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**"Writing the Body Spiritual": Sexual/Textual/Spiritual Links
in the Writings of Antonia White, Emily Coleman and Djuna Barnes**

by

Sandra M. Chait

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of**

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Doctoral Dissertation

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Abstract

**“Writing the Body Spiritual”: Sexual/Textual/Spiritual Links
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by Sandra M. Chait

**Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee: Professor Sydney Kaplan
Department of English**

This study undertakes an examination of the textual search for female spiritual identity by three Modernist writers, Antonia White, Emily Coleman and Djuna Barnes, and identifies their aesthetic approach to such a spiritual quest as “writing the body spiritual.” Like Gilbert and Gubar’s “sexual linguistics,” “writing the body spiritual” describes a gendered approach to textuality, but extends gender firstly in its definition, by including masculine/feminine holism, and secondly in its reach, by incorporating within its sphere of influence also the spiritual. White, Coleman and Barnes query woman’s placement on the negative side of Enlightenment binaries and, by textually highlighting her relationship to the spiritual, show these positions -- female, flesh, matter, the profane -- to be comprised in large part by their supposed opposites. In bringing such binaries together, they seek also to establish their literary subjecthood as god-the-author-of-their-texts, for they perceive their writerly authority in relation to god threatened by the “inferior” position imposed on them as sexually active women.

In tracing the spiritual dimension in the writings of these three authors then, this study foregrounds the “spiritual” as a third and interrelated element in the relationship between female sexuality and art during the Modernist period. It presents the sexual/textual/spiritual triad as a combined and interwoven influence in these women’s writing and shows their texts to be the products of the interaction among all three elements, specifically in the unconscious. The unconscious thus becomes the key to spiritual explorations in their works and its intricate connections an essential part of “writing the body spiritual.” For, even as White, Coleman and Barnes pursue their spiritual journeys in the context of Catholicism and pre-Christian Gnosticism, their internalized relationships with earlier love-objects shape the contours of their spiritual beliefs and color its affects. Through the application to their texts of Lacanian psycholinguistics, Kristevan semiotics and Winnicottian object relations theory respectively, this study explores the spiritual unconscious in each writer’s work and shows that aesthetic practice, “writing the body spiritual,” to be predicated in each case on a sexual unconscious.

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Chapter One
Renegotiating Woman's Place in the Ontological Chain

Expanding the Sexual/Textual Relationship

Revisionary readings of modernist texts since the Sixties have foregrounded the integral role the question of gender has played in the formulation of Anglo-American modernism. In particular, feminist textual explorations of female sexuality have broadened the way we define the era, making the relationship of female desire to modernist literature an important element in our understanding of the texts. Today, we see in the linguistic experimentation of Gertrude Stein's Lifting Belly, for example, the writer's attempt to move beyond the confines of male created articulations to create a language that more explicitly expresses her female sexuality in relation to her lover, Alice B. Toklas.¹ Similarly, we recognize in the texts of Virginia Woolf, Zora Neale Hurston and Willa Cather, the "sexual linguistics" by which such authors have attempted to explore their literary identity as women and sexual other.² Female writers of the twenties and thirties were deeply engaged in questioning the relationship of their

¹ See, for example, Penelope J. Engelbrecht, "'Lifting belly is a Language': The Postmodern Lesbian Subject," Feminist Studies 16.1 (1990): 85-114.

² Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, vol. 1. The War of the Words (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988) 227-71.

sexuality to their art, and their findings, as expressed textually, transformed the face of Modernism.

In reading such sexual/textual explorations in the works of the Modernist authors Antonia White, Emily Coleman and Djuna Barnes, however, a third element emerges which adds a further strand to this already complicated interaction. This element -- the spiritual, by which I mean the religious impulse irrespective of its institutional context -- concentrates the attention of these women writers as much as the sexual and shows their literary concerns to encompass a more explicitly triangular version of the sexual/textual relationship. That which concerned them -- the spiritual -- lay intricately entwined with the sexual and textual, each affecting the others along pathways these three writers investigated with single-minded purpose. In probing the connections between their female desire and literary production, White, Coleman and Barnes sought to understand the ways in which those sexual and creative links derived from their "inferior" position as women in relation to god.³ Since, as females, their sexual identity historically placed them on the negative side of the ontological binary, on the side of the profane as opposed to the sacred -- a topic I shall discuss later in this chapter -- the question of literary subjecthood thus appeared to them as much a

³ In this study, I have adopted the following use on capitalization of the names and pronouns of religious figures: I use a lower-case "g" for god and goddess, except where I quote other's use of capitalization; upper-case "H," "F," "M," "U," "UR" and "W" for Him, Her, Father, Mother, Ultimacy, Ultimate Reality and Word respectively to distinguish the spiritual use of these signifiers; and upper-case "J" and "C" for Jesus Christ, a proper name.

religious as a sexual dilemma. How were they to write as god-the-author of their own texts when their very sexuality as women supposedly undermined the power of that spiritual/literary relationship in which all three women claimed to believe? This insecurity about female ontological status, even as they asserted their personal, literary and spiritual authority, characterized all three women's texts and led to an aesthetic approach that engages what we now understand as "writing the body." It speaks textually to the needs of the female body to express itself beyond the confines of patriarchal language, but ultimately goes beyond the *écriture féminine* of Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray by its inclusion also of the spiritual.⁴ White, Coleman and Barnes's need to explore the nature of their female desire and its relationship to spiritual subjecthood extends their textual search into the realm of the transcendent and, further, calls into play, as I shall explain, the unconscious as the common denominator that links all three dimensions of their female identity in the texts. Their aesthetic practice, the textual pursuit of spiritual subjecthood predicated on a sexual unconscious, I therefore define as "writing the body spiritual" and suggest its use by White, Coleman and Barnes as foregrounding an important aspect of that larger,

⁴ The concept of *écriture féminine* (feminine writing) derives from French feminist Helene Cixous, who cites its "source" as the mother and the mother-child relationship prior to the acquisition of language. She describes this language as different from male writing in that it subverts logic and any restriction on the free play of meaning. In The Laugh of the Medusa, for example, Cixous defines such female textuality as writing the body in white ink, for she claims that women are never far from the mother and retain always a little of their mother's milk. Luce Irigaray, on the other hand, identifies woman's writing of her body with the structure and shape of her genital organs. Thus, in The Sex Which Is Not One, she describes female textuality as multiple, fluid, diverse and heterogeneous and always evasive of male control.

fundamental problem in modernism, namely, the crisis of legitimation unleashed by the demise of institutionalized religion.

