, which has made him "damned, and carefully public" (163). Nora disrupts his narrative in their last conversation, telling him to "Listen! You've got to listen!" (155), but he is no longer capable of listening to an alternative narration. Nora "troubled him," however, and as he goes into his favorite bar, "he said to himself, 'Listen!'" But his role is too set; in his life, the word "listen" can only function externally, as a command to his perpetual audience. "The people in the cafe waited for what the doctor would say, knowing that he was drunk and that he would talk" (158). Incoherent, almost unconscious, he does talk, but he has lost his authority, and people laugh at him:

"Funny little man," someone said. "Never stops talking--always getting everyone into trouble by excusing them because he can't excuse himself--the Squatting Beast, coming out at night--" (163)

Throughout the novel, the gesture shared by both
Matthew O'Connor and Felix Volkbein has been to bow. Just as Felix has bowed compulsively to the mythic truth of aristocratic nobility, Matthew has bowed to the equally mythic authority of the Church. In the end, though, Matthew O'Connor's prophetic failure is complete. He is no longer even afforded the subordinate dignity of bowing; he has been reduced to Jenny Petherbridge's gesture of cultural parasitism. Felix has Guido, his son by Robin, though the boy is feeble-minded and frail. O'Connor also accomplishes his goal, effecting a degraded kind of drunken crucifixion in the bar:

He came down upon the table with all his weight, his arms spread, his head between them, his eyes wide open and crying . . . He tried to get to his feet, gave it up. "Now," he said, "the end—mark my words—now nothing, but wrath and weeping!"

(166)

The reader who does "mark his words" will, like T. S. Eliot, be disappointed. This is not the end, and more follows besides "wrath and weeping." Eliot did manage to convince himself that the final chapter was not, as he first believed, "superfluous," but "essential, both dramatically and musically" (xii). The true necessity of the last chapter, however, is that it not only reifies the subversion of O'Connor's text, it aligns the text of Nightwood with the process of Nora Flood's interrogation, and frames the upcoming final chapter in an atmosphere of anticipation, as the reader prepares to mark Nora's words when she speaks
with her newfound lesbian authority.

Interestingly enough, the one character in Nightwood least imbued with any kind of textual authority is Nora Flood's partner in love, Robin Vote. As an actor in the novel, Robin is nearly silent; her voice is almost completely absent. In a book that dedicates whole chapters to dialogue, Robin's few moments of speech are usually reported indirectly to the reader. When she gives birth to Felix's son, Guido, the novel reports that "Amid loud and frantic cries of affirmation and despair Robin was delivered" (48). Upon meeting Robin, Jenny Petherbridge "knew about Nora immediately; to know Robin ten minutes was to know about Nora. Robin spoke of her in long, rambling, impassioned sentences" (68).

Nora Flood and Matthew O'Connor are each inscribed with faith in the power of the "word"; O'Connor collapses beneath his belief in the word of the church, while Nora interrogates and dismisses the authority of O'Connor's words in an effort to discover her own. Robin, however, is the least inscribed character in the novel, although she remains involuntarily so. Nora realizes that "in Robin there was this tragic longing to be kept, knowing herself to be astray" (58), but no existing structure of meaning seems adequate to "keep" her. As a result, Robin eludes inscription even when she actively seeks belief in one "word" or another. After marrying Felix, Robin converts to
Catholicism, but the nuns pity her, "feeling that they were looking at someone who would never be able to ask for, or receive, mercy . . . (46).

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. (47)

Although Robin remains uninscribed by the "word" that Matthew O'Connor finds so compelling, Nora's efforts to "save" Robin from the damnation of "her dissolute life, her life at night" (156) render Nora in the position of representing another translation of the same "word." Matthew O'Connor, noting Nora's adoption of the role of Robin's savior, tells Nora, "You almost caught hold of her, but she put you cleverly away by making you the Madonna" (146). But while Matthew is so inscribed by the word of the Church that he ends up crucified, Nora is able to recognize the implications of her role as Madonna, and on her own authority, rather than through Matthew's commentary.

