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Disrupting An(Other): Sexuality as Political Resistance

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DISRUPTING AN(OTHER): SEXUALITY AS POLITICAL RESISTANCE

by

Emma Downey

A Master's Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of
Bucknell University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Masters of the Arts in Literary Studies

Approved By:

Dr. Erica Delsandro
Graduate Thesis Advisor

Dr. Anthony Stewart
Department Chair

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Ralph Waldo Emerson said that "the voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a thousand tacks," which really encapsulates the journey of this project. Getting here, to the final result, was less of a straight path and more of a labyrinthic cross-pollination of interests. Throughout, there were moments, I was not sure if I'd be able to finish. Yet, here it is…and there's a lot of people I have to thank for that.

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Abstract

If sexual knowledge can threaten social and political institutions and their control, how do the contents and subjects of literature and publications in the interwar period make that legible? Moreover, if female sexuality–represented or real–was seen as something disruptive to the normal functioning of society, did sexuality offer a useful entry point for social, political, or ideological critiques of the interwar period? My project responds to these questions by analyzing the lives and writings of two female authors of the interwar period: Djuna Barnes (1892-1982) and Katharine Burdekin (1896-1963). In my analysis, I focus on two major points of connection. First, both of the authors lived a life which deviated from societal norms of gender and sexuality, which I argue influenced their own politics regarding sexuality and society. Second, each of the authors draw direct links between the sexual and the political in their writing and, I argue, use sexuality as a platform for social criticism and political intervention. More broadly, this project proposes an understanding of non-normative sexuality as something imbued with the political potential to disrupt or subvert heteronormative structures.

Introduction: A Queer Time

> "It's *queer* how out of touch with the truth women are! They live in a world of their own and there has never been anything like it and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over." – Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

In 1929, American journalist and author, Janet Flanner (1892-1978) wrote: "It may be interesting to know that Radcliffe Hall's novel about lesbians, *The Well of Loneliness*, though banned in England and under fire in New York, has escaped condemnation in France, where it now enjoys a local printing."[1] The book and its author were brought to court on charges of obscenity since they depicted, in terms we now would find broad and cryptic, a female character who expressed sexual feelings for another woman. Published in the interwar period in Europe, the *Well of Loneliness,* linked new theories of sexology popularized by Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) with developing feminist thought and reflected the trend of moving away from Victorian social mores. Most discussions of the British government's response to the novel suggest that, because the novel depicted a woman expressing sexual desire for another woman (which would have been defined as sexual deviancy at the time), the courts took legal action to censor it. However, as I explored deeper into the sensational trial of *The Well*, I noticed that the controversy and publicity surrounding the book and its author seemed concerned with its influence on readers rather than the actual content. What was really at stake, it seemed, was public control of women and their access to sexual, and by extension, social and political, knowledge. This prompted the question: if sexual

[1] Flanner, Janet. *Paris was Yesterday*, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 48.

knowledge can threaten social and political institutions and their control, does literature of the interwar period make that legible?

The publication and subsequent censorship debates surrounding *The Well of Loneliness* are regarded by feminist historians as key moments for the introduction of lesbian sexuality into the British public sphere. Unlike male homosexuality, which was outlawed in Britain, lesbianism had remained outside of juridical policy and the public eye.[2] *The Well's* sensational trial, however, brought female sexuality directly into the public sphere and Radcliffe Hall, with her short hair and masculine dress, became the face of 'lesbianism.'[3] At the same time, the main character of the Hall's novel, Stephen Gordon, became a cautionary tale of the negative consequences access to literature and knowledge, especially *sexual knowledge*, can have on impressionable young girls and this was used as allegorical justification for the novel's censorship.

The British court's decision to censor Hall's novel suggests a recognition of the links between sexual identities, public knowledge, literature, and the maintenance of the status quo by a state authority. In other words, it proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the sexual was the political. This led me to wonder: How did literature incorporate, mediate, or inflect the many registers of discourses surrounding gender and sexuality at the time? Moreover, if female sexuality–represented or real–was seen as something

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[2] Curiously, a similar legal discrepancy existed in the legal policies of Nazi Germany. Male homosexuals were persecuted and sent to concentration or labor camps, but lesbians were not.

[3] Medd, Jodie, *Lesbian Scandal and the Culture of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), xii.

disruptive to the normal functioning of society, does sexuality offer a useful entry point for social, political, or ideological critiques of the interwar period and the present?

In order to explore these questions, I focus on the writing and lives of two distinct female authors of the interwar period: Djuna Barnes (1892-1982) and Katharine Burdekin (1896-1963). Djuna Barnes was an American who moved to the Left Bank of Paris in the 1920s. She used writing to represent and explore radical forms of female sexuality and its expression. I focus on her most widely read novel, *Nightwood* (1936), a story of lesbian love in the underworld of interwar Paris. The second author, Katharine Burdekin, was a British writer. She wrote and published utopian fiction under the masculine pseudonym, Murray Constantine. Her novels depicted characters with non-normative sexual behaviors and identities that radically broke from conventional norms of gender and sexuality. In this project, I focus on her dystopian novel*, Swastika Night* (1937), which imagines a world 300 years after a Nazi victory in Europe. While the novels are distinct in their content and style, they both engage with questions of sexuality, politics, and resistance in nuanced and complementary ways.

While there has been a fair amount of scholarship on Djuna Barnes, especially in wake of the second-wave feminist movement in the 1980s, she still remains outside of the conventional canon of modernist authors. On the other hand, there is very little scholarship about Katharine Burdekin or her written works. In this project, I intend to demonstrate what these figures share in common and make a case for why this recognition is important for future scholarship on gender and sexuality in the interwar period. To do so, I focus on two major points of connection. First, each of the authors

lived a life which deviated from societal norms of gender and sexuality, which I argue, influenced their own politics regarding sexuality and society. Second, both of them draw direct links between the sexual and the political in their writing and, I argue, use sexuality as a platform for social criticism and political intervention. Specifically, my project analyzes how these figures used writing as a space for defining, creating, or exploring their sexualities and gender in relation to larger political, social, or ideological issues of the time in order to challenge and disrupt the normative standards and organization of interwar society.

Intersections of the Interwar Period

The First World War existed in the popular imaginary as "the Great War"; it was understood to be the war that would end all wars. This thinking informed the social and political policies of European governments which sought to maintain and preserve the conservative traditions and patriarchal values of the Victorian period. However, the changes to the functioning and make up of European society caused by the War proved longer lasting than officials initially anticipated. The social changes stemming from the First World War continued to come into conflict with the social standards of the Victoria Era. The attempts to maintain Victorian-era morality and intransigent insistence on the status quo in the interwar period failed to achieve what those in power hoped. Instead, what they did was fan the flames of nationalism, racism, and other tenants of right-wing political thought which helped ignite the Second World War.

The period between the First World War and the Second World War, known as the interwar period, lasted from 1918-1933. It was characterized by imbalance. The

Treaty of Versailles, which was ratified after the First World War, created significant imbalances in wealth between the nations which was exacerbated by the financial crisis of the late 1920s. At the same time, people began to move *en masse* to metropolitan cities. This created huge population imbalances between urban and rural locations and made the gap between the rich and poor significantly more visible and prominent. As the cities grew, so did the populations of marginalized and minority groups like Jews and homosexuals. These groups began to form networks and alternative communities which subverted Victorian-era social doctrine and the hegemonic power of patriarchal tradition. Practices of 'slumming,' where social elites would dress-down in order to blend into the marginal communities and take part in unsanctioned events, served to move the needle of power further from the old ways. The faith in scientific advancement and social progress at the fin de siècle was overshadowed by social anxieties and fears about social degeneration. The disciplines of science and medicine began to influence social methods and practices that sought to control and contain populations deemed deviant or criminal. It is precisely the mechanisms and multiplicity of discursive responses to the conflict of old and new which my project is interested in.

My research situates itself within the growing body of scholarship on gender and sexuality and women's lives in modernity. I engage with recent critical work concerning discourses on sexuality and gender in the modern period. Most recent, Celia Marshik and Allison Peace's comprehensive volume, *Modernism, Sex and Gender* (2019), was instrumental in providing an overview of past and present scholarship relating to gender, sexuality, politics and legislation during the modern period. Laura Doan's *Fashioning*

Sapphism (2010) presents a wonderful overview of cultural formulations and representations of lesbians and lesbianism in the modern period and Jodie Medd's *Lesbian Scandal and the Culture of Modernism* (2012) provided a rich analysis of how the concept of "lesbian" was entangled with legal, political, and literary institutions and came to signify much more than a sexual identity. The research Gay Wachman and Deborah Cohler conducted on the treatment of lesbians by the courts in the interwar period informs my discussion of censorship cases and their impact on conceptions of sexuality during the period. While these scholars focus on a particular country and/or sexual identity in their research, I employ a historical approach which links the broader cultural discourses to the writing and lives of Barnes and Burdekin. I find this approach felicitous as it allows a historical and literary analysis to function symbiotically to inform and provide evidence for the claims I will make throughout my project regarding sexuality, politics and literature.

Throughout my project, I rely on historical and cultural analysis of discourses and popular ideas that informed the political and social climate of the interwar period. The work of literary historians on public discussions of degeneration, including William Greenslade, Vincent Sherry, and David Weir, aide my discussion of how cultural anxieties manifested through fears of the "other" in the interwar period and how these were connected to the increasing popularity of right-wing ideas. I pull from critical work on the medical field of sexology, which analyzes the discipline's influence on formations of cultural identities, as well as from the primary texts of sexologists like Havelock Ellis, Otto Weininger, and Richard von Krafft-Ebbing throughout my analysis. Additionally, I

discuss the ideas of psychoanalysis using the primary texts of Sigmund Freud to discuss his ideas and their appropriation for political agendas and demonstrate the influence of his ideas on social thinking and on the authors themselves.

The work of feminist historians Judith Walkowitz and Katharina von Ankum, whose focus on women in the interwar period, offered further opportunity for contextualizing the writing of Burdekin and Barnes within the new political developments and cultural ideas about the role of women and female sexuality in European society during the period. Finally, my integrative analytic approach to the multiple discourses of the interwar period is heavily influenced by the work of Scott Spector in his book *Violent Sensations* (2016). His discussion of the interpellation of social discourses, especially those connected to sexuality, with the formation of individual subjectivities prompted me to articulate the connections between the lived experiences of Burdekin and Barnes and the political imaginaries within their novels. As a literary scholar with a penchant for history, using a historical approach to analyze the social and political discourses of sexuality and how these discourses were refracted and resisted in the novels of Burdekin and Barnes was fundamental to the development my project's argument.

Let's Talk About Sex

At the Feminist IX Conference in 1982, Gayle Rubin advocated for a radical theory of sex in her talk, "Thinking Sex." A radical theory of sex, claimed Rubin:

> "must identify, describe, explain, and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression. Such a theory needs refined conceptual tools which can grasp

> the subject and hold it in view. It must build rich descriptions of sexuality as it exists in society and history. It requires a convincing critical language that can convey the barbarity of sexual persecution."[4]

Almost forty years later, scholars and activists are still trying to accomplish Rubin's goal. While intellectual, social, and culture steps have been made towards more inclusive and expansive discussions and analysis of sex and the vectors of power that interpolate it, much more work needs to be done. In my project, I strive to analyze sex and sexuality in a way that aligns with Rubin's concept of a "radical theory of sex" in order to craft my foundational claim about the political efficacy of sexuality as a tool of cultural criticism and a source of radical political potential.

I avoid limiting my focus to one type of sexuality (e.g: lesbian) or relying on an umbrella term (e.g:gay) which often exclude the subjective through an implicit universalizing. Instead, I look at how sexuality, as a subjectivity, informs the ontological experience and epistemic framing of individuals and their lives and, through this approach, can provide insight into the erotics of mental activity and the libidinal energies that inform the political investments of individuals. Psychologist and scholar, Muriel Dimen, reminds us that sexuality "rests between things, it borders psyche and society, culture and nature, conscious and unconscious, self and other."[5] Sexuality occupies a

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[4] Rubin, Gayle, "Thinking Sex," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* edited by Carole S. Vance. (Boston: Routledge, 1984), 275.
[5] Boone, Joseph Allen, *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 2.

liminal place which links "us" with various "others" and "unknowns" in society. Since it is always in-between, sexuality evades our grasp and threatens to destabilize rigid social categories. It is located in the borderlands of our political and social practices; between our sociopolitical institutions and the ideologies they perpetuate. Sexuality constantly defers or evades all-encompassing definitions which seek to bring it out of its "shadowed existence" and into discourse.[6]

My thoughts on the role of sexuality in narratives have been greatly influenced by the work of Joseph Allen Boone in his book, *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (1998), which explores the centrality of sexuality to constructions of subjecthood, identity and narrative in the modern period. While Boone's book provides an expansive discussion of the topic, he primarily focuses on canonical modernist texts and authors; whereas, by analyzing understudied female authors, my project focuses on individuals that, as women who engaged in non-heteronormative relationships, were directly implicated in the political and social debates and efforts to control and define sexual behaviors and identities at the time. In this project, I use my discussion of how Burdekin and Barnes exploit the unstable and liminal nature of sexuality in their writing to explore how they conceived of politics through sexuality. Moreover, I demonstrate how these women used sexuality as a source of political subversion and resistance. In doing so, I hope to show how these figures were "less invested in destabilization for the sake of liberation *from*, than in destabilization as a

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[6] Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 35.

mode of liberation *into*–into realms of unknown, untapped desires that have no necessary end."[7]

As a foundational figure for historical and cultural studies of the history of sexuality, Michel Foucault and his critical legacy is fundamental to my analysis of the cultural discourses on sexology, censorship, and degeneration. Foucault's work, *The History of Sexuality*, rethinks power as a "productive network" which produces the very things it seeks to repress and establishes links between individual sexual subjectivities, social emancipation movements, and cultural discourses.[8] By combining historical analysis with social theory, Foucault's ideas offer a critical approach to thinking about the relationship of sexual behaviors, identities, and practices to the way they are discussed in the political and public spheres. However, Foucault's analysis is not without flaws, as his analysis implicitly privileges the male homosexual experience by uncritically using it to represent the universal experience.

Many scholars of gender and sexuality have made this criticism of Foucault in their work. Of these critics, Terry Castle, has been widely influential in her work on the representations of lesbianism in literature. Her book, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Sexuality and Modern Culture* (1993), argues that the figure of the lesbian has been relegated to a phantom-like existence in the Western imaginary precisely because female sexual desire and sexual agency *were not talked* about in society. Castle points out that Foucault's analysis of discourse and sexuality fails to account for the lack of discourse

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[7] Boone, *Libidinal Currents*, 7.
[8] Foucault, Michel, "Truth and Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 119.

about female homosexuality. Following Castle's lead, Jodie Medd takes issue with Foucault's analysis in her claiming the social production of lesbianism, that is, how women came to identify themselves as lesbians, fit "more within models of interpretation, reading and fantasy" than within the institutions of the "power/knowledge/pleasure triad" described by Foucault.[9] My project amends Foucault's general principles on the relationship of discourses and sexuality with the more contemporary work by scholars of lesbian modernism to engage in a critical historical analysis of the interwar discourses on female sexuality, which I use to contextualize my claims about the political positions of the authors and how their positions influenced the critiques they make in their novels.

Talk Theory to Me

In addition to critical engagement with the cultural and historical context of the interwar period, my project argues that Katharine Burdekin and Djuna Barnes used representations of non-normative sexualities and behaviors in their novels to critique and resist the heteronormative conventions and institutions of European society. I found the approaches used by scholars of gender and sexuality and queer studies useful for elucidating my claims about the political efficacy of sexuality and analyzing how the author's depictions of the non-heteronormative in their novels represent possibilities for social subversion and political resistance to the normative conventions and institutions of interwar European society. Furthermore, I employ discussions of queerness as a political subjectivity and link them to the temporal imaginary of the future in my final chapter. There, I analyze the temporalities of the represented and imagined resistance in the

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[9] Medd*, Lesbian Scandal and the Culture of Modernism*, 13.

novels and how these imaginaries are connected to sexuality in both *Swastika Night* and *Nightwood.*

The field of queer studies is no different than any other academic discipline in that there are scholars who have ideas and theories that fundamentally disagree with others in the field. The debate which is most relevant to my project is the question of the political efficacy of queerness as it relates to the temporal imaginary. Leo Bersani's book on homosexuality, *Homos* (1995), asked the question, "Should a homosexual be a good citizen?" and is often credited as being the incendiary text of the divergence of queer scholars. In *Homos*, Bersani argued that homosexuality was antagonistic to civil society, coining the idea that would later be called the "antisocial thesis" in queer scholarship. This led to a wave of queer scholarship which focused on queer negativity, queer anti-futurity, and the politics of loss and mourning that built their arguments upon the notion that homosexuality and queerness is "antisocial." In response, scholars who disagreed with queer negativity came up with counter arguments which asserted queerness as a radical utopian imaginary and argued non-normative identities were imbued with the potentiality to spark change, paving the way for queer positivity.

Since my engagement with queer theory is focused on elucidating the link between the sexual and the political, I use scholars from both sides of the debate in my project. For example, I use the ideas of Lee Edelman in his book, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), which approaches queer "negativity as society's

constitutive antagonism."[10] I use Edelman's discussion of how the child, as a symbol, ensures that heterosexual normativity is tied to the future to explore how biological reproduction is temporally and ideologically tied to the reproduction of society in the political imaginary. I also use the ideas of queer studies scholar, José Esteban Muñoz in his book, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), which he wrote as a direct response to Edelman's book. Muñoz understands queerness as a utopian impulse that prompts us to desire and imagine a world of better social relations and more pleasure. "Queerness," Muñoz argues, is often glimpsed in "the realm of the aesthetic," which makes his ideas particularly salient to my project since it analyzes instances of non-normative sexuality in literary texts.[11] In addition to Edelman and Muñoz, I incorporate the work of Jack Halberstam and Teresa De Lauretis within my discussions and analysis of the novels.

In addition to queer theory, I rely on academic studies of gender and sexuality to enhance my discussions of the novel's representation of non-normative individuals, sexual desires, and their subversive potential. Michael Warner's books, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (1999) and *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), helped me to conceptualize how political and social belonging relies on constructions of normativity. While these texts are only discussed in one chapter, Warner's ideas about the function of normativizing institutions and discourses

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[10] Caserio, Robert L., Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz and Tim Dean, "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory," in *PMLA, Vol 121 No. 3* (May 2006), 822.
[11] Muñoz, José Esteban, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queerness* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

influenced the framing of my entire project. Additionally, Warner's claim that publics and counterpublics can "mediate the most private and intimate meanings of gender and sexuality" and eventually lead to "new forms of gendered and sexual citizenship" informed my argument that the novels not only critiqued the social norms and political trends of interwar society, but imagined possibilities for resisting and subverting them.[12]

One of the major political trends of the interwar period was the increasing popular support of right-wing ideals and fascist political projects as exemplified by the Nazi Party's rise to power in Germany. To address the connection of right-wing political ideas to gender and sexuality, I use Dagmar Herzog's *Sex After Fascism* (2005) and Klaus Thewleweit's *Male Fantasies* (1986). Herzog discusses how the Nazi Government's stance on sexuality was nuanced and contradictory and highlights how competing messages on sexuality were deployed to serve specific political functions. Thewleweit uses a psychoanalytic approach to analyze how the sexual and political were connected in right-wing male fantasies and how these fantasies manifested as violence and misogyny among German Freikorps soldiers. These books, combined with the work of modernist scholars who discuss the relationship of literature to fascism including Jane Marcus, Alice Yaeger Kaplan, and Erin Carlston, helped to give theoretical and political context to my claims about how Burdekin and Barnes critique and resist right-wing ideas in their novels.

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[12] Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counter Publics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 55.

Taking the Lead

The argument I am making in this project is multifaceted and involves the interplay of the cultural, political, sexual, and aesthetic. Therefore, I have structured my project in a way that provides relevant cultural and historical context in the first chapter, which I continue to reference in the subsequent chapters. Moreover, since the authors I have chosen to analyze differ in the content of their writing and their lived experiences, I discuss them and their respective novels in separate chapters. In these individual chapters, I include biographical information about the author and connect it, wherever relevant, to the content and characters of their novel. The final chapter, which focuses on the theoretical concept of temporality and its relationship to the forms of resistance within the novels, is when I discuss both of the authors and their novels in cohesion. It is my hope that the structure of my project demonstrates the broad applicability of sexuality in the political and social spheres, and that this helps to contextualize and ground my claims regarding the authors and their novels.

My first chapter discusses the discourses of the interwar period. I focus on three main touchstones of interwar discourse (degeneration, censorship, and sexology) and explain how these concepts are interwoven in the political rhetoric and ideology of the time. Specifically, I am concerned with how these discourses were used to pathologize and criminalize individuals whose sexual desires or behaviors were different than the established conventions of heteronormativity. Throughout the chapter, I underscore the important link between these discourses and cultural ideas about and social constructions of sexuality and sexual behavior. I articulate how these links provide evidence for the

claim that sexuality was an object of politics and further this point by discussing the acute deployment of sexual tropes and stereotypes in right-wing political rhetoric. Finally, I highlight the inability or unwillingness of officials to deal with issues regarding female sexual desire or female homosexuality to prompt the question: what was it about female desire and female sexuality that was so threatening to the political institutions and ideological forces of the interwar period?

My second chapter discusses Katherine Burdekin and her novel, *Swastika Night*. I discuss how aspects of novel reflect trends of the interwar period with particular attention to the way Burdekin represents gender and sexuality in relationship to the hyper-masculine Nazi State. My analysis begins with a discussion of the role women occupy in the novel and I use this discussion to make an argument about the critical impact of representing women in such a way. Following that, I describe the homosocial/homosexual relationships between the male characters in the novel and the role of violence and eroticism. Finally, I analyze the character of Von Hess and the influence his secret book has on Alfred and Hermann, to return to the connections between Burdekin's novel and the real-life happenings in Europe at the time. Throughout the chapter, I draw on the ideas of queer utopianism and futurity, as well as the work of Klaus Thewleweit and Dagmar Herzog, to claim Burdekin's novel reconsiders the importance of social difference, agency, and homoerotic love in the political project of making, *or destroying*, a future.

My third chapter discusses Djuna Barnes and her novel, *Nightwood*. I argue, the novel unravels interwar discourses about psychoanalysis and sexual deviance and

challenges their power as discourses of authority in the present, which, in turn, questions the role these discourses should have in shaping the future. I discuss the characters and content of the novel in the context of Freudian texts on psychoanalysis to demonstrate how Barnes called these ideas and their diagnostic authority into question. Next, I focus on how Barnes inverts the interwar conceptions of 'normal' through her use of stereotypes and depiction of stigmatized individuals. Through this reading, I suggest that Barnes sought to represent non-normative sexuality and transgressive sexual desire as imbued with the power to reshape and reconfigure the normal modes of society.

My final chapter connects the arguments and claims of the preceding sections to a discussion about the forms of resistance within the novels. I analyze the types of political resistance included in each of the novels and analyze *how* and *why* these forms of resistance are linked to sexuality. To make my case, I discuss two major themes which are present in both novels, reproduction and homosexuality, in cohesion with the ideas of prominent queer theorists to demonstrate how these concepts are tied to the temporal imaginaries which link the past to the present and future. Building on this claim, I assert that the imagined resistance of Burdekin and Barnes involved resisting not only the imposed standards of normativity, but the imposed *temporality* of normativity.

To conclude, I remark upon the ontological and phenomenological spaces of critical engagement with society that stem from the point of sexuality. I return to the question posed in the first chapter: what was it about female desire and female sexuality that was so threatening to the political institutions and ideological forces of the interwar period? In response, I suggest a possible answer that is not based in gender-specific

analysis, but rather, involves a discussion and acknowledgement of the political potential of non-normative sexuality and sexual desire to destabilize the subjectivities of individuals and prompt them top challenge the authority and control of political intuitions and to subvert the ideologies that perpetuate rigid standards of social and sexual heteronormativity.

Chapter 1: Discursive Degenerates

"We must not think that by saying yes to sex; one says no to power." – Michel Foucault, *A History of Sexuality: Volume One*

"What ideology could make it clearer than fascism does that have people have a sexual, as well as material, interest in their political life?" – Alive Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*

In December 1902, a letter from a Chief Clerk at the British Home Ministry's Office of Works to the Scotland Yard claimed the "increasing number of persons charged with indecency" was caused by the "increase in the *number of women* who enter the Parks."[13] The letter was contained in a collection of correspondences, bureaucratic documents, and reports related to the Scotland Yard's attempt to control crime and immorality and respond to the social changes of the modern metropolitan city at the turn of the century. The period, known as the *fin-de-siècle*, took place between the early 1890s to around 1905 and was marked by increasing industrialization and urbanization. Young able-bodied workers moved *en masse* to urban cities in Western Europe leaving rural agricultural work and old traditional values behind them. The 1880s was, as historian Judith Walkowitz describes, a "historic moment" which enabled middle-class women the freedom to speak publicly about sexual danger and passion "thanks to the new spaces, forms of social communication, and political networks available in a redefined public domain."[14] As burgeoning cities became hubs of technological innovation and social progress, they were also subject to increasing rates of crime, including prostitution, and poverty, which prompted fears of disease and social regression.

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[13] "*Immorality in Royal Parks and Pleasure Gardens*." Government Document. WORK 16/512. Defining Gender Archive. http://www.gender.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/Immorality in Royal Parks and Pleasure Gardens [Accessed November 20, 2019]. Italics my own.
[14] Walkowitz, Judith, *City of Dreadful Delight* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 9.