Textual evidence of this questioning of female ontological, epistemological and linguistic relationships can be found in all three women's fictional works, as well as in their letters, essays or diaries. For each of them, irrespective of whether they claimed or disdained traditional religious belief, art derived unconsciously from a source beyond their control. To Coleman, it constituted "a revelation of religion,"⁵ while for White, it appeared as "both a gift from God and a curious product of one's own background."⁶ Even the reticent Barnes acknowledged that "the good" dealt out through art "is put into our hands by some sort of magic or miracle, -- just for a brief hour or so, for it is as tiring as the work of mediums."⁷ Believing their art to be inspired through this

⁵ With the exception of her novel, The Shutter of Snow, plus a handful of her poems and short stories, most of Emily Coleman's writing remains unpublished. Much of the material from which I shall quote exists as manuscripts and typescripts in the Emily Holmes Coleman Papers held by the University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware, where I undertook my research. Similarly, some of the correspondence between Coleman and Djuna Barnes which appears in this study, as well as Coleman's unpublished essay on Barnes's Nightwood, I obtained from archival sources, viz. the Papers of Djuna Barnes, Special Collections, University of Maryland at College Park Libraries. Future references in this study to the Emily Holmes Coleman Papers at Delaware and the Papers of Djuna Barnes at Maryland will be listed in the notes as the EC Collection and DB Collection. The above quote, therefore, reads: Emily Coleman, "Art, Science and Religion 11," Essay, EC Collection (ser.111.4 box 115 file 1007).

⁶ Antonia White, Antonia White: Diaries 1926-1957, 279.

⁷ Djuna Barnes, letter to Emily Coleman, May 5, 1935, Correspondence, EC Collection, (ser.1 box 2 file 10).

mystical connection, then, they perceived their future ability to produce “good” writing as dependent on their maintenance and nurturance of that bond, even as they questioned its nature. “I always thought,” Barnes confided to Hank O’Neal, “that if I did anything wrong, if I took a pencil that didn’t belong to me, if I was dishonorable in any way, in any fashion, then I would be unable to write a word.”⁸ Thus, while as New Women they could flaunt their female sexuality in the face of “man” without concern for society’s moral approbation, when it came to the face of god, as it were, the odds appeared to them more loaded. In an unpublished poem entitled, “This Love Cannot Divide Me from my Good,” Coleman sought spiritual reassurance for the sexual desire that crept upon her unbid as she prayed. “O Father of all desire!” she wrote, “You who created love! You who made us--/Can you think evil of my wildest fire/When in the darkness of felicitous/Smiles, it comes upon me with the speed/of demons?”⁹ Coleman, of course, being the most actively religious of the three women, constantly scoured her soul. But even Barnes, who suffered no guilt whatsoever for having sex with whomever she liked, devoted much textual space to the exploration of guilt’s association with spiritual redemption, as I shall explain in chapter four.¹⁰ While Barnes

⁸ Hank O’Neal, “Life is painful, nasty and short . . . in my case it has only been painful and nasty”: Djuna Barnes 1978-1981: An Informal Memoir (New York: Paragon House, 1990) 80.

⁹ Emily Coleman, July 1954, revised 1963, Poems, EC Collection (ser.111.14 box 122 file 1465).

¹⁰ Antonia White recorded in her Basil Nicholson diary of December 4, 1937, “Djuna told me she had no feeling of guilt whatever about sex, about going to bed with any

claimed to hold out little hope for her own salvation in an after-life she visualized as essentially a repeat of her earthly sufferings, she nevertheless continued to seek it through her art until the last days of her writing life. Art provided the only means by which she, as well as White and Coleman, could make sense of the tremendous suffering each had experienced in her personal life. For that reason, the importance to these three writers of art's redemptive role cannot be overestimated. Art, with its mystical connection to truth, whatever its nature, provided their existence with meaning and they sought to share through it whatever knowledge and understanding they believed to have been vouchsafed them through the Word.

In tracing the spiritual dimensions in the writings of Antonia White, Emily Coleman and Djuna Barnes then, this study will foreground "the spiritual" as a third and interrelated element in the relationship between female sexuality and art during the Modernist period. It will present the sexual/textual/spiritual triad as a combined and interwoven influence in the writings of these three Modernist authors, showing their texts to be the products of the interaction among all three elements, firstly, in terms of their socially constructed religious identities as sexual women, and secondly, in the unconscious. At the level of the first, the external world, I shall delineate in White, Coleman and Barnes's writings their struggles against the institutional forces of theology, philosophy and science that denied them, on the grounds of their female

man or woman she wanted, but that she felt extremely guilty and ashamed about drinking..." *Diaries*, 115.

sexuality, ontological value and, thereby, their ability to experience transcendence in either the creative or spiritual realm. At the second level, the unconscious, I shall trace the repetition, projection or transference to the realm of the textual and spiritual of their internalized early childhood experiences of female desire in relation to patriarchy. In each case, the specific nature of that personal childhood experience as perceived through the imagination will be seen to shape and color the author's notions of the spiritual, as evidenced in the text. In the interaction of the contents of these two levels, the texts of White, Coleman and Barnes thus will reveal the developing, but frequently retrenching, line of their emergent spiritual identities.

The Status of Truth in the Modernist Era

Bonnie Kime Scott in her introduction to The Gender of Modernism points out that gender does not exist in isolation but in interaction with other categories, such as "class, race, nation, economic stature, and family type."¹¹ To these, I would add religion in its very broadest sense as the ideology, ontology, metaphysical or spiritual beliefs in accordance with which a society constructs itself and from which it draws its values and expectations about gender roles. Surprisingly, Scott has not itemized religion as one of her implicated categories despite her inclusion in her book of the

¹¹ Bonnie Kime Scott, The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990) 30. In her more recent Refiguring Modernism, vols. 1&2 (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996), Kime Scott does touch tentatively on religion in her section on Djuna Barnes, suggesting a kind of totem-animal worship by Robin of the dog in the last scene in *Nightwood* (1: 117). However, she does not relate this religious ritual, as she calls it, to gender.

obviously spiritual writings of H. D.¹² Thus, while her 1990 entreaty to think about the structure of such categorical systems in relation to gender calls to mind new hermeneutic categories -- female sexuality with race, for example, as in the works of Harlem Renaissance writers, Jessie Fauset or Nella Larsen -- she does not point her reader in the direction of the spiritual. She chooses to mention neither religion nor truth, nor even the idea of the sacred, as implicated in gender during the Modernist period. No doubt, the supposed dissolution of the Christian god during this period fuels her omission. Certainly, my notion of a female quest for truth in this era may seem an anomaly, or at the very least an anachronism in the face of it. As we know, many of the *fin-de-siecle* and First World War generations, responding to Nietzsche's repudiation of Christianity and to the physical and psychic fragmentation of which quantum physics and psychoanalysis had convinced them, turned their backs on institutionalized spirituality. Antonia White herself dropped Catholicism from her life between 1925 and 1940. The church's laws and teachings no longer seemed relevant to the moral problems facing the urban inhabitants of the Anglo-American world of science and industry. The destruction of the war machine, too, and the revelation of man's capacity for savagery towards his fellowman, tarnished the image of the omnipotent god and led many avant garde writers to reject also His heavenly realm.¹³

¹² "Notes on Thought and Vision," for example, plus "Joan of Arc."

