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The Short Stories of Djuna Barnes : A Less Disquieting Vision

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THE SHORT STORIES OF DJUNA BARNES:

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This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading the works of the relatively unknown American author, Djuna Barnes, often proves to be an intense experience, an experience which is not easily forgotten. Although one may not readily comprehend the thematic content of Barnes' work, one is immediately drawn to the beauty and the power of her language. Barnes' language is harmonious with her ideas. In her writing she deals with the often confusing complexities of the human condition, and to express those complexities, she uses language that is as highly charged and as complex as the condition described. She writes poetic fiction, prose that is inundated with poetic qualities. Barnes' short stories, novels, poems, and plays are poetically as well as powerfully written, especially since she is able to combine the metaphoric quality and fluidity of poetry with the impact of drama. The following passage from her novel Nightwood demonstrates some of the qualities of her writing.

> How more tidy had it been to have been
> born old and have aged into a child,
> brought finally to the brink, not of
> the grave, but of the womb; in our age
> bred up into infants searching for a
> womb to crawl into, not be made to
> walk loth the gingerly dust of death,
> but to find a moist gillflirted way.[1]

In expressing the idea that it would be preferable to grow young instead of to grow old, Barnes juxtaposes the opposing realities

[1] Djuna Barnes, Nightwood (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1937), p. 99.

of birth and death, youth and age. Her ability to smoothly juxtapose incongruities and unlike objects is evident throughout her work and often serves to "shake-up" one's awareness of reality and also to heighten one's awareness or perception of the confusing complexities of the human condition. The passage is demonstrative of most of Barnes' work in that she often creates a literary montage in which dualities are resolved.

In creating the incongruous images of being born old and then of aging into a child, one is brought not to the grave at the end of one's life but to the womb. In the circular structure of the passage, one moves from birth through the aging process to death, but the aging process takes one not to the grave but back to the initial stage of birth, the womb. The final outcome is death, but Barnes proposes that one not be made to reach that end reluctantly or warily but as comfortably as one finds oneself in the womb. By using the circular structure, Barnes succeeds in bringing together opposites and achieves congruity by the end of the passage.

In addition to demonstrating the quality of her writing, the passage from Nightwood also points to what may be considered Barnes' final summation of life. Throughout her career, Barnes maintained a rather disquieting personal vision of life in which the meaning of life lay in its meaninglessness. Barnes acknowledged the positive forces in life such as religion, tradition, family, and love but maintained that such mainstays serve only as buffers, offering a means of coping or, better yet, a way of staying the disillusionment that comes with the

realization that the meaning of life is its meaninglessness. For example, one searches for love in fulfillment of one's destiny. In the search for love, however, come enlightenment and disillusionment (a conflict in human existence which Barnes maintained cannot be resolved). No matter what one does in life, there will always be disillusionment. Love itself can never be totally fulfilling, and the only real destiny is the grave. The following passage, which is also taken from Nightwood, further encapsulates Barnes' basic attitude toward life and her disquieting vision of life.

> I, as good a Catholic as they make, have embraced every confection of hope, and yet I know well, for all our outcry and struggle, we shall be for the next generation not the massive dung fallen from the dinosaur, but the little speck left of a humming-bird;. . . .[2]

Such a vision might surely find some recompense in being brought finally in a "gillflirted way" to the womb instead of to the grave. Such an attitude is consistently revealed in her major works. Barnes' major works, Ryder, Nightwood, and The Antiphon, reflect her life and her disquieting personal vision. Her short stories do not reflect that life and vision to the extent that the major works do.

Although Djuna Barnes' personal vision is evident in all of her work, her short stories often reveal a softer side to Barnes, bespeaking a less disquieting vision. In contrast to a personal vision which is generally void of hope, one finds moments in which Barnes puts

[2] Barnes, Nightwood, p. 154.

a light in her window of darkness. Such moments are especially found in a few of the short stories. In revealing a less disquieting vision, the short stories often reveal a kinship with other visions, especially those found in Romanticism and Surrealism. Such associations are often slight, but they occur often enough and are strong enough to make for startling contrasts in her writing between two visions, one generally void of hope and one in which hope glistens.

Barnes' major works are extremely enigmatic and thus seldom easy to read, much less comprehend. Although the short stories are often as enigmatic, they are somewhat more accessible to the reader. It is, perhaps, the accessibility of the short stories that makes them so important as an introduction to Barnes' larger works and to her full career as a writer.

To understand the full impact of the contrast between Djuna Barnes' personal vision and the often subtle moments or even whispers of a less disquieting vision, one must know something about Barnes and her other work.

Even with the recent publication of Andrew Field's biography entitled Djuna, little is known about her. She consistently shunned publicity, refusing to sell her work by first selling a particular image of herself as an artist. She was an extremely private person, especially for the last forty years of her life during which time she lived as a recluse in a two-room apartment in Greenwich Village until her death at age 90 on June 18, 1982. Understanding Djuna Barnes and her work becomes a matter of piecing together a few facts which are

interspersed among many impressions and many memories. Reading the few books and articles about her work and biographies of other people containing bits of conversation and remarks made to and about her allow one a glimpse of Barnes the person. The image, though, becomes a ghost-like presence not unlike that of Robin, the elusive character in her novel Nightwood.

To consider Djuna Barnes in light of her contemporaries--a listing of which creates a literary montage of Who's Who--is to consider the person who was often the center of attention. She was a "quick, lean figure, with absolutely astonishing eyes--deeply beautiful and crackling with energy."[3] "The Barnes," as she liked to be called, seemed to know everyone in Europe during the 1920's and 1930's, and everyone knew or wanted to know Djuna. Socially, she was very much a part of the "Lost Generation," that group of people who sought in Europe, especially in Paris, what they could not find elsewhere--an environment that was conducive to the free expression of ideas in art. One might include among her friends and close acquaintances James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Peggy Guggenheim, Ezra Pound, Margaret Anderson, Robert McAlmon, Kay Boyle, Eugene O'Neill, and William Carlos Williams; Djuna Barnes was as fascinating as any of them.

Tall with beautiful white skin and magnificent red hair, Djuna was considered to be among the most desirable women in Paris. Robert

[3] Frances McCullough in A Festschrift for Djuna Barnes on Her 80th Birthday, ed. Alex Gildzen (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Libraries, 1972), n. pag.

McAlmon recalls Djuna's poise and beauty but also relates that she was "far too good-looking and fundamentally likable for anything but fond admiration, if not a great deal more, even when she [was] rather overdoing the grande dame manner and talking soul and ideas."[4] She was a person given to sweeping gestures, but most people who knew her remember an elegance matched only by a quick wit. She was a remarkable talker.[5] Her language was exquisite, often similar to that used in her poetry and prose.

In addition to being a woman who was striking in appearance and stimulating in conversation, Barnes exuded an air of confidence. Her confidence was not based entirely on good looks and a charming personality, however. Her ability to write was recognized and appreciated by her contemporaries. In fact, according to Janet Flanner, she is remembered as the most important woman writer in Paris during the 1930's.[6]

Barnes' career and lifestyle as a writer, including the years with the expatriates in Paris and the later years as a recluse in Greenwich Village, seem very much in line with her rather atypical childhood. Born on June 12, 1892, on Storm-King Mountain near Cornwall-on-Hudson, New York, Djuna, along with her four brothers, was

[4] Robert McAlmon, Being Geniuses Together, 1920-1930 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 34.

[5] Janet Flanner, "That Was Paris," The New Yorker, 11 March 1972, p. 34.

[6] Flanner, p. 34.

raised to be self-sufficient and independent in an unusually self-sufficient, independent, and often eccentric family. The unique familial ambience was due in part to Djuna's father, Wald Barnes. Wald Barnes was arbitrarily opposed to late-Victorian society and thus chose to provide for his family on a 105-acre farm on Long Island, a setting which was at that time as natural and private as possible. Family members worked the farm together and shared with each other an accumulated knowledge of art, music, and literature. Djuna herself played several musical instruments and began writing poetry and plays at an early age.

Andrew Field points out that the real driving force within the Barnes' family, however, was not Wald Barnes but his mother Zadel Barnes. A teacher, a writer, and a feminist, Zadel Barnes maintained a nurturing atmosphere of creativity within the Barnes' home, instilling within its members an appreciation of the humanities and of the fine arts. Zadel Barnes' presence and influence, however, were not without adverse effects, for Djuna increasingly saw her father as a failed artist and a weak person in the shadow of her grandmother, "the spoiled American son of a powerful mother."[7] She also developed ambivalent feelings towards her mother for not asserting herself, for remaining in the shadow of an overbearing husband and of a dynamic mother-in-law. The family situation was far from idyllic. Barnes' social isolation as a child and her understanding and impressions of

[7] Andrew Field, Djuna (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1983), p. 179.

her family would remain with her and prove to be perhaps the most profound influences upon her life and work.

Djuna left her family in her late teens, continuing her education by studying painting at the Pratt Institute and at the Art Students' League. She began her professional life in 1913 when she became a reporter-illustrator for the Brooklyn Eagle. She subsequently worked for many New York newspapers and magazines, often interviewing celebrities such as Lillian Russell, Diamond Jim Brady, Florenz Ziegfeld, Mother Jones, and Billy Sunday. It was not long before she began publishing poems and short stories in the popular magazines and newspapers of the day such as the Sunday Telegraph, Munsey's, Little Review, All-Story Weekly, Smart Set, Dial, and Vanity Fair. She sometimes used the pseudonym of Lydia Steptoe. Barnes also wrote a column for Theatre Guild Magazine and saw her own plays produced in association with the Provincetown Players. From 1920, when McCalls magazine first sent her abroad, until 1941, Barnes worked on both sides of the Atlantic, continuing to write interviews and human interest stories while publishing her more serious work. As a journalist alone she was prolific. Douglas Messerli notes in the introduction to his bibliography of Barnes' work that her reactions to Paris and to the whole European cultural ambience which appeared in Vanity Fair, Charm, The Double Dealer, and The New Yorker often reflected the sentiments of the expatriates.[8]

[8] Douglas Messerli, Djuna Barnes: A Bibliography (New York: David Lewis, 1975), p. xii.

Djuna Barnes was the epitome of a writer. Throughout a long and varied career, she was a poet, a journalist, a playwright, a short-story writer, and a novelist, and she was accomplished in all genres. In addition to writing, she was an illustrator and a portrait painter. She often combined her artistic endeavors. Robert McAlmon notes with admiration that Barnes colored by hand her drawings in forty copies of her book, Ladies Almanack.[9]

Djuna's first published book, The Book of Repulsive Women, is really a booklet consisting of eight poems and five drawings. It was published in 1915 as one of a special series of chapbooks issued by Guido Bruno, who operated a Greenwich Village garret. The poems and drawings depict rather garrish women who fall from innocence to decadence against an urban background. The book marks the first stages in the development of Barnes' personal vision of life, a vision which was to culminate in her novel Nightwood.