The letter to the Scotland Yard is a great example of the thinking and approaches European governments and officials used to tackle the negative consequences of modernity. First, blaming the increase of prostitution on the increase in number and visibility of women in a public space (thereby, completely disregarding the laws of supply and demand by failing to consider the possibility of another culprit–namely, male patrons) exemplifies a major discursive trend of the interwar period: implicating non-normative members of society for immorality and increases in criminal behavior.[15] Second, by blaming women for *sexually immoral* behavior, it shows how public constructions and portrayals of female sexuality influenced political decisions and governmental policies. Modernist scholar, Jodie Medd, claims that the impetus to control the bodies of women in wartime (WWI) prostitution codes insinuated that women, rather than men, were seen as the "social problem" of modernity and that "transgressions of expected feminine morality" were seen as challenges to states mobilized for total war which threatened "the very possibility of victory."[16] During the war, the ability to maintain control over the feminine sphere of society became a symbol of the strength and security of a nation. Constructed ideals of female purity limited the possibilities for female emancipation during the fin-de-siècle; however, this would change for women of the interwar period.[17]

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[15] Middle-class women did, however, call attention to men's role in prostitution during their social reform campaigns. For a more nuanced discussion of prostitution, and the role women played in conservative social and more reform movements, see Judith Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society*.
[16] Medd, Jodie, *Lesbian Scandal and the Culture of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 43.
[17] Lybeck, Marti, *Desiring Emancipation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 6.

In the interwar period, the increasing popularity of eugenicist ideas on human behavior and social interactions shifted the social epistemologies and architectonics of public discourse by shifting the emphasis from economic struggle to *sexual* selection.[18] Freudian psychology had grown in popularity and cultivated a social impulse to pathologize individuals and behaviors which were out of the ordinary. The burgeoning medical field of sexology offered a new vocabulary to identify sexual deviants and analyze their behaviors, which led to a medicalization of sexuality in society. As the sexual behaviors of individuals became a legitimate topic of political and social discourse, they were also used to mediate and focus public fears and anxieties of the period. For example, the 1920's New Woman was described as someone "of uncertain class origins" who was adventurous and consumptive and "assumed to be sexually active."[19] While this description did not encapsulate all women of the time, the interplay of new discourses on sexuality and social phenomena, like economic independence of women, in the discursive construction belied larger fears about new actors in the public sphere, declining patriarchal authority, and other post-war anxieties.

In this chapter, I provide a historical and cultural context to understand how public discourses leading up to and during World War II interpellated individuals as political *and* sexual subjects. I situate my discussion within three major cultural touchstones of the interwar period: degeneration, sexology, and censorship. The competing discourses, ideas, and anxieties relating to gender and sexuality during the

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[18] Burdett, Carolyn, "The Hidden Romance of Sexual Science: Eugenics, The Nation and the Making of Feminism" in *Sexology and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 46.
[19] Lybeck*, Desiring Emancipation*, 6.

interwar period were tied to cultural controversies about the subversive potential of literature in society. Degeneration was often invoked alongside public denunciations of sexual deviancy in literature and art and was used as a basis for censorship. For example, in the infamous censored novel, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), the lesbian heroine Stephen Gordon discovers her inverted sexual identity after finding a book by Krafft-Ebing, a prominent sexologist of the time, in her father's study.

Despite the clear imbrication of public discourses in modernist literature, literary scholarship has tended to focus on one major discourse (i.e: sexology) at the expense of the myriad of other equally important ideas of the period. This practice, I argue, has led to a hermeneutical violence which is particularly detrimental for holistic explorations into how literature and public writing refracted and reimagined the complex interchange of discourses in the interwar period by failing to capture the lived experience of individuals who, though they may have agreed or disagreed at various junctures, were nonetheless situated in the midst of these discourses. Therefore, I find it felicitous to investigate the moments when discourses of sexology, censorship, and degeneration overlapped in interwar European society in order to situate the authors of my project within the overarching ideological currents they explore, challenge, and undermine in their lives and writing.

Degeneration and Decadence

Two major currents of discourse in the modern period, especially relating to modernist art and literature, were tied to two concepts prevalent in society at the time: degeneration and decadence. Degeneration was often evoked as a term of disparagement

and had a negative connotation; on the other hand, decadence was associated with extravagance and a proclivity for bourgeoise ideals. Etymologically, decadence means "decay." Initially, it was used by critics of art in the eighteenth century to suggest a decay in the pure morals of past works of art; however, as the turn of the century came around the term decadence became a descriptive term used by artists seeking to establish their art as oppositional to tradition. "Decadence," according to David Weir, "provides a conceptual focus that helps to unify the cultural transition from romanticism to modernism."[20] Romanticism is marked by emotive and passionate expressions, cohesive narratives, and an affinity for nature and beauty. Modernism is marked by jarring syntax, cosmopolitan characters in urban settings, and a lack of cohesive narration. In the middle is decadence which brings in some of the elements of romanticism while leaving some behind to make room for modernism.

David Weir summarizes this in his book, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism,* asserting, "decadence and degeneration have little in common: one refines corruption and the other corrupts refinement."[21] Both decadence and degeneration were often used when talking about art and literature during the interwar period; however, decadence was often applied to things which had been accepted as having artistic or moral worth, while degenerate was a term used to describe works deemed morally or artistic contemptable. Curiously, the etymology of degeneration combines "de" meaning to fall away from and "genus" meaning birth or ancestry. The word itself implies the

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[20] Weir, David, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), xvi.
[21] Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, ix.

action of moving away from ones' origin and implies a subconscious connection of the past to the present. The etymological implications of "degeneration" suggest a fear not of falling behind or moving backwards but, rather, a fear of moving away from or no longer repeating the ways of the past. By diving deeper into the way each word was used, we are able to gain important insight into the way public discourse about art and artists reflected the social anxieties and social discourse which permeated the interwar period.

A pioneering work of decadent literature at the turn of the century was Joris-Karl Huysmans', *Against Nature* (*À Rebours)* (1884). It focuses on the life and thoughts of Jean des Esseintes, an elite who rejects nineteenth century bourgeoise culture by seeking respite in the idling and extravagant machinations of his own mind. The book follows the tradition of earlier works of French decadence like Baudelaire's poetry collections *The Flowers of Evil* (*Les Fleurs de Mal)* (1857) and *The Spleen of Paris* (*Le Spleen de Paris)* (1869) and works of Theophile Gautier including his novel, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835); however, Huysmans' work marked the point of departure from sheer decadent literature to the mixing of decadence and modernism. The novel's aesthetic inspired many later writers who incorporated themes of decadence into their modernist work, such as Oscar Wilde.[22] In the 1903 preface to his book, Huysman's described his writing process as "without preconceived ideas or definite intentions" and described the character of des Esseintes as a man "winging a swift flight to the land of dreams…living alone and

[22] In fact, *Á Rebours,* famously makes an appearance in Wilde's famous novel, *The Portrait of Dorian Grey* (1890*)*.

aloof, remote from his own country."[23] His description echoes the ideas of romantic literature, but his character sketch takes on a presciently modernist persona of a troubled individualistic character driven mad by their own inner monologues, which found its full realization in literary figures like Joyce's Leopold Bloom and Djuna Barnes' The Doctor. After the publication of *À Rebours*, decadence slipped into modernist works of art and became an aesthetic tool for offering an alternative mode of being that challenged or rebelled against the banality of modern society's industrialization and endless progress.

In his book, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (2014), Vincent Sherry summarized decadence in modernism as "a word for some of the most disturbing and tradition-shaking qualities in modernism."[24] Sherry called attention to the temporal qualities of decadent modernist art; in doing so, he offered an alternative to conventional analysis of the decadent movement, like that of David Weir, which defined decadence as the product of the dialectical relationship between romanticism and modernism. Instead, Sherry pointed to how decadence, as an aesthetic category, ontological subjectivity, and epistemological framework, was enmeshed in the modern period through works of art and literature and underscores its importance for scholarship on the modern period.

According to Sherry, degeneration "tends to emphasize the evidence of regression from the normative values."[25] Yet, most evidence points to the idea that fears of degeneration were not necessarily about regression but rather fears of, as Williams

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[23] Huysmans, Joris K. *Against Nature*. Newburyport: Dover Publications. Accessed November 28, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central, viii.
[24] Sherry, Vincent, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20.
[25] Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence*, 30.

Greenslade puts it, "dark side of progress."[26] In his argument, Sherry builds on the queer re-framing of historical narrations pioneered by Richard Ellman to argue literary histories that link decadence to queerness fail to account for the "temporal imagination of modernism" which is founded on "a possession of the temporal remnant as an all in all" rather than a force which move society forward.[27]

While Sherry's linking of decadent art to a disruptive queer temporality is useful for some aesthetic analysis, his denial of futurity fails to account for the fact that so many artistic works of the modern period deemed as decadent were banned due to fears they would *corrupt* their audiences. Returning to the etymology of degeneration is useful for discussing Sherry's claim because, as I mention earlier, the root word "genus" means "birth or ancestry." In this way, the word seems to imply a fear not of corruption of the past but a falling away from it *towards* a way or being or existing that is no longer representative or connected to that past. Using this reading, the degeneration seems to imply a recognition of a futurity that is not "regressive" but rather, something unprecedented. This is important for two reasons. First, being labeled as having the potentiality to corrupt implies the art has or evokes some sort of futurity which, when recognized, prompted the moral watchdogs of society to denounce the art as 'degenerate.' Second, acknowledging this futurity prompts a deeper investigation into scientific discourses on eugenics and racial superiority and their role in determining the discourse on degeneration and proposed solutions to corruption. It seems, then, what is really

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[26] Greenslade, William. *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 16.
[27] Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence*, 27.

important in discussions of modernism and modernist art is what public discourses of degeneration underscored or implied.

Evidence for the connection of discussions of degeneration in society that discursively tied art with science and medicine can be found in Max Nordau's polemical book, *Degeneration* (*Entartung*) which was originally published in Germany in 1895. A comprehensive ode to the good old days of yore, Nordau's work presents itself as a scholarly analysis of an epoch "unmistakably in its decline" which sought to diagnose the "symptoms" in order to help society determine "what shall be considered good tomorrow."[28] Nordau's book goes to great lengths to analyze the ills of fin-de-siècle society with chapters like "The Richard Wagner Cult" and "The Young German Plagiarists" and eventually concludes with a "Prognosis" that:

> The hysteria of the present will not last. People will recover from their present fatigue. The feeble, the degenerate, will perish; the strong will adapt themselves to the acquisitions of civilizations, or will subordinate them to their own organic capacity…The art of the twentieth century will connect itself at every point with the past, but it will have a new task to accomplish–that of introducing a stimulating variety into the uniformity of civilized life, an influence which probably science alone will be in a position to exert, many centuries later, over the great majority of mankind.[29]

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[28] Nordau, Max, *Degeneration*, (New York: D. Applegate Publishers, 1895), 4 & 7.
[29] Nordau, *Degeneration*, 550.

In this prognosis, Nordau uses jargon from the disciplines of psychoanalysis ("hysteria"), Darwinian Naturalism ("adapt") as well as references the purpose of art and its role in shaping the future while attending to the past. The ideas of Nordau, as exemplary of cultural fears of degeneration, make it clear the fear was not of regression but rather, a fear of unchecked social progress towards a futurity unbridled by the remnants of the past. Furthermore, by concluding with an affirmation of the effectiveness of "science" to "exert" its civilizing force over mankind, Nordau's statement is a shining example of how those who shared his fear of degeneration turned to science–specifically, eugenicist science–as a solution. This point makes more sense when we look beyond art, to the way degeneration was used to define individuals who existed, in one way or another, on the margins of society.

Fears of degeneration were, as William Greenslade asserts, "an enabling strategy by which the conventional and respectable classes could justify and articulate their hostility to the deviant, the diseased, and the subversive."[30] As medical and psychological discourses entered the public sphere they were used as an algorithmic frame to diagnose the social problems of the interwar period for political ends, just as Nordau did in *Degeneration*. Rather than focus outward at external threats to national sovereignty, social reformers and inflammatory public figures focused their attention on the internal problems within their respective communities, cities, or nations. Preying on public fears, officials and political leaders projected social anxieties onto individuals' cases and used civil proceedings to give an appearance of 'curing' the problem; in doing so, they

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[30] Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel*, 2.

engendered distinct boundaries between those who belonged and those who did not, which were informed by prominent medical and legal ideas of the period. Nordau noticed the earlier instances of this phenomena relating to the growing field of sexology and wrote, "sexual psychopathy of every nature has become so general and so imperious that manners and laws have adapted themselves accordingly."[31] The field of sexology became a tool used by public figures and political officials to construct and demonize the 'internal others' of European society in the interwar period; at the same time, it also provided an identificatory vocabulary and social acknowledgement which cultivated and empowered these non-heteronormative communities of others.

Sexology

Sexology, broadly defined, was "the study and classification of sexual behaviors, identities and relations."[32] During the interwar period, prominent sexologists included Havelock Ellis, Magnus Hirschfield, Edward Carpenter, Richard Krafft-Ebing, and Otto Weininger. Individual sexologists used different terms, like "invert," "deviant," "uranian," and "eonist" to describe homosexuals, transvestites, and other non-heteronormative individuals and sexual behaviors. As they fought for prominence, the linguistic differences became a tool of differentiating their theories from others in the field. Sexology entered into public discourse at the same time that eugenicist scientific research was gaining legitimacy in educated circles. These fields were combined in the public sphere to fuel racialized fears of miscegenation. Siobhan B. Somerville aptly

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[31] Nordau, *Degeneration*, 538.
[32] Bland and Doan, "Introduction" in *Sexology Uncensored*, 1.

states, “the beginnings of sexology were related to and perhaps even dependent on a pervasive climate of eugenicist and anti-miscegenation sentiment and legislation.”[33] Moreover, many sexologists had a background in criminology or criminal psychology and this background informed the way they drew links between sexual behaviors and deviancy in their theories. Sexology connected sexual behaviors, sex acts, and gender to evolutionary fitness and mental aptitude. This made it useful for public figures and political officials to use it to pathologize subversive or characterize individuals as ‘deviant’ in legislative hearings. However, the ideas of sexology also opened the door for individuals to validate their own sexual identities and many of the radical writings underpinning the social and political movements of the time borrowed from or were inspired by sexological discourse. In this way, sexology served both a source of liberation and empowerment and a mechanism of social control in interwar society.

Richard von Krafft-Ebing is often credited as transforming sexology into a field of medical science. His work, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), covered topics of homosexuality, sadism, masochism, fetishism, bestiality, and more. Krafft-Ebing, who had trained in criminal psychiatry and worked at a mental asylum, wrote in his preface, “as far as sexual crimes are concerned erroneous ideas prevail,” suggesting his volume would remedy these “erroneous ideas.”[34] He attempted to categorize the multiple manifestations of sexual desires and proclivities using Darwinian models of evolution. In her analysis of Krafft-Ebing’s ideas of same-sex desire, Merl Storr cites Krafft-Ebing’s

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[33] Siobhan Somerville, “Scientific Racism and the Homosexual Body,” in *Sexology in Culture: Labeling Bodies and Desires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 69.
[34] Krafft-Ebing*, Psychopathia Sexualis* (London: Staples Press, 1965), xiv.

belief that, "all humans share the original onto- and phylogenetic bisexuality" and "strongly developed sexual dimorphism is a sign of advanced evolution" to demonstrate how Krafft-Ebing explained bisexuality through the ideas of his scientific contemporaries.[35] In doing so, Krafft-Ebing added new emphasis to the term sexual deviance by suggesting that the expression of same-sex desire was a regression in human development and progress.

In a similar vein were the flagrant ideas of Otto Weininger. Only months after the publication of his book *Sex and Character (Geschlect und Charakter)* in 1903, Weininger committed suicide at the young age of twenty-three. Though Jewish himself, Weininger's ideas on sexology were pervaded by misogyny and anti-Semitism and would later be cited by the Nazi regime. Weininger claimed there was no such thing as a man or woman but only "ideal types" and asserted "our constitution is not fixed," but rather that all humans "oscillate between the masculine and feminine." [36] As Judy Greenway claims, Weininger's theories criticized the feminist movement's privileging of the feminine gender and instead, advocated for emancipation of the individual rather than one sex or another.[37] In another section, Weininger critiques motherhood as representative of a false bourgeoise morality, but then continues to claim women are incapable of self-knowledge because, due to their fluid and amorphous sexuality; they lack the boundaries necessary for "a transcendental morality."[38] He links these feminine characteristics to Jewish

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[35] Storr, Merl, "Transformations: Subjects Categories and Cures in Krafft-Ebbing's Sexology," in *Sexology in Culture: Labeling Bodies and Desires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 14.
[36] Greenway, Judy, "It's What You Do With It That Counts," in *Sexology and Culture: Labeling Bodies and Desires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 29.
[37] Greenway, "It's What You Do With It That Counts," 29.
[38] Ibid, 30.

identity in his book which reflects the dominant trends of racial stereotypes against Jewish men in the period.

Prominent British sexologists, Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis took more progressive approaches in their explorations and research on sexuality. Edward Carpenter was openly homosexual and used his writing as a way to legitimize his own existence by advocating for social acceptance of sexual deviants and homosexuals. Carpenter's theory, inspired in part by Weininger's denial of "ideal types," relied on a continuum of genders to avoid categorizing–and, by extension, social pathologizing–different genders or sexual behaviors. However, in doing so, he relied on the preexisting scientific lexicon used to define racial difference which referred to the "shades" of skin color and referred to mixed-race individuals as "half-breeds," in his discussion of sexuality.[39] Similarly, Ellis who believed homosexuality stemmed from a "retarded development on a congenital basis," believed the difference in sexual preference could be visually distinguishable on the body.[40] Furthermore, Ellis drew upon the historical precedents of scientific investigations of racial difference by claiming this difference was most visible in *female* genitalia and reproductive anatomy.[41] Even in their attempts to create a progressive study of sexual deviancy, Ellis and Carpenter's ideas were fraught with the same racialized and eugenicist biases which fueled fears of homosexuality and social deviants in the period.

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[39] Somerville, "Scientific Racism and the Homosexual Body," 70.
[40] Ellis, Havelock, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F.A David Company Publishers, 1927), 85.
[41] Somerville, "Scientific Racism and the Homosexual Body," 66.

Dr. Magnus Hirschfield, perhaps the most progressive German sexologist, was an advocate for homosexual rights in his theories and writings on sexology. He had numerous patients which he met with to discuss their sexual behaviors, desires, and compulsions in an effort to make sense of their impulses and understand their differences. In 1897, he founded the Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee (Scientific-Humanitarian Committee) in an effort to direct sexological discourse in society toward humanitarian goals. When his Committee met in London in 1929, *The Times* paraphrased Hirschfield's ideas on homosexuals, saying, "…they should neither marry nor have children," but should, however, "…be allowed to live their own lives."[42] Hirschfield directed the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (Institute for Sexual Studies) from 1919 to 1933 in Germany, where he met patients and conducted his research. Due to its controversial work, Hirschfield and his Institute were often targeted by right-wing groups. After the Nazis seized power, they ransacked the institute and burned his books, causing Hirschfield, a Jewish homosexual, to flee to Germany for his safety.

The ideas of sexologists–and sometimes the sexologists themselves–often appeared in various literary publications of the period. Of particular importance for my project, are the instances where sexology appeared in connection with writing about women's issues and experiences of the time. Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis appeared in the feminist magazine, *The Freewoman,* which was edited by suffragette and anarchist Dora Marsden.[43] The journal was notorious for its frank discussion of sexual

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[42] "League for Sexual Reform." *The Times*, 9 Sept 1929. From *The Times Digital Archive*, 9.
[43] *The Freewoman* ran from 1911 until 1913, when it became *The New Freewoman.* Then, in 1914 it morphed into the non-feminist literary journal, *The Egoist*.

issues, banned by literary giant W.H Smith, and was denounced by *The Times*.[44] In July 1913, Ellis wrote that he "admired the energy and courage" of the journal even though he could not identify with "its spirit and outlook" and Carpenter called the journal "broadminded" for its contribution to the "rational discussion of human problems."[45] In Germany, lesbian magazines like *Die Freundin* (Girlfriend) and *Der Skorpion* (the Scorpion) depicted same-sex eroticism and discussed issues of feminism, erotic love, and sexual behaviors using the terms of German sexologists. Historian Claudia Schoppmann, who conducted interviews on the experiences of women in Weimar period, learned that access to homosexual literature often triggered the self-awareness of forming a lesbian identity.[46]

While the terms of sexology helped homosexual individuals feel validated in their sexual proclivities and behaviors, it also provided legislative and governing bodies an expansive group of terms it could use to ostracize and vilify deviant individuals. Describing someone as a 'sexual deviant' was a tactic used to control the behavior of the individual, especially when it came to women. For example, Jodie Medd asserts in her book *Lesbian Scandal and the Culture of Modernism*:

> "…the suggestion of lesbianism is projected onto a variety of actions that need not even qualify as 'perverse female desire'…the extraordinary allegations that suggest lesbianism in this period are rarely really about a

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[44] Greenway, "It's What you do with It That Counts," 36.
[45] Ellis and Carpenter, *The New Freewoman*, "Some Opinions on the Freewoman," July 1st 1913. The Modernist Journals Project. Accessed online at: https://modjourn.org/issue/bdr519694/
[46] Schoppman, Claudia, *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians During the Third Reich*, (New York: Columbia University Press 1996), 96.

> woman's same-sex erotic behavior–they are allegations deployed for other reasons and reference a woman's social standing, her pubic eroticism and performance, or her power as a cultural producer."[47]

The interwar period was marked by a cultural recognition of sexuality as an agent of cultural and political change which represented a threat to the established social order. Literary scholar, Gay Wachman, notes that since women were considered sexually passive, "active sexual desire in a woman was a mark of degeneracy."[48] By expressing desire or embodying their sexuality in an empowering way, women could be accused of degeneracy, oftentimes through accusations of lesbianism or homosexuality. In *Desiring Emancipation*, historian Marti Lybeck argues "claiming sexual subjectivity" was one of the most "threatening aspects" of gender emancipation and explains how women "policed their own and others' actions to make certain that unleashed desire would not compromise their desired autonomy."[49] Women of the interwar period were forced to self-censor their desire in order to preserve the freedom to pursue their other desires. Women who chose not to stifle their sexuality or censor their desires risked becoming targets of legal and political action.

Censorship

Censorship, as made famous by the 1895 obscenity trial of Oscar Wilde, was used by European governments to suppress and control subversive literature, especially that

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[47] Medd, *Lesbian Scandal and the Culture of Modernism*, 10.
[48] Wachman, Gay, *Lesbian Empire: Radical Cross writing in the Twenties* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 22.
[49] Lybeck, *Desiring Emancipation*, 13.

which depicted or was suggestive of sexual immorality. During the First World War, censorship also served as a tool to maintain morale and support for the war effort. Great Britain pioneered censorship during the war by passing the Defense of the Realm Act (1914) which suppressed anything which deviated from the views of wartime propaganda. After the war, British courts continued their censorship crusades by invoking the Obscene Publications Act (1857) and the Hicklin Rule (1868) which defined "obscene" works as "tending to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influence and into whose hands a publication may fall."[50] The "minds" vulnerable to corruption were generally associated with young women and oftentimes the impetus for censoring a work stemmed from a desire to limit women's access to the social and political sphere. However, because censorship cases were sensationalized in the media, they often produced the opposite of the censor's desired effect by bringing discussions of sexuality, obscenity, morality, politics and literature to the center of the public eye.

This was exactly what happened in the events which led to the 1918 libel trial involving actress and performer, Maud Allan. Beginning in 1908, Allan toured Europe while starring in her production, *Visions of Salome*. It was loosely based on Oscar Wilde's book, *Salome* (1891), and involved Allan performing the Dance of the Seven Veils, a sexually charged erotic dance which immediately brought both criticism and fame to her show. A *New York Times* critic described Allan's dance as: "Bare-limbed and scantily draped in filmy gauzes…Miss Allan ... is more beautiful in face and figure than

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[50] Parkes, Adam, *Modernism and the Theater of Censorship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

some of them, and she has a grace, a picturesque personal quality, which is all her own."[51] Not only did Allan's performance involved an expression of an empowered female sexuality, it was tied to the play by Oscar Wilde which added an extra layer of transgression and forbidden sexuality. Given this, it was unsurprising that in February 1918, just a week after an announcement for the show appeared in the British paper, *The Sunday Times*, Allan's performance became the target of a political ad in the pages of *The Vigilante,* a radical right-wing newspaper.

The article, called "Cult of the Clitoris," accused Allan of being a lesbian spy who was using her Salome performance to help German conspirators "propagate evils which all decent men thought had perished in Sodom and Lesbia."[52] The article's author was Noel Pemberton Billing, a member of the Independent Party in British Parliament. Billing was known for his extremist views and leadership of the Vigilante Society which sought to rid England of "the invisible German presence spreading moral degeneracy."[53] In the article, Pemberton espoused fears of German "moral degeneracy" with extravagant claims like "in Lesbian ecstasy the most sacred secrets of the State were betrayed" and insinuating 47,000 high-ranking British officials *and their wives* were implicated in the German scheme.[54] The title of the article, by referencing the clitoris, reinforced to conventional thinking that female homosexual bodies were "less sexually differentiated

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[51] Childs, Kevin. "A Hundred Years On From the 'Cult of the Clitoris' Libel Trial, Let's Remember that Fake News is Nothing New," *The Independent,* 31 May, 2018. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/oscar-wilde-maud-allan-cult-of-the-clitoris-black-book-first-world-war-a8369811.html

[52] Ibid.

[53] Medd, *Lesbian Scandal and the Culture of Modernism*, 29.