¹³ An obvious exception here is T. S. Eliot, whose fictional and non-fictional texts reveal an espousal of the institutionalized Christian god and a desire to live by the church's teachings. See, for example, Christianity and Culture, composed of Eliot's

The Imagists, for example, abandoned the pursuit of transcendence altogether. Ezra Pound, like T. E. Hulme before him, committed himself “to a natural rather than a transcendent basis for poetry,” while Impressionist Ford Maddox Ford frequently brought spirituality down to earth with a strict adherence to the reality of his times.¹⁴

The Christian god, as site of truth, thus lost his hegemonic position, his power displaced by the nature of the thing itself which *les Imagistes* -- and the Impressionists, as well -- attempted to capture by “approximating the scientist’s ‘hard’ methods, his hard observation of detailed fact.”¹⁵ As Derrida reminds us, however, dissociating one’s mind from the desire for an originary cause is not so easy. Even the author of Thus Spoke Zarathustra could not escape the *cloture* of metaphysics; even he who proclaimed the death of the gods took “truth” as his point of departure.¹⁶ No matter

two essays, “The Idea of a Christian Society” and “Notes towards the Definition of Culture” (1939; New York: Harvest-Harcourt Brace, 1977).

¹⁴ Michael H. Levenson, The Genealogy of Modernism (Cambridge, Mass: Cambridge UP, 1984) 112; Ford Maddox Ford, “On Heaven,” Collected Poems (New York: Oxford UP, 1936) 13.

¹⁵ Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, ed., Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930 (1976; New York: Penguin, 1991).

¹⁶ Nietzsche tried to find his way round the impossibility of absolute knowing by actively forgetting and suggested that every discourse, including that of science, is only a perspective. But when he designated the will-to-power as the grounds of perspectivizations, Jacques Derrida claims in Of Grammatology, he thereby repeated the metaphysical process. Derrida deconstructs in this text the theories of Nietzsche, as well as those of Heidegger, Freud and Husserl, and foregrounds the concept of presence from which each of their theories is derived. Although these philosophers came closest to Grammatology in their questioning of Knowledge, Being, Psyche and Subjectivity, respectively, and in that sense are the forerunners of it, they stopped short of conceptualizing a limitless structure. Derrida defines grammatology as the science

the demise of the Judeo-Christian god, the trace of the Other continued to be found in the Modernist text. The Cantos reveal Pound's reverence for the past as the bearer of truth and even Ford, through his admission of Impressionism as a "frank expression of personality," potentially opened the door to individual expressions of metaphysical thought.¹⁷ For even if a writer's slant on the spiritual personifies only his own personality, as Ford implied, it nevertheless represents a particular perspective on truth. Thus, although truth had become detached from its traditional signified, it continued to exert its pull on those who, confronting the chaos left by the collapse of institutional supports, sought to impose some sort of order on their lives by investing that order with meaning.

Even with its altered status then, truth persisted, like the lighthouse beam in Virginia Woolf's novel, to lure the spiritually hungry towards its secrets across darkened waters covering dangerous shoals. White, Coleman and Barnes, as women, were not alone in experiencing its pull and seeking to capture a shaft of its light in their texts. For many Modernists, such pursuits drew on two forms of ideology -- art and theosophy -- both of which also had a bearing on the individual quests undertaken by the Catholic White and Coleman, as well as the agnostic Barnes. For them, as for other

of the effacement of the trace, the trace presupposing Being, the mark of interior presence.

¹⁷ See, for example, Michael Levenson's discussion of Ford's changing attitude towards Yeats in A Genealogy of Modernism (1984; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 114-5.

writers of the period, the first form, art, itself became a theology; it became “pure,” an abstraction that was denied any social function, and represented the highest truth to which man and woman could aspire.¹⁸ With its correlation to timelessness, its sense of unity, wholeness and permanence, it mimicked the very characteristics which provided “real” theologies with their ineluctable appeal. Virginia Woolf sought unifying truth in the aesthetic moment, seeing that moment of insight as providing a way out of the existential chaos that threatened her generation; a string of such moments, as shaping that chaos into meaningful ontological order. White, for her part, found in similar aesthetic moments a different kind of truth. In The Sugar House, for example, as in Woolf’s memorable dinner scene in To the Lighthouse, time stops. Clara’s senses are momentarily captivated by the “choirboy” sound of her Catholic friend Maidie’s singing, “the smells of cabbage water and tanning, the scratching of Trevor’s nail file and the tinny clang of the chapel bell” (32). “This moment is like no other,” Clara thinks as “she (is) carried into that other realm where everything ha(s) a significance beyond itself” (ibid.). But in White’s account, unlike Woolf’s, the author foregrounds the connection between the transcendent moment and the creative impulse. She describes Clara as feeling, simultaneous with the moment of truth, that “certain loose

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (1968; New York: Schocken, 1986) 224. Benjamin describes “l’art pour l’art” as a negative theology and warns that “mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual” in that it makes no sense to ask for the “authentic” print when any number of prints have been produced from a negative. The danger however lies in what replaces ritual when the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production. The inevitable replacement, according to Benjamin, is politics.

threads which had been floating in her mind for weeks spun themselves together” so that “she saw the rough shape of a story” emerge (33). The spiritual and the textual thus combine and Clara is inspired to write. What is more, in this moment of wholeness, of *jouissance*, her mystical inspiration is shown to derive in part from female desire, for Maidie’s voice, as White describes it, contains “all the yearning of all women waiting for their lovers to return”(32). White’s step into the transcendent world of the unknown, unlike Woolf’s, trailed traces of the Catholicism with which she was as intensely involved as with her writing. She had returned to the Catholic church in 1940 and, like a convert yet again, lived in “terror of failure in the spiritual life” (Diaries, 180). Truth in art, by necessity therefore, was required to resonate with the voice of her god, providing her with the divine assurance of his presence which she needed for her sexual/textual/spiritual exploration even as she raved angrily at her own lack of spiritual confidence. No doubt, she would have agreed with Wyndham Lewis who soon recognized that *l’art pour l’art* simply collapsed the Absolute into time; its metaphysics into fiction.¹⁹

The second philosophical form to which, in the supposed absence of the ground for the Absolute, such yearning drove Modernist writers, consisted of the religions of the past, particularly those exotic or esoteric mythologies that lay beyond the borders of contemporary Western Christianity. D. H. Lawrence, for instance, explored the

myths and practices of the Aztec Indians, while William Butler Yeats propounded his own interpretations of the symbols of Kabbala and the Anima Mundi. “. . . deprived by Huxley and Tyndall . . . of the simple-minded religion of my childhood,” Yeats admitted, “I . . . made a new religion”²⁰ Like him, many Modernist writers filled their spiritual void with individual versions of truth shaped by their own existential yearning. They constructed for their spiritual appeasement alternate beliefs which frequently drew on earlier pre-Christian forms such as Gnosticism.²¹ In turning back to such conflict-dualist religions, the literary Modernists, and Djuna Barnes particularly, were responding no differently than Theological Modernists to the existential crisis occasioned by the conflict between their personal experience of being in the world and the way Christianity and, in particular, Catholicism, insisted they understand that experience. Since the two forms of Modernism evolved simultaneously over the same time-period in response to similar pressures, this turning backwards to the past is not surprising.²² Lawrence Gamache points out in “Defining Modernism: A Religious and

¹⁹ See Wyndham Lewis, Wyndham Lewis on Art: Collected Writings 1913-1956, ed. Walter Michel and C J. Fox (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969) and The Writer and the Absolute (London: Methuen, 1952).

²⁰ William Butler Yeats, Autobiographies (New York: Macmillan, 1927) 142.

²¹ For studies of gnosticism, see Kurt Rudolph, Gnosis (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987) or Hans Jonas, Gnostic Religion, 2nd ed. (Boston: Peter Smith, 1990).