In her illustrated novels Ladies Almanack and Ryder, both published in 1928, Barnes demonstrated her knowledge of and facility with the English language. In both books Barnes played with language, arriving at a style that is metaphorically concise. Ladies Almanack, the entire title of which follows, was supposedly written and illustrated by a Lady of Fashion and was published privately in Paris.

LADIES ALMANACK
showing their Signs and their tides;
their Moons and their Changes;
the Seasons as it is with them;

[9] McAlmon, p. 183.

their Eclipses and Equinoxes; as
well as a full Record of diurnal
and nocturnal Distempers[10]

Its apparent anonymity might be attributed to its dealing with the activities of Parisian lesbians. Maintaining an Elizabethan prose, Barnes used language saturated with sexual, almost pornographic, innuendos and references. In Ryder, which is as earthy but not as blatantly pornographic as Ladies Almanack, Barnes parodies a variety of traditional literary forms.

As Louis Kannenstine points out in a footnote to The Art of Djuna Barnes, the book Ryder, which chronicles the lives of Sophia Grieve Ryder and her son Wendell Ryder, is interesting for its autobiographical details. Wendell Ryder raises his two families (he has both a wife and a mistress) on Storm-King-on-Hudson which bears a close resemblance to Storm-King Mountain and Cornwall-on-Hudson. Wendell himself recalls Djuna's father in that both men assumed their mothers' surnames, were self-sufficient and skillful, and abhorred the public school system. Sophia Ryder, with her charismatic personality, resembles Djuna's grandmother. Further, both women maintained literary salons in London. Wendell's wife, Amelia, recalls Djuna's mother, Elizabeth Chappell, who also was born in England but moved to America upon marrying. Both women also studied the violin at London's Conservatory of Music and came from a family of cabinet

[10] Djuna Barnes, Ladies Almanack (Paris: privately printed, 1928).

makers.[11]

Ryder and Ladies Almanack are exceedingly humorous and reveal a liberated facility with language. In these works Barnes also began to reveal what would become her extended personal vision of life. To Barnes, life equalled struggle. In her early works--the poems, the short stories, Ryder, Ladies Almanack--Barnes began to define that struggle by examining, often humorously, the effects and influences of religion and history as well as love and sexual desire upon one's life.

Along with defining and refining her attitude towards life, Barnes was forever polishing her craft, and the short stories stand as a tribute to her development as a writer. One finds the short stories chronologically interspersed among her major novels, plays, and journalistic accomplishments. Barnes' first collection of short stories, A Book, was published in 1923 and contains the following twelve short stories: "A Night Among the Horses," "The Valet," "Beyond the End," "Oscar," "Katrina Silverstaff," "The Robin's House," "No-Man's-Mare," "Mother," "The Nigger," "Indian Summer," "The Rabbit," and "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady." The collection of twelve stories also includes three one-act plays, eleven poems, and six pencil drawings. A Book was reissued as A Night Among the Horses in 1929 without the drawings but with three additional stories, "Aller et Retour," "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady," and "The Passion."

[11] Louis F. Kannenstine, The Art of Djuna Barnes: Duality and Damnation (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 173-174, n. 2.

Presented against a European background, the three additional stories reflect Barnes' nine-year residence in Europe.

Several of the early short stories were revised and reprinted in two later books, Spillway and Selected Works of Djuna Barnes. Spillway was published in London in May of 1962 and contains the following ten short stories: "Aller et Retour," "Cassation" (published previously as "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady"), "The Grande Malade" (published previously as "The Little Girl Continues"), "A Night Among the Horses," "The Valet," "The Rabbit," "The Doctors" (published previously as "Katrina Silverstaff"), "A Boy Asks a Question," "Spillway" (published previously as "Beyond the End"), and "The Passion." "The Grande Malade" was not collected in the earlier books but was previously published in This Quarter in 1925. Selected Works of Djuna Barnes, published in New York in May of 1962, contains all of the short stories included in Spillway (except for "A Boy Asks a Question"), the novel Nightwood, and Barnes' preferred version of her play The Antiphon. In 1982 Douglas Messerli, Barnes' foremost bibliographer, published Smoke and Other Early Stories, a collection of fourteen stories Barnes contributed as early as 1913 to the New York Morning Telegraph Sunday Magazine, the All Story Cavalier Weekly, and The Trend.

The thirteen short stories considered in depth in the following chapters were published in A Night Among the Horses and Spillway, except for "Dusie" which was not collected but which appeared as a contribution in 1927 to Americana Esoterica. Except in a few cases,

most of the stories to be considered will be the revised versions.

In Barnes' development as a writer, the short stories served her well as stepping stones to her most refined work, Nightwood. They are, however, noteworthy in their own right. Her facility with the English language is ever present. As Kannenstine observes, the narrative voice of the short stories is extremely economical and concise, in exposition and in metaphor. Barnes never wasted words, and the verbal condensation of the narrative often results in language which is both elusive and concrete.[12] In the short story "The Passion," for example, Barnes metaphorically describes Princess Negrita Rholinghousen, at once describing the aged woman and the bleakness of her life.

> Her knees dropped the silk
> of her dress in two sharp points
> like the corners of a candy box.
> Slowly this scented case moved
> through the odorless day.[13]

As Kannenstine further points out, "Each of Miss Barnes' stories is involved with what happens when what is dark and suppressed spills out into the deceptive world of daily events and rational motives."[14]

All of Barnes' language play and thematic concerns culminated in her 1936 novel Nightwood. Basically, the plot of Nightwood traces the effect of the elusive and enigmatic character Robin Vote upon the

[12] Kannenstine, p. 59.

[13] Djuna Barnes, A Night Among the Horses (New York: Horace Liveright, 1929), p. 249.

[14] Kannenstine, p. 68.

lives of four other characters--Felix Volkbien, Nora Flood, Jenny Petherbridge, and Dr. Matthew O'Connor. The character Robin exercises a remarkable magnetism and poignantly illuminates reality for the other characters. Each character seeks to "integrate" Robin into his or her life, often with devastating results. The story of Nightwood is poignantly revealed within the "closed structure" of the novel. In her book entitled Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel, Sharon Spencer carefully delineates the characteristics of a novel with a closed structure.

According to Spencer, only one perspective, a restricted point of view, is employed in a closed structure. Every representation of a character, an action, or a theme is either projected in the same intellectual, emotional, judgmental, and atmospheric light, or every character, action, and theme bears upon the same point.[15] The atmospheric light of Nightwood bears upon the same point. Every character in Nightwood is thrust into the night world, and none emerges unscathed. It is a marvelous tale of perpetual loss and struggle. In his article entitled "Spatial Form in the Modern Novel," Joseph Frank aptly points out that "the eight chapters of Nightwood are like searchlights, probing the darkness each from a different direction yet ultimately illuminating the same entanglement of the human spirit."[16]

[15] Sharon Spencer, Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1971), p. 26.

[16] Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in the Modern Novel," in his The Widening Gyre (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 31-32.

As Wallace Fowlie further points out, the novel succeeds in presenting characters of deep solitude illumined by the very darkness of their world, the very darkness they seek to penetrate.[17] The darkness each character seeks to penetrate is the misconception each has of his or her life. Much of the action does take place at night, and the night, the darkness, contributes to the characters' understanding of themselves, causes them to become aware of certain actions and consequences.

A sense of alienation among the characters is maintained throughout the novel and serves to draw one's attention to their plight individually as well as collectively. Sharon Spencer notes that all of the characters are expatriates, drifting from one European capital to another, and from Europe to America and back again.[18] This fact prompts one to go beyond the individual characters to consider the whole of Occidental culture. Barnes was adept in presenting the basic traditions and religions of the Western world from the lives of a handful of people.

In Nightwood Barnes succeeded in bringing together the form of the novel with its thematic content. She achieved a unique synthesis of style and theme by consistently employing highly metaphoric poetic diction in dealing with the confusing complexities of human life. The title itself serves as a metaphor for the novel as a

[17] Wallace Fowlie, Love in Literature (1965; rpt. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), p. 139.

[18] Spencer, p. 43.

whole if one agrees to associate "night" with the search and attainment of knowledge and "wood" with growth or the passage of time as demonstrated by the rings seen on the inside of a tree. In Nightwood Barnes examines one's passage through life and the often rude attainment of knowledge while on that journey.

The personal vision of life Barnes began to reveal in her earlier works emerged with full force in Nightwood in a poetic fiction that is overwhelming in its impact. In Nightwood she totally lays waste the doctrines and customs according to which so many people live. She acknowledges the positive forces and influences in life but destroys any illusions one may have about them. In Barnes' final analysis, there are no placating solutions to the struggles in life.

Nightwood is so powerful a novel that one is not really surprised to discover that the novel frightened even its author. The publication of Nightwood coincided with Barnes' withdrawal from public life. Although she did continue to write privately and did publish an article in 1941 in Town and Country, twenty-two years passed before Barnes published another major work. The Antiphon, a drama in blank verse, appeared in London in 1958. Exceedingly difficult to read and to understand, The Antiphon reiterates the sentiments of Nightwood but further plunges one into a world void of either hope or despair as a final resolution.[19]

[19] James B. Scott, Djuna Barnes (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), p. 132.

Critics are divided in their appraisal of Barnes' work, some even dismissing it because of their own admitted lack of understanding. However, as one critic stated in a review of A Night Among the Horses, "She will please only those who enjoy skillful phrasing, subtlety of thought and feeling, and emotional interpretation of experience."[20] Another critic appropriately stated the following:

> Her writing alone makes her work worth reading but the aware reader will come out with much more and if he can look into the mirror honestly he will learn and be enriched by the experience. Djuna Barnes, however, cannot be read lightly nor hurriedly. Her work demands much--and pays in return.[21]

What Barnes' work pays in return is an experience with rich, dynamic language that touches the heart in revealing the spiritual and emotional torment of human existence. She addresses the human condition and poignantly achieves a perception of that condition on the universal level. Although it is true that she offers no placating solutions to the problems inherent in human existence, Barnes never discounts or mocks the human spirit. In speaking of many modern writers, Barnes stated the following in a rare interview in 1971.

[20] John McClure, "Literature and Less," rev. of A Night Among the Horses, by Djuna Barnes, New Orleans Times Picayune Magazine, 25 August 1929, p. 4.

[21] Diane M. Bell, "Incidents Clearly Sketched," rev. of Selected Works of Djuna Barnes, by Djuna Barnes, Columbian Missourian, 13 May 1962, Sec. 2, no. pag., n. col.