[54] Childs, "A Hundred Years On From the 'Cult of the Clitoris' Libel Trial" *The Independent,* 31 May, 2018.

than the norm," because lesbians, along with black woman and nymphomaniacs, were assumed to be "atavists" and "degenerates" and grouped together as "possessors of a primitive sexuality."[55] These ideas stemmed, in part, from eugenic science and sexologists like Havelock Ellis, whose scrutiny of the anatomical differences of female 'inverts' was discussed previously. By mapping difference onto the body, those deemed sexually deviant became visual representations of corruption and degeneracy.

In an effort to clear her name Allan took Billing to court on charges of libel. The case turned into a sensation and Billing, choosing to represent himself in court, used the publicity to further his political agenda. He fed public hysteria and concerns about national and imperial strength by articulating a direct link between sexual knowledge and lesbianism and situating national wartime anxieties about German spying and war mongering in Europe within the female body. During his examination of Allan, Billing pressed her to say whether she thought Wilde's play "expressed spiritual feelings or physical" and asked if she could see "sexual perversion in the play."[56] Later, Billing asked Allan if she knew the meaning of the word "clitoris." In the coverage of the case by *The Times,* Mr. Billing's questions were described as seeming "very wide of the alleged libel."[57] His questions, though vague and disjointed, illuminated an underlying epistemological connection between a knowledge of female sexuality and degeneracy or immorality. Billing's "courtroom antics invited public scrutiny of sexology, foreign

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[55] Bland, Lucy, "Trial by Sexology?" in *Sexology and Culture: Labeling Bodies and Desires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 184.
[56] "Mr. Billing's Trial." *The Times*, 30 May 1918, *The Times Digital Archive*, 4.
[57] "Salome Libel Case." *The Times*, 15 April 1918, *The Times Digital Archive*. 3.

influence, exoticism, and decadence–but rarely of lesbianism;" in this way, the case serves as a key example for how discourses on sexual behaviors and fears of deviancy and degeneration were used during the period to bolster unrelated political and ideological goals.[58]

Laura Doan describes the trial as "an important shift in the visibility of lesbianism in English legal discourse and in the public arena."[59] Gay Wachman asserts the trial was significant because of its "sensationally negative representation of lesbianism."[60] Allan's trial marked the moment the term 'lesbian' entered into the public discourse as a signifier of deviant sexuality; however, the 'deviancy' was linked to a political vulnerability rather than to specific sexual acts. Allan lost the case but was unable to rebound from the damages the sensation caused to her career. Allan's case is a shining example of, as Terry Castle astutely discusses in *The Apparitional Lesbian,* how Western patriarchal society has transposed their anxieties and fears upon the concept of a 'lesbian' and in doing so, has historically dehumanized female desiring subjects.

Allan's trial would be followed by the famous 1928 censorship trial of Radcliffe Hall's lesbian novel, *The Well of Loneliness*. A self-described sexual invert, Hall's short hair and masculine dress came to symbolize the "mannish" female sexual invert coined by sexologist Krafft-Ebing. Although her novel was banned in Britain, it continued to be published and widely read across Germany, France, and America. In Weimar Germany,

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58 Doan, Laura, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press), 33.
59 Ibid, 32
60 Wachman, *Lesbian Crosswriting*, 14.

Britain's banning of *The Well* served as evidence for the "seduction thesis" which was the belief that "publicly visible homosexuality could seduce a normal person into homosexuality."[61] Despite widespread public belief in the seduction thesis; however, Weimar Germany enjoyed one of the freest queer presses in the interwar period, publishing lesbian magazines like *Garconne*, *Der Skorpion*, *Die Freundin* and in Berlin, the first lesbian city guide, *Berlins lesbische Frauen*.[62] These publications, like Hall's novel, gave women access to ideas on sexology, female sexual desire, and same-sex love which aided many women in the self-recognition of their own sexual identities, contributed to budding lesbian subcultures, and created counter-discourses on female sexuality throughout the public sphere. Despite widespread efforts to control and suppress the public awareness of deviant and non-heteronormative sexuality during the time, government officials could not completely control the exchange and dissemination of information in the public sphere during the interwar period.

Conclusion

As government officials and political figures tried to establish order and reinvigorate the vestiges of pre-war Victorian morality, they appropriated many of the new ideas and social epistemologies into their positions, platforms, and policies. Since the new ideas and discourses had tied the social disciplines of medicine and sociology to personal matters like gender, sex, and reproduction they shifted political discussions from

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[61] Morhoefer, Laurie, "The Book Was A Revelation, I Recognized Myself In It: Lesbian Sexuality, Censorship, and the Queer Press in Weimar-Era Germany," in *Journal of Women's History*, Vol 27, No.2, 63.
[62] Ibid, 68.

broad social ills or national problems to individual actions or the personal behaviors of citizens. Fears of declining populations were no longer talked about in the Victorian terms of a nuclear family; rather, they were mediated through denunciations of sexual deviants, inverts, and homosexuals, or the androgynous New Woman. Public pathologizing contributed to cultural constructions of stereotypes which became useful tools in political manipulation and fear mongering. By forming stereotypes and social pathologies and using them as figures to mediate public fears, the epistemological and discursive shifts of the interwar period facilitated the rise of right-wing politics by linking the sexual and the political.

This was especially true in the case of women. As women entered the public sphere and female sexuality and female desire became a major focus of social discourses it prompted an inevitable liberalization of gender norms. It was no longer unusual for a woman to express "choice" in her sexual preferences and popular culture reflected this. However, this shift in social thinking also triggered a shift in medical concern from "the fact of women's sexual activity to their choice of sexual and social partners."[63] As early scholar of gender and sexuality, George Chauncey Jr. pointed out, "the fact that some women chose other women rather than men as sexual partners thus became the primary fact to be explained and condemned" which prompted a move in the interwar period to resexualize women in a way that tied them to men.[64] Thus, conservative interwar

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[63] Chauncey, George Jr., "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: The Changing Medical Conceptualization of Female 'Deviance,'" in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press: 1989), 106.
[64] Chauncey, George Jr., "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality'" 106.

discourses used new medical and scientific ideas as evidence for their claims and ammunition for their quest to link women's sexuality back to men.

The arguments which tied women's sexuality back to men were based in patriarchal and heteronormative ideas about gender roles and biological essentialism. As culture began to venerate female sexual desire and sexual choice, it also postulated sexual desire and choice as the basis for women's "involvement in heterosexual institutions such as marriage."[65] Since women's increased access to jobs and positions in the public sphere had decreased the economic necessity of marriage, linking female sexual desire to the choice of whom to marry was an effective means of reasserting traditional gender norms and sexual behaviors. This combined with the implicit political imaginaries which underpinned social and political fears of degeneration and the cultural controversies about the subversive potential of literature were all used to reinscribe tradition behaviors and norms on those, like women, who sought to live differently during the interwar period. In the following chapter, I look at how Katharine Burdekin critiques the discourses and political trends of the interwar period and their effect on the lives of women and other marginalized subjects in her novel, *Swastika Night* (1937).

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[65] Ibid, 107.

Chapter Two: *Swastika Night* (1937)

"Not God but a swastika
So black no sky could squeak through.
Every woman adores a Fascist,
The boot in the face, the brute
Brute heart of a brute like you." – Sylvia Plath, "*Daddy"*

The shifting political, intellectual, and cultural trends of the interwar period inspired new forms of political engagement and associations. The connections women formed during their work for the war effort coalesced into renewed support for the women's suffrage movement. Women began to take action through protests, meetings, and distributing pamphlets which drew further attention to their new agency in the public sphere. At the same time, many men who returned home from the war, found their jobs occupied by new social actors. Moreover, traditional ideas of the European citizen (a white male) were threatened as new sexological discourses made the homosexual a visible social identity. Women seeking the right to vote challenged patriarchal authority. The increased visibility of 'others' in European society threatened constructions of white male superiority and men's economic and social competition with women after men returned home from the war.[66] With their superior social position as and masculinity as they knew it under siege, many of these disenfranchised men sought refuge in fascist and nationalist groups. Modernist scholar Celia Marshik notes how changing social conditions led to new conceptions of "hegemonic" (e.g: straight, employed, educated) and "subordinate" (e.g: homosexual, poor, working class) masculinities in European society, which in turn, heightened the appeal of right-wing rhetoric and political ideology

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[66] Marshik, Delia and Allison Pease, *Modernism, Sex, and Gender,* (London, U.K: Bloomsburg Publishing, 2019), 95.

which promised to reinstate the old values and traditional conceptions of masculinity in Europe.[67] Writing at the peak of these political tensions and trends, British novelist Katharine Burdekin explored the new political, scientific, and cultural discourses and ideas and the possibilities for the future they opened or foreclosed in her works of utopian and dystopian fiction.

Katharine Burdekin wrote ten novels between 1922-1940. In her novels, she tackled social and political questions of feminism, gender, sexuality and explored the role played by the state in the production of knowledge by situating her stories in futuristic dystopias which mirrored modern Europe. Literary scholar Alex Lothian claims that Burdekin "articulates futures for gender and reproduction and attempts greater feats of 'imagination' than Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) did in that it does not assume that meanings or politics will remain historically stable."[68] Similarly, Andy Croft praised Burdekin's fiction as "undoubtedly the most sophisticated and original of all the many anti-fascist dystopian of the late 1930's and 1940s."[69] Despite this high praise, there remains a surprising lack of scholarship on Burdekin's fantastic novels and the value of her imaginaries and the political interventions and possible futures they explored. This lack is, in part, due to Burdekin's secretive and reclusive literary and personal life.

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[67] Marshik, Delia and Allison Pease, *Modernism, Sex, and Gender,* 95.
[68] Lothian, Alexis, "A Speculative History of No Future: Feminist Negativity and the Queer Dystopian Impulses of Katharine Burdekin's Swastika Night," in *Poetics Today 37:3* (September 2016), 456.
[69] Croft, Andy, "Worlds without End Foisted into the Future: Some Antecedents of Nineteen Eighty-Four," in *Inside the Myth: Orwell; Views From the Left* edited by Christopher Norris (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984), 209.

Radically Reclusive

Most of the biographical information on Burdekin comes from the extensive sleuthing and scholarship of Daphne Patai. In the 1980s, Patai made a connection between a strange writer called Murray Constantine and Katharine Burdekin, ultimately realizing Burdekin used "Murray Constantine" as a masculine penname for some of her publications. Burdekin began using this penname for her writing in 1934, which Patai suggests was a conscious effort to protect her two young daughters in the case of a German invasion of England.[70] Patai continued to investigate the life and work of Burdekin and her research, which is published in the feminist press editions of Burdekin's novels, remains the primary source of Burdekin's biographical information. Patai's research uncovered interesting details about Burdekin's unique personal life, especially Burdekin's choice to leave her husband and live together with another woman while they raised their children. This curious tidbit has led scholars, including Patai, to speculate on Burdekin's possible sexual orientation, but no conclusive evidence has proved anything for certain. While the lack of biographical information makes it difficult to draw direct or conclusive links between the author and her texts. What is known about Burdekin's life, I argue, can help to contextualize what may have influenced her decision to use her writing as a space to challenge the political and social conventions of modern European society.

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[70] Patai, Daphne, "Imagining Reality: The Utopian Fiction of Katharine Burdekin," *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers 1889-1939* edited by Angela Ingram and Daphne Patai (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 239.

By choosing to live an unconventional lifestyle and raise children without a male figure in the household, Burdekin defied the conventions of British domestic and social life in a direct and embodied way. After separating amicably from her husband in 1922, Burdekin moved to the British countryside where she lived with the woman who became her "lifelong friend and companion."[71] The pair shared the role of parenting, domestic work, and income earning equally between them. Burdekin's female companion, interviewed by Patai, chose to remain anonymous which added fuel to academic speculation about the true nature of the woman's relationship and heightens the mystery surrounding the reclusive life of Burdekin. By living in the rural countryside, Burdekin and her partner escaped the criticisms and curiosity of neighbors and lived their lives relatively undisturbed. In her correspondence with Patai, Burdekin's companion described their tangential connection to the literary circles of the interwar period: "we knew many writers but as isolated individuals. Indeed, we always lived in the country, very rustic and private, with sorties to London."[72] The isolated life in the British countryside certainly contributed to her obscurity; nevertheless, evidence and correspondences prove Burdekin was interested and involved in the social, political and literary discourses of the time.

Scholar George McKay noted Burdekin's "friends and admirers" included "Radcliffe Hall, Hilda Doolittle (H.D.), Margaret Goldsmith, and Frederick Voight, as

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[71] Patai, "Imagining Reality," 163.
[72] Cited in English, "Lesbian Modernism and Utopia," 94.

well as the Woolfs and Bertrand and Dora Russell."[73] For example, in a 1934 letter to prominent sexologist, Havelock Ellis, poet H.D, revealed the true identity of Murray Constantine describing Burdekin as "tall, dark, very strange & clever" in her letter implying she was acquainted with the reclusive writer.[74] After this initial letter, H.D acted as an intermediary between Burdekin and Ellis, facilitating a brief correspondence between the two which took place between 1934 and 1937.[75] Their exchange demonstrates Burdekin had a clear interest in the theories of sexology and is an example of how the reclusive writer still had oblique intersections with the literary modernist circles. She often included examples of sexological theories in her novels which contain characters who have no gender, like her protagonist in her novel *Proud Man* (1934) or who are sexual inverts as in her novel, *The Rebel Passion* (1929). As Patai noted, "contemporary reviewers tended to miss Burdekin's important critique of…gender ideology and sexual politics" although some did note the "feminist sympathies" of her texts.[76]

Burdekin's novels were projects of possibility that engaged with nuanced notions of futurity by challenging convention and creating a space where the political and the sexual were one in the same. In her novels, Burdekin pushed past conventional limits of imagination to create new possibilities for gendered and sexual behavior in a similar style to Ursula le Guin (1929-2018). Modernist scholar Elizabeth English highlights the

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[73] McKay, George, "Katharine Burdekin: An Alien Presence in Her Own Time," *in Recharting the Thirties* edited by Patrick J Quinn (Cranbury: Associated University Press,1996), 187.
[74] English, "Lesbian Modernism and Utopia," 93.
[75] Ibid, 95.
[76] Patai, Daphne, "Foreword," in *Swastika Night* [1937] by Katharine Burdekin (New York: Feminist Press, 1985), iii.

utopian elements of Burdekin's fiction noting how Burdekin makes varied sexual identities the source of societal change and upheaval by implying sexual difference is necessary and instrumental in challenging hegemony and the status quo. As English notes, Burdekin defines sexuality in her novels "through the inversion of conventional gendered behavior" and takes a stance "that sexuality and gender intersect and inflect one another" in society.[77] One of the most interesting examples of Burdekin's exploration of the connection of sexuality and politics can be found in her dystopian novel, *Swastika Night,* which engages with rise of fascism in Europe through its prescient predictions and nuanced imaginings of future sexualities.

Prescient and Poignant: *Swastika Night*

Swastika Night was published in 1937 by Victor Gollancz and was reissued in 1940 after it was selected for his Left Book Club.[78] It was one of Burdekin's most widely read novels, having sold about seventeen thousand copies. At that time, however, it was not published with Burdekin's real name. The novel's popularity, it seems, was due in large part to its cultural and political relevancy of its subject matter as well as its nuanced imaginary. The novel takes place in Europe three-hundred years in the future after the Nazis have won World War II. Society is completely dominated by German men and organized as a military hierarchy. The novel, in many ways, is eerily prescient of what would become the actual policies of the Nazi government in the later war years. The Jews have been eradicated. Women are kept separate from the male-centric society in camps,

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[77] English, "Lesbian Modernism and Utopia," 100.
[78] Patai, Daphne, "Imagining Reality: The Utopian Fiction of Katharine Burdekin," 236.

have shaved heads, and are allowed to exist for the sole purpose of reproduction. Hitler, long since dead, is seen as a deity who was not born, but exploded into being. All knowledge of the past comes from the Hitler bible, an appropriation of Hitler's ideas by a man called Von Weid. In the early days of the Reich, Von Weid published a book which, among other things, said women were only good for reproduction, Hitler could never have been born by a woman because of his superior status, and laid the groundwork for the social organization of the current Reich.

The social structure relies on an enforced military hierarchy where loyalty to the German nation is imperative and violence is sanctioned and rampant. The novel is focused on three main characters: Hermann, Alfred, and Von Hess. Hermann is a German soldier, who is simple and brutish and acts as an example of the ideal "German man." Hermann met Alfred during his military training, but the pair are separated by their nationality and class. Alfred is an Englishman, which means he is socially ranked below all Germans; however, he is a skilled mechanic which permits him to work in the German nation for the government. If Hermann is the archetypical German man, strong and loyal to the Reich, Alfred represents the foils to Hermann's best traits: he is inquisitive, defiant, and philosophical.

In the novel, Hermann nearly beats a young choir boy to death in a violent, jealous rage. As a consequence of his action, Hermann and Alfred are brought to the German Knight, Von Hess. Knights, in the novel, are high-ranking officials assigned to oversee regions of the German empire, and Hermann and Alfred must give testimony to Von Hess about the beating. Von Hess notices something strange (the text uses the word

"queer") about Hermann and Alfred which leads him to reveal his family's secret. The Von Hess family has, for centuries, kept a clandestine book which contains the true history of Germany and Europe before the German victory in World War II.

The secret book chronicles the *real* history of Europe and includes an explanation about how the ideas of Von Weid helped create the empire as it exists now. In the book, there is a photo of Hitler with a woman. This is scandalous because it shows women were once permitted in society and had access to a high-ranking Nazi figure. Von Hess asks Alfred to be the book's new protector, since the Knight has no male heirs to keep it, and Alfred takes the book back to his home in England. Hermann, after learning about the contents of the book and having his soldierly loyalty upended, decides his only options are suicide or exile. He chooses exile. Afterwards, Hermann is sent to England where he re-connects with Alfred and helps Alfred protect the secret book. The novel concludes with a frustratingly open-ended conclusion.

In this chapter, I discuss key aspects of the novel that reflect trends of the interwar period to note how Burdekin adeptly highlights how gender roles and sexuality change according to political and epistemic constructs. My analysis begins with a discussion of the function and social role women have in the novel during which I engage with the ideas of feminist historians and Lee Edelman on queer futurity and reproduction. Following that, I describe the homosocial/homoerotic relationships between the male characters in the novel and the role of violence and eroticism in them. My analysis pulls heavily from the work of Klaus Thewleweit on German Freikorp soldiers in his expansive work *Mannerphantasien,* translated as *Male Fantasies* (1986), to convey the

nuances of Burdekin's thinking about the role of the sexual in the political. Finally, I analyze the character of Von Hess and the influence his secret book has on Alfred and Hermann and return to the connections between Burdekin's novel and the real-life happenings in Europe at the time. Throughout the chapter, I draw on the ideas of queer utopianism and futurity, to claim Burdekin's novel reconsiders the importance of social difference, agency, and homoerotic love in the political project of making–*or destroying*– a future.

As studies of sexuality and gender gained their deserved place among academic and cultural discussions, studies on the sexual realm of the political sphere became popular. Studies of fascism, in particular, often detail the homosocial and homoerotic elements of fascist military organizations, political institutions, and social groups. Among these studies is the work of cultural historian Klaus Thewleweit. Using psychoanalytic and critical approaches, Thewleweit explores the historical constructions of German masculinity and fascism by paying particular attention to the function of sexuality and desire in an effort to highlight the libidinal motivations and investments in the construction of masculinity among the German male soldiers. In his discussion, Thewleweit notes the tendency in scholarship to link male homosexuality and fascism using examples like Adorno's aphorism, "totalitarianism and homosexuality go together," as evidence for the trend.[79] Thewleweit warns about the epistemological danger of uncritically linking homosexuality to fascism stating: "it sets in motion a series of

[79] Theweleit, Klaus, *Male Fantasies*, Vol. 1, *Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, translated by Stephen Conway, Erica Carter, and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1987), 55.

prejudices, false ideas, and personal-defense mechanisms, to reach the strained-but-safe conclusion that homosexuals are always first and foremost the *others*."[80] Instead of othering, Thewleweit explores the cultural and historical roots of fascism, trying to understand its appeal and endurance over time.

Thewleweit's approach to analyzing German male homosociality, though it was produced years later, aligns with the male-dominated futuristic fascist world Katharine Burdekin creates in *Swastika Night.* Both Burdekin and Thewleweit, in their own ways, analyze the role of male homoerotic and homosocial desire within fascist organizations and fascist political states; in doing so, both Thewleweit and Burdekin avoid otherizing homosexuals, denouncing homosexuality, or assuming homoerotic desire is inherently tied to fascism. On the contrary, Burdekin decides to make homosexual love a source of resistance and subversion to the fascist state in the novel. Her decision was radical. Burdekin wrote the novel at a time when male homosexuality was illegal in England and under fire in many other parts of Europe. By not otherizing homosexuals, Burdekin forces the reader to confront how their negative reactions to homosexuality in the novel expose their subscriptions to the tenants of right-wing politics.

In this way, Burdekin's novel is similar to the approach Jack Halberstam takes in their approach to studying homosexuality and fascism in their book, *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). Halberstam, like Thewleweit, acknowledges that "homosexuality in fascism…has been subject to all kinds of homophobic projection" and points out that most individuals "prefer to talk about the persecution of the gays by the Nazis" rather

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[80] Theweleit, Klaus, *Male Fantasies*, Vol. 1, 55.

than discuss "their collaboration in the regime."[81] Halberstam explores the homoerotics of fascism to probe questions about the relations between sex and politics and "the erotics of history and the ethics of complicity," which is precisely what, I argue, Burdekin does in *Swastika Night.* I wonder if Halberstam has read *Swastika Night,* and, if not, imagine they would find it worthwhile given their thoughts about the Documentary film, *Paragraph 175* (2000). "The film," Halberstam states "cannot imagine any model of history that would tie a modern viewer with the German male soldier rather than his victim" and explains that "this historical connection" is what they hope to explore in her analysis. Burdekin's novel, as I will describe shortly, does exactly what Halberstam states the documentary film cannot: it allows the reader to identify with a German Nazi soldier.

Homo-Socialism

From the beginning of the novel, Burdekin boldly and bluntly depicts same-sex male desire. The character of Hermann is described as trying to catch the eye of a young choir singer in the Holy Hitler Chapel. Hermann describes the young boy as "a Hero-Angel," "innocent," and "smooth-skinned" which, if not for the boys' singing voice of "unearthly purity and tone," evokes the image of a Greek marble statue rather than a young singer.[82] Hermann objectifies the young boy and turns him into a sexual object; in doing so, the boy is morphed into a sort of celestial angel or marble statue.[83] Immediately after fawning over the young choir boy, Hermann sees a group of women entering the

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[81] Halberstam, Jack, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 148.
[82] Burdekin, Katharine, *Swastika Night* [1937] (New York: Feminist Press, 1987), 5.
[83] This can also be connected to Nietzsche's idealization of the Greeks as masculine archetypes, which I would expand on if I had more time to dedicate to a queer study of Nietzsche.

church and reacts with disgust and hatred. The overt juxtaposition of Hermann's adoration of the young choir boy with his revulsion toward the women allows Burdekin to destabilize her reader's conventional understandings of gender and desire and establish how they are altered in the fascist state.

The homoerotic desire Hermann expresses for the young singer is sexual and objectifying and becomes more interesting when contrasted with how Hermann describes his long-time friend Alfred. As Hermann exits the chapel, he notices a figure standing on the manicured grass. The figure is Alfred, an Englishman who worked as an aeromechanic for the German army. We learn that Hermann and Alfred met while Hermann was in England for his military training. At the sight of Alfred, Hermann is "overcome by a wave of emotion in which love, irritation, fear and a wild sort of spiritual excitement all mingled."[84] While Hermann's reaction to the beautiful young singer expressed his homosexual desire through objectification, his reaction to Alfred implies a mix of emotions and feelings that straddle the line between homoerotic love and homosocial friendship. More importantly, we learn the relationship between Hermann and Alfred–friendship or more–is a transgression.

In the novel, the British are classified as a "subject race," which means Alfred is of a lower social class than all Germans, including Hermann.[85] Despite the difference in social rank, Hermann describes Alfred as "a higher man than he" and "a special Englishman."[86] Rather than view Alfred as a lower being than himself, Hermann respects

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[84] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 21-22.
[85] The other races/nationalities mentioned in the novel are the Japanese and Christians.
[86] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 21.

Alfred and finds his "English untidiness" endearing.[87] Ironically, the notion that Hermann would be attracted to "untidiness" contrasts with the novel's initial scene where Hermann admires the "smooth-skinned" choir boy. Hermann's attraction to the choir boy would be permitted within the Reich society because it could be read as soldierly admiration of a strong male and homosexuality is not punished as long as the men, at some point, have sex with a woman in order to have a son. Halberstam discusses a similar occurrence in real-life Nazi society explaining that the Nazis "deployed homophobia and sexual morality only when and where it was politically expedient to do so…they turned a blind eye so long as participants in the sexual activity under scrutiny were 'racially pure.'"[88] However, Hermann's affection for Alfred would not be permitted in the Reich society because Alfred is a different race and socially ranks below Hermann.

Their international friendship defies the codified social rules and hierarchy of the German empire and represents an instance–perhaps better termed as a utopian impulse–in which same-sex desire can undermine and break past established structures. Hermann describes Alfred as a man who "does not mind being out of step," which Hermann chalks up to Alfred's Englishness and, again, which he finds endearing.[89] The idiom, "being out of step," originates from the practice of soldiers marching in military training; thus, Hermann's choice to describe Alfred with this particular idiom is indicative of how influential the military culture of the German empire on citizens and how they think. Furthermore, the fact that a German soldier would express fondness for a defiant

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87 Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 21.
88 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 154.
89 Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 21.

individual who is socially inferior shows the radical power of homoerotic desire to undermine cultural and political boundaries.