²² Although, today, theological Modernism is understood generally to refer to criticisms of traditional theology in Christian churches, at the end of the 19th century it described specifically the movement within the Roman Catholic church to bring Catholic beliefs more in line with contemporary and scientific thinking. This movement, by its support of modern science, its criticism of the Bible, and its demand that the Church encourage

Literary Correlation,” that the attraction of such conflict-dualist religions was rooted in several facts: firstly, the Gnostics, like the literary and Theological Modernists themselves, were “consistently opponents of the established authorities;” secondly, “they felt a sense of discomfort with the world and its mundane truths, seeing themselves as thrown (in a sense analogous to Heidegger’s) into its imperfections and chaos without choice and without the power to control its forces working to control them;” thirdly, “the existential alienation they felt was matched by a real alienation from ordinary society;” and, finally, because of their belief in private, spiritual, illumination as the source of truth known only to the chosen, truth itself was subjective and relative”(76)²³ The conflict-dualists with their notions of good and evil, and of light and dark, thus offered Modernists like Barnes the means to understand and come to terms with the existence of evil and suffering in their lives. The early Barnes, having suffered greatly at the hands of her family, identified with the Gnostic concept of two separate Divinities, to one of which was assigned responsibility for the good in the world, and to the other evil. Barnes believed herself to be descended from the latter

personal integrity and autonomy so that Catholics may make their own, individual decisions when it came to moral questions, angered the traditionalists who believed in the absolute power of the Church. The traditionalists, too, believed in the absolute power of the pope, since the Church had made the Declaration of Papal Infallibility in 1870. So, when in 1907, Pope Pius X condemned the movement and declared Modernism heretical, its leaders, Father Alfred Loisy of France and Father George Tyrrell of England, were excommunicated. Modernism came to an end in 1943, when Pope Pious XI, through his encyclical “Divino afflante Spiritu,” opened the way for biblical criticism in Catholicism.

²³ Lawrence Gamache, “Defining Modernism: A Religious and Literary Correlation,” Studies in the Literary Imagination, 25.2 (1992): 63-81.

rather than the former via her father and her grandmother before her. Thus, when Emily Coleman wrote to her friend, “O Djuna, I understand so much in you which was hitherto not revealed to me: your great secrecy about the things of your spirit (it is because they are ‘of the party of the Devil without knowing it’ (Blake) and one dare not tell them); your interest in Magic, Spells, Charms, Witchcraft, Mysteries,” she touched the core of Barnes’s spiritual identity.²⁴ Barnes’s texts are rife with references to demonology and the underworld. The beast Thingumbob’s love-object is described in Ryder, for example, as having been fathered and mothered, one and the same, in the underworld, “so that she had no seam in the soul, either on the one side or on the other side, as we have” (119). Barnes’s association of her own soul with that other divinity whose kingdom is accessed through the occult thus raises an interesting question in the context of this dissertation. If Barnes, as I mentioned earlier, believed her art to be inspired by some sort of “magic” or “miracle,” we may ask to which god she owed her literary allegiance? Are we to understand a creative pact with the god of “the good?” Or a Faustian bargain with the devil?

Gnosticism also fueled the occult interests of theosophy. Modernist authors, following the writings of Madame Blavatsky, spiritualism or Eastern religions, sought encounters with the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* through occult phenomena

²⁴ Coleman to Barnes, Oct. 30, 1937, Correspondence, DB Collection (ser.1 box 4).

such as somnambulism, animism, automatism, telepathy and hallucinatory experience.²⁵

In their interaction with these processes, they hoped perhaps to obtain direct experiential contact with the source of all truth. The naming of one of the chapters in Djuna Barnes's Nightwood, "La Somnambule," and the significance the author assigns to animals, particularly to dogs, constitute just two of the many indications of the influence of theosophical thought on Djuna Barnes's consciousness. One of the main tenets of theosophy, the transmigration of souls through reincarnation, forms the ideological basis of her novel Nightwood, the awakening of Robin -- la somnambule, who lives in two worlds -- representing the emergence of a woman newly-souled from a beast (35-37). Thus, when the author describes Robin as "the infected carrier of the past," as "she who is eaten death returning," she speaks literally, according to her always physical understanding of philosophical ideas.

The influence of gnostic thought, whether through theosophy or spiritualism, spread swiftly among the Modernists. Gamache identifies such influence in the texts of Joyce, Lawrence, the early Eliot, Yeats, Forster, Durrell and O'Neil and uses these examples to support his claim that "modernists did think about and search into religious traditions . . . for much the same reason th(at) modernist religious scholars probed the origins and development of Christian scriptures and doctrine; both needed to find a

²⁵ These Latin signifiers describe the experience of the Holy as outlined by Rudolf Otto in his classic book about the phenomenology of religious experience, The Idea of the Holy (1917, Eng. trans. 1923; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1958). *Mysterium* refers to the otherness of the holy; *tremendum* to the sense of its infinitude and *fascinans* to its ability to draw men and women outside of and beyond their usual consciousness.

basis for their understanding of themselves, society, and the universe, especially as a foundation for understanding human conduct" (77). Even those writers raised in the Catholic system, traditionally the most anti-gnostic of the Christian sects, as Gamache points out, felt its appeal in the new Modernist teachings that now confronted the Church. The Catholic Antonia White, for example, through reading the work of the "heretical" Jesuit, George Tyrrell, a leading figure in the theological Modernist movement, opened herself to the Gnostic idea of truth being vouchsafed to the individual as private, spiritual illumination, rather than handed down to the masses by the Church.²⁶ However, while Gnosticism may have provided White, Coleman and

²⁶ While White felt the lure of Tyrrell's argument, she struggled back and forth with the notion of a subjective and relative truth. She claims in The Hound and the Falcon that if she could, she would devote herself to the Holy Ghost, not to the punitive father nor to the sacrificial son the Church promotes, but to "the Spirit that illuminates and informs the Universe" (20). A few pages further into the correspondence with Peter Thorp that constitutes that book, however, she writes that the Church "is the language I know and everything I feel and need can, I think, be expressed in it"(44). Further, on the subject of Tyrrell's excommunication by the Church, she expresses agreement with punishment for heretical thought (80-81). White admitted her own inconsistency and frequently expressed confusion (39). Nevertheless, she continued through her texts to seek her own answers to those teachings of the Church that she personally found unconvincing. In Frost in May, for example, the nuns instill in their young charges the Church's teaching that all art must be directed towards the greater glory of god. Thus, when Leonie and Clare throw themselves too passionately into their performance of Beatrice and Dante, Mother Radcliffe removes Leonie from the play, accusing her of taking "willful sensuous pleasure" in her role (169). Nanda, however, bursts into tears at the sight of Clare's beauty. She is moved to an exquisite intensity of feeling and tries to persuade herself "that her love of beauty (is) connected with God" (158). She knows full well, the author writes, that it has its source somewhere quite else than in that divine realm she associates with Him, nevertheless her questioning of the nun's teachings in this regard continues in The Sugar House, in which Nanda, now called Clara, quotes the Bible to the sculptor, Gundry, who has been talking to her about his attempts to see the essential beauty in objects by stripping them of their associations:

Barnes with answers for many of their personal doubts and dilemmas, its grounding in conflict-dualist binaries contradicted the more convergent nature of each woman's female being as she claimed to experience it. Gnosticism's binaries, even as they offered a neat and orderly formation by which to explain their earthly transgressions, challenged the fluid co-mingling of opposites which these three Modernist writers simultaneously asserted in their texts. The resulting discord, fueled by the internalization of their female experiences, as I shall explore them in the following three chapters, created textual tensions. It built up through such contradictions a stress informed by dialectical exchanges that co-existed in an uneasy state of unresolved pressure as these authors negotiated their female path to truth.