> "They've lost all sense of nuance," she said. "You go to bed, and you do this or the other. That has nothing to do with anything and certainly not with literature. There is great drama in human encounters and in love and solitude, but that they miss. I'm sorry for them, really."[22]

Producing the bulk of her work between World War I and World War II, Barnes developed and polished her craft during provocative times. Europe of the 1920's and 1930's proved especially fertile ground for the development of new artistic movements and endeavors. Surrealism, probably the most significant movement, emphasized liberating the artist to expand his or her awareness of reality beyond realism by utilizing conscious and subconscious states of mind. Although she attached herself to no movement, maintaining her independence and overwhelming individuality throughout a long and varied career, Djuna did reap the benefits of such artistic stimulation. The climate was right for her. Hayden Carruth convincingly points out that in Nightwood

> ...Djuna Barnes, in her own natural person, came closer than anyone else to the heartbeat of western culture at that moment, and...had the intelligence and sensitivity and verbal genius to realize her closeness in her writing.[23]

[22] Henry Raymont, "From Avant-Garde of the Thirties, Djuna Barnes," New York Times, 24 May 1971, n. sec., p. 24, cols. 1-4.

[23] Hayden Carruth, "A Duesgiving: For Djuna and Others," in A Festschrift for Djuna Barnes on Her 80th Birthday, ed. Alex Gildzen (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Libraries, 1972), n. pag.

As one shall see, she also had the intelligence and the sensitivity to realize a closeness to other times, other heartbeats.

In dealing with the less disquieting vision in the short stories, one notices certain inherent characteristics. First, Barnes uses the physical alienation of the characters as a framework within which to reveal the spiritual and mental states of the characters. Chapter II considers the individual situations of the characters.

Second, that which is beautiful and which touches one emotionally is often revealed in encounters between experience and innocence. Most of the main characters in the short stories are older women who are experienced in the ways of the world, who are well aware of the struggles in life, and who maintain no illusions. There is great drama in human encounters, however, and the experienced characters often find themselves pitted against children or young adults whose innocence is ensured by their youth. Such encounters reflect aspects of Romanticism and of its later counterpart, Surrealism. Chapter III covers such encounters and also the relationships of three adult characters to nature. These relationships reflect aspects of Romanticism and further serve to reveal Barnes' less disquieting vision of life.

Chapter IV also considers encounters between experience and innocence but does so from a different angle. While Chapter III looks at such encounters from the adult point of view, Chapter IV considers the same human condition from the child's point of view. As one shall see, the adult characters endure a sense of despair; the children do not.

DRAMA IN SOLITUDE

All of the main characters are physically alienated in one way or another. Some characters are separated from their homelands; some are physically separated from others because of illness or age. Reference is constantly made throughout the short stories to "travelling" or to being "some place else." As in Nightwood, many of the characters in the short stories drift from one European capital to another or from Europe to America without any sense of belonging to the places in which they find themselves. Any sense of home or of family is usually distorted or referred to indirectly.

In "Aller et Retour," for example, Madame Erling von Bartmann, a forty-year old Russian widow living in Paris, is first met travelling from Marseilles to Nice. Along the way, she is seen as an active observer of but not an active participant in the life which surrounds her. She calmly observes, "look[ing] neither pleased or displeased."[1] Madame von Bartmann's alienation seems to be self-imposed, however, for one soon discovers that she abandoned her husband and young daughter seven years earlier for reasons not disclosed to the reader and is returning to her former home only because her husband has died and she desires to see what kind of person her daughter has become. Madame von Bartmann stays only as long as she feels she must, and one finds her

[1] Djuna Barnes, "Aller et Retour," in her Spillway (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 10. All further references throughout the thesis to short stories from Spillway will be given in the text.

again travelling at the end of the story.

Julie Anspacher, the thirty-nine year old main character in the short story "Spillway," is also first met travelling as she returns home from a sanitarium after a five-year absence. Three characters appearing in the short stories have travelled as immigrants to the United States. Drs. Katrina and Otto Silverstaff, who appear in the short story "The Doctors," are Russian-Jews who have immigrated to America in order to establish a medical practice. The main character in the story entitled "The Rabbit" is an Armenian immigrant to America.

Three stories specifically involve women who are physically alienated from the mainstream of society by age and beauty. Princess Negrita Rholinghousen appears in "The Passion," Carmen la Tosca in "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady," and Madame Boliver in "Indian Summer." Like Madame von Bartmann in "Aller et Retour," both Princess Negrita Rholinghousen and Carmen la Tosca are strong, independent women who in their more advanced years have chosen to isolate themselves from society. They emit an air of mystery and find others curiously watching them. Madame Boliver's situation is especially unique, for at the age of fifty-three, she finds herself blossoming into a youth and beauty she had never known before and certainly could never have anticipated.

In the four short stories involving children as main characters, a sense of alienation is overtly displayed. In the short stories "Cassation," "The Grande Malade," and "Dusie," the narrator seems to be the young girl Katya, telling her stories to the same

anonymous woman, referred to only as "Madame." In the short story "Cassation," the characters comprise an interesting mixture of nationalities. The young girl Katya is Russian but is travelling in Germany. The older woman Gaya is Italian but also speaks English and German. Katya admits that upon first meeting Gaya and her husband she is unable to tell whence they come. In "The Grande Malade" one finds Katya and her sister Moydia in Paris. Attaching themselves to no one city or country, Katya constantly refers to events which will change their clothing or behavior. In fact, Katya ends "The Grande Malade" by saying, "Truly, we speak a little French, now we must be moving on" (p. 41). "Dusie," a story which is again set in Paris, presents a young girl who is alienated in the image she projects. "They touched her as if she were an idol, and she stood tall, or sat to drink, unheeding, absent;" later it is noted that "something in her grew and died for her alone."[2] In "Oscar," one finds the characters physically alienated in the isolated setting of a small rural town.

In "A Night Among the Horses," alienation is the crux of the story. John, the hostler, is alienated from the horses and the environment he loves by his employer Freda Buckler, who constantly tells him that he must aspire to be more than an hostler and that he must learn to appreciate material possessions. She tries to mold him into

[2] Djuna Barnes, "Dusie," in Americana Esoterica By Various American Authors (n. p.: Macy Masius, 1927), p. 78.

her image of a gentleman. Her encouragement becomes taunting, however, as she ignores his feelings, especially his love for his horses. Forced to assume a character with which he is not comfortable, John realizes that "[he] wouldn't fit in anywhere after Freda, he'd be neither what he was nor what he had been; he'd be a thing, half standing, half crouching, like those figures under the roofs of historic buildings, the halt position of the damned" (p. 46). At the climax of the story, John finds himself at a masked ball given by Freda. Although he dresses as an ordinary gentleman might dress, he realizes that he is out of dress in terms of himself. Everything John attempts to do in the story serves only to further alienate him from his true nature. His final alienation, an alienation which leads to his death, comes when he attempts to seek solace among his horses. Dressed not in the familiar garb of a groom but in the strange garb of a gentleman, he approaches his horses. Finally, even they cannot accept him, however, and John is trampled to death accidentally by the horses he loves.

The physical alienation of the characters often heightens the reader's awareness of the inner turmoil suffered by the characters in Djuna Barnes' short stories. Julie Anspacher in "Spillway," for example, suffers from tuberculosis and is thus alienated in her illness--by the illness itself and by a five-year confinement in a sanitarium. Although the reader soon learns that her sense of alienation extends beyond her actual illness, one sympathetically understands her telling her husband Paytor that she is alien to life.

The main character in the story entitled "The Rabbit" is an Armenian immigrant to America and is, perhaps, the most poignantly alienated of all the characters and immediately arouses sympathy in the reader. Inheriting a small tailoring shop, Armietiev the Armenian is encouraged to leave his beloved farm and his beloved Armenia for the lower section of Manhattan. Physically alienated, Armietiev longs for his country. Upon viewing the slabs of meat in the butcher shop across the street from his tailoring shop, "[he] remembered too easily the swinging meadows of his own country, with the cows in the lanes and the fruits overhead, and he turned away and went on stitching" (pp. 62-63).

The physical alienation of the characters further serves to heighten or symbolize the characters' own awareness of a spiritual separation from self or of having somehow gone astray. Many of the characters are not at peace with themselves; they suffer an inner estrangement. One might again point to Julie Anspacher in "Spillway" as an example.

Alienated in her illness and confined in a sanitarium, Julie has a brief affair with a fellow patient, sincerely believing that neither of them has long to live, sincerely believing that no one will ever know of her indiscretion. Although the person with whom she has the affair does die, Julie and their child continue to live. Julie is devastated that she lived long enough to give birth to a child, especially since the child bears the burden of her unfaithfulness and can only perpetuate her illness since she too is afflicted with tuberculosis. Racing toward death, she gives birth to a child; the

happening is beyond her comprehension. According to Suzanne Ferguson, "Spillway" fully and effectively articulates the problem of inner estrangement in its complex and psychological realism.[3]

This kind of alienation is similar to what André Breton called going astray. Although Djuna Barnes wrote or published most of her short stories before André Breton published his manifestoes on surrealism, her short stories often reflect sentiments similar to those expressed by Breton. Since they were contemporaries, similarities seem especially noteworthy. In his Manifestoes of Surrealism, which was published in 1924, André Breton states the following.

> From childhood memories, and from a few others, there emanates a sentiment of being unintegrated, and then later of having gone astray, which I hold to be the most fertile that exists. It is perhaps childhood that comes closest to one's 'real life'; childhood beyond which man has at his disposal, aside from his laissez-passer, only a few complimentary tickets; childhood where everything nevertheless conspires to bring about the effective risk-free possession of oneself.[4]

Breton celebrates the childhood that was so ardently expressed in the works of the Romantics and goes on to specifically address a later condition or sentiment, "a feeling of being unintegrated, of

[3] Suzanne C. Ferguson, "Djuna Barnes's Short Stories: An Estrangement of the Heart," The Southern Review, 5 (1969), 34.

[4] André Breton, Manifestoes of Surrealism, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The Univ. of Michigan Press, 1969), pp. 39-40.

having gone astray." It is not merely a state of reminiscence; it is a state of alienation. According to Breton, one is totally integrated with oneself in childhood. A child's mind knows no limits due especially to the power and conspiratorial efforts of imagination and fantasy. The sky is green; trees are blue. In adulthood, however, one learns to process or even to stifle one's imagination and appreciation of fantasy. One may acclimatize oneself to adulthood, but there emanates from childhood memories a sense of having gone astray. In adulthood one becomes unintegrated and alienated. This alienation often results in a disruption of the human condition, in human suffering and despair, or in what may be properly termed the agonized heart. The image of the agonized heart is notable in almost all of Barnes' work but gains prominence throughout the short stories and is poignantly revealed through the alienation of the characters.