The radical potential of Alfred and Hermann's friendship continues to evolve with the plot. Alfred continues to vocalize his lack of German patriotism and becomes more resolute in his skepticism. For example, while walking together in the woods, Alfred muses about the history of British rebellions in the early days of the empire and discloses his idea that a rebellion "of disbelief" would succeed against Germany by causing the Empire to "rot from within."[90] After this, Alfred goes to sleep. Hermann contemplates what he has heard and Alfred's influence on Hermann wanes ("When Alfred was awake Hermann thought almost like an individual") and Hermann returns to "think[ing] like a Nazi."[91] Not only does the relationship between Alfred and Hermann transgress social norms, but it also alters Hermann's subjectivity and frees him, albeit *momentarily*, from his epistemological and ontological reliance on the Nazi state.

Upon returning to his right-mind, Hermann realizes Alfred has committed treason and recalls the national creed: "*Nothing is dishonorable, nothing is forbidden, nothing is evil, if it is done for Germany and for Hitler's sake*."[92] Realizing it is his patriotic duty to kill Alfred, Hermann pulls out his knife, but he is unable to move:

> "He could imagine it [the knife] dulled with blood, his duty done, his oath fulfilled, his friend lying dead–but he could not, he *could* not make his arm obey him to strike downwards into Alfred's body. Personal love did

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[90] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 26.
[91] Ibid, 31.
[92] Ibid, 32.

> still exist, and Alfred even sleeping had still a stranglehold on Hermann's will. So, he was a traitor, a bad German; he was *soft*."[93]

Hermann is able to *imagine* fulfilling his duty and killing his friend but is unable to physically enact it due to "personal love." In admitting his love by choosing Alfred over his patriotic duty, Hermann becomes a "traitor" and "bad German." The act of identifying with an other, in this case, a non-German individual, is for Hermann also the moment he disidentifies with the German Nazi State. By including this moment, Burdekin refuses to blame fascism on homoeroticism; rather, she offers a glimpse of a futuristic possibility where homoerotic love, admitted and affirmed as such, could be a challenge to fascist ideology.

Burdekin is quick to qualify the utopian potentiality of Alfred and Hermann's homoerotic love by situating it against the backdrop of an all-male society which imposes hierarchy and enforces order through brutality and violence. As Thewleweit points out, the fascist concept of a nation refers to a specific "form of male community…that rises from a 'call of the blood'…a community of soldiers."[94] The consequence of this hyper-masculine community requires the desire of anything other or feminine to be repressed, which according to Thewleweit physically manifests in acts of physical violence against others (Jews, women, etc.). An example of this occurs when Hermann finds the young singer attempting to rape a Christian girl in the woods. Hermann feels "physically jealous" and "loathes" the boy for "being interested in girls." Hermann once again

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[93] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 32

[94] Theweleit, Klaus, *Male Fantasies*, Vol 2, *Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror* translated by Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 81.

objectifies the boy; but this time, as an object he could "smash, tear, make bleed and utterly destroy."[95] Hermann's violent reaction, directed at the boy rather than the girl, shows how homosexual desire also functions as a mechanism to enforce order and adherence to the regime of the hyper-masculine world.

However, this moment of violence is immediately followed by a moment of homoerotic desire which presents a glimmer of hope. Following Hermann's violent outburst, that almost kills the choir boy, he and Alfred must explain the story to a Knight which marks the moment they meet Von Hess. In his defiant spirit, Alfred holds eye contact with the Knight and the two share a moment of homoerotic connection described as, "the mysterious flow, strengthening and ebbing and strengthening again, of two human spirits which are joined in sympathy."[96] The shared homoerotic gaze between Von Hess and Alfred is what prompts Von Hess to divulge the knowledge of his secret book with Alfred and, in doing so, preserving the key to resisting the German empire. Moreover, it has the side effect of "excluding Hermann entirely," which causes Hermann to involuntarily "shuffle his feet" despite standing at attention.[97] Once again, Hermann's homoerotic feelings for Alfred manifest in his body and cause him to physically break from the social conventions and his own military training in involuntary and uncontrollable ways.

Ultimately, homoeroticism becomes the core of what saves the secret book and, therefore, the potential for a non-fascist future. Nazi officials discover the secret cave

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[95] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 47.
[96] Ibid, 43.
[97] Ibid.

Alfred, Hermann, and Alfred's oldest son have been going to in order to read Von Hess's secret book. The Nazis violently burst into the cave and Hermann, in a valiant and instinctive reaction, lunges at them. In the commotion, Alfred's son is able to escape out a passageway with the book but Hermann is killed. The embodied rebellion prompted by Hermann's feelings for Alfred have their aegis in a physical attack of the Nazis–the moment Hermann finally regains control over his body from the State–which leads to his death. When the Nazis ask Alfred why he and Hermann were in the cave, Alfred implies they met there to have sex which satisfies the Nazi soldiers and prevents them from asking further questions. By acting on his homoerotic feelings for Alfred, Hermann ensures the book remains safe. By implying a homosexual relationship with Hermann, Alfred ensures the Nazis do not investigate further and thus protects his son and the book. In this way, homoerotism is instrumental in resisting the State and ensures the utopian hope for a different future (represented by the secret book) will endure.

While careful not to demonize homosexuality, Burdekin still crafts a critique of the male-ruled patriarchal state and its role in the creation of the fascist state. Burdekin and Thewleweit both look beyond the hideous political effects of fascism to remind their readers that fascism can influence the very re-production of society and the "crudest examples of this are to be seen in…male-female relations, which are also relations of production."[98] While the male characters of the novel have moments in which they break from the ideological controls of the German empire, these moments take place in the absence of women. In fact, the only moment a male character has a chance to include

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[98] Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Vol 1, 221.

women in the epistemological resistance is when Alfred goes to visit his newly born daughter; yet, this is also the only moment Alfred becomes disheartened in his quest for change. In this way, by pairing the male homosociality and homosexuality with a glaring absence of women, Burdekin presents a critique about the dangers of a society which defines itself and its members along the lines of difference of any kind.

Women: Re-productive Destruction

Rather than blame fascism on homosexuality, Burdekin separates "a homoerotic masculinity that slots neatly into existing power structures from the kind of gender deviance that would involve men identifying with women's concerns and imagines a world where the former has become so powerful that the latter is no longer possible."[99] Put another way, the masculine world of *Swastika Night* operates on "an individualistic ideology of sexual love" which dovetails "with certain aspects of the fascist state in its production of and securing of bonds between Aryan men."[100] Burdekin's utopian portrayals of male homosexuality and homosociality in the novel are contrasted with the enslavement and exclusion of women as breeders for the reproduction of the Nazi state. Even as she offers hope in the homosocial and homoerotic relationships of Alfred, Hermann, and Von Hess, Burdekin qualifies them with the omnipresent absence of women from the action of the novel. Burdekin is careful to depict this absence not as a result of male fascist homosexuality but as a product of the enactment of hyper-masculine political ideology in Europe.

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[99] Lothian, "A Speculative History of No Future," 463.
[100] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 156.

Although the all-male world of *Swastika Night* may seem like a utopian society of male homosociality, it is a harrowing dystopia for women. In his study, Thewleweit asserts that the dominant historical processes and narratives used to define and represent women have "enabled men to see and use them collectively as part of the earth's inorganic body–the terrain of men's own production."[101] The situation of women in *Swastika Night* is an extreme, though possible, representation of how women's bodies can literally be turned into factories for reproducing the male-dominated society. In the novel, the German empire has eliminated the need for enforcing the nuclear family. Instead, it is replaced by the concept of a paternal State and the notion of familial ties are replaced by ties of nationhood and "Blood." There is no place for women in the nation; however, they remain necessary for its re-production. Saved and enslaved by their biology, women are kept alive in the German empire for the sole purpose of bearing children. Specifically, for bearing strong sons. Through their exclusion from society and otherization, women are no longer desirable. They are no longer objectified; they are commodified. They are "nothing human."[102] Instead, the women of the novel are capital goods necessary for the maintenance and continuation of the German empire. At the same time, they are producing the very conditions necessary for the nation's collapse.

The first encounter with women in the novel takes place in the Holy Hitler Chapel, a secular church built in the shape of a Swastika, where Hermann's thoughts teach the reader that once every three months women are "herded like cattle" from the

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[101] Theweleit, *Male Fantasies,* Vol 1., 294.
[102] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 9.

Women's Quarters to the church to attend the "Women's Worship."[103] The service is less of a religious ceremony and more of an indoctrination session during which the women are reminded of their status and role in society. Above all, the reader learns through the thoughts of the Knight administering the service, that it was important to teach the "younger women that *they must not mind being raped*."[104] As the Knight continues his inner monologue, he explains the only time the "crime of rape" exists is with young pubescent girls because they "might bear puny babies."[105] There is no possible violation of the female bodily autonomy because as producers for the state, women's bodies are property of the state. Instead, the threat lies in the possibility of risking a weak nation by raping a woman before she is capable of producing a strong son for the German nation.

The right-wing political project which encouraged the creation of a strong and fit nation-state (termed by the Nazis as *Volksgemeinschaft*) was widespread in Europe during the interwar period. The women in *Swastika Night* represent not an exaggeration of this idea, but rather, the eventual result of its political implementation. Right-wing platitudes which focused on the idea of national "fitness" preyed on interwar fears of social degeneration. By appropriating the ideas of prominent discourses including sexology, psychoanalysis, and eugenicist science, right-wing politicians were able to demonize particular groups based on race, mental ability, religion, or sexual behavior and construct members of these groups as threats to the order and stability of society. At the

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[103] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 8.
[104] Ibid, 13. Italics my own.
[105] Ibid.

same time, the messages of national fitness and social belonging appealed to women by linking their reproductive capacity to a sense of hope for the future of the nation-state.

The calls for women to join in the construction of a fit and racially pure nation-state were characteristic of the Nazi Party in Germany, but similar rhetoric and sentiments existed across Europe. Many women interpreted these claims as an invitation for women to join the political and social sphere. Fascist calls on women to do their patriotic or national duty by actively contributing to the state, at least initially, were a key way the Nazis gained such a high volume of female support. Historian Claudia Koonz explores this phenomenon in her book, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (1986), which explores the role women played in the early creation of the Nazi State stating that "far from remaining untouched by Nazi evil, women operated at its very center."[106] In fact, it was German women's early support of the Nazi state which facilitated policies of moving Jewish individuals into ghettos outside of major metropolitans and, later, to concentration camps. Perhaps, Burdekin noticed the role women played in the early days of the Nazi's rise to power in Germany, since she refuses to absolve the women in her novel of their complicity in creating the Reich.

The German empire in *Swastika Night* relies on the exclusion of women from the State to justify their reproductive exploitation, much like the real Nazi State relied on the otherization of Jews to validate and perpetuate its racial and sexual policies. The women of the novel have been completely desexualized and dehumanized, but they are described

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[106] Koonz, Claudia, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (London: Routledge, 2013), 5.

in ways that were eerily prescient of descriptions of Jewish individuals in concentration camps ("small shaven ugly heads" and "ugly soft bulgy bodies").[107] Although the novel makes no direct mention of the Jewish race, it's not a far leap to assume that when imagining what the a 300-year German Reich would be like, Burdekin guessed the Nazis would eventually eliminate or remove Jewish individuals from the Reich and, that afterwards, the Reich would be in need of a new "other" to solidify and ensure the perpetuation of the German nation-state: women.

The logical jump from Jews to women was not without historical precedents. Thewleweit commented on the long-standing tradition of treating women as inferior subjects stating "women have nothing to do with the state…they are on par with the colonized races."[108] Moreover, anti-Semitic propaganda often used anti-Semitic stereotypes which feminized Jewish men and associated Jewishness with female qualities like sexual promiscuity, lavishness, and guile which were perceived as negative. By constructing the women in the novel as dehumanized, colonized subjects who are forced to exist outside of, yet still produce for, the German state, Burdekin makes it clear that the oppression of women is tied to the political structures and practices of Western imperialism and colonialization. Burdekin recognized the inherent paradox of the futuristic utopian nation-state: while women are allowed to *reproduce* it, they do not *produce* it, nor is there a place for them *within* it.

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[107] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 9.
[108] Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Vol 1., 63.

After Von Hess shows Alfred the secret book, he describes the role women in the past had in European society. Von Hess claims women have always lived according to "an imposed masculine pattern" and explains that after the victory of the war German men wanted "women to be at their will like the women of a conquered nation"[109] In this dialogue, Burdekin underscores the connections of imperialism, colonization, and patriarchy. She portrays women as a colonized people. The women in *Swastika Night* are caught "between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation" and come to occupy "the displaced figuration of the 'third world' woman caught between tradition and modernity."[110] Burdekin uses the women in the novel to demonstrate that what separates the European woman from the colonized woman and what protects the European woman from experiencing the violence and discrimination faced by colonized women, are artificial boundaries created and enforced by men which are socially malleable and temporally contingent.

Burdekin makes this comparison tangible and demonstrates it as an immediate possibility for the reader's present by representing a moment when a German woman is killed. In the preface of the secret book, the Old Von Hess describes seeing a body by the side of the road:

> "It was the naked body of a woman, young, he thought, but the face was so mangled he could hardly tell. They eyes were torn out and the nostrils slit up. The hair had all been pulled out, leaving nothing but the ghastly

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[109] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 109 & 81.
[110] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *Can The Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* edited by Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 306.

> red skull-cap of blood. The body was covered with innumerable stabs and cuts…The nipples had been cut off…Next day he [Old Von Hess] learned it was the body of a girl who had laughed at a band of the new 'Von Weid Women,' a pretty young girl who didn't mind Hitler being God but couldn't see why women should be ugly."[111]

In this gory description, Von Hess realizes a young woman has been brutally attacked and mutilated because she "laughed" at supporters of the right-wing ideas of Von Weid and she "didn't see why women should be ugly." This moment represents a turning point in the past where support of the German empire became a matter of life and death; in addition, it signifies the turning point for how German women were seen and treated in society. The young girl is scalped in order to destroy her beauty and remove her feminine sexuality. By cutting off her nipples, the attackers have symbolically removed the girl's femininity and figuratively ended her ability to breast feed which is an act of motherhood. The extreme violence represents "the realization that white, Western subjects can be dehumanized in the ways that seem natural for racialized others," which Burdekin uses to amplify the threat right-wing ideas about gender and sexuality posed for *all* non-male groups.[112]

Burdekin's warnings continue through the dialogue of Von Hess and Alfred. Von Hess asserts, "It's an unnatural crime to allow something totally different from yourself to impose a pattern of living on you," which serves as a repudiation of any individual

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[111] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 84.
[112] Lothian, "A Speculative History of No Future," 447.

who acquiesces to the rules and norms of the patriarchal state and society.[113] Burdekin uses this opportunity to call attention to women's complicity, unconscious and subconscious, in supporting their own oppression. As Von Hess says "the pliancy of woman is the tragedy of the human race."[114] Gesturing at the political situation in Germany at the time of *Swastika Night's* publication, Von Hess mentions that women were "wildly enthusiastic" about Hitler and "everything he did" in the early years of the Reich.[115] Later on, Von Hess denounces women of the past because they were "aiming at equality only" which is a not-so subtle criticism of the interwar feminist and suffrage movements.[116] The *equality* women sought through the suffrage movement was to have equal political rights to men, but, as Burdekin hints at through the comments of Von Hess, in reality it was really the *equal* right to participate in a male-created and male-dominated system. Women had to vote for a man, and in doing so, became complicit in their own acquiescence to male authority.

Burdekin was not the only modernist author to notice this paradox of the interwar feminist and women's suffrage movement. The poet Mina Loy (1882-1966) wrote in her "Feminist Manifesto" (1914) that "professional and commercial careers are opening up for you" and then questioned women with the rhetorical injunction, "is that all you want?," which is echoed in Von Hess's statement that women were "aiming at equality only."[117] Loy continues throughout her manifesto to push women towards an idea of

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[113] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 110.
[114] Ibid, 109.
[115] Ibid, 110.
[116] Ibid, 109.
[117] Loy, Mina, "Feminist Manifesto," November 15th, 1914. Held in the Beinecke Library Collections at Yale University. Accessed from: https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3483137

femininity that is not subject to, or defined by, patriarchal social norms. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), too, criticized the feminist movement for seeking to emulate masculinity in her book, *Three Guineas* (1938). In the essay, Woolf portrays the feminist movement as successful in gaining women access to the financial means to pursue education and other pathways to individual betterment; however, she notes that by viewing these opportunities as the ultimate achievement rather than stepping-stones, women are perpetuating and participating in the structures of patriarchal hierarchy rather than dismantling them.

The overarching link between the critiques made by Loy, Woolf, and Burdekin is that the feminist movement led women to reproduce the masculine norms of society. The feminist movement was perceived as failing because it did not allow women to cultivate political and social subjectivities outside the constraints and conventions which were already in place in European society. By setting the final goal of the movement as "equality" with men, the feminist movement maintained the patriarchal idea of masculine superiority. Rather than the creation of a wholly new idea of female political subjectivity which was defined by women themselves, the power of identity construction remained in the hands of men. Burdekin's representation of women as reproductive slaves represents this in a nuanced and visceral way. The women of *Swastika Night* are engaged in a two-fold project of reproduction: biological reproduction, by bearing sons, and the social and ideological reproduction of the Nazi empire because they have internalized their own subjection and believe themselves to be inferior to men.

A close reading of Von Hess's claim, "It's an unnatural crime to *allow* something totally different from yourself to *impose* a pattern of living on *you,*" contextualizes Burdekin's portrayal of women in the novel within a broader critique of European society during the interwar period.[118] The verb "allow" implies a subject who lacks, or fails to take, personal agency over their identity, their decisions, and more broadly, their everyday lived experience. Noticeably, it is "some*thing*" not "some*one*" who imposes the regime. With this subtle distinction, Burdekin includes institutions or cultural practices (e.g: the law, the church, heterosexuality) as possible culprits of imposed patterns of living. Furthermore, the "you" at the end of the sentence acts an apostrophe which implicates the reader in the creation of the dystopian future and destabilizes the comfortable binaries of reader and character, reality and fiction, and most pressingly, dystopia and present.

The Secret (of) Book(s)

Burdekin underscores the destabilizing effects of literature through the secret book Von Hess shows to Alfred and Hermann. Von Hess's great-great-great-grandfather wrote the book in an attempt to preserve the historical memory of Germany's past in response to the attack on memory which took place in the empire after the Nazi victory in Europe. It was an attempt to preserve the historical memory of how things had been in hopes that it would demonstrate the fallibility of the empire's present organization. The book remained safe in the Von Hess family due to their status as Knights in the German Empire. The burden of keeping the book had been passed from father and son; however,

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[118] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 110.

Von Hess's three sons died in a plane crash. Without a male heir, Von Hess thought the book and its memories would die with him, until he meets Alfred and Hermann and is moved by Alfred's "queer" and defiant behavior. After this encounter, Von Hess is moved to share the secret of the book.[119] Following this, Burdekin uses the book, its contents, and the character's reactions to it as an argument for the radical potential of literature and against its censorship.

In the secret book's preface, the old Von Hess describes how the excessive German pride which followed their WWII victory was laced with a "fear of memory" about the past.[120] This fear reached "its expression" in the book of a "bloodthirsty scholar" named Von Weid.[121] In his book, Von Weid sought to prove, beyond a doubt, the stories fabricated by the German empire for propaganda. He "proved" that "Hitler was God" and explained he was not "born but exploded," which elevated Hitler to a deity and cut his mother–and by extension, women–out of the story.[122] He also "proved" women were not human but "a kind of ape" which was necessary to justify their exclusion from the empire.[123] Finally, he proved everything that was "said, thought or done" before Hitler was the "blackest error of subhuman savagery" and called for its elimination.[124]

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[119] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 43.
[120] Ibid, 79
[121] Ibid.
[122] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 79. N.B: Athena, the Greek God of wisdom and war, was said to have exploded out of Zeus's forehead.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.

Additionally, Von Weid included remedies to fix the ills of society–in a diagnostic fashion similar to that of Max Nordau–which included the separation, shaving, and dehumanization of German women and the censoring and elimination of anything which conflicted with Von Weid's ideas. Von Weid's sexism shrouded in eugenics (equating women with monkies) and his colonial racism (connecting blackness to savagery) are direct parallels of the contents and discourses in Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892). Von Hess explains Von Weid's book was popular "with a large section of men" who were so proud of having won the war, they felt it was beneath their dignity "to risk rejection by a mere woman," an implicit jab by Burdekin at the virulent sexism of Nordau's book and its underlying motivations as well as a broader commentary on the libidinal appeal of right-wing rhetoric to men during the interwar period.[125] Von Weid's suggestions were eventually adopted as official policies and practices by the Reich Government.

The old Knight opposed the implementation of Von Weid's ideas and was concerned about the lasting effects of the loss of cultural memory; however, as a Knight he risked death if he opposed the policies. Unable to speak out, the old Knight turned to the one way he could resist: *writing*. Von Hess describes his ancestor as "no scholar" but "simply a man who had read a good many book to amuse himself."[126] The old Knight's proclivity for reading, ultimately, becomes an impetus for his rebellion against the Nazi state. Moreover, it illuminates the political power of reading and writing as a

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[125] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 81.
[126] Ibid*,* 74.

universalizing element. While Von Weid was a scholar who used writing to destroy memories of the past, the Old Knight was "no scholar," but a simple bibliophile, who used writing to preserve the historical memory. If *Swastika Night* represents a dystopian future built on the social ideals espoused by thinkers like Nordau and right-wing Nazi ideals, the books of Von Weid and Old Von Hess's call attention to the important role literature can play in *creating* or *resisting* the threat of a totalitarian state.

While set in a "futuristic" Europe, there are traces of "the past," which represent ties to the reader's "present" throughout the novel. Burdekin wrote and published *Swastika Night* in the years following the Nazi takeover of the German Government. Europe was on edge as the threat of fascism and right-wing political ideas spread across the continent and in England. After watching the Nazi Government impose harsh controls on the daily lives of citizens, Burdekin saw the threat of "Nazism as a potential annihilation of scientific, technological, and all other potentially hopeful futures."[127] The dystopian world of *Swastika Night* was not unimaginable or far-away but a tangible possibility for the future of Europe which could be, and needed to be, prevented. By knitting the roots of the German Empire in *Swastika Night* so closely to Burdekin's present political, social, and cultural realities, the novel becomes a skeleton key which opens the doors that hide the roots of right-wing appeal and unlocks the gateways to possible avenues of resistance to the fascism.

Burdekin believed the subversive power of literature stems from writing's ability to blur the boundaries between past, present, and future. She puts this belief into practice

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[127] Lothian, "A Speculative History of No Future," 457.

by making the rise of right-wing ideas in her interwar present serve as evidence for the fascist future she imagines in the novel. Additionally, she includes a testament to the subversive power of literature through her representation of how literature influences the characters. For example, Von Hess explains that while parts of Von Weid's book were incorporated into the "Hitler Bible," the book itself was destroyed because:

> "How can you keep a book which proves a man is God, or that advocates the destruction of records of other civilizations? It simply proves those things were there and the Hitler was not always divine. There was plenty of Memory in Von Weid's book."[128]

Even a book like Von Weid's, which vehemently and violently tried to un-do and disprove the past, betrays itself because it contains the memory of the past in the act of refuting it. Much like the word degeneration implies a "genus," a birth or origin which is being moved away from, Von Weid's book, by implicitly recognizing a past before itself which it must disprove, is an example of how memory (cultural, historical, social, or otherwise) can be contained in literature. It is radical and subversive, Burdekin tells us, because "Memory" of the past (as in Von Weid's book) can contradict lies and impositions in the future; similarly, "Memory" of the present (as in *Swastika Night*) can anticipate future consequences and prevent their occurrence. She underscores the power of memory by capitalizing it and making it a proper noun ("Memory") imbuing the concept with a person-like agency. In this way, both Von Hess' secret book and Burdekin's novel itself force the reader to look critically at their present by

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[128] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 80.

simultaneously looking forward and looking backward. The paradoxical power of literature is where Burdekin believed the glimmers–the potentialities–of utopian hopes for an emancipated future were present.

Conclusion

Swastika Night is a book about a possible future that refuses to distance itself from the present; yet, it remains firmly entrenched and reflective of it. In this way, Burdekin tactfully defamiliarizes her reader from the traditional comforts that come with engaging in narrative fiction. Instead, her readers experience a discomfort "at the unusual portrait of their own society."[129] Literature's ability to affect discomfort and destabilize the reader is, it seems, why Burdekin chose it for her "arena of action" to engage in critical critique and analysis of the present structures and conditions of interwar society. While offering fractals of utopian futures and glimmers of dystopian possibilities, Burdekin refuses to offer an easy solution to, or explanation for, right-wing political thought. Instead, she chooses to represent a dynamic portrait of the multiple nodes and vectors of power in society.

Through her dystopian portrayal of a futuristic Europe governed by the Nazi empire, Burdekin cautions her readers to recognize when foreclosures of the future take place and, in the words of Lothian, "to attend to their complications–the most crucial of which is that the commonplace opposition between queerness, whether understood as homoerotic desire or as deviant gendered subjectivity, and reproductivity does not hold

[129] Patai, Daphne, "Imagining Reality: The Utopian Fiction of Katharine Burdekin," 232.

across multiple times and spaces."[130] In this way, Burdekin challenges the epistemological constructions of gender and sexuality in the interwar period and represents how these constructions can be leveraged for political oppression, social manipulation, and cultural control. Using the conversations and interactions between the characters, Burdekin draws links between the erotic and the social, the sexual and the political, and the economic and reproductive; in doing so, Burdekin demonstrates that "fascism is not a monster that rears its ugly head now and again, it is always present in our daily relationships with each other."[131] The next chapter will discuss how another author, Djuna Barnes, presents a critique of right-wing ideology and cultural trends in the interwar period through the lens of gender and sexuality in her brilliant novel *Nightwood* (1936).