From the foregoing discussion of the status of truth and the rather ubiquitous presence of the trace of the Other in Modernist texts, it would seem that while the notion of truth itself had become more personal, subjective and internal, it nevertheless continued to exude an attraction and allure that many of the Modernists, including White, Coleman and Barnes, seemed incapable of resisting. The desire "to know," with all the sexual connotations that that verb confers in a biblical and psychoanalytic sense, remained during this era a fairly common denominator in the textual exploration of *avant garde* writers. Such writers could no more cease from searching for a first

"If thy eye be single," she quotes, "thy whole body shall be full of light" (23). When Gundry demurs that Jesus Christ might be scandalized at having his words applied to painting," Clara confides, "the connection between art and religion has always intrigued me," confirming that the Church had not yet cowed her on that question and that it still remained unsettled in her mind (ibid.).

cause, a primary justification, than they could cease from desire. Even the desire to free oneself from desire, as Lyotard points out in "Rewriting Modernity," is essential to desire itself.²⁷ ". . . desire is intolerable," he claims, and we continually seek ways to put an end to it, but since there can be no end to such desire, its satisfaction grants only a temporary stay before desire reasserts itself once again (ibid.). In this way, we continuously fuel desire. Whether it be desire of the sexual or the spiritual kind, given their interrelation as I shall illustrate in the following three chapters, the desire "to know" the Other perpetuates the desire "to know" in both registers. Thus, if the search for sexual identity can be said to be one of the defining characteristics of the Modernist period, spiritual searching may not be that far behind. Perry Meisel with his notion of *belatedness*, already has shown Modernist literature as acting out the loss of something primary it wishes to regain.²⁸ The loss of that primacy --presence, God, truth -- experienced by writers who have come belatedly to a world already represented, is produced retroactively, according to Meisel, by gathering evidence belatedly to signify the presence of its absence. The "will-to-modernity" therefore represents the myth of Modernism and writers such as Joyce, Woolf, and Forster, exemplify Meisel's claim that in evidencing such recuperation of presence, they bring to the attention of the reader the withdrawal of its ground. Since this dissertation is not concerned with the

²⁷ Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Rewriting Modernity," Inhuman Reflections on Time, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991) 29.

²⁸ Perry Meisel, The Myth of the Modern: A Study in British Literary Criticism after 1850, (Newhaven: Yale UP, 1987).

ground of presence but rather with the *process* of the individual and subjective search for intimations of presence itself, I shall not pursue this aspect of Meisel's argument further.²⁹ It is interesting to note however that Meisel makes no distinction in his text between male and female Modernist writers' approach to the will-to-modernity. Yet, if the early 20th century perspective on woman's ontological position even after her enfranchisement still maintained her spiritual inferiority, her lack of soul, and therefore her essential inability to experience transcendence, as I shall show, her recuperation of presence in her texts surely signifies something more than that of a male Modernist writer accomplishing the same thing. The existence in the text of such presence and transcendence represents perhaps as much of an achievement for sexually active women writers during the Modernist era as that of representing female sexuality in the text.

Textual Differences in Male and Female Spiritual Exploration

The emancipation of American and European women in the 1920's and 30's legally enabled them to cast their votes as fully-fledged citizens. But, just as the act of suffrage offered no female privilege in the social, familial and economic arenas, it

²⁹ One might however apply to Meisel's will-to-modernity the same Derridean argument employed on Nietzsche's will-to-power theory. If every *belated* author's recuperation of presence is merely a perspective on truth in the sense that coming late to a world of representations already there, they retroactively construct their own, individualized forms of presence, then that will-to-modernity is itself the *grounds* of such perspectivization and thus repeats the metaphysical process. Meisel perhaps allows himself an escape by calling the will-to-modernity the "myth" of Modernism, but the drive to seek truth and transcendence, the drive itself, remains a compulsion which Meisel cannot explain.

effected little change within Judeo-Christian teachings as to the position of woman as spiritual other. As Christian Feminist critic Mary Daly points out in her texts about woman's subaltern situation within Christian religious institutions, patriarchal religion took its reading from patriarchal society which in turn justified its valorizing of male power over female by pointing at religion to show such preference as "natural."³⁰

Since the New Woman's more overt sexuality threatened the control of husbands, fathers and, in turn, the state, the church continued with patriarchal backing to exert its authoritarian position. It held women to impossibly high moral standards, while turning a blind eye to men's flouting of the same standards. For example, it reinforced women's abjectness by encouraging humility and turning the other cheek, and demanded sexual repression and self-sacrifice as the only path to female spiritual redemption.

Such interpretations of women's role within Christianity derived from the teachings of the early Christian church which, by associating women with flesh, body, and matter, had essentially twisted the 2nd. century Gnostic dualities of spirit-over-body, light-over-dark, good-over-evil, so that their negative, inferior oppositions applied specifically to the female of the sex.³¹ Such an interpretation of woman's

³⁰ Mary Daly, "The Spiritual Revolution: Women's Liberation as Theological Re-education," Feminist Theological Ethics, ed. Lois K. Daly (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) and Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).

³¹ James B. Nelson, Between Two Gardens, (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983) 6.

ontological position grew out of the doctrines of St. Augustine (4th. and 5th. century), and since such doctrines, particularly his sin-redemption spirituality, still influenced Christian thought into the mid-20th century, women of the Modernist period continued to be denigrated as less than fully human. Women were held responsible for the existence of sin which the Christian churches defined specifically in sexual terms. Thus, as late as the 1940s, Antonia White could write to her Jesuit-trained correspondent Peter Thorp, "It is a profound truth that makes Eve the channel of the fall" and suggest without any sense of irony that "the Church's defects may be due to her femaleness" (The Hound and the Falcon, 86). While Catholicism accounted for much of the self-hatred in Antonia White, the Catholic church was not alone in its denigration of woman's spirituality. Its thinking can be detected in the teachings of many denominations during the Modernist period for whom female sexuality provided an external scapegoat to explain the moral lapses of men. Karl Barth, for example, considered by some to be the greatest Protestant theologian of the 20th century, felt himself justified in writing that women were "ontologically" subordinate to men.³² Such thinking permeated the culture of the early part of the century making its acceptance as commonplace and "natural" as the equally abominable belief in the ontological inferiority of the Jew. The linking of woman and Jew, as psychoanalysts

³² Quoted by Mary Daly, "The Spiritual Revolution," 121, but not textually identified. It is ironic to me that Barth, believing women to be inferior in the sight of God, subsequently would lead the church opposition to Nazi control during the Second World War.

and theorists would later point out, held at its mutual core an intense fear of the woman/ Jew within, which must be projected onto an external other before its perpetrator became himself a victim of the “disease.”³³ At the time, however, the belief in the ontological inferiority of women and Jews fell into the category of common discourse. Coleman and Barnes, for example, despite their friendships with Peggy Guggenheim, Mina Loy, Sybil Barney, and Raissa Maritain -- all of Jewish heritage albeit, with the exception of Guggenheim, at one time or another rejected -- frequently remarked on the Jew’s lack of moral and ethical values. In Nightwood, Barnes suggests the fraudulence of the Jewish father of Felix Volkbein for “making a pretence to a barony” and “adopting the sign of the cross,” and casts aspersions on the integrity of Felix himself in terms of how he came by his wealth (3, 8). Gnosticism, too, of course, considered the Jews the people of the devil, himself an angel, whom Christ came to earth to destroy (Jonas, 132-133). It thus provided Barnes with further fuel for commonly held Christian sentiments.