In light of Breton's belief that only in childhood does one freely possess oneself and that one's passage through life is tantamount to having gone astray, several critics trace the theme of "backward grief" in the works of Djuna Barnes: one tries to recapture the child's possession of the self, enduring a ritual of return, attempting to understand what was lost and how one lost it.[5] For Djuna Barnes backward grief leads to anguish and ontological

[5] James Baird, "Djuna Barnes and Surrealism: 'Backward Grief'," in Individuals and Community: Variations on a Theme in American Fiction, ed. Kenneth H. Baldwin and David K. Kirby (Durham, North Carolina: Duke Univ. Press, 1975), p. 168.

bewilderment.[6] Life equals struggle. Existence is an incessant struggle to endure or to suffer patiently everything beyond the end of rational comprehension or understanding. In the short stories, the restlessness inherent in the situations of the characters is revealed. As Kannenstine points out, Barnes focuses upon situations in which suppressed dread and passions pour out into the spillways of the characters' lives.[7]

Her concern with the disintegration of an individual is revealed in the short stories "Spillway" and "The Doctors." Each character is poignantly aware of her inner estrangement, and each in her own way seeks a resolution to the backward grief. Neither desires to be a child again, but each tries to recapture or reaffirm the child's possession of self. Julie Anspacher especially searches for an explanation while Katrina Silverstaff aims for a final solution.

As James Baird observes, the total existence of Julie Anspacher involves a struggle. He compares Julie's situation to that of being caught in a constricted stream. She rushes toward death while continually attempting to travel backward to the source of the flow, attempting to reclaim the innocence at the source, that risk-free possession of self.[8] In her backward grief, she is lost in still

[6] Kannenstine, p. xiv.

[7] Kannenstine, p. 81.

[8] Baird, p. 176.

water because she cannot really go backward and fate does not allow her to die.

Lost in still water, Julie tells her husband Paytor that she blames no one for her predicament. She does not even blame herself for having had the affair which resulted in the birth of her child Ann. Further, she tells her husband Paytor that she is not seeking forgiveness for what she has done. She does not choose either remedy, however, due to any lack of remorse. On the contrary, neither laying blame nor receiving forgiveness would alleviate her inner estrangement. "[To] beg forgiveness is not enough; to receive?--it would not be enough" (p. 92).

Religion, too, offers her no relief, no insight.

> "I've tried to believe in something external and enveloping, to carry me away, beyond--that's what we demand of our faiths, isn't it?" (p. 94)

In "Spillway" one finds a direct reference to what may be referred to as Djuna Barnes' attitude toward religion. She acknowledges religion as a positive force but further implies that it cannot resolve Julie's mental anguish or appease her agonized heart.

What Julie desires is some kind of comprehension of her dire circumstances, some insight to allow her some relief.

> "I was saying nothing. I said, all is lost from the beginning, if we only knew it--always." (p. 88)
>
> * * * * *
>
> "The real, the proper idea is," she said in a pained voice, "--is design, a thing should make a design; torment should have some meaning." (p. 93)

For Julie "death was past knowing and one must be certain of something else first" (p. 95). Since Julie cannot go forward to death, she attempts to go backward. Julie finds no peace, however. In attempting to go back to the source of the flow, she finds not innocence but the beginning of experience.

> Tears came into her eyes, but they did not fall. Sentimental memories of childhood, she said to herself, which had sometimes been fearful and had strong connections with fishing and skating, and the day they had made her kiss the cheek of their dead priest... that had made her cry with a strange backward grief that was swallowed, because in touching his cheek she kissed aggressive passivity, entire and cold. (pp. 96-97)

For all her suffering in her alienation and backward grief, Julie remains a strong person. She waits for her death; she does not contemplate suicide. She proves stronger even than her husband Paytor who does commit suicide. Their life is seemingly rendered meaningless, a realization Paytor cannot accept. Julie somehow accepts the meaninglessness, and one can almost hear her recite Madame von Bartmann's final words, "Ah, how unnecessary" (p. 19), as she ascends the stairs to her dead husband.

Some critics maintain that the problems of characters such as Julie Anspacher and Katrina Silverstaff are essentially philosophical and religious, that they clearly and desperately desire a relationship with God or with something like God.[9] Upon close examination,

[9] Ferguson, p. 38.

however, one might concede that their problems stem from a separation from self, from a profound sense of having gone astray. Barnes is concerned with human anguish, and in "The Doctors" one finds a sense of terror of the heart that is beyond all rational comprehension.[10]

At one point during her gynecological studies, Dr. Katrina Silverstaff, for reasons unknown, goes astray. She continues to be a functioning human being but maintains a distance between herself and the world around her. Believing that "we have fashioned ourselves against the Day of Judgement" (p. 72), she, too, is racing toward death, and her obsession with that thought removes her from any normal sense of time. She is outwardly the perfect wife to her husband Otto and the perfect mother to her son and daughter, but she only goes through the motions. She tends to her family but is not really with them in her heart. Like Julie Anspacher, Dr. Katrina Silverstaff is lost in still water.

> She never recovered her gaiety. She married Otto but did not seem to know when; she knew why--she loved him--but he evaded her by being in the stream of time; by being absolutely daily. (pp. 72-73)

* * * * *

> Otto was inordinately pleased with her; she was "sea water" and "impersonal fortitude", neither asking for, nor needing attention. She was compact of dedicated merit, engaged in a mapped territory of abstraction, an excellently arranged encounter with estrangement;.... (p. 73)

[10] Kannenstine, p. 76.

That she is estranged is the crux of the story. Katrina becomes totally distracted, totally disinterested in life. "Does one destroy oneself when one is utterly disinterested?" (p. 77) she asks her fated lover Rodkin. Katrina decides that one does and further decides to commit suicide. "You see," she continued, "some people drink poison, some take the knife, others drown. I take you" (p. 78). Rodkin becomes the symbol of Katrina's final estrangement. One is never told how she actually dies, however. Further, the only clue given to Katrina's estrangement is given in her own words. "There is something in me that is mournful because it is being" (p. 77). In light of Barnes' work and life, that seems reason enough.

In "No-Man's-Mare" the family of Pauvla Agrippa finds itself alienated from the natural order of day-to-day life. Pauvla Agrippa is dead, her body lying in the living room of the small house, and her husband and her sister Tasha do not know quite how to handle her death: "Agrippa's husband seemed lost, and wandered about like a restless dog, trying to find a spot that would give him relief as he smoked."[11] There is between the adults within the home an overwhelming sense of incompleteness. Tasha finds herself praying to different objects to find comfort while the husband simply appears lost. In their alienation they seek comfort and some sense of harmony.

[11] Djuna Barnes, "No-Man's-Mare," A Night Among the Horses, p. 133.

Although Barnes focuses upon situations in which suppressed dread and passions pour out into the spillways of the characters' lives, one will note that she often arrives at the conclusion that there can be strength in going astray.

An integral part of Barnes' less disquieting vision of life seems to be that dignity is what one can finally hope to strive for and to attain. To go astray, in Barnes' terms, is to think, to feel, to live, to remove oneself from any kind of protective shell. There is despair in any sense of alienation or in any sense of having gone astray, but there can also be dignity, which is, perhaps, one's only saving grace.

DRAMA IN HUMAN ENCOUNTERS

Dignity is achieved by some of the characters, but it is not come by easily. It is not always easy to think, to feel, to live, to remove oneself from any kind of protective shell. In accord with Barnes' disquieting personal vision that life equals struggle, life also equals suffering. These are inescapable facts of life. One can see that many characters struggle and suffer in their alienation. There can be no doubt that any sense of alienation endured by the characters in the short stories often causes mental and emotional derangement. From that abysmal state, however, one finds the characters either plunging deeper into the depths of despair or achieving some sense of dignity. That alienation leads to despair or dignity is reflected in several of the short stories and often involves the intermingling of experience and innocence.

Experience is often represented by older women who have knowledge of the ways of the world. They have experienced life. They are well aware of the struggles in life and maintain no illusions about what it has to offer. In addition to displaying a knowledge of the ways of the world, the experienced characters also reveal a sense of having gone astray. Their realization may be a fleeting moment, but it is no less painfully felt on the part of the characters. Such characters often exude a sense of dignity--as if a sense of dignity had become their final resolution in life. There is dignity in those who are able to handle the disillusionment in life; there is despair in those who cannot.

The experienced characters often encounter characters who are innocent. Innocence is represented by children, by young adults, and, in some cases, by adults. Innocence is maintained by those who are young and by those who have not yet gone astray, who have not yet endured a separation from self through a disillusioning experience. Barnes never chooses innocence over experience or experience over innocence as the better state in which to live but rather emphatically acknowledges the existence of both. She acknowledges them for what they are--inescapable facts of life. In acknowledging them as inescapable facts of life, she further recognizes that to be human involves both stages. At some point in one's life, one will experience disillusionment.

In the short story "Aller et Retour," one finds experience and innocence represented in the persons of Madame Erling von Bartmann and Richter von Bartmann. Madame von Bartmann is presented throughout the story as a strong, dignified woman of experience, one who has learned much of life in forty years. When she returns home to her daughter upon the death of the girl's father, Madame von Bartmann's former husband, she finds that her daughter has grown up in body but is still a child in mind.[1] She realizes that Richter needs her guidance, and she decides to stay with her "for quite a while" (p. 13). Reference is made throughout the story to Madame von Bartmann's strength and to Richter's frailty. The physical characteristics of the two characters

[1] Ferguson, p. 33.

come to denote mental and emotional qualities. Madame von Bartmann's strength is symbolic of experience. She has endured life. Richter's frailty is her innocence.

The following passage is symbolic of innocence meeting experience.

> She still held the key to the gate in her gloved hand, and the seventeen-year old girl who came up from a bush took hold of it, walking beside her (p. 12).

Madame von Bartmann holds the key to knowledge and experience which she hopes to impart to her daughter. A dignified person, she hopes to instill a sense of dignity in Richter. She wants her daughter to be a thinking person in her own right.

In the short stories "Aller et Retour" and "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady," Barnes realizes a closeness to other times, to other heartbeats. Barnes especially echoes sentiments expressed by the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Rousseau considered childhood to be a period in one's life when one ought to be respected, protected, and instructed. One ought to be respected because childhood is a legitimate state in life, in one's development as a person. One should not be slighted or ignored but nurtured along. Simply by virtue of being a child, one's capabilities are limited; one is capable of doing only so much, physically as well as mentally. One's ability to reason is especially limited; one might even say that it is dormant. As a result, one is not able to examine details critically, to then generalize about those details, and finally to judge. Such a state in one's development must

be respected and taken into account. Such a stage must be protected. Since Rousseau's final ambition for a person is the attainment of true moral judgment, awakening one's reasoning faculties too soon in one's development might diminish the chances of attaining that goal. Therefore, Rousseau believed that a child must be protected. Instruction must come gradually. Contrary to the British romantic belief that the child is the philosopher, Rousseau believed that the philosopher must be produced out of the child through slow and careful supervision. To rush a child's education would only confuse the child and would prove detrimental to his or her proper development, especially in the ability to analyze, to generalize, and to judge.[2] One finds elements of Rousseau's views on education in "Aller et Retour" and "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady."