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[130] Lothian, "A Speculative History of No Future," 469.
[131] Russell, Elizabeth, "The Loss of the Feminine Principle in Charlotte Haldane's *Man's World* and Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*,"in *Where No Man Has Gone Before: Women and Science Fiction* edited by Lucie Armitt (London: Routledge, 1991), 26.

Chapter Three: *Nightwood* (1936)

"…in fact, my greatest virtue is I never use the derogatory in the usual sense." – Mathew O'Connor[132]

"[It is] inappropriate to use the word perversion as a term of reproach." – Sigmund Freud[133]

If the world of *Swastika Night* gave its readers a possible dystopian future in order to critique the present, Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* gave its readers insight into the parts of their present which were seen as dystopian. Originally published in England in 1936, *Nightwood* is both notoriously ambiguous and difficult, and poignantly beautiful and expansive. The novel, much like its characters, continually defies attempts to categorize or canonize it. While it is a modernist classic in a broad and colloquial sense, the categories of "classic" or "modernist" are nebulous themselves and do not quite encompass the zeitgeist of *Nightwood*. The novel contains hallmarks of high modernist fiction including alienation, unconventional narrative, social ennui, and attention to the unconscious; however, its focus on the marginalized of society and blunt depictions of so-called social and sexual deviants distinguish the novel from its high modernist contemporaries. *Nightwood* has been referred to as a work of "lesbian modernism," "feminist fiction," and "sapphic modernism," but the most commonly quoted description comes from Jane Marcus, who called it a "modernism of marginality."[134]

Put another way, the world of *Nightwood* is a world of otherness; it is a "conceptual space in which the normative becomes…the excluded, the taboo, and the

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132 Barnes, Djuna. *Nightwood* (New York: New Directions Press, 1937), 177.
133 Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth, *Freud on Woman: A Reader* (New York: Norton & Co, 1990), 14.
134 Marcus, Jane, "Laughing at Leviticus: Nightwood as Woman's Circus Epic," in *Cultural Critique, No. 13* (Autumn 1989), 147.

unmentionable."[135] By making those deemed the degenerates of society the focus of the novel, Barnes humanizes and recognizes those who were stigmatized in the interwar period by European society. Although the novel does not explicitly mention the ideology of fascism or German Nazism, by depicting degenerate behaviors and social deviants, it refutes right-wing discursive trends and public denunciations of marginalized and stigmatized groups. The "Aryan Superman is absent from the text," as Jane Marcus notes, and his "uprightness is the ethic which the characters' abjection opposes."[136] *Nightwood* blurs the established social binaries of real/unreal, grotesque/beautiful, night/day, love/desire, writing/speaking, truth/lie through ingenious deployment of stylistic syntax, temporal shifts, decadent settings, and the characters themselves. The novel's focus on non-normative individuals (Jews, homosexuals, abortionists, prostitutes, ect.) purposely plays with the conventions of what is socially permitted and what ought to remain private. It defies discursive and legislative efforts to contain or limit expression of non-heteronormative identity or sexuality–a practice which Barnes upheld throughout her life.

Biography

Prior to writing *Nightwood*, Barnes's early writings focused on the lives and experiences of working-class individuals. From October to December 1913, while working as a reporter and illustrator for the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle,* Barnes wrote a series called "Veterans in Harness," which explored the lives of a postman, a waiter, an elevator

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[135] Boone, Joseph Allen, *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 235.
[136] Marcus, "Laughing at Leviticus," 147.

operator, and a physical culture teacher.[137] In another article, she interviewed a dentist who pulled teeth for free near Coney Island capturing the tonality and alliteration of the Dentist's spiel. In fact, her unconventional writing practices contributed to a sort of mythology about Barnes. She gained a reputation for her "reportorial energy and toughness," which landed her interviews with famous characters like the bank-robber "Baby Face" Nelson.[138] Regardless of her subject, Barnes' early journalism tried to "make the reader aware of the strange and contradictory nature of the quotidian world."[139] Her writing features were called subjective journalism because they captured the world and its inhabitants as Barnes saw it. The subjective quality of her articles set Barnes apart from other journalists and helped contribute to her growing notoriety.

Barnes continued to push the conventions of journalistic practice and blur the boundaries of subjectivity and objectivity, experimenting early on with the political potential of writing. From 1913 until 1920, when Barnes moved to Paris, she continued to engage in journalism and freelance work oftentimes pushing the limits of convention and professional propriety to capture the essence of a story. In 1914, Barnes worked on a feature for *World Magazine* discussing the hunger strike of the English Suffragists. The Suffragists had been force-fed by officials and Barnes, in an effort to be able to write about their experience, was force-fed with a tube. In the article, "How it Feels to be Forcibly Fed," she described the experience in graphic detail concluding with: "If I, play-

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137 Goody, Alex, *Modernist Articulations: A Cultural Study of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy and Gertrud Stei*n (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 35.
138 Levine, Nancy J, "Bringing Milkshakes to Bulldogs," in *Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes* (Carbonville and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 32.
139 Ibid, 29.

acting, felt my being burning with revolt at this brutal usurpation of my bodily functions, how they who actually suffered the ordeal in its acutest horror must have flamed at the violation of the sanctuaries of their spirit."[140] By being fed with a feeding tube, Barnes crossed the objective boundary of reporter and subject and embodying both positions simultaneously.

At the same time, Barnes was keenly aware of the social impulse to fetishize, objectify, and otherize things which deviate from social standards of normativity. She resisted this impulse through her writing and her life. In fact, her career as a news reporter ended in 1918 when she was fired by her editor for refusing to divulge the "facts about a rape case she had investigated."[141] Similarly, she denounced the practice of objective criticism describing it as "nothing more than the eye garrulously denouncing the shape of the peephole that gives access to hidden treasure."[142] Even in her own life, Barnes refused to allow herself to be an object of inquiry or use her status as a renegade writer for social clout. In a 1971 interview for the *New York Times* with Henry Raymont, Barnes described being invited to people's homes because they thought she was "amusing" and tersely said, "So I stopped it."[143] For Barnes, the only difference between the extraordinary and the ordinary was the artificial value society placed on something instead of another and she was averse to the processes and people which engaged in these practices.

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[140] Barnes, Djuna, "How it Feels to Be Forcibly Fed," *New York World Magazine*, 6 September 1914, sec. 5, p. 17.
[141] Levine, "Bringing Milkshakes to Bulldogs," 33.
[142] Ibid, 32.
[143] Ibid, 33.

Even when Barnes left America in 1921 and moved to the bustling scene of Paris' Left Bank, she preferred to exist on the periphery of the elite artistic circles. She rarely spent time in their exclusive bookstores of Shakespeare and Company or La Maison des Amis des Livres, which were hubs of literary criticism and modernist production.[144] Instead, she preferred solitude and "her vicious wit often turned on those who intruded upon her solitary mood."[145] While Barnes was close with James Joyce, whom she called Jim and regarded as an equal, most of Barnes's socializing took place among the lesbian circles which frequented the infamous salons like that of Natalie Barney. In these circles, Barnes spent time with Peggy Guggenheim, who provided Barnes the financial support which allowed her to live and write in Paris, and met Thelma Wood, with whom Barnes would have an impassioned and troubled relationship. The life of the Paris salons and her relationships with their female attendees became the focus of Barnes' writing while in Paris.

If Barnes's early journalistic work in America is emblematic of Barnes's early commitment to denying voyeurism, her publications in Paris reflect a theoretical and historical investigation into the legacies of patriarchy and social control on the ability of women, especially lesbian women, to exist and express their female sexuality. The three works Barnes wrote while in Paris, *A Book* (1923), *Ryder* (1928), and *Ladies Almanack* (1928), were all focused on the nightlife of the Parisian Left Bank and included topics of lesbian love and female sexuality. *Ryder* became a best-seller in America in the same

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144 Benstock, Shari, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris*, 1900-1940, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 230.
145 Ibid, 236.

year that *Ladies Almanack* circulated among underground lesbian communities in Paris. While *Ryder* was perhaps a more serious literary work which focused on Barnes's childhood experiences and explores questions of gender and sexuality, the *Ladies Almanack* was a political statement which celebrated women's bodies and lesbian sexuality by illustrating "the effects of man's effort to define woman" and providing "different images for women."[146] In an early example of what French feminist Helene Cixous termed *écriture feminine,* Barnes insists on writing the body into her work and, especially in her Paris writing, recognizes how the vestiges of patriarchal inscriptions on women's bodies (and bodies of the 'other') function in political and social spheres.[147]

Slumdogs Without Heirs

It is unsurprising that Barnes's next novel, *Nightwood*, features elements from her own life in Paris and depicts the relationship between her and Thelma Wood. Barnes wrote the novel during the 1930s, while she traveled between North Africa, England, New York, and Paris. These travels, particularly to North Africa, no doubt influenced the novel's references to colonialism and imperialism which are grounded in the bodies of the characters. The plot, or the approximation of one, revolves around four main characters: Felix Volkbein, a Jewish Baron; Nora Flood, an American journalist who stands in for Barnes; Robin Vote, a strange figure who represents Barnes' partner Thelma

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146 Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*, 251.

147 It's interesting to note that Cixous cited James Joyce as an example of this practice, yet, as far as I know, does not offer the same praise for Barnes, even thought she was his contemporary and Joyce often collaborated with Barnes.

Wood; and Doctor Mathew O'Connor, a quack abortionist and transvestite prone to drunken diatribes.

We come to know the characters and their motivations, as T.S Eliot writes in his preface for the novel, "through their effect on each other and by what they say to each other about others" and therefore never really come to know them at all.[148] Most of the scenes take place in smoky bars, dimly lit rooms, and dark streets, and the action almost always occurs at night. The characters come into contact through strange meetings in hotel rooms, bars, clandestine soirees, and a circus. The progression of the novel is loosely centered on the movements (figurative and literal) of Robin Vote as she becomes involved with Felix, and then Nora, and then a more minor figure, Jenny Petherbridge. Meanwhile, the character of Doctor O'Connor tries to narrate and explain the strange happenings of the plot. Despite his best efforts, his attempts only contribute further to the impossible quest of making sense of the characters and their actions.

In her analysis of *Nightwood* in "Laughing at Leviticus," Jane Marcus refutes criticisms of the novel's decadence and critics' implications that Barnes had an affinity for fascism. Marcus focuses on *Nightwood's* preoccupation with "the abject" and compares it to Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1965) to argue *Nightwood* is a "kind of feminist anarchist call for freedom from fascism."[149] Although Marcus wrote her article in 1989, it remains, in my opinion, one of the most compelling discussions of the political project and radical potential of *Nightwood*. In the rest of this chapter, I build

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[148] Eliot, T.S, "Preface" in Nightwood by Djuna Barnes (New York: New Directions Press, 1937), xv.
[149] Marcus, "Laughing at Leviticus," 144.

upon Marcus's claims with my own analysis of Barnes's critique of right-wing politics and attempt to further her argument by focusing on the representation and function of deviant sexualities and transgressive sexual desire in the text.

I read *Nightwood* as a queer text because it carries the "inscription of sexuality as something more than sex."[150] Writing about the political and social power of non-normative sexuality desire forty years after *Nightwood's* publication, Guy Hocquenghem described "homosexual desire" to be neither "on the side of death nor the side of life" but as "the killer of the civilized egos."[151] His ideas align with Marcus's claim that *Nightwood's* project is to "expose Freudian psychoanalysis's collaboration with fascism in its desire to civilize and make normal what it considers to be the sexually aberrant misfit."[152] The novel forces readers to face the individuals and ideas that interwar society sought to repress: that is, the social unconscious. To do this, I argue, *Nightwood* unravels interwar discourses about psychoanalysis and sexual deviance and challenges their authority in the present; in turn, Barnes questions the role these discourses should have in shaping the future. Furthermore, the novel calls attention to the libidinal and erotic elements of the political and social realm to show the subversive capacity of deviant sexualities and transgressive sexual desire.

I elucidate and explore these claims in the rest of this chapter. In the first section, I discuss the character of Doctor Matthew O'Connor and argue he functions as a parody

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150 De Lauretis, Teresa, "Queer Texts, Bad Habits, and the Issue of a Future," in *GLQ 17:2-3* (2011), 244.
151 Hocqueghem, Guy, *Homosexual Desire* translated by Daniella Dangoor (Durham: Duke University Press, 1974), 150.
152 Marcus, "Laughing at Leviticus," 164.

of Freud which Barnes uses to call into question the ideas of psychoanalysis. Next, I focus on how Barnes inverts the interwar conceptions of 'normal' through her characters and their descriptions. I note her use of Jewish stereotypes to describe non-Jewish characters and argue that this leads to a sense of solidarity between the characters who would be stigmatized for their sexual or racial identities in interwar society. In doing so, I explore how Barnes connects the concept of 'the night' to the conceptions of nationhood and belonging. In the final section, I return to Freudian psychoanalysis to offer a reading of *Nightwood*'s ending and the relationships of the characters as playing with Freudian structures and ideas. Through this reading, I suggest that Barnes wants to represent non-normative sexuality and behaviors as imbued with the power to reshape and reconfigure the normal modes of society.

Psychoanalyst of the Night

Freudian psychoanalysis was in vogue at the time Barnes was working on *Nightwood*. Much of Freud's practice involved making sense of what his patients said (usually about their childhood) by connecting it to long-standing narratives which represented various forms of physic repression or obsessions (e.g: the myth of Oedipus represented repression of the castration complex); and these, in turn, gave meaning to and explained the actions or impulses of his patients. The new ways of thinking about the human mind and behavior espoused by Freud and his followers had prompted new forms of artistic experimentation. For example, Freud's ideas of the subconscious and unconscious, which he discussed in relation to dream analysis, influenced the works of the early French Surrealists. Furthermore, the practice of psychoanalysis during which

patients would speak in a long stream of free-association arguably inspired the literary trend, famously used by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, known as stream-of-consciousness. In this section, I explore the implicit and explicit links Barnes draws between her novel and Freudian psychoanalysis.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) began practicing psychoanalysis in Vienna during the turn of the century. His earliest writings on psychoanalysis and sexuality included *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). In these early writings, Freud put forth a radical view of sexuality which argued that an individual's infantile experiences of pleasure imprint on their unconscious yet are forgotten ("repressed") as the individual ages and used his hypothesis to analyze how childhood experiences influence adult behaviors and desires. Most famous of Freud's early ideas was his concept of the Oedipus Complex, which he would continue to revise and revisit throughout his career. The Oedipus complex, Freud said, was a combination of a positive complex in which the child's first experience of unconscious desire is for their parent of the opposite-sex and hatred of the same-sex parent and a negative complex in which the child desires the same-sex parent and hate for the parent of the opposite sex.[153] As the child grows, they begin to identify more strongly with one parent and this identification can determine their adult sexuality and behaviors. In order to provide evidence for his schematic explanations of human sexuality and behaviors, Freud often

[153] Freud's take on the Oedipus Complex is often over-simplified. A close reading of Freud's early writings on it, as well as his revisions, reveals that his formulation is what leads Freud to argue for the universality of bisexuality, which I discussed in the final section of this chapter.

wrote about his patients as case studies to formulate schematic explanations for human sexuality and behavior.

One of Freud's most famous case study examples is Ida Bauer, a female hysteric whom was brought to Freud by her father after he discovered her affair with a woman.[154] Freud referred to Bauer as "Dora" in his writings and treated her for neurosis. His treatment involved subjecting her to dream analysis and heavily pushing his own interpretations of her actions–pushing her to understand her decisions based upon the Oedipus schema–for which he received heavy criticism.[155] After this criticism, Freud began to reevaluate his views on human sexuality and "retreated from his tendency not only to influence his patients by suggestion" but also to "inflict his interpretations on them and even to insist on their compliance."[156] In fact, after the First World War, Freud began to study women (including his own daughter) who were "set on intellectual careers or on training to be psychoanalysts" and did not fall into the categorization of hysterics.[157] Additionally, after studying soldiers who exhibited physical manifestations of their traumas from the war, Freud began to refigure his theory about the unconscious and how it can be expressed. These new developments moved Freud to consider the relationship of the individual to culture and society in his diagnosis, which was apparent in his post-war writings.

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154 For further reading see: *Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905).
155 Later, Freud noted his own influence on the patient by claiming that Dora "transferred" her love of her father onto Freud himself and cited this as reason for ceasing treatment.
156 Freud, Sigmund and Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Freud on Women: A Reader* (New York: Norton and Company, 1990), 11.
157 Ibid, 36.

The most direct reference Barnes makes to Freud and his theories is through the character of Doctor Mathew O'Connor. While we never learn what his medical degree is actually in, or if he really has one, we learn he has an affinity for gynecology and gives secret abortions to distressed nuns. The Doctor, as the other characters refer to him, is prone to drunken diatribes and nebulous narratives which attempt to make sense out of the chaos of the world with language. In this way, the Doctor is not only a literal doctor (or at least, he is should we choose to believe so) but he is also involved in a doctoring, so to speak, of the plot. He pieces fragments of conversation and actions had by multiple characters together with platitudes to create the semblance of a cohesive narrative which serves as the reader's guiderail through the darker portions of the novel's plot, much like Freud's writings attempted to shine a flashlight into the dark realms of the human psyche. Additionally, the characters in the novel continuously come to the Doctor for advice and to confess their problems, just as Freud's patients would come to him. In this way, the Doctor is a parodic representation of Sigmund Freud. He is the psychoanalyst of the night.

The Doctor makes jests at the practice of psychoanalysis which act as challenges to the perceived authority of psychoanalysis and its political appropriation in which it was used to pathologize and diagnose individuals in interwar society. The Doctor laments the impact of sociological studies like psychoanalysis, describing people as "poor beasts fattened with a knowledge of each other they never wanted, having had to contemplate each other…until death."[158] In humorous lines like, "It's my mother without argument I

[158] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 100.

want!" and by literalizing the idea of infants returning to their mother's wombs (imagining, for example, "women wincing with terror, not daring to set foot to the street for fear of it") the doctor directly parodies and mocks Freudian ideas. [159] Moreover, the Doctor's rambling and fragmented diatribes coincide with the novel's refusal to create clear meanings or definitions and together, they evoke an implicit critique of the infallibility of self-created narratives which runs throughout the novel. For example, in one of his drunken monologues the Doctor tells his listeners they ought to doubt "everything seen, done, spoken, precisely because we have a word for it, and not its alchemy."[160] By parodying Freud and his psychoanalytic efforts to diagnosis individuals and analyze sexual behavior through narratives, the character of the Doctor empties psychoanalytic ideas of their diagnostic authority and meaning.

The emptying of meaning and authority is furthered by the Doctor's open admittance of his own dishonesty. Through confessions like, "I am my own charlatan" and "God has made me a liar," the Doctor constantly admits that he "knows not" and "can't guess why," yet characters continue to come to him for advice and entertainment.[161] Freud himself was notoriously prone to conjecture but was radically honest about it. In in his book, *The Ego and the Id*, after giving an explanation of bisexuality and the Oedipus complex, Freud notes the inadequacy of his own explanation stating, "the ambivalence displayed in the relations to the parents should be attributed entirely to bisexuality and that *it is not*, as I have represented above, developed out of

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[159] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 99 & 149.
[160] Ibid, 83.
[161] Ibid, 101.

identification in consequence of rivalry."[162] In many of his writings, Freud often admits the potential inapplicability of his theories and concepts, but quickly follows his admission with more discussion of the concept and his own analysis.[163]

The character of the Doctor, however, differs from Freud in that Freud admits to his errors or oversights while the Doctor admits to his dishonesty. The Doctor says that the cause of his dishonesty is people confessing their secrets and desires to him ("talking like mad").[164] He says: "I talk too much because I have been made so miserable by what you are keeping hushed."[165] In this way, the Doctor is a reluctant and unreliable Freud, a psychoanalyst who never wanted to be but became one anyway. Driven mad by what people are repressing ("keeping hushed") the Doctor feels the need to fabricate narratives ("talk too much") to ease his own misery.

Whether or not Barnes intended this to be indicative of her own thoughts on Freudian analysis or its rhetorical appropriations or if it presents a more meta-commentary on the function of narratives (and writing) the idea of being driven "mad" by what society keeps "hushed" is worth pressing into. Freud discussed the idea of what is "kept hushed" in his book, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), in which he describes the role society plays in repressing sexuality. In the book, he describes a tension between the individual and society which stems from the conflict between an individual's pursuit of freedom (that is, freedom to express and enact their unconscious desires) and

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[162] Freud, *Freud on Women*, 279. Italics my own.
[163] Freud's moments of pause and admission of potential failings, interestingly, were often tied to his understandings and conceptions of the sexual desires and behaviors of women.
[164] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 135.
[165] Ibid, 162-163

civilization's command that an individual repress these desires and conform to social convention. The laws and social codes of a civilization restrict an individual's ability to express their freedom, which evokes feelings of discontent, but these feelings of discontent are mediated by the feelings of happiness that come from being a member of a societal community. Years later, Michel Foucault writes against Freud's analysis in his book, *The History of Sexuality*, stating: "What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as *the* secret."[166] While Freud believed society truly repressed sex, Foucault points out that society only pretends to repress sex, while in actuality, it continues to speak about it "ad infinitum." The Doctor's commentary, then, seems to align with Foucault's take on sex and society. Rather than "*exploit the secret*" of sexuality, as did the sexologists and psychoanalysts of the interwar period, the Doctor is made "*miserable*" by it. He resorts to lying and excessive talking in order to cope with his inability to directly discuss sexuality and desire because the social decorum and conventions of the day demanded they be repressed and kept "hushed."

What Foucault calls the "shadowy existence" of sex which stemmed from models of Freudian psychoanalysis is useful for thinking about the world of *Nightwood* because the novel takes place in the shadows and underworld of the city where sexual deviants and social misfits, under the cloak of night, are able to express their sexualities and desires more openly. The disciplines of sexology and psychoanalysis sought to name, categorize, and try to understand sexual behaviors and desires ("speaking of it ad

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[166] Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 35.

infinitum"). Moreover, public figures and political officials used Freudian concepts in order to pathologize, criminalize, and other those who deviated from normative standards in society ("exploiting it as the secret"). Michael Warner touches on this in his discussion of Sedgewick's "closet" and its relationship to the private and public speech stating, "common mythology understands the closet as an individual's lie about him-or herself…but the closet is better understood as the culture's problem, not the individuals."[167]

It is unsurprising, then, that the Doctor's favorite topic is "the night."[168] By speaking of the night, the Doctor can speak, though vaguely, about sexuality, deviant identities, and desire. Moreover, the night is the time when the Doctor is able to "evacuate custom" and "go back into his dress;" that is, he is able to dress and act like a woman.[169] Since, as Warner notes, "being publicly known as homosexual is never the same and being publicly known as heterosexual; the latter always goes without saying and troubles nothing, whereas the former carries echoes of pathologized visibility," the night presents a space where the Doctor can be himself without risking public exposure.[170] The night has a power to free people from social imperatives and loosens the necessity to conform by presenting an escape from the "pathologized visibility" of the daytime. It is a space where different sexualities can be expressed, and different identities

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167 Warner, Michael, *Public and Counter Publics* (New York: Zone Books), 52.
168 Barnes, *Nightwood*, 80.
169 Ibid, 80.
170 Warner, *Public and Counter Publics*, 52.

intermingle–where secrets can be exposed–without worrying about being deemed deviant or being stigmatized.

The night world in *Nightwood* is filled with day dreamers, sleepwalkers, marginalized misfits, beasts, animals, and those who love them. It transcends demarcations of nationhood, racial or ethnic identity, sexual behavior. Hence, the book refers to it as various obscure lands ("lost land," "secret land," "foreign land") which all the characters seem to have access or connection to, despite their differences of race, religion, and sexuality.[171] The night represents a space where it becomes nearly impossible to pathologize individuals according to their sexual desires and behaviors, as represented by the Doctor's lying, because the night takes place beyond of civilized society. The Doctor, unlike Freud, is able to speak about the night because, by virtue of his femininity and transvestite identity, he is a part of it.[172]

We learn more about the night when Nora, seeking advice about Robin, goes to the Doctor's apartment. After urging Nora to think about the night, the Doctor gives a sort of historical and philosophical account of the night:

> "…now the nights of one period are not the nights of another. Neither are the nights of one city the nights of another. Let us take Paris for an instance, and France for a fact…French nights are those which all nations seek the world over–and have you noticed that? Ask Dr. Mighty O'Connor; the reason the doctor knows everything is because he's been everywhere at the wrong time and has now become anonymous.'
>
> 'I'm telling you of French nights at the moment,' the doctor went on, 'and why we all go into them. The night and the day are two travels,

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171 Barnes, *Nightwood*, 45, 7 & 57.

172 If I had more time, I would expand on this point by discussing the role of feminization of the "Jews" in right-wing political propaganda (especially the Nazis) and the character of the Doctor in relation to Freud, who was Jewish and was forced to flee the Nazis because of his racial identity.

> and the French…alone leave testimony of the two in the dawn: we tear up the one for the sake of the other; not so the French.
>
> 'And why is that; because they think of the two as one continually and keep it before their mind…'"[173]

The night, as the Doctor explains to Nora, has a past; however, in his historical account he is careful to note that the nights of "one period" or "one city" can differ from the nights of others. In other words, the Doctor points out that social expectations of normativity can change over time and vary by location. Despite these variations, the Doctor notes that he has always been "everywhere at the wrong time." As a queer, and likely transgender individual, the Doctor is unable to find a place or time in which he won't be stigmatized for his sexuality or deviance. Because, as he says, most places "tear up" the night (that is, stigmatized identities and deviant sexualities) and privilege the day (normal identities and conformity). Non-normal individuals must "become anonymous;" they are figuratively or literally erased and relegated to that-which-is-not-the-day: the night.