Theology alone, whether Christian or pre-Christian, however, cannot be blamed for such ideas. Philosophy and particularly the quasi-scientific texts of the day reinforced the practices of early 20th century society, creating a vicious circle of

³³ Andrea Freud Loewenstein in her study of the misogyny and anti-Semitism of British Modernists Wyndham Lewis, Charles Williams and Graham Greene, Loathsome Jews and Engulfing Women (New York: New York UP, 1993), gives a detailed account of the link between the two forms of othering. Her chapter entitled, “In Search of a Psychoanalytic Theory,” attempts to explain such othering in these three writers as part of intricate defense systems devised to protect them from self-knowledge.

oppression that lasted until after the Second World War. Otto Weininger's Sex and Character, for example, translated into English in 1906 and reprinted in 1927 (the year Barnes's relationship with Thelma Wood came to a stormy close and she started writing Nightwood), drew a parallel between the soullessness of women and that of Jews.³⁴ Women, according to the Austrian philosopher, were devoid of soul and intellect and therefore incapable of transcendence. By extrapolation, Jews because of their supposed excess of the female principle fell into the same category. Women's only hope for redemption thus lay in their proximity to men with whose souls they came into contact. Such pseudoscientific claims about proportional male and female principles comprised part of the literary culture of the Modernist period and even those Modernists who hadn't read Weininger's work were familiar with his ideas through popular exposure. His book went through twenty-five editions during the interwar

³⁴ Otto Weininger, Sex and Character, (1903. New York: A. L. Burt Company, 1906) holds that all humans possess both male and female principles in varying degrees, the absolute female principle comprising nothing more than animal sexuality, the absolute masculine principle, the genius of truth. In between the two extremes exist variously proportioned men and women, but even the least masculine of the men can aspire to morality and experience spiritual and artistic transcendence, while even the least feminine women (the most masculine) cannot escape her lack of a soul (186). The female principle is ego-less; she has no logical thought or ethical values, no imagination, except sexual imagination, and is unaware of her destiny. She has an unconscious life, and for that reason can never be a genius (113). Genius to Weininger represents an ideal masculinity in its highest form.

Weininger, a self-hating Viennese Jew who converted to Protestantism, committed suicide at the age of 23. The publication of his book immortalized him as a young genius in his culture and the book's translation into English spread his fame across the world. In the pre-war years, his work received both affirmations and refutations. Amongst the many positive evaluations was one by feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Review of Dr. Weininger's Sex and Character" The Critic (1906) 12:414-17.

years and the dispersal of his ideas (in translation) outside of his native Austria ensured that they would reach Modernist writers in English no matter where they took up the pen. In *Ulysses*, for example, James Joyce engaged with and challenged the Austrian Jew's misogynist and anti-Semitic ideas about women and Jews.³⁵ While no evidence exists that Barnes, White and Coleman ever read Weininger's work, the texts of all three writers deal with many of his most disturbing criticisms. *Nightwood*, for example, foregrounds the tragedy of denying divine life and resurrection to women, Jews and transvestites, while Coleman, in "The Tygon," produced an entire novel on jealousy, which Weininger perceived as a particularly female moral flaw that prevented women seeing beyond their own concerns to more universal and transcendent issues (205). What is more, all three obsessed about "genius," for which Weininger claimed women had no capacity; "self-pity," which he wrote was "eminently a female characteristic"; and "truthfulness" which he thought an impossible feat for women (*Sex and Character*, 112-113; 199; 145).

Freudian psychoanalytic theory, its textual use spreading among Modernist writers exploring the unconscious, bore itself the imprint of Weininger's theories.

³⁵ Nancy A. Harrowitz and Barbara Hyams, eds., *Jews and Gender: Responses to Otto Weininger* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995). This text contains three essays on *Ulysses*: Marilyn Reizbaum, "Weininger and the bloom of Jewish self-hatred in Joyce's *Ulysses*," Natania Rosenfeld, "James Joyce's womanly wandering Jew," and Elfriede Poder, "Molly is sexuality: The Weiningerian definition of woman in Joyce's *Ulysses*." The authors also claim his influence on D.H. Lawrence and Gertrude Stein, as well as on Guillaume Apollinaire, Franz Kafka, Elias Canetti, Gunter Grass, Sigmund Freud and Ludwig Wittgenstein, amongst others.

Freud had read an earlier draft of Weininger's dissertation when the young student had sought his advice on finding a publisher. Although this version was less deprecatory about women and Jews, Freud still found that it treated them with equal hostility and he thus identified Weininger as being influenced by infantile complexes. But even as Freud dismissed Weininger in this way, he nevertheless claimed that "what is common to Jews and women is their relation to the castration complex."³⁶ In other words, male Jews, as a result of being circumcised, experienced penis-envy as supposedly did women. It was this emphasis on woman's lack or absence that infuriated Feminist critics who perceived as a phallogentric depiction of female desire Freud's representation of the girl-child as a stunted version of the male subject.³⁷ Female genitalia, notably out-of-sight relative to the male penis, registered as absent in the Freudian analytic structure. For that reason, the vagina was depicted as worthless and women's position expressed

³⁶ See Freud quote as described by Harrowitz and Hyams, Jews & Gender, 8.

³⁷ Early criticism of the female position in Freud's paradigm came from Ernst Jones, Karen Horney, Helena Deutsch, Joan Riviere, Melanie Klein, Marie Bonaparte and Jeanne Lampl-de Groot. This "first debate" of the 1920's and '30s was followed by the feminist texts of the 1970's and '80s, which Teresa Brennan refers to in The Interpretation of Flesh: Freud's Theory of Femininity (New York: Routledge, 1993) 37, as the "second great debate." Kate Millett, Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer and Simone de Beauvoir sued Freud et al for defining women as lesser beings and thus perpetuating the myth of woman as inferior. Feminist criticism flourished and many new texts appeared on the market deconstructing Freud's arguments. Amongst the most influential writing was the *écriture féminine* of Luce Irigaray, Speculum de l'autre femme (Paris: Minuit, 1974), Helene Cixous, "Portrait of Dora" Diacritics 13.1 (Spring 1983): 2-32 and "The Laugh of the Medusa" (Signs, 1 (Summer 1976): 875-99 and Julia Kristeva, Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

always as lack. No proper representation being accorded her, woman remained forever “other” to man, required by his desires to be the passive partner on which the male subject acts out his unconscious life. For, the division of the subject into being and non-being, signified by the successful negotiation of the castration complex, required woman to renounce her desire “to know.” By relinquishing her desire to possess the penis herself and instead shifting that desire to a more passive wish to have a child by the male subject who possesses a penis and thus “is,” she accepts her inferior ontological position of non-being in order to be considered “sane.”