A calm observer of life, Madame von Bartmann is analytical. She does think and feel intensely about life. She reflects Rousseau when she tells Richter that she (Richter) "must know _everything_ and _then_ begin. [She] must have a great understanding, or accomplish a fall." (p. 16) Further reflecting Rousseau, Madame von Bartmann more than anything wants her seventeen year old daughter to think.

> "Think everything, good, bad, indifferent; everything, and _do_ everything! Try to

[2] For a concise analysis of Rousseau's philosophy, see Tony Tanner, _The Reign of Wonder: Naivety and Reality in American Literature_ (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 2-4.

> know what you are before you die.
> And," she said, putting her head
> back and swallowing with shut eyes,
> come back to me a good woman." (p. 17)

Madame von Bartmann seems to equate goodness with the ability to think; she further realizes that strength can be gained from experience. She is disappointed when Richter shyly approaches her to tell her of her engagement and coming marriage to Gerald Teal. Madame von Bartmann's final line, a line which also ends the story, reveals her utter disappointment in Richter's choosing to be married. Her statement, "Ah, how unnecessary" (p. 19), implies that she does not think Mr. Teal's love will be a nurturing love. Mr. Teal tells Madame von Bartmann that "Richter will be occupied" and that he hopes "she will find her greatest happiness at home" (p. 19). Richter's innocence is ensured as Gerald Teal offers everything that is just the opposite of what Madame von Bartmann had hoped for her daughter. Madame von Bartmann most certainly agrees with Rousseau in her thinking that at age seventeen it is time for Richter to think, to feel, to grow in self-awareness--to experience.

There is another view present in the story which goes beyond the education of innocence. One can sense in Madame von Bartmann other sentiments at play. She reflects surrealism when she seems to long for another time, another place, revealing a sense of having gone astray.

> "Once," she said, "I was a child
> like you. Fatter, better health--
> nevertheless like you. I loved nice
> things. But," she added, "a different
> kind, I imagine. Things that were

> positive. I liked to go out in the evening, not because it was sweet and voluptuous--but to frighten myself, because I'd known it such a little while, and after me it would exist so long. But that--" she interrupted herself, "is beside the point. Tell me how you feel." (p. 16)

Richter is not able to tell her mother how she feels. One finds that although Madame von Bartmann is an impressive character, she is unable to impart her wisdom to her young protegé, her daughter, mainly because Richter has not yet gone astray. She has not yet experienced. She does not understand.

"A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady" is the quintessence among the short stories in incorporating and revealing romantic attitudes as well as Barnes' attitude toward childhood and adulthood and life in general. It is a serious story with humorous overtones.

The lady of whom a question is asked is Carmen la Tosca whom others regard as a woman of strength, dignity, and wisdom. The boy is fourteen-year-old Brandt Wilson who is almost a caricature of the romantic image of a young boy.

> He was short and his head was large and his face already a little prematurely softened by melancholy. He was splashed with mud and his red tie stuck out ridiculously at the top of a vest that was too large for his small, shyly muscular chest.[3]

[3] Barnes, "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady," A Night Among the Horses, pp. 213-214.

Climbing easily through Carmen la Tosca's bedroom window, a movement reminiscent of Peter Pan, Brandt Wilson sheepishly engages her in a conversation. Innocence again meets experience. He seeks the answers to questions he has about his older brothers' experiences. He does not yet understand the emotional and sexual complexities to which his older brothers have been introduced or have endured, a dilemma which Paul Coveney in his The Image of Childhood considers to be a Freudian extension of the romantic concept of initiation into society.[4] Experience has not yet destroyed his innocence, and he struggles to understand what has happened to his brothers. His is still a childlike vision of existence.

He particularly asks Carmen la Tosca about love and suffering and is interested in knowing what he must go through to be like his brothers. Somewhat twisting the romantic conviction, substituting "evil" for "experience," Carmen la Tosca tells him, "A little evil day by day, that makes everything grow."[5] Realizing that Brandt Wilson is too young to understand all that she has to say, Carmen la Tosca gives him advice in the manner of Rousseau. She tells him not to worry about what he hears but does not understand. In a later version of the story, her advice is even more reminiscent of Rousseau.

[4] Peter Coveney, The Image of Childhood (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 337.

[5] Barnes, "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady," A Night Among the Horses, p. 217.

> "But I want to know now."
> "Now," she said, "now is the time when you leave everything alone." (p. 85)

In addition to romantic implications, one also finds elements of surrealism in the story. For example, one of Brandt Wilson's older brothers, Bailey, is at the period in his life when he is passing from innocence to experience.

> "My brother is where no one understands--My sister said, 'I don't like Bailey any more, he has lost that cunning little light in his eyes'--and I said, 'It's still there when you give him something he likes, and he is untying it, with his head bent down--'."[6]

One might contend that Bailey emanates a sense of being unintegrated. One might further contend that in such a moment as described by Brandt Wilson, Bailey is trying to recapture the child's possession of self.

Carmen la Tosca also reflects the theme of backward grief in which one attempts to understand what was lost and how one lost it.

> "That was innocence. We are all waiting for the day when people shall learn of our innocence all over again," Carmen la Tosca said brightly.[7]

There are sentiments expressed which may be attributed to Barnes' personal vision of life which is defined in her novel Nightwood.

[6] Barnes, "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady," A Night Among the Horses, p. 215.

[7] Barnes, "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady," A Night Among the Horses, p. 216.

> "And is that suffering?"
> "Yes, a special kind, for every one," she said gravely. "But not a personal torment. You are not to believe in that. Suffering is all alike, yours, mine, everybody's. All these distinctions and what people say about them is nonsense. Suffering is all the same everywhere for every one."[8]

Madame von Bartmann reveals a similar sentiment when at one point in "Aller et Retour," she prays "with all her vigorous understanding for a common redemption" (p. 11). James B. Scott points out that in Nightwood the character Dr. Matthew O'Connor realizes "that life is suffering and that suffering does not end; pain in no way carries the correlation that relief must be forthcoming."[9] Barnes finally reveals life to be a painful process in that the attainment of knowledge belies the elimination of doubt and uncertainty. Leslie Fiedler agrees that for Barnes man's uncertainty is his essential condition, and the struggle to attain knowledge is his definition.[10]

> "The simple story, simply told by simple people--that in the end is all you will listen to."[11]

[8] Barnes, "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady," A Night Among the Horses, p. 216.

[9] Scott, p. 100.

[10] Leslie A. Fiedler, No! In Thunder (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), p. 16.

[11] Barnes, "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady," A Night Among the Horses, p. 217.

As Alan Williamson observes in his article entitled "The Divided Image: The Quest for Identity in the Works of Djuna Barnes," one discovers in the works of Djuna Barnes quiet acceptance of the suffering and despair of the human condition as the resolution in life.[12] Carmen la Tosca offers no placating solutions to young Brandt Wilson. Her only resolution in life is quiet acceptance--dignity.

> "Just as it is. The calf is born, she lies in the sun; she waits for the end. That is dignity."[13]

Again, in a later version, the following conversation takes place between Carmen la Tosca and Brandt Wilson.

> "Dignity--despair--and innocence."
> "Is that all?"
> She had taken up her paper. "That is everything. In the end it will be the death of you." (p. 86)

There is a moment in the popular film ET--The Extraterrestrial in which a group of young boys on bicycles is lifted into the night air by the power of ET and whisked away to its destination and to safety. Hardly anyone can respond with anything but awe and wonder to the moment when the shadows of the riders pass in front of the bright, full moon. An adult's response might be a mixture of wonder and

[12] Alan Williamson, "The Divided Image: The Quest for Identity in the Works of Djuna Barnes," Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction, 7, No. 1 (Spring, 1964), 62.

[13] Barnes, "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady," A Night Among the Horses, p. 218.

nostalgia--and a pang in realizing that such a moment is simply impossible. For an adult there is intermingled in all of this a sense of having gone astray. There is a longing for the time when the belief in such a moment was possible. There are similar moments, moments filled with nostalgia and wonder, in two of the short stories.

One finds in the short story "Indian Summer" a unique coupling of innocence and despair in the person of Madame Boliver. At the age of fifty-three, she is "suddenly swept away in a mad current of reckless and beautiful youth",[14] blaz[ing] into a riotous Indian Summer of loveliness."[15] It is a wondrous respite in an aging life. The change in Madame Boliver does not go unnoticed, and she is as suddenly overwhelmed by young, ardent admirers. Thrust into a situation previously unknown to her, she is eager to participate, to experience, to kindle emotions within herself which she had long since decided simply did not exist. She is, of course, extremely happy with her newly-acquired youth and beauty and ardent in her acceptance of the attentions and love of one person in particular, the young Russian Petkoff. They fall in love.

All of this, however, comes in the winter of Madame Boliver's life: "she exhaled something that savored of those excellences of odor

[14] Barnes, "Indian Summer," A Night Among the Horses, p. 180.

[15] Barnes, "Indian Summer," A Night Among the Horses, p. 182.

and tone akin to pain and to pleasure."[16] Instead of growing old after having experienced youth, she blossoms into youth and beauty, bringing with her age and wisdom. "She could be said to have bloomed at too auspicious an age; she was old enough to appreciate it [youth and beauty], and this is a very dangerous thing."[17] It does prove to be a very dangerous thing. She becomes a nova, a star burning too brightly, and she begins to fade. She fades as if the mixture of youth and age, of beauty and wisdom, cannot finally come together.

Madame Boliver becomes ill, and it is in her illness that a painful realization occurs. When reassuring Petkoff that she will soon be well because she is a young woman, he asks her if she really is young.

> And it was then that the horror of the situation dawned upon her. In youth, when youth comes rightly, there is old age in which to lose it complacently, but when it comes in old age there is no time to watch it go.[18]

A similar sentiment is expressed in "The Passion." Princess Negrita Rholinghousen is a very old, very dignified woman who is attended to by servants and, once a month, by a similarly old Polish officer, Kert Anders. People assume that the Princess and Kert Anders

[16] Barnes, "Indian Summer," A Night Among the Horses, p. 182.

[17] Barnes, "Indian Summer," A Night Among the Horses, p. 189.

[18] Barnes, "Indian Summer," A Night Among the Horses, p. 191.

were once lovers. The "passion," however, can be found only in the heart of the Princess as she herself poignantly reveals.

> She set her tea cup down with a slight trembling of the hand, then added with mordant acerbity, "But--if a little light man with a beard had said 'I love you', I should have believed in God" (p. 107).