Thus, the Doctor's account of the night seems to be a critique of the violence society inflicts by enforcing standards of normalcy and pathologizing or criminalizing identities and individuals who deviate from them. Unlike Freud, whose approach to society's influence in *Civilization and Its Discontents* was ambivalent and objective, the Doctor's discussion of the night presents a critique of the necessity to conform with more bite. When the Doctor venerates "French nights," he does so because the French do not enforce strict demarcations between the day and the night, between the normal and the

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[173] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 82.

deviant; rather, they "think of the two as *one* continually." The idea of "French nights," then, hints at the radical potential of a society which does not define through difference, where the night and the day bleed into each other free from the constructs of time and decorum.[174] Rather than define things through difference (e.g.: I am this and *not* that), the Doctor describes the radical potential of defining things as "one continually" (e.g.: I am this *and* that) to destabilize social binaries and subvert conceptions of sexual and social normativity.

Alle Katze sind Grau in Der Nacht

This critique of social conformity and its negative impact on non-heteronormative individuals in society called attention to a troubling trend of right-wing discourses and politicians of the interwar period to appropriate the discourses of psychoanalysis and sexology to pathologize and demonize non-conforming individuals in society.[175] Right-wing discourses and politicians linked new medical ideas about sexual behavior and desire to public imaginings of social and national belonging. They pandered to fears of social deviants (e.g: Jews and homosexuals) in order to gain support and establish a sense of shared identity which not only excluded deviants but could not exist without their exclusion. Writing about the formation of identity based on creating social groups in *The Psychological Structure of Fascism*, theorist Georges Bataille, describes the "not normal"

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[174] Barnes was qualified to write about such a subject since she herself was a frequent participant in French Nights. She was involved in the nightlife of the Paris Left Bank and was a frequent visitor of Natalie Barney's radical female-only salon.

[175] Here, Barnes moves from her critique of Freud's theories to a critique of how they were used. It's worth noting that Freud himself went to great lengths to try to ensure his theories would not be used to demonize or ostracize individuals. In his 1905 writings on sexuality he stated his objections to the term "degeneration" and, as highlighted in the epigraph to this chapter, did not want to use the term perversion as a "reproach."

members of society as a "heterogenous" group of religious, sexual, and national identities who "generally provoke repulsion and can in no case be assimilated by the whole of mankind."[176]As Bataille's description points out, the targets of right-wing rhetoric included any individual whose identity or behavior deviated from the status quo. Bataille's description of "heterogenous" identities who "provoke repulsion" and fail to "assimilate" into normal society could, quite adequately, be written about the queer characters of *Nightwood*.

There's a common German idiom, *Alle Kätze sind Grau in der Nacht*,[177] which has iterations in multiple languages. The idiom literally means "all cats are grey at night," and figuratively notes the power of the night, the dark, to erase differences between individuals and act as a social equalizer. Barnes captures the sentiments of this idiom in her modernist novel, *Nightwood* (1937). The cast of characters in *Nightwood* includes Jews, homosexuals, cross-dressers, tattooed circus performers, and transgender individuals all of whom would be subject to social stigmatization and political ostracization during the interwar period. Despite this fact, the word degenerate does not appear in the text nor is the idea of deviation used in a derogative way. By not including these socially charged words, Barnes not only makes a conscious effort to not fetishize or other the novel's characters, but she also directly challenges the discursive authority of these words to identify and define individuals. Just as Barnes challenged the categories of identity in her early journalism and her life, she uses the language and contents of her

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176 Bataille, Georges and Carl R. Lovitt, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," in *New German Critique*, No. 16, (Winter 1979), 71.
177 Trans: All Cats are Grey in the Night.

novel to call into question the purpose of, and problematize the power inherent in, the social practice of placing identities onto individuals. Furthermore, by including *only* characters who fail to meet normative social standards, the world of *Nightwood* makes deviancy the new-normal and exposes the instability of social codes and definitions of normativity.

While many critics have mentioned *Nightwood's* depiction of the queer underworld, my analysis of Barnes's worldmaking aligns with that of Scott Herring. In *Queering the Underworld* (2007), Herring argues that *Nightwood* "obliquely illuminates how fantastic underworlds help non-normative subjects escape the imperative to embrace a collective sexual history by putting a stranglehold on this pervasive ideal" through its "commitment to antirepresentation."[178] While the novel includes a menagerie of queer, criminal, and carnivalesque characters, it does not fetishize or objectify them as social others which exemplifies what Herring means by "commitment to antirepresentation." Barnes' choice to normalize the non-normal was an oppositional stance to the social discourses regarding social degeneration and right-wing political rhetoric which were happening across Europe during the interwar period.

For example, right-wing provocateurs used the anti-Semitic stereotype of the "wandering Jew" who was portrayed as a liar who made his living by swindling. The stereotype perpetuated the notion that Jews had no history or homeland of their own in order to prevent the assimilation of Jewish individuals into society. Barnes uses the

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[178] Herring, Scott, *Queering the Underworld*: *Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 155.

stereotypical descriptions of Jews (e.g: wandering and lacking a clear nationality) to describe the other characters in *Nightwood* in order to ally homosexuality and Jewishness against a mutual plight of social demonization, preventing the reader from being able to situate clearly differentiate or pathologize the characters within distinct categories of race, gender and sexuality.

Most of the novel's characters are prone to wandering and lack full backstories or knowledge about their pasts. Felix is described as having simply "turned up in the world."[179] All we learn of Nora's past is that she does "advance publicity for the circus" and Doctor O'Connor claims to have "brought her into this world" but no more than that.[180] Robin enters the novel like an apparition with no past and is "unable or unwilling to give an account of herself" which persists throughout the novel.[181] Robin is prone to bouts of wandering and disappearing which are described using the discourse of Jewish stereotypes: "some *lost land* within herself," "she *wandered* to the thoughts of women," "Robin took to *wandering* again." Even the Doctor, who seems to be the only character willing to speak about his personal past ("I was in the war once myself") is an unreliable narrator and provides no genuine facts or truths about his backstory or history.[182] At one point, the Doctor says, "my mind is so rich it is always *wandering*," evoking stereotypes of wandering and wealth to describe his inner thoughts.[183] The effect of Barnes' liberal

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179 Barnes, *Nightwood*, 7.
180 Ibid, 18.
181 Ibid, 49
182 Ibid, 22.
183 Ibid, 105.

application of Jewish stereotypes allies Jewishness with homosexuality and evokes a sense of solidarity among those who make up the 'others' in European society.

Barnes represents this solidarity in the relationship shared between Felix and the Doctor which seems to involve the mutual choice to keep the secrets of one another's identities safe. During a moment of mutual recognition, similar to Eve Sedgwick's ideas of paranoid reading and the notion that it "takes one to know one," Felix and the Doctor discover secret aspects of each other's identities. While the book's description of Felix is blunt about his Jewishness, the character of Felix in the novel does not openly admit to being Jewish. However, the Doctor is the only character who recognizes Felix's Jewishness and asks Felix with "feigned indifference" what "nation" he would want the mother of his son to be.[184] Since Judaism is traditionally matrilineal, the reader can infer the Doctor's "feigned indifference" about the potential nationality of Felix's son is the Doctor's polite way of expressing his knowledge of Felix's 'secret' identity and his willingness to respect that secret.

Similarly, the Doctor identifies as feminine and cross-dresses when alone, but Felix, unlike the other characters, often witnesses the Doctor engaging in feminine practices in public. After seeing the Doctor rouge his lips and dab perfume on his wrists, Felix thinks to himself that "he would continue to like" and "would have to cover" for the Doctor which expresses Felix's knowledge of the Doctor's queer identity and his willingness to keep it a secret.[185] Later in the novel, when Nora visits the Doctor, she

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[184] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 38.
[185] Ibid, 36.

finds him wearing a wig and a "woman's flannel nightgown."[186] Rather than express disgust or mock the Doctor, Nora expresses acceptance and empathy for him and thinks: "What nation, what religion, what ghost, what dream, had not worn it–infants, angels, priests, the dead; why should not the doctor, in the grave dilemma of his alchemy, wear his dress?."[187] The shared recognition and respect for the other person's anonymity is another example of how Barnes refuses to stigmatize her characters and conveys a sense of solidarity between stigmatized groups, like homosexuals and Jews.

The Doctor's description of himself as anonymous because he is always "everywhere at the wrong time" mirrors the novel's description of how people would swear to have seen Felix "the week before in three different countries simultaneously."[188] This quote is particularly salient because it illustrates how stereotypes, by assuming all members of a group share particular characteristics, function discursively to erase individuality. Thus, stereotypes are different from social stigmatization, though the two often operate in tandem, because stigmatization operates on the level of individuality and can make individuals feel targeted or watched while stereotypes operate on the level of groups of communities and can contribute to a feeling of anonymity. Warner discusses the way sexual stereotypes can lead to stigmatization at length in his book, *The Trouble with Normal* (1999), which explores how shame–about one's identity and sexual preferences–can be refurbished as a source of queer empowerment. "Stigma," Warner points out, "is a social identity that befalls one like fate. Like the related stigmas of racial

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[186] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 39.
[187] Ibid, 80.
[188] Ibid, 7.

identity or disabilities…It attaches not to doing, but to being; not to conduct, but to status."[189] Cognizant of this distinction, Barnes includes stereotypes while avoiding stigmatization in the novel to demonstrate how anonymity can be a way to subvert social institutions which enforce normativity.

Marcus reads *Nightwood* through the lens of Mikhail Bahktin's concept of the carnivalesque highlighting the plethora of identities and sexualities which make up the curious constellation of *Nightwood's* characters. Marcus comments on the central role of the Denkman Circus which operates in the background of *Nightwood's* plot and often serves as a meeting place for the characters. The circus features clowns, tattooed performers, animals, and a transgender trapeze artist named Frau Mann. Nora is employed by the circus and is friends with many of its performers whom she often invites to her home. In addition to the menagerie of circus-folk, Barnes also discusses convention-defying aspects of the characters as if they were commonplace. Robin is described as having masculine qualities ("hipless smoothness of her gait," "her broad shoulders") which suggests she could be classified by sexological terms as an invert.[190] The Doctor identifies as a woman and cross-dresses at night. Through its circus-like contents and characters, Marcus claims, the text does not allow the reader to "play any participatory role" but instead, casts them as an audience member "at a circus or cabaret."[191]

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189 Warner, Michael, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 28.
190 Barnes, *Nightwood*, 69 & 71.
191 Marcus, "Laughing at Leviticus," 184.

Barnes's choice to focus her novel on the lives and stories of these characters was a defiant act which refused to engage in stigmatization and, in doing so, challenges the ability of readers to otherize the characters. The novel, like Felix and the Doctor, is committed to preserving the anonymity of its characters and contents. *Nightwood's* fragmented plot and jumps in temporality prevent the reader from knowing everything that is happening when it happens. The reader must rely on the unreliable explanations of the characters to fill in the gaps in time (some are which are never filled at all). In addition, the novel's convoluted syntax turns even descriptions of simple scenes into enigmatic settings which are nearly impossible to fully discern. Teresa De Lauretis explains how *Nightwood's* "syntactical and rhetorical density, its unusual lexical choices, and the kaleidoscopic storytelling embedded in its elliptical narration" frustrate the reader's expectations of narration and normalcy.[192] It allows its characters the space to disappear, evade recognition, and escape consistent identification by the reader. The text subverts the impulse of Western thought to make what is dark light, what is unseen seen, and what is unknown known by ensuring it, and its contents, remain anonymous.

Nightwood is a text which continually questions social institutions of normativity and exposes the fallibility of immutable identity. It inverts established convention by making non-normal characters and behaviors the norm. It allies the non-normative racial and sexual identities like homosexuality and Jewishness by playing with the invocation and application of anti-Semitic stereotypes. In addition, the stylistic choices Barnes's included in the text work together with the contents and characters to prevent the reader's

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[192] De Lauretis, Teresa, "Queer Texts, Bad Habits, and the Issue of a Future," 244.

attempts to categorize or ascribe absolute meaning. All of these factors allow *Nightwood* to call into question the social standards and institutions of normativity which, in turn, diminishes their authority and ability to perpetuate unopposed. I agree with Marcus reading of *Nightwood* as "a prophecy of the Holocaust, an attack on the doctors and politicians who defined deviance and set up a worldview of us and them."[193] The novel allows no "innocent 'outside position' from where the subject can identify him/herself with a normative or neutrally innocent point of view" in order to challenge the very notion that sexual deviancy or social pathologies were anything but a product of political and social discourses of normalcy.[194]

Deviant Desire

To further disrupt social conceptions of "normal," Barnes plays with Freudian typologies and schemas of the unconscious in order to explore the realm of sexuality which does not conform to constructions of heteronormativity and therefore exists outside of society's control. To elaborate on my claim, it is necessary to return to a discussion of Freud's writings and what they had to say about sexuality, the unconscious, and the formation of a subject; specifically, *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923). After this detour through Freud, I will explain how Barnes plays with these typologies in *Nightwood* through a discussion of the characters and their relationships to animality. In doing so, I argue that Barnes used her writing to highlight the radical and subversive potential of unrestrained desire.

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193 Marcus, "Laughing at Leviticus," 188.
194 Caselli, Daniela, "The Indecent 'Eternal': Eroticism in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*," in *Modernist Eroticisms: European Literature After Sexology*. (London: Palgrave Macmillian: 2012), 151.

Totem and Taboo is an effort to analyze the behaviors and cultures of what Freud calls "primitive races" in order to trace links between the past and present. It is more of an anthropological meditation than a psychological study and draws broad links between human cultures before civilized society and modern culture. [195] In the text, Freud states that the first taboo among human societies was incest and explains this through a combination of historicizing the practices of ancient cultures with his own theories of the Oedipus complex and childhood fantasies. He asserts that "the oldest and most important taboo prohibitions are the two basic laws of totemism: namely, not to kill the totem animal, and to avoid sexual intercourse with the totem companions of the other sex."[196] According to Freud, members of primitive races and cultures marked their familial ties with animal totems and all members of a family group would share the same totem animal. In this way, the animals the totem represented became sacred and illegal to kill, and those who shared the same animal totem were not permitted from having intercourse. Thus, totems prevented incest and, according to Freud, formed the "basis of social organization."[197]

This early text was the foundation of Freud's later work, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), which, as discussed earlier, focuses on how society represses and controls an individual's sexual desires and impulses. However, the jump from *Totem and Taboo* and *Civilization and Its Discontents* required Freud to work through the question

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[195] Specifically, Freud refers to the "primitive races in Australia, America and Africa" throughout the text.
[196] Freud, Sigmund. *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* c. 4 edited by Dr. A. A. Brill, (New York: The Modern Library, 1938), 831.
[197] Freud, Sigmund. *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* c. 4, 884.

of how societal controls function in the individual psyche. That is, why would individual comply with societal rules and expectations and willingly decide to not act on their sexual desires and impulses? To answer this, Freud came up with what he called a "structural theory" of character formation which he described in *The Ego and the Id* (1923).

In the text, *The Ego and the Id*, Freud articulates a theory of the mind which he claimed was comprised of three parts: the ego, super ego, and the id. The id, he said, was "the reservoir of the libido" and unconscious instincts which he called "drives."[198] The super-ego, or ego-ideal as he sometimes referred to it, represents the parental and societal norms ("it compromises the prohibition") which have been unconsciously internalized.[199] The ego mediates between the libidinal desires of the id and the commands of the super-ego and, as Freud states, "conflicts between the ego and the ideal will…ultimately reflect the contrast between what is real and what is physical, between the external and the internal world."[200] Thus, it is the ego which takes the internalized injunctions of the super-ego (the internalized prohibitions of the parents and society) and uses them to control the unconscious libidinal impulses and drives of the id. The ego, then, is "the form of conscience" and is what allows an individual to exercise "moral censorship;" however, as Freud himself notes, the ego's ability to do so is predicated on "identifications with other people, on the basis of having the same ego ideal."[201]

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198 Freud, *Freud on Women*, 277.
199 Ibid, 280.
200 Ibid, 281.
201 Ibid, 282.

Just as a mutual animal totem in primitive societies served as a probation on incest, the super-ego serves as the internalization of the multiple prohibitions in modern society. The key which links all of Freud's texts is the notion of the libido which Freud characterizes an individual's unconscious drives and instincts. In primitive cultures, these drives were limited by the animal totem. In modern society, they are limited by parental and social prohibitions and denunciations. In the rest of this section, I present a reading of *Nightwood* which connects the characters and their actions to these Freudian texts in order to make the case that Barnes represented queer sexualities as resistant to civil and social controls and injunctions.

For example, the character of Robin represents the uncontrolled desires and unconscious drives. Robin is characterized as a somnambulist who lacks volition and is motivated purely by unconscious instinct, drive, and desire. Throughout the book, Robin does not think. Instead, she has "her mind in her hand" and represents the embodiment of impulse and drive. Robin is described by the characters as "listening to some echo of some foray in the blood" and "animated" by blood furthering the notion that she represents unadulterated instinct and desire.[202] She is entirely controlled by her id, unbeholden to the rules of the superego or the mediation of the ego. Because Robin lacks a super ego and has been unable to form an ego, she is unable to form "identifications with other people." Instead, Robin is wholly tied to the animal, the infantile, the primitive unconscious space of drive and instincts.

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[202] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 44 & 56.

When Felix first sees Robin, he says, "Sometimes one meets a woman who is a beast turning human…Such a woman is the infected carrier of the past: before her the structure of our head and jaws ache–we feel that we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers."[203] Robin is outside society ("beast turning human") and thus, outside the controls of language or social norms (she makes the "structure of our head and jaws ache") which means she is beyond the purview of the super ego. Thus, the "ache" the sight of Robin causes is "structural," because the sight of her momentarily brings Felix outside of language into the primitive–the preconscious–realm of the psyche and he figuratively puts his "face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers." As Robin seeks out relationships in the novel in an effort to find a place to remain, she represents the unrestrained libido–the id–seeking the controls of the super ego and ego. In trying to find a place to stay, she represents the necessity of an individual's libido (the id) to be follow social norms and standards (the super ego) in order to be able to a part of society.

In the novel, Felix is one of the few characters who still seems concerned with his relationship to normal society. He is, in this way, one of the few characters who Freud would deem, at least psychologically speaking, well-adjusted. Felix views Robin as an opportunity to continue his family lineage by bearing him a son. Thus, their relationship represents heteronormative reproduction, both literally of a child and figuratively of social norms. However, Felix's relationship with Robin ultimately has the opposite effect.

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[203] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 37.

Robin has a child, Guido, who suffers from unnamed ailments and exudes a doll-like placidity. Moreover, Robin leaves Felix after having Guido and has numerous affairs with other women deviating from social expectations of marriage and sexuality. Felix, after confiding his feelings about his failed relationship to the Doctor, says Robin placed him "in the dark for the rest of his life."[204] Rather than control Robin, the relationship of Felix and Robin marks a point where Felix is moved from the social civilized world to "the dark," that is, the unconscious desires and libidinal drives of the id.

The Doctor, in his typical ambiguous way, responds to Felix with the story of a horse who "knew too much" and "was in mourning for something taken away from her."[205] While the meaning of this story is unclear, the Doctor's choice to explain Robin's actions using the story of an animal furthers the notion that Robin represents the id. Her actions and reasoning can only be explained in terms of the animal. This happens again moments after when Felix postulates that Robin's "density…of youth" was, perhaps, what accounted for his "attraction to her."[206] Felix's statement links Robin to the infantile ("density of youth") and the Doctor's response, again, links Robin's behavior to the animal. He says, "Animals find their way about largely by the keenness of their nose," after which he explains that humans lost their sense of smell in order "not to be one of them [an animal]."[207] The Doctor's response is interesting, given that earlier in their

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[204] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 113.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid, 119.
[207] Ibid.

conversation Felix noted how Robin has an "odour of memory" as if she had come from somewhere "that we have forgotten and would give our life to recall."[208]

The Doctor's response about animals and their powers of smell, then, seems to convey two key points about Felix's relationship with Robin. The first, is that Robin, as a figure of embodied drives, represents the connection to the primitive unconscious. The second, is that Felix's attraction to her represented his own intrinsic desire to express and act upon his unconscious drives. It's worth mentioning here that the name Felix comes from the Latin word "feles" which means cat. An animal by nature and name, Felix affirms his instinct by chasing after Robin, just as a cat would chase after a bird. Thus, the last time we see Felix in the novel he sees a man whom he thinks is the Grand Duke Alexander of Russia and, much like the Felix earlier in the novel, it seems like Felix is excited at the sight of a figure of the "great past." He stares at the figure with the abandon of "what a mad man knows to be his one hope of escape" and as he exits the bar he moves as if he were to bow to the man but instead moves "as an animal will turn its head away from a human."[209] No longer able to bow to the great human past, Felix, after his relationship with Robin, is now more connected to the primitive past. He is, perhaps, more animal than human.

The relationship of Robin and Nora is often read by scholars of psychoanalysis as a recreation of the relationship between mother and child because of how it is characterized in the novel. In her relationship with Robin, Nora seeks to reproduce a

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[208] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 118.
[209] Ibid, 123.

parent-child relationship as demonstrated by Nora's obsession with providing Robin a home. Robin is described as expressing a "wish for a home" which, it seems, functions symbolically to assure Robin that she "belonged to Nora."[210] Robin's desire for a home reflects the psychoanalytic concept of the child's desire to reunite with their mother and return to the womb. Further, since every object and spoken word in their apartment attests "to their mutual love" and "the combining of their humours," it further suggests that the pair's relationship is an effort to reproduce the mother-child relationship.[211] The lesbian relationship of Nora and Robin, then, "crystallizes the ambivalences of separation and fusion that psychanalysts since Freud have seen as the libidinal truth driving all erotic desire" and the attempts of Nora to create a home for Robin represent the attempt at reification of mother and child.[212]

This reification is impossible, however, and Robin begins to leave the home and wander just as she did with Felix. Nora tries to follow Robin's wanderings and the Doctor, after seeing her do so, says "there goes the mother of mischief," which again reflects the mother-child relationship.[213] Nora, as the parent-figure, represents the super ego and its desire to regulate and control the id. Nora's attempts to control and contain Robin fail. She follows "traces" of Robin, similar to how a dog follows the scent of an animal, and she becomes hyper aware of the "faint sounds of the street" and the "murmur

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[210] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 55.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Boone, *Libidinal Currents*, 247.
[213] Barnes, *Nightwood,* 61.

from the garden" as she listens for Robin to come home.[214] Driven mad by her desire for Robin, Nora seems unable to control her own unconscious drives and impulses.

Like Felix, Nora seeks the advice of the Doctor about Robin. Nora explains she is unable to "just sit here forever–thinking" about Robin and wants to know how she can get Robin to return to her.[215] Already, Nora seems to recognize that the conscious action of "thinking" is ineffective and that she needs to act but, without Robin, she is unable to access her 'drives,' and can only conceptualize actions mediated through social norms ("I've got to write to her").[216] The Doctor notices this as well and says, "I know where your mind is! She, the eternal momentary–Robin who was always the second person singular."[217] The Doctor's quote furthers the claim that Robin not only represents the unconscious drives but also, by describing her as "always the second person singular," literally stating that Robin is "you," which implies Robin is already a part of Nora. This idea is reiterated by Nora's descriptions of Robin's absence as "a physical removal" and "an amputation that Nora could not renounce." Later in the conversation, Nora states, "She [Robin] is myself" which, by using "myself" instead of the grammatically correct "me" constructs Robin not as an external copy but literally an intrinsic part of Nora's own constitution.[218]

After this conversation, the Doctor advises Nora to make "bird's nests with her teeth" and tells the story of his friend who built nests that were so good it prompted the

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214 Barnes, *Nightwood*, 61.
215 Ibid, 125.
216 Ibid, 126.
217 Ibid, 127.
218 Ibid, 127.

bird to "stop making their own" and then, rhetorically asks if this reminds Nora of "any nest you have made for any bird, and so broken it of its fate."[219] The Doctor's statement comments on the way Nora tried to build a home ("nest") for Robin in order to ensure that Robin would not forget to return. The Doctor's rhetorical question, however, points to the fact that Nora's efforts were ineffective precisely because they attempted to break the bird (Robin) of its fate by imposing compliance (the super ego). This is discussed in a different way when Nora shares the anecdote of when Robin is groped by a policeman. Robin does not react, and Nora reacts by saying "Die now, so you will be quiet, so you will not be touched again by dirty hands, so you will not take my heart and your body and let them be nosed by dogs–die now."[220] In both the case of the bird's nest and the policeman, Nora is unsuccessful in limiting or controlling Robin.