White, Coleman and Barnes were familiar with Freudian theory. White particularly knew the principles of that “metapsychology” having undergone sustained psychoanalytic treatment with Dr. Dennis Carroll from 1935 to 1938. However, discussion of religious, spiritual or ontological matters appears to have been off-limits in the clinical situation. “During analysis,” White wrote to Peter Thorp, “I was usually headed off when I tried to broach the subject of religion” (The Hound and the Falcon, 159) Since she feared the questioning of her sanity, it is unlikely that White pushed very hard to explore the subject with her analyst. Emily Coleman, however, married to psychologist, Deak Coleman, immediately recognized the connection. “Psychoanalysis is the exposure of the conflict between God and the Animal in man,” she wrote in an unpublished essay entitled, “A Criticism of Freud” (ser.111.4 box 4 file 1013). She used the signifier “man” traditionally, seeing both men and woman’s morality now assuming different contours. Evil, through psychic spectacles, derived not from a

turning away from god, but from “infantile sexualism, fixation, female masturbation, phobias, compulsions, narcissisms, sadism and masochism.”³⁸ Freud had opened up a “different picture of evil,” and the new knowledge would explain the suffering that seemed to her the prerogative of women trapped in a system that disallowed them their full identity as sexual/spiritual and intellectual beings. Coleman thus saw psychoanalytic structure as both reflecting and foregrounding the social and institutional pressures that prevented women from developing to their full potential, in that, while it perpetuated the system, it simultaneously exposed it enabling her to see more clearly the roots of the conflicts that led to evil/ “insanity.” White and Coleman both experienced institutionalization and the stigma of being declared “insane.” Barnes, too, frequented nursing homes, mostly against her will. But while all three women expressed a certain wariness in relation to psychoanalysis, it was Coleman who questioned Freud’s dismissal of religion as neurosis and turned his argument on its head. Freud relegated religion to nothing more than a form of universal obsessional neurosis projected into the realm of the spiritual, an infantile illusion which he assumed man would outgrow as his confidence in his own mind and the power of *logos* developed.³⁹ To White, however, the infantilism related to the *denial* of life after death:

³⁸ Unpublished notes for essay, alternately called, “Art, Science and Religion” and “Beyond Blake and Nietzsche” (ser.111.4 box 115 file 1007)

³⁹ Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, Standard Ed. trans. James Strachey (1927; New York: W. W. Norton, 1961) 55. He theorized that the primal father was the original image of god, the model on which later generations shaped the figure of god as

“I wonder how mad we all are - and how sane. I can’t help feeling that people who think that life is cut off sharp with death are insane, & that it is part of sanity to see the relation between this life and the whole - though we may not understand it; but I think the perception of that is sanity. That is why I am sane, and if I could live according to that - i.e., not live in a world of black infantile impatience - I would have acquired full sanity. What is insane in me is the disparity between my deepest beliefs and my life.”⁴⁰

In The Future of an Illusion, Freud made an interesting distinction between men and women in this context which perhaps accounts for Coleman’s sense that psychoanalysis foregrounds the problems of women, ontologically too. In addressing the reader,⁴¹ Freud questions the popular assumption of woman’s intellectual inferiority and denounces “the fact” of their *essential* ““physiological feeble-mindedness”” as “disputable and its interpretation doubtful” (61). He argues instead that “intellectual atrophy” occurs because “women labour under the harshness of an early prohibition against turning their thoughts to what would most have interested them - namely, the

a protection against the powerful forces of the world that endangered them. And further, that the concept of eternal life as a safe and just place with a moral world-order provided the framework for their wish fulfillment.

⁴⁰ Coleman to Barnes, April 6, 1937, Correspondence, DB Collection (ser. 1 box 4).

⁴¹ The Future of an Illusion addressed Freud’s correspondent, Oskar Pfister, a Lutheran pastor and disciple of Freud, who applied psychoanalytic theory to the spiritual problems of members of his congregation. Their amicable but intellectually sparring correspondence spanned nearly 30 years and is collected in Psychoanalysis and Faith: The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Oskar Pfister, ed. Heinrich Meng and Ernst L. Freud, trans. Eric Mosbacher (New York: Basic Books, 1963). In his 1928 “The Illusion of the Future: A Friendly disagreement with Prof. Sigmund Freud,” trans. S. Abrams, International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 74.3 (1993) 557-579, Pfister offers a counterargument to Freud’s text, in which he, while acknowledging the connection between psychic illnesses and religious beliefs, claims them to constitute only one part of the story of religion.

problems of sexual life. As long as a person's early years are influenced not only by sexual inhibition of thought but also by religious inhibition and by loyal inhibition derived from this," he claimed, "we cannot really tell what in fact he is like" (ibid.).

While Freud resorts to the generic "he" at the end, he seems to imply that such prohibitions are stronger on women and therefore more intellectually crippling than on men.

Wholeness as Key to Female Ontological *Angst*

Given the social, theological, psychological, philosophical and scientific pressure on women affirming their inferiority, it is not surprising that strong females such as White, Coleman and Barnes rebelled against the representation of their sex and sought to establish a more accurate portrayal of their identity as sexual, spiritual and creative women. In seeking such self-affirmation, they perceived the path to their redemption in all spheres of activity as lying in the pursuit of wholeness, which concept brings together the supposed binaries of light and dark, good and evil, spirit and matter, soul and body, and ultimately man and woman. Barnes's texts particularly reflect her engagement with the dualism derived from early gnostic thought and practices, her longing to recapture the unifying wholeness that predates man's fall driving her discursive attempts to show the sexual and spiritual to be linked as one in the unconscious. The guiding principle of gnostic thought, that "unity is life, separation death" defines the writings of White, Coleman and Barnes, no more so than as it relates to gender (Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 271). For unlike the earthly moral evaluation of bi-

sexuality, dual-gender became something of an ideal for Gnosis (ibid.).⁴² It reflected the lack of division portrayed by male-female couplings of heavenly beings and was attributed amongst others to the highest being, namely god (ibid.). Barnes and Coleman's shoring up of their male dimension at the expense of their female, therefore, may signify as much as an attempt to establish a desired sexual equilibrium than as any belittling of womankind. Even so, such attempts are frequently tentative, whether in relation to sex or religion, for the lack of division itself creates problems, as Barnes's protagonist Julie Anspacher found in Spillway. "Personally I don't feel divided," the guilt-free Anspacher confesses; "I seem to be a sane and balanced whole, but hopelessly estranged" (95). For such unity of good and evil, as of male and female, stands at odds with the gendered roles constructed by society. Coleman's "tygon," half-lion, half-tiger, one with stripes, and one with a mane, but perfectly unified, remains a spectacle, a freak that Frieda saw at the Milan zoo (The Tygon, 204). Unity as difference, therefore, needed to be approached with caution, and White, Coleman and Barnes's progress towards it, as I shall show, frequently manifested itself as a stop-start affair. Beset by personal doubts and the accumulative effects of destructive events and relationships in their own lives, they hesitated, lapsed, then surged ahead only to hesitate yet again. Coleman, for example, wrote of her "incessant, prolific, creative

⁴² "Gnosis" signifies the direct revelation of the Divine which may be granted to the seeker-after Truth after long study and practice.

flow” as her “prize for being masculine,”⁴³ yet simultaneously reminded Barnes that because they were both masculine and feminine, “and torn both ways,” they could “know somethings.” “Knowledge is power,” she claims, returning to the play on the signifier, and “this power is eternal.”⁴⁴ For what Coleman realized is that possession of knowledge, both sexual and spiritual, defined woman’s position as god of her text.