After Robin has abandoned her, Nora haunts the ports of Europe looking for her: "I said to myself, I will do what she has done, I will love what she has loved, then I will find her again" (156). While in a rundown neighborhood in Naples, Nora discovers a young girl sitting before "gaudy prints of the Virgin":

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. (157)

In her discussion of the "otherness" of Woman within a
patriarchal discourse, Luce Irigaray points out the language
within this system has valorized only the "oneness" of male
"subjects," and that, trapped in this logic as the eternal
"Other," women are forever relegated to the underside of
system in which "[t]he 'feminine' is always described in
terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex
that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex" (This
Sex, 69). Denied the specificity of female subjectivity in
this logic, Irigaray asks "how we can introduce ourselves
into such a tightly-woven systemacticity" in order to
"destroy the discursive mechanism" (76). One suggestion she
offers is through "mimicry":

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to
try to recover the place of her exploitation by
discourse, without allowing herself to be simply
reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself--
inasmuch as she is on the side of the "perceptible,"
of "matter"--to "ideas," in particular to ideas
about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine
logic, but so as to make "visible," by an effect of
playful repetition, what was supposed to remain
invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation
of the feminine in language. It also means "to
unveil" the fact that, if women are such good
mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed
in this function. They also remain elsewhere . . .
(76)

Nora Flood's adoption of the role of savior, of
"Madonna," in her relationship with Robin Vote has not been
particularly "playful," but by acting out Robin's behaviors
Nora has, in a sense, "remained elsewhere," and has escaped losing herself in the function of the Madonna. Within the discourse of a patriarchal cultural economy, the strictly narrowed parameters of recognized roles are too confined to accommodate any human being. Matthew O'Connor, whose homosexuality locates him on the feminized "Other" plane of patriarchal dualism, will never be able to function purely as a savior figure; his efforts to combine the essence of his sexuality with the role offered to him through his church demolish him. Nora Flood, however, finally recognizes the fact that she will never truly be a "Madonna," but merely a "fixed dismay." The reductive "oneness" of the Madonna function is a mere mirage of possibility; by adopting the Madonna as a model, Nora Flood has risked sacrificing her humanity only to fill "the space between the human and the holy head, the arena of the 'indecent' eternal."

According to Irigaray, "to speak of or about woman may always boil down to, or be understood as, a recuperation of the feminine within a logic that maintains it in repression, censorship, nonrecognition" (This Sex, 78). Throughout Nightwood, Robin Vote, as a kind of abstract essence, is spoken of or about by Matthew O'Connor, Nora Flood, Felix Volkbein and Jenny Petherbridge, particularly in terms of "the negative, the underside, the reverse" of phallomorphic conventions (This Sex, 26). She is an "enigma" (44), the
"eternal momentary" (127), an "invert" (136), "utterly innocent" (138), a "wild thing caught in a woman's skin" (146), an "uninhabited angel" (148), and "something strange" (156).

Eventually, the portrait of Robin that emerges in Nightwood is of a woman standing outside of patriarchal discourse, in an arena that has yet to be fixed in language. Her husband notices that "her attention, somehow in spite of him, had already been taken by something not yet in history. Always she seemed to be listening to the echo of some foray in the blood that had no known setting" (44). "I never did have a really clear idea of her at any time," he tells Matthew O'Connor. "I had an image of her, but that is not the same thing. An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties" (111). Jenny Petherbridge admits that "She is really quite extraordinary. I don't understand her at all" (115).