Yet, unlike Felix, Nora has a moment where she realizes the reason she was unable to be with Robin was precisely because she sought to impose normativity (the super ego) onto Robin (the id). Nora explains that after she learned of Robin's departure to America with Jenny, she left Paris and traveled throughout the world. During her travels, Nora encounters a girl "on a chair, leaning over its back, one arm across it, the other hanging at her side, as if half of her slept, and half of her suffered," which seems to echo the moment in the novel when Felix first sees Robin.[221] The girl laughs and Nora, after noticing a painting of the Madonna on the wall, thinks, "I knew that that image, to her, was what I had been to Robin" which reflects a pivotal moment where Nora

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[219] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 127-128.
[220] Ibid, 145.
[221] Ibid, 157.

recognizes the role she had played in the relationship with Nora by connecting it to the ultimate figure of the mother. Nora describes this moment in language that directly parallels Freud's concepts of the drives:

> "I stood in the centre of eroticism and death, death that makes the dead smaller, as a lover we are beginning to forget dwindles and wastes; for love and life are a bulk of which the body and heart can be drained, and I knew in that bed Robin should have put me down. In that bed we would have forgotten our lives in the extremity of memory, moulted our parts, as figures in the waxworks are moutled down to their story, so we would have broken down to our love."[222]

This moment marks the point when Nora affirms the drives of her id ("eroticism and death") and relinquishes her authority to Robin ("I knew in that bed Robin should have put me down"). Thus, this moment is a death. Figuratively, it could also be read as depicting the female orgasm. The French refer to orgasm as "let petite mort," which means "the little death," is indicative of the associations between death and sexuality. Either way, it is not the death of Robin or the unconscious drives but the death of Nora's desire to control and possess Robin. It is the death of Nora's clinging to the norms of society and an affirmation of the female orgasm, and, by extension, female sexuality. It marks the moment Nora relinquishes her ties to civilization.

In response to Nora's story of her reaction to the girl, the Doctor gets his hat and coat and leaves in a "confused and unhappy silence" without speaking. After which, he

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[222] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 158.

goes to another bar and after a lengthy drunken diatribe, states "the end…now…"[223] Some scholars like to read the Doctor's last words as the conclusion of the novel and the final chapter in which Nora and Robin reunite, as a sort of epilogue. I agree with this reading, but I'd like to propose a different rationale for why Barnes would conclude the novel this way. Since the final remarks of the Doctor where he pronounces the end come immediately after Nora's rejection of social conformity, I read them as representing the end of the influence of language, of psychoanalysis, of discourse, to make sense of people and actions. The Doctor is unable to narrate, unable to put into language, a response or explanation for what Nora expressed because Nora, by disavowing her compulsion to 'mother' and possess Robin, has disavowed the way society understood or explained lesbian relationships and eroticism in modern society. Therefore, the Doctor's part in the novel concludes with his lamentation that "the end–mark my words–[is] now nothing but wrath and weeping!"[224] The novel, however, does not end there.

Instead, the novel ends with the reunification of Nora and Robin. Robin has left Jenny, and is described, in animalistic terms, as circling "closer and closer" to where Nora lives, sleeping "in the woods" and, later, inside a "decaying chapel."[225] As Robin comes closer, Nora's dog becomes vocal and restless. One night, the dog runs into the woods and Nora follows him and, without explanation or conscious thought, "begins to run" until she is "blindly…plunged into the jamb of the chapel door.[226] Nora sees Robin

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[223] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 166.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid, 168.
[226] Ibid, 169.

and, in the following moments, the three subjects of Nora, Robin and the dog become indistinguishable from each other. Robin and Nora lose not only their names but also their socially assigned genders: "Then she began to bark also, crawling after him–in a fit of *laughter*, obscene and touching."[227] Unlike the Doctor's ending of "wrath and weeping," the reunification of Robin and Nora is filled with "laughter" and "touching" despite its obscenity. Unrestrained by social convention and unheeding of her super ego, Nora is finally able to be with Robin. Together in their communal ecstasy, they are no longer human; they are animal.

To further explore this final scene, it's worth recalling Freud's discussion of the totem in *Totem and Taboo.* The totem was an object shaped like an animal, which members of the same family were taught to view as sacred. It represented an implicit prohibition of sexual intercourse and served as an early form of religion which constituted the "basis of social organization." Barnes seems to be playing with this notion through the use of the dog, which is an anti-totem in that it is an animal which facilitates the communion of Robin and Nora. She even foreshadows this earlier in the novel when the Doctor, who I read as a representation of Freud, predicts that "though those two [Nora and Robin] are buried at opposite ends of the earth, one dog will find them both."[228] Furthermore, the entire scene takes place in front of "a *contrived* altar, before a Madonna."[229] The word contrived highlights the artificial quality of the religious relic and pokes fun at the significance of the Madonna. Thus, Barnes establishes the erotic

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[227] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 170. Italics my own.
[228] Ibid, 106.
[229] Ibid, 169.

reunion and animalistic ecstasy of Robin and Nora as irreverent, or perhaps, in opposition, to the "basis of social organization."

The ending of *Nightwood* rejects the fears of interwar society stemming from sexological discourses which feared that lesbianism and female sexuality, through "its inherent refusal to submit to the "evolved" social institutions of marriage and motherhood would ultimately result in a return to 'bestial primitivism."[230] Barnes, like later scholars of queer sexuality, seemed to disagree that there was something problematic about the "refusal to submit to social institutions." If the last words of the Doctor tell us anything about Barnes's own thoughts, they seem to suggest she believed submitting to social institutions and conventions of normativity would only lead to "wrath and weeping," especially for those with non-normative sexual or social identities. Barnes would, I think, agree with Hocquenghem's assessment that homosexual desire is "neither on the side of death nor on the side of life; it is the killer of the civilized egos."[231] By playing with Freudian ideas of civilized social behaviors and using Freud's own "structural theory" as a background for her characters and their actions, Barnes calls into question the legitimacy and universal applicability of these theories. Furthermore, by ending the novel with the sexual reunification of Robin and Nora she gives an alternative take on non-normative sexualities–sexuality unregulated by social conventions– as not "deviant" but as imbued with the potential to radically reformulate and refigure society itself.

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230 Smith, Patricia Juliana, *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 30.
231 Hocqueghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 150.

Conclusion

As the infamous feminist saying goes, the personal is the political. For Barnes, the *personal* was the *person* in her life and writing. There was no distinction between body and mind, interior and exterior, thought and action. Margaret Anderson described having difficult communicating with Barnes because Barnes could not "approach impersonal talk about the personal element."[232] Speaking and writing were not private acts of confession or disclosure for Barnes, rather, they were moments where divisions could be collapsed, and binaries were destabilized. This is exactly what Barnes does throughout *Nightwood.* She shows that "normality, authenticity and the possibility of expressing a true self are undone" and "leaves no innocent position from which to judge" members of society which had been stigmatized or deemed as not normal, degenerate, deviant, or other.[233]

Through narrative disjuncture and strange contents, *Nightwood* depicts a world that is within and outside the norms of interwar society: a counterpublic. The reader is unable to create a subject position that is outside or antagonistic to the others of society (e.g.: the homosexual the Jew, the deviant, the transvestite, the lesbian, the invert) and, because of this, is reminded that "the more you go against your nature the more you will know of it."[234] The reader is involved and yet outside of the novel's world which destabilizes their concrete subjective position making them vulnerable. In this way, *Nightwood* "mediates the most private and intimate meanings of gender and sexuality"

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[232] Anderson, Margaret, "My Thirty Years War," cited in *Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes*, 36.
[233] Caselli, Daniela, "The Indecent 'Eternal': Eroticism in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*," in *Modernist Eroticisms: European Literature After Sexology*. (London: Palgrave Macmillian: 2012), 155.
[234] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 162.

and elaborates "new worlds of culture and social relations in which gender and sexuality can be lived, including forms of intimate association, vocabularies of affect, styles of embodiment, erotic practices, and relations of care and pedagogy."[235]

Furthermore, *Nightwood* calls into question the discourses and ideas of psychoanalysis and sexology and questions their universal applicability by inverting conceptions of normal to show the tenuous relationship individuals have to civilized society. Ultimately, *Nightwood* refuses the trends of interwar discourses and their appropriation by right-wing politics to delineate between "us" and "them" and uses this as a basis for social, political, and national belonging. In doing so, Barnes urges her readers to imagine a world where "the derogatory" can never be used in "its usual sense." The novel presents a way of imagining "new forms of gendered and sexual citizenship" which stem from "active participation in collective world making through publics of sex and gender" that subvert and challenge the dominant ideology and imaginaries of society.[236]

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[235] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 57.
[236] Warner, *Publics and Counter Publics*, 57.

Chapter Four: Temporalities of Resistance

"Far in the distance, we might perhaps dimly perceive a humanity with many genders, none of which is named with a name that is not its own. They are nameless not because they have been laid waste, but because they could have or could be any name but have no need to have or to be any." – Klaus Thewleweit, *Mannerphantasien*[237]

In the first chapter of this thesis, I explored how the political, legal, and discursive institutions of interwar society imposed a heteronormative social structure through their conceptions of social belonging and nationhood in the sexual lives and desires of individuals based on a shared assumption of a normal (hetero, straight, white, and male) sexuality. All other forms of sexual behaviors or desires were seen as deviant and disruptive to the smooth functioning and order of society. However, this research exposed a key commonality of interwar efforts to control the behaviors of individuals and define the standards of normativity: they often rejected, erased or avoided direct discussion of female sexual desire or female sexuality. This prompted the question: Why? More specifically, what was it about female desire and female sexuality that was so threatening to the political institutions and ideological forces of the interwar period?

To answer this question, I turned to the lives and writings of two female authors of the modernist period: Katharine Burdekin and her novel, *Swastika Night* (1936) as well as the author, Djuna Barnes and her novel *Nightwood* (1937). In my second and third chapters, I explained how the lived experiences and lifestyle choices of these women resisted normative expectations and institutions of interwar society as well as how they used their writing as a space to challenge and subvert them. In doing so, I focused on how

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[237] Thewleweit, Klaus, *Male Fantasies*, Vol 2, *Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, translated by Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 107.

Burdekin and Barnes conceptualized sexuality as a space of contested power between social/political control and the individual and described how they represent non-normative sexuality and desire in their writings to resist, contest, and undermine the norms of interwar society. Instead, what Burdekin and Barnes did was imagine a society that was wholly *different*.

In this chapter, I plan to elaborate on Barnes' and Burdekin's novels by analyzing the types of political resistance they include in their novels and analyze *how* and *why* these forms of resistance are linked to sexuality to claim the imagined resistance of Burdekin and Barnes involved resisting not only the imposed standards of normativity but the imposed *temporality* of normativity. To make my case, I discuss two major themes which are present in both novels: reproduction and homosexuality. I compare how these themes operate and are represented in each of the novels in order to analyze *how* they represent the links between sexuality and political resistance. In addition, I put my discussion of the novels in the conversation with the ideas of prominent queer theorists to articulate *why* reproduction and homosexuality are tied to the temporal imaginaries of political and social institutions and ideologies. Ultimately, I return to my initial question regarding what was so threatening about female sexuality and desire to offer, not *the* answer, but *a possible* answer which is connected to my arguments about resistance.

Temporality, Reproduction, and Children

In his polemic book of queer theory, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), Lee Edelman discusses how the figure of the child functions as a symbol

which ties the act of reproduction to the future. Edelman writes that "the child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and been enshrined as the figure for whom that order must be held in perpetual trust."[238] The child, he explains, reinforces the cultural norm of heterosexuality because it symbolizes the heterosexual couple's potential to create the future. The child is the link of the heterosexual present and the heterosexual future, or as he says, "the marriage of identity to futurity in order to reproduce the social subject."[239] Edelman claims that the "figural relations," which make up the ideological organization of a given society, coalesce in the figure of the child and that, by identifying the symbol of the child as symbol for the future, these "figural relations" are perpetuated and maintained.[240] In other words, the child symbolizes a temporal connection to the future and individual investments in the child reflect their teleological investments in the future.

While Edelman is certainly not the first scholar to point out the symbolic role of the child, or how heterosexual reproduction is linked to reproduction of the social and material conditions, his analysis adds a nuance because it postulates an alternative to the "political vision *as a vision of futurity*" and positions the queer as the harbinger of this alternative.[241] He builds on Leo Bersani's antisocial thesis to advocate for a politics of queer negativity which rejects the heterosexual order and constraints of normativity. He believes that the efficacy of the queer, which is usually in reference to a homosexual

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[238] Edelman, Lee, "The Future is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive," in *Narrative Vol 6. No. 1* (January 1998), 21.
[239] Edelman, "The Future is Kid Stuff," 22.
[240] Ibid, 24.
[241] Ibid, 22.

male, "resides in its capacity to expose as figural the symbolic reality" and undermine the logic of the regime.[242] By rejecting the socially constructed ideal of the heterosexual couple and not identifying with the symbolic figure of the child, queers undermine the notion that the child (that is, participation in and perpetuation of the heterosexual regime) is a requirement of fulfillment, happiness, and socially-sanctioned life. Both *Swastika Night* and *Nightwood* depict worlds which, like Edelman, explore how the figure of the child is connected to the reproduction of the heterosexual order and present possible ways it can be resisted.

In *Swastika Night*, the women have been turned into breeders who are forced to bear children for the Nazi Empire. The women are indoctrinated from a young age to believe that they are inferior to the men and that their only purpose is to bear sons. Sons remain with the mother for six months, after which they are taken away from their mothers and into the all-male society of the empire. Daughters remain with the mothers and become breeders after puberty. The women are treated like a colonized race and forced to live outside of society in ghetto-like villages. They have their heads shaved, receive inadequate food, and are viewed as non-human by the Nazi empire. Even worse, the women have wholly internalized their subject position and the misogyny of the empire's teachings. However, there is something strange, like a silent rebellion, taking place among the women in *Swastika Night.* They have stopped having daughters.

We learn this in the early scene of the novel at the Holy Hitler Chapter. The Knight who is directing the monthly women's worship thinks to himself about how the

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[242] Edelman, "The Future is Kid Stuff," 24.

women have "destroyed us by doing what we told them" and explains how the lack of daughters will eventually lead to the "inglorious end" of the German empire.[243] Through the Knight's thoughts the reader learns that only the elite authorities of German society are aware of the problem. Furthermore, the lack of female children seems to be an unconscious occurrence rather than a direct choice of the women. By not bearing daughters, the women "demonstrate the contradiction that Burdekin understands to be at the heart of Nazism…It can perpetuate itself only by producing more of those it claims to want to eradicate."[244] The Nazi empire eradicated women from the social sphere and turned them into breeders by forcing them to bear male sons to continue to Reich. The women continue to bear sons and following orders. However, by not bearing daughters the women expose the paradox of the Nazi empire's organization: it relies on women, literally and figuratively, to reproduce itself.

By refusing to produce more women for the Nazi regime to exploit and abuse, the actions of the women in *Swastika Night* reflect a similar ideology to Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a feminist labor activist and member of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World). In her 1916 speech, "Limiting the Over-Supply of Slaves," Flynn described how workers across Europe were actively choosing to have fewer children in order to limit the supply of working-class individuals in society. Flynn described this practice as "indicative of the spirit that produces sabotage" and "one of the most vital forms of class warfare there are" because it "struck at the roots of the capitalist system by limiting their

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[243] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 12.
[244] Lothian, "A Speculative History of No Future," 464.

supply of slaves."[245] A classic Marxist, Flynn was well aware that the European system of industrial capitalism required a steady supply of workers in order to function and believed that the act of having fewer children was an effective means of sabotaging the system. Similarly, Burdekin was aware of the necessity of women and their children for the perpetuation and maintenance of the all-male Nazi empire.

Burdekin's links the women's unconscious refusal to have sons to a broader critique of patriarchal and heterosexual organization of society in the novel. When speaking with Alfred, Knight Von Hess states that, "We Germans have made women be what they cannot with all their good will go on being–not for centuries on end–the lowest common denominator, a pure animal–and the race is coming to extinction."[246] While this quote is directed at the "Germans" in the context of the novel, as I discuss in the earlier chapter, Burdekin often uses her critiques of the misogyny and sexism of German Nazism to criticize the broader patriarchal organization of European society. Through Von Hess's statement, Burdekin denounces the practice of turning women into breeders, that is, enforcing the notion that the only value of women lies in their ability to reproduce because it turns women into "the lowest common denominator" and "a pure animal." The critique, then, is not just of right-wing ideas or German Nazism, but a critique of the patriarchal, heterosexual order because it also forces women to be mothers and have children to ensure its maintenance and reproduction.

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[245] Flynn, Elizabeth Gurley, "Sabotage: The Conscious Withdrawal of the Workers' Industrial Efficiency" (Chicago, 1915) Accessed from: https://www.iww.org/history/library/Flynn/Sabotage.
[246] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 70.

Thus, Burdekin is similar to Edelman in that she recognizes the way biological reproduction is directly linked to a heteronormative political vision of the future. Just as Edelman asserts that the political efficacy of queerness lies in their ability to expose the fallacies inherent to social narratives which link the child and future, the women in *Swastika Night* expose the fallacy of male superiority which the German empire is founded upon. By continuing to follow expectations and have sons, while also not having daughters, the women in *Swastika Night* have created the ultimate imbroglio for the Nazi empire. They have forced the leadership into a position where the necessity of women must be acknowledged, and the entire social organization must be undermined or else the society will cease to exist entirely.

Interesting, Wilhelm Reich makes a similar point in his lengthy book, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, published in 1970. In his psychological study, Reich discusses the role of sexual control and repression in securing the support of the masses. While discussing the role of women in the Nazi state, Reich notes that, "the wife must not figure as a sexual being, but solely as a child-bearer," claiming that portraying women solely as mothers prevents them from gaining a "sexual consciousness."[247] Reich elaborates on this point with his often-quoted claim that, "sexually awakened women, affirmed and recognized as such, would mean the complete collapse of authoritarian ideology."[248] This line, although written years later, reflects the sentiments expressed by Von Hess in *Swastika Night*, suggesting that Burdekin's critique of the patriarchal linking of women

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[247] Reich, Wilhelm, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux: 1970), 105.
[248] Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, 105.

to their biology due to their capacity to reproduce was inextricably tied to right-wing projects of state building.

Both Reich and Burdekin note the de-sexualization of women and their role as mothers (and thus, producers) of the Nazi state. As the Knight Von Hess explains: "if a woman could rejoice publicly in the birth of a girl, Hitlerdom would start to crumble."[249] The key here is not the birth itself, but the ability to openly celebrate ("rejoice publicly") the creation of something which is deemed antithetical to the function and operation of society and its future ("the birth of a girl"). To be able to rejoice in the birth of a girl would require the women in *Swastika Night* to see inherent value in their own gender and, by extension, themselves as women. In this case, the figure of the female child, has the potential to radically call into question the organization of the Nazi empire, should the women come to see it differently than they how they have been indoctrinated. In a sense, Burdekin uses this to provide the reader a type of resistance and way of questioning the status quo which, like Edelman's figure of the queer, functions by subverting the social narratives that ensure the present will be reproduced in the future.

While Burdekin's critique focuses on the how women are reduced to their reproductive capacity and forced to contribute to the perpetuation and maintenance of a given regime, Barnes's critique focuses on the figure of the child as a symbol of the inevitable future. In *Nightwood,* the character of Robin, who is childlike herself, often tries to provide her lovers with a child. In her relationship with Felix, Robin has a son called Guido who is abnormally small and wrinkled. In her relationships with Nora and

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[249] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 14.

Jenny, Robin gives the women dolls. The only other child in the novel, a small girl who lives with Jenny, is described as doll-like and almost non-living. Many scholars have analyzed the significance of the doll-children in *Nightwood* from the lens of lesbian sexuality, as a rejection of motherhood, and as a criticism of heteronormativity, both of which are compelling. In the rest of this section, I will propose a reading of Barnes's doll-children as symbolic representations of the death of the heterosexual order in order to analyze how she connects reproduction to the future.

Barnes locates her novel and its characters outside of traditional narratives and understandings of teleological temporality. The Doctor famously distinguishes between legend and history by describing the former as "the best a poor man can do with his fate" and the latter "the best the high and mighty can do with theirs."[250] The Doctor's statement resembles the ideas of German philosopher, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), who claimed that there is no "document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism" and described how narratives of history as teleological could be used in the service of right-wing political projects like Nazism.[251] For example, the stereotypes and rhetorical descriptions of Jews used by the Nazi party, as Alice Yaeger Kaplan notes, sought to turn Jews into "a non-people… abstracted shadows (skeletons) of humanity;" the Nazi propaganda erased the knowledge and conception that the Jews had a past in order to justify removing the Jews from the present.[252] By denying the existence of a

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[250] Barnes, *Swastika Night*, 15.
[251] Benjamin, Walter, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), 248.
[252] Yaeger, Alice Jaeger, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 31.

Jewish past, the Nazis were able to advocate for political platforms and projects which would deny the Jews a future.[253]

It's no coincidence that the only Jewish character in *Nightwood*, Felix Volkbein, is obsessed with building a connection to a fabricated past. In fact, the novel opens with the origin story of Felix which begins in 1880 and concludes thirty years and a few pages later at the moment where "history stopped for Felix."[254] The facts about Felix's origin come from his Aunt. The only photos Felix has of his past are portraits, which are not of his family at all but rather two "intrepid and ancient actors."[255] Felix overcompensates for his fabricated and vacuous past by becoming obsessed with the figures and events from the Christian concept of the "great past." He feels as if "the great past might mend if he bowed low enough" and believes that paying homage to the past is "the only gesture which includes the future."[256] When he begins to court Robin, he brings her to museums and monuments and tries to teach her about the past by sharing his wealth of knowledge about historical figures and events. Despite his desperation to connect with the "great past," Felix is constantly aware of the artificiality and mendacity of his efforts. Thus, Felix's only hope of forming a real connection with his past and ensuring his place in the future is to have a son.

The character of Felix and his obsession for a son is a direct example of how the child "has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and been enshrined as the

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[253] Thus, it is interesting that Felix, as a Jew, is the only character who seeks to preserve the past and believes it plays a role in the future.
[254] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 7.
[255] Ibid, 7.
[256] Ibid, 9 & 39.

figure for whom that order must be held in perpetual trust."[257] When Felix finally gets a son, however, it does not produce the intended effect. Instead, Felix's son Guido is described as "mentally deficient and emotionally excessive, an addict to death" who has been born to "holy decay."[258] Guido's birth also marks the end of the relationship between Felix and Robin. Felix sees Robin holding Guido "high in her hands as if she were about to dash it down" and, though she does not throw the child down, the scene symbolizes her rejection of the future which Felix had hoped his son would ensure.[259] After this scene, Robin tells Felix that she did not want Guido and Felix responds by acknowledging that he cannot force Robin to care for her child ("it seems I could not accomplish that").[260] Furthermore, Felix explains that "in accepting his son" he "must accept a demolition of his own life" which underscores the fact that Guido not only failed to assuage Felix's fears and affirm his desired future, but also demolished the possibility that Felix could be a part of heteronormative society.[261] Guido is a child that is not symbolic of the future, but instead a figure that symbolizes the lack of it.

Similarly, the references to dolls and the characterizations of children in the novel as doll-like continues Barnes's critique of the figure of the child as a symbol of the future. In the novel, Robin gives both of her female lovers, Nora and Jenny, a gift of a doll. In fact, it is only after seeing a doll in Jenny's house that Nora realizes Robin has been unfaithful to her with Jenny. Nora recalls the moment while talking with the Doctor

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257 Edelman, "The Future is Kid Stuff," 21.
258 Barnes, *Nightwood*, 107.
259 Ibid, 48.
260 Ibid, 49.
261 Ibid, 108.

and explains the significance of the dolls saying, "We give death to a child when we give it a doll–it's the effigy and the shroud; when a woman gives it to a woman, it is the life they cannot have, it is their child."[262] Robin's desire to give her lovers a doll reflects her desire to give them a future and exposes the fallibility of making the child the ultimate goal of sexual relations. By symbolizing the "life they cannot have," the doll represents the inability of the homosexual couple to reproduce and, by extension, their inability to participate in the heteronormative temporality of society.

Barnes furthers her critique of the symbolic role of the child in the description of how Robin exploits the doll she gave Nora. Nora describes the scene saying:

> "Sometimes…I would find her standing in the middle of the room in boy's clothes, rocking from foot to foot, holding the doll she had given us–'our child'–high above her head, as if she would cast it down, a look of fury on her face. And one time, about three in the morning when she came in, she was angry because for once I had not been there all the time waiting. She picked up the doll and hurled it to the floor and put her foot on it, crushing her heel into it…"[263]

Just like she did with Guido, Robin holds the child above her head which threatens the possibility that she would throw the child/doll down. The earlier moment with Guido represents Robin's rejection of the socially enforced role of a mother and her anger over the constraining heteronormative future which the child represents. In this moment,

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[262] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 142.
[263] Ibid, 147.

however, a subtle detail adds a new layer of significance to Robin's action. Robin is wearing "boy's clothes." With this detail, Barnes includes the layers of gender and sexuality, and presents a queer critique of symbolic value of the child to underscore the notion that the future represented by the child is heterosexual and, because of this, incompatible with the figure of a woman who wears "boy's clothes."

Although they engage with the theme of reproduction in different ways, both novels recognize the temporal link between reproduction and the political significance of possibilities and potentials of the imagined future. The woman in *Swastika Night* call into question the imagined future of the hyper-patriarchal, all-male Nazi empire by exposing the integral role women have in the creation and maintenance of the regime through an unconscious refusal to bear daughters. Their resistance manifests as a stopping of the future which will inevitably force a reconsideration and reformulation of the future as something different. The doll-children in *Nightwood* expose how the child as a symbol of the future enforces and perpetuates a heterosexual social order by denying the possibility for alternative identities or desires to attain fulfillment or participate in the future. Robin's reoccurring act of rejecting the child and dolls, then, represents resistance as a physical "saying no" to the figure of the child and the heterosexual future it represents. Both novels engage in the type of political resistance Edelman advocates for because they "choose not to choose the child."[264] The novels agree with Edelman that "the figure of futurity must die" because the characters "have seen the future and it's

[264] Edelman, "The Future is Kid Stuff," 29.

every bit as lethal as the past," and advocate for an alternative temporality by insisting that "*the future stops here*."[265]

Homosexuality, Temporality, and Queer Desire

Edelman's approach to resisting reproductive futures is useful for thinking about how Barnes and Burdekin are resisting social narratives that tie biological reproduction to the telos of reproduction of social norms. However, Edelman's concept of queer negativity does not, I believe, fully capture the political possibilities and sexual imaginaries which *Swastika Night* and *Nightwood* urge their readers to consider. Through representations of non-normative sexualities both of the novels depict queer desire as imbued with the power to disrupt, break, or fracture the ontological investments individuals have in the political, social, and libidinal regime in which they live. The scenes where the characters experience homoerotic passion or non-normative sexual desire are also moments where they rebel against social convention and resist the impulse to conform to, or follow, social codes and political laws. Although they are fleeting, these moments, I argue, represent moments in which the characters experience an ontological break from heteronormativity and exist in a *queer temporality* which facilitates and prompts their acts of defiance and resistance.