Her passion is one of enlightenment and disillusionment, for it is never realized. "The Passion" turns out to be a touching story of love not only lost but never found.

The characters in "A Night Among the Horses" and "The Rabbit" endure a sense of alienation that truly does lead on to anguish and despair. In those two stories especially, civilized decadence and nature tragically conflict.

In "A Night Among the Horses," John, the hostler, is content to be among his horses. When he is with his horses, he is on familiar ground; the smells of the stable are reassuring.

> His heart ached with the nearness of the earth, the faint murmur of it moving upon itself, like a sleeper who turns to throw an arm about a beloved.[19]
>
> * * * * *
>
> . . . for animals greet the Summer, striking the earth, as friends strike the back of friends.[20]

[19] Barnes, "A Night Among the Horses," A Night Among the Horses, pp. 1-2.

[20] Barnes, "A Night Among the Horses," A Night Among the Horses, p. 3.

Freda Buckler, on the other hand, is presented as a different sort of beast. Small with cunning fiery eyes and a pink, pointed chin, she is often referred to as a little beast, a mouse, and a praying mantis. She is not to be trusted and is determined to change John, to make him something he is not prepared to be. She desires to turn him into a country gentleman or, more specifically, into a person whose main concern is material possessions. As Suzanne Ferguson points out, the grotesque mummery of the courtship is matched only by the gruesome irony of death as Freda Buckler succeeds in turning John into a thing that even the horses perceive as monstrous and which they destroy.[21] The horses destroy accidentally, however; Freda destroys intentionally.

At the end of the story, it is as if John has betrayed nature and himself. The result of his alienation is utter despair.

> Wheeling, manes up, nostrils flaring, blasting out steam as they came on, they passed him in a whinnying flood, and he damned them in horror, but what he shouted was "Bitch!", and found himself swallowing fire from his heart, lying on his face, sobbing, . . . (p. 49).

Rugo Armietiev truly is a man of nature and enjoys a sense of oneness, of unity, in his relationship with nature in his native Armenia. He sees only the beauty and continuity in nature.

> He liked to pass his hands over the creatures of his small land, they

[21] Ferguson, p. 29.

> were exactly as pleasing as plants;
> in fact he could not see much
> difference . . . (p. 60).

In the country Armietiev lives in a state of perpetual innocence. Life is vital and good. In his tailoring shop in Manhattan, however, he readily senses a change in the fiber of his life.

> He tested the air, as he had tested the
> air of his country, he sneezed; he held
> the room up in his eye by the scruff of
> its neck, as you might say, and shook it
> in the face of his lost acres (p. 62).

Armietiev's departing from the country and his moving to the lower section of Manhattan is symbolic of his passing from innocence to experience. Sitting and stitching diligently in his tailoring shop, his mind wandered constantly to his country, to "another season" (p. 70) as his thoughts turned to "ploughing, seeding, harvesting" (p. 70). Another season might be equated with a time of growth and constant renewal. Armietiev was at peace with himself because he was in harmony with the world around him. He readily recognizes that he is not in harmony with the world around him in Manhattan, and he suffers an inner estrangement. As Paul Coveney points out in The Image of Childhood, the power of human nature and society negates the enjoyment of the soul's innocence.[22] Such negative forces present themselves in the form of the young Italian woman Addie, who succeeds in destroying the

[22] Coveney, p. 60.

state of childlike innocence of Armietiev. Unfortunately, she replaces it not with constructive but destructive forces.[23]

After Addie complains that Armietiev is hardly a hero, he, childlike, tries to interpret what she means by hero and what she wants him to do. He remembers tales told to him by gypsies and tales of great people known for heroic deeds. He also remembers that people sometimes die performing heroic deeds. He decides that in order to avoid the possibility of being killed himself he must kill something. He does kill something, and the experience proves devastating for him.

> "I-I have killed--I think I have killed--."
> "Where? What?" She moved away from him, looking into the corner at the box. "That!" She began to laugh, harsh, back-bending laughter.
> "Take it or leave it!" he shouted, and she stopped, her mouth open. She stopped and lifted up the small, grey rabbit. She placed it on the table; then she came to Armietiev and wound her arms around him. (p. 71)

Armietiev's experience leads on to despair, to an agonized heart. The following passage reveals the destructive elements of his experience.

> "Come," she said. "Comb your hair."
> She was afraid of him, there was something strange about his mouth swinging slightly sidewise. She was afraid of his

[23] C. M. Bowra, The Romantic Imagination (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p. 38.

> walk, loud and flat. She pushed him toward the door. He placed one foot after the other, with a precision that brought the heel down first, the toe following . . . .
>
> "Where are you going?"
>
> He did not seem to know where he was, he had forgotten her. He was shaking, his head straight up, his heart wringing wet. (p. 71)

In marked contrast to the final despair of "A Night Among the Horses" and "The Rabbit" is the final peace found in "No-Man's-Mare." Even though it involves a death, "No-Man's-Mare is perhaps the most wistful of the short stories. For a few moments one character especially experiences a sense of oneness with herself and with nature. For a few moments there is no inner estrangement--only peace.

Upon the death of Pauvla Agrippa, her husband and her sister Tasha become extremely unsettled. They seek solace. Although Pauvla Agrippa is dead, the death does not seem final. The adults in the story do not know what to do. The children in the story, however, seem to be aware of something that is beyond the knowledge of the adults.

> This baby [Pauvla's] and the boy [Pauvla's brother] had one thing in common--a deep curiosity--a sense that somewhere that curiosity would be satisfied.[24]

That children know something that the adults do not is suggested throughout the story. The children never appear dislocated or

[24] Barnes, "No-Man's-Mare," A Night Among the Horses, p. 133.

alienated, even in the face of death. They emit a sense of harmony and peace that the adults find severely lacking.

In The Image of Childhood, Paul Coveney maintains that in Romanticism children aptly affect adult consciousness and in doing so assert the continuity and the unity of human experience.[25] In her use of children in "No-Man's-Mare," Barnes reflects the romantic conviction. The image is further reinforced by the children's relationship with nature. This is especially evident when a wild horse is determined by the family to be the only practical means of transporting the body of Pauvla Agrippa to her grave site only after the adults realize that children have been seen approaching the animal. When the husband announces that the horse cannot be caught, a neighbor contradicts him. "It's easy enough to catch it; this week three children have stroked it."[26]

There is a further implied relationship among the children and the horse and Pauvla. Because of their youth, the children are innocent and maintain a close relationship with nature which is evident in their relationship with the horse. Pauvla Agrippa assumes a natural quality in her death that approximates innocence and thus becomes close to nature.[27] Her closeness is evidenced in the climax

[25] Coveney, p. 25.

[26] Barnes, "No-Man's-Mare," A Night Among the Horses, p. 140.

[27] Scott, pp. 38-39.

of the story when Pauvla Agrippa is carried into the sea by the horse. There is no sense of Pauvla Agrippa's having been lost at sea, however. There remains only a sense of reconciliation and peace. The story ends with the following simple but meaningful statement.

> That night Tasha picked up Pauvla Agrippa's sleepy boy and standing in the doorway prayed to the sea, and this time she found comfort.[28]

[28] Barnes, "No-Man's-Mare," A Night Among the Horses, p. 144.

OTHER HEARTBEATS

Some of the young characters who are on the verge of entering adulthood are able to maintain their innocence in spite of rather dramatic experiences. These characters tend to overdramatize their situations because they do not know or completely understand what has happened to them and because they know of no other way by which to integrate the painful experiences into their lives.

The children in the short stories to be discussed are all between the ages of fourteen and seventeen. Although the children are as physically alienated as the adults, one might contend that Barnes uses children to present a slightly different perspective of her basic attitude toward life and, in doing so, reveals a less disquieting vision. There are no placating solutions, no resolutions to this struggle called life. While the children do not necessarily emit a sense of dignity, however, they do not emit a sense of despair. They accept the human condition, and, in doing so, at times vividly reflect romantic as well as surreal convictions.

"Cassation," "The Grande Malade," and "Dusie" are among the few stories in which Barnes does not employ the impersonal third-person narrative technique. Using the young girl Katya as a first-person narrator enables Barnes to aptly present a different viewpoint of situations in which the adults emit a sense of despair. In contrast to the despair of the adult characters, one finds the perspective of one who has not yet gone astray. That Katya tells her stories to a female

known only as Madame further serves to enhance the singular perspective of life as seen through a young person's eyes. There can be no doubt that Katya observes with a child's eyes. Everything tends to be seen as massive and tall and wide. Her child's ability and inclination to exaggerate is evident in the beginning of the short story "Dusie" where she describes Dusie as being "tall, very big and beautiful, absent and so pale. She wore big shoes, and her ankles and wrists were large, and her legs beyond belief long."[1]

Viewing the world through such eyes, Katya also tends to be dramatic, at times over-dramatic. For example, she wears satin trousers out of respect to China, which "has a majesté because you can not know it. It is like a big book you can read but not understand." (p. 34) Katya is very much the romantic child. She has a dancer's heart and lives in a fantasy world. Her imaginative power is in accord with what C. M. Bowra calls the romantic imagination in that she, along with other children, seems to have no sense of time or of the limitations of the human state.[2] She is in a constant state of flux.

> "So we are Jew and not Jew. We are where we are. We are Polish when we are in Poland, and when in Holland we are Dutch, and now in France we are French, and one day we will go to America and be American; you will see, Madame." (p. 32)

[1] Barnes, "Dusie," p. 75.

[2] Bowra, p. 99.

The children also recall André Breton who similarly maintained that in childhood "the absence of any known restrictions allows [a child] the perspective of several lives lived at once . . . . Children set off each day without a worry in the world. Everything is near at hand, the worst material conditions are fine. The woods are white or black, one will never sleep."[3] In this respect the children are in marked contrast to the adult characters who, while responding to the refractive elements in life in a surreal sense, are acutely aware of one life. Barnes' children have simply not yet gone astray; they do not suffer as the adults suffer. While the adults accept--with dignity or despair--the situations in which they find themselves, the children--with innocence--tend to move on.

In his article entitled "The Innocent Observer," Ronald Berman discusses at length his observations of the naive observer, the child who, though not responsible for the existing social order, is a victim of that social order. As a victim, the naive observer views the social order through an unclouded eye, responding to what he or she sees with the innocence of accurate perception. Berman further maintains that the perception of the naive observer is as valid as his or her experiences.[4]

[3] Breton, pp. 3-4.

[4] For a concise analysis of the child as naive observer in literature, see Ronald S. Berman, "The Innocent Observer," Children's Literature, 9 (n. d.), 40-50.