Most importantly, Nora comes to understand that the effort to fit Robin's absolute, unyielding Otherness within the recognized parameters of conventional roles is the effort to render Robin invisible. "A shadow was falling on her--mine--and it was driving her out of her wits," she tells Matthew O'Connor (155). In Janet Flanner's The Cubical City, Delia Poole's friends try frantically to reduce her to a "definable form" by encouraging her to marry. Nora also has tried to reduce Robin to a "definable
form," but comes to understand that her fear of Robin's "formlessness" is a fear of her own female nature. As Nora admits, "Suddenly, I knew what all my life had been, Matthew, what I hoped Robin was--the secure torment. . . . I thought I loved her for her sake, and I found it was for my own" (151.) By realizing that "She is myself" (127), Nora stops speaking "of or about" Robin and speaks of herself in a language that approximates a female discourse able to subjectify "this sex which is not one." On Robin's mouth Nora has kissed her own; when Robin is taken, Nora comes to understand that she has been robbed of herself.

Like Felix Volkbein and Matthew O'Connor, who both bow, Nora Flood and Robin Vote have also been distinguished in the novel by a shared gesture, which is the act of turning. As Kenneth Burke has pointed out in his analysis of the novel, the word "turn" appears five times in the passage in which Nora and Robin meet (332). Nora's description of the lesbian experience itself emphasizes the movement of turning.

In the short final chapter, the two women lovers go through their final turn, and separately return to America, the country in which they first met. Robin accompanies Jenny Petherbridge to New York and leaves her. "Robin now headed up into Nora's part of the country. She circled closer and closer" (168). Gradually she takes to sleeping in Nora's backyard chapel, where she is discovered one night.
by Nora's dog. Following her dog, Nora sees a light in the chapel:

She began to run, cursing and crying, and blindly, without warning, plunged into the jamb of the chapel door.

On a contrived altar, before a Madonna, two candles were burning. Their light fell across the floor and the dusty benches. Before the image lay flowers and toys. Standing before them in her boy's trousers was Robin. (169)

Dell Hymes has suggested that through this "contrived altar" to the Madonna, "the author quietly reinstates matriliney . . . and establish[es] the primacy of the female" (50). Typically, what Robin intends with this altar, she never says. But it is her voice that ends the novel: When Nora opens the chapel door, Robin goes down on all fours and barks at the dog.

He ran this way and that, low down in this throat crying, and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head, until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees. (170)

The novel ends with Nora's watching silence, but it is a weighted silence, a silence before the word. The two women have completed yet another turn, and have returned to each other. Before Nora is another text to be decoded and expressed. Now, however, she is conversant in the night language of lesbianism, a language which may be as innocent of patriarchal reference as the barking of a dog.
Nightwood was published the year that the Spanish Civil War began. The possibilities of Nora's lesbian response to the scene before her were nearly drowned out in the explosions of the following World War. Jane Marcus calls Nightwood a "prophecy of the Holocaust, an attack on the doctors and politicians who defined deviance and set up a world view of us and them, the normal and the abnormal, in political, racial, and sexual terms . . ." (249). There is no doubt that the novel identifies the victims of Fascism with an uncanny accuracy: Nora's silence almost became the heavy stillness of the silenced. The years that followed Nightwood's appearance have not been easy ones for the inhabitants of the nightworld; we have been threatened by political purges, hate crimes, psychiatric abuse, legal discrimination, economic and educational bigotry, and medical malpractice.

Fortunately, lesbian readers who are prepared to "mark Nora's words" at the end of the novel are now rendering up a body of scholarship that is successfully integrating Nightwood and the rest of Djuna Barnes's material into an emerging canon of culturally diverse, artistically vigorous literature. More work with Barnes is necessary; an edition of Nightwood unburdened by T. S. Eliot's Introduction and his editorial decisions has yet to be published, although the material is available in the McKeldin Library at the University of Maryland. This edition of Nightwood will
inevitably appear, propelled by the same energy as that of the invisible world of readers who collected and hoarded anything that was "gay," who kept Nightwood alive and in print as a "cult novel." Nightwood itself has sustained its readers, by collecting and hoarding, in one dense artistic vision, the complex night vision of the lesbian.
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