To help elucidate my argument I rely on the work of queer theorist, Jose Esteban Muñoz from his book, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer* Futurity (2009). Muñoz wrote the book, in part, as a response to the work of Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman on queer antisociality and negativity which Muñoz described as "the gay white

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[265] Edelman, "The Future is Kid Stuff," 30.

man's last stand."[266] He uses the work of queer artists from different genders and races to demonstrate how his theory of queerness is more capacious than the antisocial queer theories which, Muñoz asserts, seem limited in their applications.[267] In the book, Muñoz uses the utopian ideas of Ernst Bloch and Marxist thinkers to argue for a theory of queerness as a "critical investment in utopia is resistant to the stultifying temporal logic of a broken-down present."[268] Unlike thinkers on the side of queer negativity, Muñoz's argument of queer sexuality and its relationship leads to a theory of queer futurity that "attends to the past for the purpose of critiquing a present."[269]

Muñoz proposes an understanding of queerness as "not yet here" and as a "warm illumination of a horizon imbued with a potentiality," stating that it can often be glimpsed "in the realm of aesthetic."[270] He positions queerness as a utopia which can only be represented or imagined, but in the act of its representation or imagination, it allows for a critical engagement with and questioning of the present. He describes queerness as the "stepping out of the linearity of straight time," the act of which allows us to phenomenologically question our investments in the present moment.[271] The key, for Muñoz, to the experience of queerness and it's critical efficacy is the "desire for a futurity."[272] The act of desiring a queer futurity, one that does not exist already, is an act

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[266] Muñoz, José Esteban, "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory," in PMLA, Vol 121 No. 3 (May 2006), 825.
[267] Or, as Muñoz puts it, "…failures of imagination in queer critique that I understand as antirelationality and antiutopianism."
[268] Muñoz, 826.
[269] Ibid, 826.
[270] Munoz, José Esteban, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.
[271] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 25.
[272] Ibid, 30.

of imagination. In this way, the key to calling into question the "straight time" of the present and resisting heteronormativity is the ability to imagine and desire things outside or beyond it. Muñoz's ideas on non-normative desire and their connection to temporal imaginaries are helpful for understanding how homoerotic desire and passion in *Swastika Night* and *Nightwood* distances the characters from their ontological investments in the normative regime and allows them to resist it.

In *Swastika Night* there are multiple moments where the characters are shaken from their investments in the Nazi regime and forced to confront or critique their present. The character of Hermann, as I discussed in chapter two, fails in his duty as a Reich soldier because he is physically unable to kill Alfred. He reaches his arm up to stab Alfred and becomes paralyzed by his feelings for Alfred. In this moment, we see Hermann break from his identification with the rules of Nazi society, which represent the linear temporality of the present, because of his homoerotic desire–his queer desire–for Alfred. His homoerotic desire is also a desire for a futurity; specifically, a futurity in which Alfred could remain alive despite his treasonous statements and Hermann would not be obligated to kill his friend. Furthermore, following this moment Hermann continues to choose his friend over his duty as a German Nazi soldier which underscores the fact that Hermann in unable to fully return to the obedient subject he was before.

The moment the Knight Von Hess first meets Hermann and Alfred reiterates the change in Hermann's countenance. The Knight notices "one or two queer little things" about Hermann which makes the Knight wonder how Hermann "managed to develop

such a stubborn power of resistance?"[273] After which, the Knight notices Alfred and realizes that Hermann's resistance is "animated by a fiery and most resolute spirit emanating from the unholy flesh and bones of a foreigner [Alfred]."[274] Here, Burdekin articulates the impact the relationship with Alfred has had on Hermann and implies that the relationship has resulted in Hermann's disidentification with the Nazi regime. It's no coincidence, I believe, that the Knight associates Hermann's "stubborn power of resistance" with the "one or two *queer* little things" he notices about Hermann.

It is the queerness of Alfred and Hermann, their nonconformity to the Nazi empire, which initially prompts the Knight to consider revealing his secret book to them. Before doing so, however, the Knight decides to share something with Alfred that puts both of their lives and positions at risk: flying. Alfred, although he is an airplane mechanic for the German empire, is not permitted to fly planes because he is British. The Knight's decision to allow Alfred to fly his plane defies the rules of the empire and also puts both of their lives at risk. It is an act of defiance, but also an act of imagination. When flying the plane, Alfred is described as "intoxicated," the freedom of flying is like an ecstatic pleasure which affirms for Alfred that things could, and should, be different.[275] Alfred thinks to himself that "he had something no one could ever take away from him, not if they tore him into little strips–he had flown," highlighting the impact the experience has on his subjectivity. Flying the plane allows Alfred to glimpse the "horizon imbued with potentiality" and allows him to desire, to imagine, a futurity outside the

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[273] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 43.
[274] Ibid, 43.
[275] Ibid, 50.

constraints of the German empire.[276] The Knight seemed to anticipate the effect of flying would have on Alfred because afterward he promises to tell Alfred about the secret book.

The secret book contains evidence of the past which the German empire had erased from the historical memory. It had been passed down through the generations in Von Hess's family. The book, as a record of the past which has been erased by the present, represents the ultimate critique of normative temporality and order of the German empire because it exposes it as fabricated and contingent. The act of reading its contents breaks the reader from "the present's stultifying hold" and, by showing a way of living and organizing society that is different than the German empire, the secret book affirms Alfred and Hermann's disidentification with the regime as a "belonging in particularity that is not dictated or organized around the spirit of political impasse that characterizes the present."[277] In other words, the book breaks through the stultifying effects ideology espoused by the Nazi empire has on the political imaginaries of its citizens. After reading the book, Alfred describes the impact the new information had on him saying, "he felt that his secret mind… which was always strong and hopeful, had taken its usual forward leap."[278] The book offers a glimpse into a queer temporality which affirms Alfred and Hermann's feelings of abjection from the Nazi empire by allowing them to use the past, the *real* past, to critique the present. More importantly, it allows for them to hope, to desire, to imagine that things could be different which is, in itself, an act of resistance.

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[276] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.
[277] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 28.
[278] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 97.

The conversations between Alfred and the Knight after reading further elucidate the connection of desire, temporality and resistance. During a tense conversation about power and violence, the Knight asserts that "the rebellion must be unarmed, and the power behind the rebellion must be spiritual, out of the soul."[279] This connects to Alfred's earlier statements about the fallibility of the German empire where he advocated for a "rebellion of disbelief" and explained that "the skepticism will grow because it's a lively thing, full of growth, like an acorn."[280] Both the Knight and Alfred seem to recognize the radical potentiality that comes from individuals who are capable of imagining things differently from the way they are. In other words, when individuals experience moments in which the present is called into question these experiences have more influence than physical, armed rebellions because these moments cause individuals to desire possible futurities that break from the teleology of the present. In *Swastika Night*, Burdekin uses moments of homoerotic and queer desire which disrupt the characters identification with the norms of the German empire to demonstrate the political efficacy of non-normative desire.

Barnes explores the political potential of non-normative desire in a similar way in her novel, *Nightwood*. Unlike Burdekin, however, Barnes explores this through a more abstracted representation of non-normative desire based on the character's relationships with the novel's somnambulist protagonist, Robin Vote. Curiously, Robin is often described with adjectives and analogies that have a temporal aspect. For example, she is

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[279] Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 100.
[280] Ibid, 26.

described as "the figure of doom" and speaking with her made people feel as if they were being "confronted by a catastrophe that had yet no beginning."[281] These descriptions suggest that what others find unsettling about Robin is the fact that she seems to be connected to a different, non-normative temporality. The adjective "doom" and metaphor of a "catastrophe that had *yet* no beginning" are felicitously similar to Muñoz's description of queerness as a "not *yet* here" that allows individuals to "feel this world is not enough" and supports a reading of Robin as a figure of queerness.[282] Thus, through their relationships and interactions with Robin the other characters of *Nightwood* catch glimpses of a non-normative temporality and begin to imagine different possibilities of existence.

This is especially the case with Felix Volkbein and his relationship with Robin. Initially, Felix is characterized as the only character in the night-world of the novel who seeks a connection to the heteronormative society of the "day." Felix is obsessed with the history and relics of the past, but only because he believes paying "homage to our past is the only gesture that also includes the future."[283] Felix's obsession with the past makes him unable to imagine a future which is not a reproduction of the past. When he meets Robin and begins to court her, he takes her to museums and historical cities to teach her about the past. During this, Robin touches objects which causes Felix to feel apprehensive because "the sensuality in her hands frightened him."[284] Robin's

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[281] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 41 & 48.
[282] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.
[283] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 39.
[284] Ibid, 42.

irreverence for the objects of the great past and the sensual way she interacts with them is unusual, causing Felix's sense of unease. As Felix narrates the past to Robin, he fails to hold her attention, which prompts him to say "I am deceiving you."[285] Robin's inattention and unwillingness to share in Felix's reverence for the past evokes a feeling of unease which exposes Felix to the fabricated nature of the past and acknowledges his part in perpetuating it.

Despite the unease, Felix asks Robin to marry him. He describes his love for Robin as "if the weight of his life had amassed one precipitation," indicating that he viewed his marriage as the penultimate accomplishment in life, second only to the birth of a son.[286] When Felix marries Robin, he hopes that she will give him a son who would "recognize and honour the past" because, he believes, without such love "the past as he understood it would die away from the world."[287] In this quote, Barnes links Felix's obsession with the past to his desire for a heteronormative and patriarchal family. Doing so indicates how obsessed and limited Felix's imaginary is by his inability to imagine a future that does not "contain the past." At the same time, Felix is also aware that Robin does not share his vision of the future. At one point, Felix describes Robin as if her attention "had already been taken by something not yet in history."[288] This description establishes Robin as a foil to Felix; whereas Felix is concerned with the past, Robin is preoccupied with a future that is "not yet" here.

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[285] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 45.
[286] Ibid, 42.
[287] Ibid, 45.
[288] Ibid, 44.

Later in the novel, when Felix is talking with the Doctor, he explains that his relationship with Robin has "placed him in the dark for the rest of his life."[289] His relationship with Robin not only failed to fulfill Felix's socially contrived desires, but irrevocably altered Felix's relationship to the past. Felix says:

> "I wanted, as you, who are aware of everything, to go behind the scenes, back-stage as it were, to our present condition, to find, if I could, the secret of time; good, perhaps, that that is an impossible ambition for the sane mind. One has, I am not certain, to be a little mad to see into the past or the future, to be a little abridged of life to know life, the obscure life– darkly seen, the condition my son lives in; it may also be the errand on which the Baronin is going."[290]

Felix admits that his reverence for the past and his identification with heteronormative time ("the present condition") was based in his desire to cultivate an omniscient knowledge or understanding of the present ("secret of time"). Felix describes his former quest for a past as "an impossible ambition for the sane mind" suggesting Felix not only abandoned his crusade but also implying he is no longer "sane." With his insanity ("one must be a little mad"), however, Felix seems to believe he is finally able to understand things ("see into the past or future") and connects this ability to the experience of being outside of liner, straight temporality ("abridged of life"). Felix's description indicates that his relationship with Robin prevented him from living fully within the normative society

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[289] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 113.
[290] Ibid, 122.

and its temporality and this, in turn, inspired a new way of thinking about the past and present that opened up possibilities for imagining a future.

Barnes even includes a direct example of how Felix's imaginary has altered after his relationship with Robin. After his conversation with the Doctor, Felix rides into Vienna with Guido next to him and Frau Mann, the transgender trapeze artist from the Denkman circus, "opulent and gay" sitting across from him.[291] The "odd trio," as the novel describes them, compromise a *queer* family which subverts and dodges convention from every angle. Though it is far from perfect, Felix and Frau Mann are alcoholics and Guido has his own struggles, the unique family represents a new form of familial relationships. Additionally, the "odd trio" parodies the holy family of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus which further underscores how this familiar arrangement is exists outside of the imaginary of heteronormativity. The final moments of Felix and his queer family represent the radical effects breaking from the constraints of normativity can have for the possibilities of social relations and organizations.

In the last chapter, I analyzed Nora's relationship with Robin through a psychoanalytic lens to suggest that the couple's reunification is predicated on Nora relinquishing her internalized adherence to the heteronormative expectations of society. In doing so, I argued Nora is able to affirm her desire for Robin without seeking to control her, which leads to a reunification with her lover in an animal-like ecstasy. Not only does the scene take place inside a church, before a "contrived altar," but Robin is

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[291] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 122.

wearing "boy's trousers," all of which hints at the *queerness* of the scene.[292] By wearing "boy's trousers," Robin defies gender norms. By having their animalistic, sapphic reunion take place inside a church, Barnes underscores the radical defiance which permeates the pair's reunion.

The moment Nora sees Robin is a moment of motion in which "Nora's body struck the wood"[293] and "Robin began going down."[294] The motion of both characters seems to involve a downward movement, a sort of falling, which could be read as Barnes rewriting the classic biblical fall. In this case, the fall does not lead to sin but to the experience of desire as something imbued with radical potential. It becomes a sort of prelapsarian desire. By starting the reunification scene with the motion of *falling*, Barnes seems to imply the pair is falling out of normal society and, by extension, out of the linear, straight time of the present. No longer tied to the vestiges of heteronormativity which had influenced the ways Nora and Robin were able to express their passion for each other, they are able to express and enact their desires. The desire of Robin and Nora, then, represents not only the "desire for both larger semi abstractions such as a better world of freedom but also, more immediately, better relations within the social that include better sex and more pleasure."[295] Reading the scene this way presents the ending of *Nightwood* as, I believe, an affirmation of, and desire for, the hopeful possibility of a *queer futurity*.

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[292] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 169.
[293] It's interesting to note, here, that in the final scenes of Felix when he is at the bar with Guido and Frau Mann, Felix's tapping to the beat is described as "his hand, on the table, struck thumb and little finger against the wood…" which seems like an interesting parallel. (Barnes, 122)
[294] Barnes, *Nightwood*, 169.
[295] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 30.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I employ the ideas of Lee Edelman and Jose Esteban Muñoz to analyze how the forms of resistance imagined in *Swastika Night* and *Nightwood* reflect an understanding of the sexual and the political as temporally connected to the political ideology and social organization of a given society. I purposely chose Edelman and Muñoz because they represent two diametrically opposed positions within the field of queer studies. Despite their theoretical disagreements, I wanted to show that they could both be used to discuss and analyze the texts. The point of demonstrating their mutual relevancy is to present a queer reading of the novels which does not take the side of antisociality, queer negativity, queer positivity, or anti-antiutopianism, but rather highlights the ontological and phenomenological spaces of critical engagement with society that stem from the point of sexuality.

I believe it is precisely the political potential of sexuality which led to female desire and female sexuality being seen as threats to the political institutions and ideology of the interwar period. Prior to the interwar period in Europe, female sexuality (at least, in its mainstream representations and within the cultural imaginary) was understood within the patriarchal confines of biological reproduction, marriage, and economics. It was functional and productive. It was not orgasmic. This changed in the years leading up to, during, and immediately after World War I. These years, as I touch on in my earlier chapters, were filled with new definitions and manifestations of female sexuality. These new ideas and imaginings of sexual desire and acts were *queer,* in the sense that they deviated from the expected norms of behavior and gender roles ascribed to women at the

time. From pamphlets on the female orgasm to literature which directly depicted female homosexual relationships, there seemed to be no limit to what could be imagined, done, or said about female sexuality.

Returning to Edelman's understanding of the political power of queers to expose "as figural the symbolic reality," the expanding ideas of female sexuality and female desire exposed the socially constructed nature of the conception that the purpose of sex was to have a child.[296] Furthermore, recalling Muñoz's idea that "queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing," the mélange of publications that described the clitoral orgasm, depicted female homosexual relationships, and new forms of sexual pleasure helped women recognize that the old "norms" of their sexual lives had not been enough and showed them what had been missing: pleasure and desire.[297] As the sexual imaginary for women expanded, so, too, did the social imaginary through the feminist movements for suffrage, workers' rights, and access to early forms of contraceptives. These new movements all relied on a new conception of the future which not only included women but, in some more radical political imaginaries, was created by them.

The political power of sexuality and sexual desire, it seems, is that it can motivate us to make our imagined fantasies become our political and social realities. The sexuality of an individual creates a space where the external reality of the present is confronted by the sociosexual imaginary exposing the disjuncture between the two. In turn, this

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[296] Edelman, "The Future is Kid Stuff," 24.
[297] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 25.

exposure forces us to critically engage, ontologically and phenomenologically, with our investments in the narratives, relations, and temporalities of the present in which we exist. Sometimes, this critical engagement results in an individual withdrawing their consent, that is, disidentifying themselves with the status quo's conception of what is normal and acceptable. These are the individuals who begin to believe in the idea that things *should* change and the possibility that they *could*.

Conclusion: At Present

"Power can be invisible, it can be fantastic, it can be dull and routine. It can be obvious, it can reach you by the baton of the police, it can speak the language of your thoughts and desires. It can feel like remote control, it can exhilarate like liberation, it can travel through time, and it can drown you in the present. It is dense and superficial, it can cause you bodily injury, and it can harm you without seeming to ever touch you. It is systemic and it is particularistic and it is often both at the same time. It causes dreams to live and dreams to die." – Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*[298]

The social conditions, political turmoil, and economic precarity that define the reality of Western society today are, in many ways, reminiscent of interwar period. Fascism has, once again, reared its ugly head. The sexual and racial identities of individuals are under attack from conservative political agendas which seek to eradicate anything and anyone who deviates from their version of normal. Medical and scientific research is often skewed by biased news reporting or political leaders to bolster support for particular policies and agendas or to deny the realities of existential threats to society, such as climate change. Even as social movements like #MeToo brought issues of sexism and rape to the forefront of the public arena by exposing the unconscionable behaviors of powerful men, America's next election will still force voters to choose between two men openly accused of sexual assault and rape. Concentration camps filled with immigrants and asylum-seekers, which separate children from their families, exist across the United States. Elected officials garner electoral support with promises to restore countries to their prior status. For example, Donald Trump's slogan "make American great again" or Boris Johnson's promise to "get it [Brexit] done" both seem like eerie echoes of the political rhetoric from the fin-de-siècle period.

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298 Cited in: Puar, Jasbir K., *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press: 2007), 221.

The similarities in the social and political conditions of the interwar period to those of current Western society were the initial impetus for this project. I was drawn to how public discourses contributed to the increasing popularity of right-wing conservative parties and fascism in Europe in the 1930s. This curiosity led to the investigations into the trends and discourses of the interwar period. While conducting the research on these discourses, I noticed that the ideas of the medical, scientific, and sociological fields were consistently used in the discussions of sexual behaviors and sexual desires of individuals and, in particular, women. Specifically, it seemed that conservative and right-wing public figures and publications used these ideas to justify policies and platforms which sought to define women's roles in society and limit their access to knowledge and education. Despite this, the interwar period was also marked by a proliferating feminist movement and an expansion of women into the public sphere which led me to investigate another realm of public exchange: literature.

In this research, I was drawn to the connection governmental authorities made between literature and the corruption of society. I focused on the sensationalized trials of Oscar Wilde and Radclyffe Hall which were prominent examples of how some literature of the interwar period could be seen as a threat to the stable functioning of society. Furthermore, because both Wilde and Hall did not practice heterosexuality, they exemplified how the contents of literature could be conflated with the lives and actions of individuals. As I dove deeper into this rabbit hole, I returned to the question of how discourses were used to control individuals, especially women. Using scholarly studies of female homosexuality and lesbianism and its representations in interwar publications, I

learned how literature became a source of empowerment and knowledge sharing for women of the interwar period.

The result of that research is the first chapter of this project. In the chapter, I argue that the competing discourses, ideas, and anxieties relating to gender and sexuality during the interwar period were tied to cultural controversies about the subversive potential of literature in society. I discuss the social fears of degeneration and decadence in order to discuss the political anxieties of the period and to suggest that these fears were tied not to a fear of regression, but of progression to a more inclusive future. I connect this to a discussion of sexology which played an important role in bringing the discussions of sexual behavior and sexual desire into the public arena. Finally, I discuss the trials of Maud Allan and Radclyffe Hall to show how representations of female sexuality which contradicted or challenged the patriarchal standards of the time were censored in an effort to control the public's own sexual behaviors and proclivities. The goal of this chapter, by showing how literature was connected to the multiple and competing discourses and ideas on sexuality of the interwar period, was to set the stage for the analysis of the following chapters.

The second and third chapters of this project focused on the authors Katharine Burdekin and Djuna Barnes and how they used their writing as a space to challenge and subvert the right wing and conservative trends of the interwar period. I analyzed Burdekin's novel, *Swastika Night*, which imagines a world three-hundred years after a Nazi victory of World War II. Through this analysis, I focused on how Burdekin plays with gender roles and heteronormative structures to launch a critique of the patriarchal

and heteronormative structures of interwar society. Similarly, I discussed Barnes's novel, *Nightwood*, to show how she inverted the notion of normalcy and challenged the reader's ability to pathologize based on behaviors and actions to show how she critiqued the heteronormative institutions and structures of interwar society. In my analysis of both authors, I return to the discourses and concepts I discussed in the first chapter to focus on how each of the authors used representations of non-normative sexuality to craft their critiques and shape their narratives.

In the final chapter, I analyzed the relationship of sexuality to the temporal imaginary of society. Using the arguments of queer scholars who discuss, albeit in vastly different ways, the relationship of temporality to the social structure and political institutions of society. I discuss this in the context of the novels by focusing on how each novel represents reproduction and homosexuality. This final chapter underscored the connection of the sexual and the political and, by linking sexuality to the temporal imaginary, proposed the idea that sexuality could be a source of radical political resistance and subversion to a given regime. In this way, it returned to my earlier curiosity about why the interwar period was marked by a simultaneous growth in feminist movements and an increasing popular support of conservative right-wing political projects to show why non-normative sexuality was a source of political empowerment and a place subject to legislative regulation. I concluded in this final chapter that the political power of sexuality and sexual desire is its ability to motivate individuals to make their imagined fantasies become our political and social realities by creating a space where the external reality of the present is confronted by the sociosexual imaginary, thus

exposing the disjuncture between the two. This conflict creates a liminal space within the individual, which can be the impetus for radical re-imaginings of society which, in turn, prompt subversive political action.

The final chapter of the project became the most personal and, in my opinion, the most salient to the present reality of Western society. Thinking about how Katharine Burdekin and Djuna Barnes resisted the normative practices of interwar society in their writing and refused to conform to them in their own lives is, of course, helpful for thinking about how we can resist conforming or perpetuating normative ideals in our own time. But, by linking this thinking to a theoretical conception of sexuality as a source of radical political potential, it suggests a conception of sexuality as a radical political praxis. Rather than think of sexuality or sexual desire in terms of an identity, sexual orientation, appearance, or behavior which contributes to the cataleptic cacophony of current identity politics, it presents a way of thinking about sexuality as a source of social solidarity and political action which transcends identity categories. More importantly, in its transcendence it allows for a shared imaginary of a future which could, and should, be *different* from the past and the present.

Currently, our society is in dire need of the ability to imagine a society that is *different*. As we face the looming threat of climate change and begin to deal with the unprecedented economic and political consequences of natural disasters and changes in global weather patterns, we need unprecedented solutions. In the United States, even the most radically progressive ideas, such as the Green New Deal, rely on a return to the political solutions from our past to fix the problems of the present. But the Green New

Deal is not green enough and solutions such as these are not good enough. As I write this conclusion, the world has been turned upside down by the global pandemic caused by Covid-19. The pandemic has forced the world economy to crash as people are forced to self-quarantine within their homes for weeks on end while people continue to die not only from the virus, but also from a lack of medical supplies and resources caused by an inadequate and profit-driven health care system. But even this global pandemic has not been enough to silence calls for a "return to normal," only serving to increase them.

If this situation is indicative of anything, it is indicative of how easy it will be for Western democracies to repeat past mistakes and bow to right-wing ideas and fascist governments. This is the future which our society is hurdling towards, unless we can come up with a collective project that imagines a different sort of future. What we need is a radical re-thinking of the normative organization of society and the patriarchal, heteronormative structures which perpetuate it. More importantly, we need to start this process from a place of shared solidarity which transcends race, gender, nationality, class, or religion. It's possible that we can turn to sex and sexuality as a source of solidarity. "Sex is a vector of oppression," states Gayle Rubin, "the system of sexual oppression cuts across other modes of social inequality" which means that it may also be a space where we can confront and address these inequities.[299] If nothing else, thinking about things from the perspective of sex and sexuality may aid us in imagining a world that does not function on binaries or hierarchies that are rooted in imposed constructs of difference.

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[299] Rubin, Gayle, "Thinking Sex," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* edited by Carole S. Vance. (Boston: Routledge: 1984), 293.

If we do not begin from a space of shared solidarity, the political support and radical collective action necessary for making the imagined world of a better future into a reality will not take place. The future world of a better life will not exist. We can no longer afford to repeat the past. The failure of our present moment will not be characterized by a lack of stability but, rather, a lack of *imagination*. But it does not have to.

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