It must be noted that Barnes' children do not follow strictly in the romantic tradition of naively observing the social order, a tradition which was perfected in the works of Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontė. First of all, they are allowed to respond freely to what they experience or see or hear. Second, Barnes does not deal with the social order on a social level. She is not concerned with society as the social novelist would be. Barnes deals with the human condition on a very personal level, and on that level Barnes' children do respond, as the naive observer responds, with the innocence of accurate perception. Further, Katya's and Oscar's perceptions of their experiences are as important as their experiences.

"Cassation," which means an abrogating, an annulling, or a breaking off according to James Scott, is a story involving another encounter between innocence and experience.[5] Innocence is found in the person of the young girl Katya and experience in the older woman Gaya. In the actual encounter, "Cassation" proves to be almost the antithesis of "Aller et Retour." There are some similarities, however, which are worth noting.

Katya is sixteen years old; Richter is seventeen. Although Richter and Katya have very different personalities, both girls are on the threshhold of maturity. Both girls become involved with strong, experienced older women. Even though Richter is shy and withdrawn while Katya is out-going, both girls maintain their innocence as a

[5] Scott, p. 31.

result of their encounters. Apparently, neither is ready to fully integrate experience into her life. Neither is ready to assume responsibility for her life. Each is protected by her innocence.

Like Madame von Bartmann, Gaya seems to be around forty years old, and she also decides that a young girl needs her guidance. Her reasons for being Katya's mentor, however, seem somewhat perverted in light of Madame von Bartmann's desire that Richter begin to think, for Gaya's desire is just the opposite. Essentially, Gaya does not want Katya to experience life or to think about life. She tells Katya to give up the theatre, dancing, and acting. It becomes evident that Gaya does not want Katya to abandon her innocent world of "play" for a more vital life. Gaya has an apparently autistic child, and she wants Katya to abandon her world for the child's world. Gaya believes that Katya would be able to relate better than she herself can to the "idiot" child, Valentine, who is about three-years old.

> "Katya will go with you. She will instruct you, she will tell you there are no swans, no flowers, no beasts, no boys--nothing, nothing at all, just as you like it. No mind, no thought, nothing whatsoever else . . . only you, only!" (pp. 28-29)

Her speech is in direct contrast to Madame von Bartmann's telling Richter to think everything. Instead of growing, Gaya desires Katya to remain with them forever, to revert to a state that seems even more primal than innocence.

In her innocence, Katya is very accepting of Gaya and all that she says to her. However, she cannot experience what Gaya is experiencing. Katya seems to speak for innocence when she says to

Gaya, "Gaya, why is it you suffer so, and what am I to do?" (p. 29) When Katya asks Gaya why she suffers, she reveals that she does not understand the situation--which is that of a woman looking desperately for help for her idiot child. Katya is not ready to integrate such an experience into her young, innocent life. One cannot even consider her question to be compassionate because she does not understand, does not empathize.

At one point in her story-telling, Katya refers to Valentine as "tainted with innocence and waste time" (p. 26). Such a state Gaya recognizes; the realization fills her with despair. Gaya has lost all dignity and sees only the tainted innocence of her child. It is tainted because it is without pleasure. It is a state of no exit. There is no growth. Gaya's experience--which is tainted with despair--is pitted against Katya's innocence--which is untainted. Katya maintains her innocence, what becomes essentially, a will to survive, to live, to experience growth.

> "Sometimes it is beautiful in Berlin, Madame, nicht wahr? There was something in my heart, a passion to see Paris, so it was natural that I said lebe wohl to Berlin." (p. 29)

In "The Grande Malade," which was previously entitled "The Little Girl Continues," Katya again tells her story to an anonymous woman. This time the story is set in Paris and involves not so much Katya as it does her sister Moydia. At fifteen years of age, Moydia is especially over-dramatic and pretentiously sophisticated.

> "She [Moydia] wanted to become 'tragique' and 'triste' all at once, like the great period Frenchwomen, only fiercer and perhaps less pure, and yet to die and give up the heart like a virgin . . ." (p. 31).

In her desire to become tragique, Moydia falls desperately in love with Monsieur X. Although their relationship is most assuredly platonic, her energy is totally consumed by her passion for him. Their relationship continues until Moydia is called away to visit her father. Upon her return, she is devastated to find that Monsieur X has died. He is stricken with a fever and dies in a drunken stupor in the company of a friend. Moydia is determined to follow her "lover" until Katya presents her with the cape that was worn by Monsieur X. One remembers Katya's comment at the beginning of the story.

> "She has a great memory in the present, and it all turns about a cape, therefore now she wears a cape, until something yet more austere drives the cape away" (p. 33).

One might agree with Kannenstine and contend that Moydia is estranged from life and from her own emotions and that her malady is chronic and incurable.[6] Considering the perspective of a child narrator, however, one may make other assertions. Early in the story, Katya makes the following comment.

> "We felt a quiet despair that people do not live or die beautifully, nor plan anything at all; and then and there we said we would do better" (p. 34).

[6] Kannenstine, p. 72.

So, Moydia does not react with quiet despair upon hearing of Monsieur X's death as much as she reacts with quiet despair upon receiving the cape. The cape offers her an opportunity to become tragique. She does not suffer the consequences of Monsieur X's death as much as she suffers the moment of death, the opportunity to die beautifully. Of course, she does not die beautifully, for she does not die.

> "[Moydia] is gay, spoiled, tragique.
> She sugars her tea from far too great
> a height. And that's all. . . . Truly,
> we speak a little French; now we must
> be moving on." (p. 40)

One might easily consider the short story "Dusie" to be a perverted tale of lesbian relationships--and it most certainly is. Yet, the story seems to be no more perverted than that of Monsieur X's drinking himself to death or of the idiot child Valentine's incessant buzzing on his mother's bed. "Dusie" is not a story of innocence pitted against experience as are the previous stories, but through the use of the innocent young narrator, whom one assumes again to be Katya, Barnes is able to maintain a consistency in presenting the details which make up the story.

The setting is again an ornate and garish house in Paris, a house which is inhabited only by women. Dusie, whose name women write in dust, is the object of love and jealousy. She is loved by Madame K--and envied by the young woman Clarissa. The narrator accurately perceives the relationships among the women and realizes that Clarissa is basically evil and can only hurt Dusie. While staying with Dusie

in the absence of Madame K--, she, half-asleep, overhears Clarissa talking to Dusie in another room.

> "You do not look as if you would live long,
> not long, but I am thirty and I think of
> you, and you must think too, about the
> most terrible virtue, which is to be
> undefiled because one has no way for it;
> there are women like that, grown women;
> there should be an end."[7]

She then sleeps, awakening to find Dusie crying with her foot crushed and bleeding. She attempts to help but is interrupted by Madame K-- who tells her that she must go away. Go away she does.

> "Yes, even now the story had begun
> to fade with me; it is so in Paris;
> France eats her own history, n'est-ce pas,
> Madame?"[8]

The story ends on a rather morbid note, but the narrator still remains untainted.

"Oscar" is far removed from the cafés, boudoirs, and streets of Berlin and Paris. One of Barnes' longest short stories, "Oscar" involves the twice-widowed Emma Gonsberg, her son Oscar, and her two suitors, Ulric Straussmann and Oliver Kahn. Although the title suggests that the story focuses on Oscar, a seemingly innocent but precocious fourteen-year-old, it focuses on him only indirectly until the end. It is rather a strange tale of perverted innocence in which the whole

[7] Barnes, "Dusie," p. 81.

[8] Barnes, "Dusie," p. 82.

structure of life seems to be out of whack. At one point early in the story, Emma Gonsberg comments to herself that her house is all at odds. Her statement captures the essence of the story. Innocence is pitted against experience in "Oscar," but one finds a perversion of the innocence normally equated with childhood and of the knowledge equated with adulthood.

The strangeness or perversion which becomes more profound as the story unfolds is readily evident in the story's setting, which is a small country town. The opening scene is idyllic, but the country, which is usually associated with the beauty in nature and the innocence of childhood, assumes adverse qualities.

> Strange things had happened in this country town. Murder, theft, and little girls found weeping, and silent morose boys scowling along in the ragweed,[9] with half-shut sunburned eyelids.

The antagonistic image of the country is maintained throughout the story by Ulric Straussmann. He consistently turns the country into a brothel and then contends that such a place was made for children. At one point he even tells Oscar "don't let your mother persuade you that the country is a nice, healthful, clean place, because, my child, it's corrupt."[10]

[9] Barnes, "Oscar," A Night Among the Horses, p. 76.

[10] Barnes, "Oscar," A Night Among the Horses, p. 86.

In this country setting, the adults present an odd grouping of personalities and philosophies. Ulric Straussmann himself is somewhat corrupt and makes of children and animals strong enemies. He enjoys telling sordid tales to Oscar and then ironically states that children are born corrupt and attain to decency. Kahn, on the other hand, is quiet but always talking, offering Emma Gonsberg advice, usually upon her request. Emma Gonsberg is the most inconsistent of the three adults. Emma is overwhelmed by life. She is overwhelmed by the attentions of her suitors who are always at odds with one another while vying for her affection, and she is further overwhelmed by the responsibility of raising a son. She is continually turning to either Ulric or Kahn for advice or answers, being totally helpless herself.

> "But, Kahn, you must think, you must give me an answer. All of this indecision is all very well for us, for all of us who are too old to change, for all of us who can reach God through some plaything we have used as a symbol, but there's my son, what is he to think, to feel, he has no jester's stick to shake, nor stool to stand on. Am I responsible for him? Why," she cried frantically, "must I be responsible for him? I tell you I won't be, I can't."[11]

Emma is the opposite of Madame von Bartmann and Julie Anspacher who not only recognize their responsibilities toward their respective children but who are also willing to accept them. Especially in contrast to Madame von Bartmann, Emma is frantic when she realizes that Oscar is beginning to think for himself.

[11] Barnes, "Oscar," A Night Among the Horses, p. 99.

Emma, Kahn, and Straussmann become almost childlike. Kahn, in fact, tells Emma that she is a child. At one point, he himself feels like a child, saying that it is difficult not to feel like a child. There are no valid reasons for their thinking or their behavior, but they are in marked contrast to the behavior of the one child in the story.

Oscar himself does not possess the features or personality usually found in a child of his age. He is described as "rather too full-grown, thick of calf and hip and rather heavy of feature. His hands and feet were not out of proportion as is usually the case with children of his age, but they were too old looking."[12] Further, "[he] took himself with seriousness amounting to a lack of humor. . . ."[13] He even tells his mother, "Well, what of it--is that any reason why I should not be serious about everything?"[14] He takes his mother very seriously when she tells him upon talking with Oliver Kahn that he must love with "an everlasting but a changing love, a love that takes in every detail, every, every element--that can understand without hating, without distinction. . . ."[15] He takes his mother very seriously when

[12] Barnes, "Oscar," A Night Among the Horses, p. 83.

[13] Barnes, "Oscar," A Night Among the Horses, p. 84.

[14] Barnes, "Oscar," A Night Among the Horses, p. 84.

[15] Barnes, "Oscar," A Night Among the Horses, p. 88.

she later tells him, "Son, hate too, that is inevitable--irrevocable."[16] At the end of the story, it is obvious that Oscar takes his mother too seriously. In a final gesture that seems as obscene as it does extreme, Oscar kills his young sweetheart, cutting her throat with a kitchen knife.

In retrospect, what seems even more obscene and extreme is the atmosphere in which Oscar is raised. Coveney notes that Rousseau contended that the environment and the ill-direction of parents and teachers cause all such deviations from virtue.[17] The events which occur in "Oscar" seem to give credence to Rousseau's contention. Oscar's particular nature is not respected or nurtured accordingly. He is certainly given no guidance. What he is given are abstract words which he cannot possibly understand. He is given too much too soon. In their youth Barnes' children recall romantic images as well as surreal images, but they also project a third image that emanates from Barnes alone--that of being terribly human. In a perverted twist of the Barnesian garden, Oscar might prove to be the human testimony.

In speaking of T. S. Eliot's Burnt Norton, Wallace Fowlie says:

> The child's moment is the exhausting of
> time and age: the moment when one is all

[16] Barnes, "Oscar," A Night Among the Horses, p. 101.

[17] Coveney, p. 44.

> characters, all sexes, all ages--the prodigiously unreal moment when we bear most of reality. Everything is unseen and unheard in childhood. And yet it is the moment when we see and hear the most, when we see the blooms of the rose garden we never entered and hear birds that sing there.[18]

There emanate from Barnes' children such moments as described by Fowlie. In their youth Katya and Moydia are exhausted almost at once but do bear most of reality, especially in their ability to consistently move on. In their inability to suffer, they are able to see and hear the most, for they are not yet concerned with personal pain. They prove to be consistently free in spirit, a hallmark for any age.

[18] Fowlie, p. 147.

CONCLUSION

Even though there are whispers of a less disquieting vision among the short stories of Djuna Barnes, her legacy is her disquieting personal vision. Of that there can be no doubt. Kannenstine points out that Djuna Barnes' short stories present a vision of a lost Eden, of innocence and unity out of time. All of the characters experience a gap, suffering a middle condition, a radical physical and spiritual dislocation, being at home neither here nor there, being neither one thing nor the other.[1] Perhaps Barnes' writing is so illustrative of disintegration because she herself felt so disintegrated. Perhaps the silence of the last forty years of her life was indicative of someone who was suffering a middle condition. Andrew Field notes the following about those reclusive years.

> The silence, then, was not a sudden turn in her life but simply a potentiality that came to the fore when various other things such as sense of self, love, accomplishment and fame had in one way or the other played themselves out. If "Uncle Tom" (for that was what she called Eliot) and Dag Hammerskjold had lived. If she had had a sympathetic partner in life. The odds were against that in the circles in which she moved throughout her mature life.[2]

Hers was a tortured soul, and there can also be little doubt that much of her disquieting personal vision grew out of an

[1] Kannenstine, p. 85.

[2] Field, p. 21.

overwhelming sense of hostility toward her family, especially toward her father. In addition to his being weak of character and a failed artist, Wald Barnes considered himself to be a sexual godhead and had several mistresses. Further, Field points to evidence that Djuna was "not exactly seduced or raped but rather 'given' sexually by her father like an Old Testament slave or daughter."[3] Perhaps Barnes' environment and the ill-direction of her parents and teachers (who were one and the same) were the fundamental cause of what might be called her deviations as an author. Barnes desperately wanted to tell her story. When she finally did tell her story in Nightwood and then in The Antiphon, she had arrived at a highly stylized way of telling it. In an excellent article entitled "Dressing the Unknowable in the Garments of the Known: The Style of Djuna Barnes," Carolyn Allen discusses the language of Barnes and states that "in Nightwood, what readers hail as stylistic innovation begins not so much with Barnes' desire to experiment as with her recognition that current modes of discourse were inappropriate for her subject."[4] In her writing she was able to tell a very personal tale in language that is not easy to understand but which is appropriate.

[3] Field, p. 43.

[4] Carolyn Allen, "Dressing the Unknowable in the Garments of the Known: The Style of Djuna Barnes' Nightwood," Women's Language and Style, University of Akron Studies in Contemporary Language, No. 1, ed. Douglas Butturff and Edmund L. Epstein (Akron, Ohio: Published with the assistance of the Department of English, Univ. of Akron, 1978), p. 107.

Her language is certainly appropriate for her disquieting vision. In his The Present Age from 1914, Edwin Muir aptly states that "Barnes is one of those few writers whose thought and expression become more felicitous, the more painful the theme she is dealing with."[5] Perhaps Barnes might have expounded upon a vision of hope had her own foundations in life been different. Creativity was nurtured in the Barnes familial setting, but perhaps she, like Oscar, was given too many abstract words. The familial garden tended by Wald and Zadel was somewhat twisted.

Like many others of her generation, Barnes often drifted in and out of relationships, both lesbian and heterosexual. She did fall deeply in love at least twice, but neither relationship was enduring. She did not have a stable personal life. Much has been made, especially in Andrew Field's biography on Barnes, of "the effect of her weak and wild father on the Barnes family and the ill-fated love between Barnes and Thelma Wood."[6] One finds much of Barnes' work to be autobiographical, especially Nightwood and The Antiphon. Field goes on to note the following.

> Djuna was the proper progeny and prodigy to fulfill the literary and feminist aspirations of Zadel. Who could know that one of the costs of this achievement would

[5] Edwin Muir, The Present Age from 1914 (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1940), p. 149.

[6] Field, p. 32.

> be an epic history and judgment of the family, both comic and bitter, with no one excluded?[7]

Barnes' writing has been called "grotesque." Field refers to John Ruskin's definition of the grotesque in painting in analyzing Barnes' style--"a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way."[8] It is true that Barnes paints images rather than tell the reader exactly what is going on. However, one might consider the style and quality of her writing to be more similar to that of Kafka than to that of other writers of the grotesque such as Sherwood Anderson and Flannery O'Connor. In fact, writers such as Anderson and O'Connor seem to use the ordinary to express the grotesque while Barnes uses the grotesque to express the ordinary. Her tales are often strange, even bizarre, but they are always poignantly human, dealing with universal themes of the human condition. Further, Barnes' characters are seldom grotesque, only their situations.

Among all of the expatriates, Djuna Barnes and James Joyce probably had the most in common literarily. Their development as writers progressed much along the same lines, both beginning with poetry, moving to short stories, and ending with highly stylized versions of the novel. Both employed Elizabethan and Jacobean

[7] Field, p. 179.

[8] Field, p. 33.

language in the early stages of their writing. As Field points out, "it is in her extension of the limits of literary language that Djuna Barnes stands on common ground with Joyce. . . . Of the early twentieth-century English writers, few can be said to pay more persistent attention to layers of language and difficult historical allusion than Joyce, Eliot and Barnes."[9] In Edwin Muir's comparison of Barnes and Joyce, one finds perhaps the most complimentary assessment of Barnes' writing.

> Miss Barnes' prose is the only prose by a living writer which can be compared with that of Joyce, and in one point it is superior to his: in its richness in exact and vivid imagery entirely without that prettiness which so readily creeps into an Irish style. There is not in her use of language, as there is in Joyce's, the faint suggestion of a possible distinction between the thing said and the way in which it is said, the feeling that one could have said it in another way if one had liked.[10]

In reading just James Joyce's collection of short stories, The Dubliners, one finds that he and Barnes share another distinct feature in their writing, especially in the development of plot. Neither author tells the reader everything. There are seemingly important events and explanations in their short stories which remain undisclosed to the reader. Field notes the following about their work as a whole.

[9] Field, p. 110.

[10] Muir, p. 150.

> Both Djuna Barnes and James Joyce share a strong disposition to verbal encrustation. They both seek to conceal more than to reveal or "communicate," and in each writer one must learn to accept this manner if one is to be able to participate in the writer's poetic intensity. This important aspect of Djuna Barnes is natural to her and not the result of any influence.[11]

According to Field, it is known that Barnes and Joyce held each other in mutual respect. Barnes considered Joyce to be the most important writer in Paris and was one of his few literary friends. In fact, it was to Barnes in 1923 that Joyce gave his original manuscript of Ulysses containing all of his annotations. Barnes' impressions of James Joyce can be found in at least two character sketches. One appeared in the April 1922 issue of Vanity Fair in an article entitled "James Joyce: A Portrait of the Man Who Is, At Present, One of the More Significant Figures in Literature"; the other sketch appeared first of all in a 1922 issue of The Double Dealer in an article entitled "Vagaries Malicieux."[12] "Vagaries Malicieux" was later published in a book of the same title. The impression Barnes relates of Joyce is brief but creates a clear image, giving an almost in-depth characterization as the following quotes demonstrate.

[11] Field, p. 111.

[12] Field, p. 109.

> A quiet man, this Joyce, with the back head of an African idol, long and flat. The back head of a man who had done away with the vulgar necessity of brain-room.[13]
>
> * * * * *
>
> Joyce lives in a sort of accidental aloofness. He is pleased when friends call, and he will go anywhere, it is said, and drink anything. He dislikes art-talk, and his friends are quite the common people.[14]

T. S. Eliot was also a friend of Djuna Barnes and a devoted champion of her work. He was instrumental in getting Nightwood published by Faber and Faber in London in 1936. His introduction to the 1937 American edition can only be considered a boon to its acceptance for publication.

> What I would leave the reader prepared to find is the great achievement of a style, the beauty of phrasing, the brilliance of wit and characterisation, and a quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy.[15]

Field aptly observes the following in summation of Djuna Barnes' writing.

[13] Barnes, Djuna, Vagaries Malicieux (New York: Frank Hallman, 1974), p. 12.

[14] Barnes, Vagaries Malicieux, p. 12.

[15] T. S. Eliot, introd., Nightwood, by Djuna Barnes (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1937), p. xvi.

> To define her as a writer it is necessary to include her silences, her encrustations, her sense of humour, and her horror before life. A painterly writer then, a modernist and an ancient, an adherent of the grotesque with elements of Joyce, Eliot and Synge, but with a unique artistic voice that is immediately recognizable and unmistakable.[16]

Her horror before life is her disquieting personal vision, a vision generally void of hope. Foremost in her work, it is recognizable and unmistakable. In all fairness, however, perhaps one also ought to include her less disquieting vision, her quiet acceptance of life, especially since she never discounts or mocks the human spirit. That in itself seems to be a sign of hope. Further, she never totally dismisses the buffers such as religion and love that delay the disillusionment that must come with life.

[16] Field, p. 33.

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