In the pursuit of holism as the answer to their confusion about spiritual identity, White, Coleman and Barnes found textual support in Alexis Carrel’s Man the Unknown and William James’s The Varieties of Religious Experience.⁴⁵ Barnes had recommended both books to Coleman and White, as well as other texts to which I shall refer in the following chapters. Carrel’s work was much discussed at Hayford Hall, where the three writers, as summer guests of Peggy Guggenheim during the thirties, welcomed his advocating of a New Man. Unlike the machine man of the times, Carrel’s ideal would embrace both ends of the Enlightenment binaries, bringing together body and soul, flesh and matter in one person, but not, the three writers failed to notice, male and female. Although Carrel had overlooked the gender part of the binary, Barnes wrote to Coleman of Carrel, “That good doctor knows that we think

⁴³ Coleman, “Art, Science & the Unknown,” Essays, EC Collection (ser.111 box 4 file 1007) 49.

⁴⁴ Coleman to Barnes, Aug. 10, 1938, Correspondence, DB Collection (ser.1 box 4).

⁴⁵ Alexis Carrel. Man the Unknown (New York: Harper, 1935) and William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (1902; New York: Modern Library-Random, 1936) Antonia White translated from the French one of Carrel’s works, Reflection on Life (London: H. Hamilton, 1952).

with our whole body, live and have our being in the whole”⁴⁶ “I write from the heart, being a female,” she affirms in the letter, and goes on to ask whether, given Carrel’s approach, her writing now may be considered “not so much from the heart as from the head in the heart” (ibid.). Her question to Coleman resonates with the title of her short story “Behind the Heart” about her relationship with Charles Henri Ford, and perhaps interacts with this notion of holism. For, the story suggests the rational and logical dimensions at the *back* of the heart that contribute to the ending of the older woman/younger man affair as much as does the sexual and romantic passion of the heart’s *front*. Barnes wrote the story as a gift to Ford and coincidentally recommended also that he read Carrel’s book.⁴⁷ Man, the Unknown, was in fact a eugenics text, as Mary Lynn Broe points out in “My Art Belongs to Daddy: Incest as Exile, the Textual Economics of Hayford Hall” and was aimed specifically at white *males* of intellect who would guide mankind into this new stage of being (Women’s Writing in Exile, 64). Gender did not even fall within Carrel’s notions of holism (314). Nevertheless, White, Coleman and Barnes took from his work that which supported their most intimate concerns. “There are two kinds in me,” White addresses god in her poem “Sed Tantum Dic Verbo,” “So tangled in my heart/ I know them not apart,/ Nor which, in craving need,” she wrote, “I call Thee in to feed” (Strangers, 158).

⁴⁶ Barnes to Coleman, Sept. 20, 1935, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2 file 11).

⁴⁷ See Mary Lynn Broe, “‘A love from back of the heart’: The story Djuna wrote for Charles Henri” Review of Contemporary Fiction 13.3 (1993):22-32.

William James's The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature provided similar fuel for the holistic yearnings of the three writers. James tried to integrate religion and science by claiming the unconscious as the source of religious experience and therefore that common denominator which brought body and mind together as one entity (507).⁴⁸ He also used the word "religion" in a new way to signify, not those institutions which identify themselves as Catholicism or Protestantism, but instead the "religious impulse," "personal religions," and the "inner disposition of men" (29). His text explores this "religious impulse" from a psychological/philosophical point of view which determines any spiritual experience as real if it produces tangible results and in some way changes the life of the person and her outlook on the world. He effected the thinking of all three Modernist writers, but his influence on Barnes, particularly, is marked throughout her texts. Compare, for example, James's "life and its negation are beaten up inextricably together . . . all happiness is infected with a contradiction (that) "the breath of the sepulchre surrounds. . . ." (135-36) with Barnes's "everything has an after-birth, i.e., a shroud. That's why terror and joy are wedded."⁴⁹ Or, for example, on the subject of evil, James's opinion that the morbid-minded see "evil as an element dialectically required," that which has "a

⁴⁸ The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature consisted of 20 Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902 by the Episcopalian doctor, artist, explorer and philosopher, William James. These lectures became famous as the standard scientific work on the psychology of the religious impulse (20).

⁴⁹ Barnes to Coleman, May 2, 1935, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser.1.2 box 2 file10).

function awarded to it in the final system of truth" (162) with Coleman's notion that man has to experience evil, to lead his soul "through the mire of rebirth which has been our survival" (Art, Science and the Unknown"). "As the psyche grows up from the slime," Coleman claimed, "so grows its unseen counterpart," for good and evil are inextricably mixed and "it is the recognition of (that) evil, and the inability of the modern mind to reconcile it with truth as accepted before, which blights the genius of the years following Victorianism"(ibid.). Coleman became so enthused of James's book that she read it twice and recommended it to a number of people close to her, including her father, John Holmes.⁵⁰ James's chapters on saintliness, in particular, fascinated her, as it did Barnes and White, and perhaps even changed the direction of her life, as I shall show in chapter 3.

Individualism and Subjectivity

In pointing to theological modernism, theosophy, psychology and psychoanalytic theory as contributing factors to White, Coleman and Barnes's quest to establish the interrelatedness of their female sexuality and spiritual desire, one common denominator stands out as the linchpin of Modernist thought. In every one of these areas of influence, the emphasis whether spiritual or psychological resides in the power of individual perception. Subjectivity and existential knowledge displace the accepted wisdom of Church and state, and Modernist writers, even as they question the status of

⁵⁰ Coleman to Barnes, Oct. 30, 1937, Correspondence, DB Collection (ser.1 box 4).

the narrative “I” as a cohesive whole, look to themselves as judges of their own morality. The pendulum of the sacred, Eugene Webb notes, had swung from the transcendent pole to the immanent and god’s death, as purported by Nietzsche, signified the death of the sacred only as a transcendent external authority.”⁵¹ The “will-to power,” the new God, as it were, lay fully immanent in “man.” For having killed the dragon of external authority -- The Great Dragon “Thou Shalt” -- man had rid himself of the belief in truth as a transcendent absolute.⁵² He had demythologized himself and in so doing become himself god.

Jung’s notion of self-realization or *individuation*, which he visualized as the completing of a circle or mandala, and in the process bringing man or woman to a full consciousness of the godhead within, further emphasized the internalized nature of the contemporary spiritual quest.⁵³ The god-image had now become a reflection of the self, or the self as an *imago dei* in man, and Emily Coleman painted pictures of Jesus Christ with Emily’s face (Collected Works, vol.11: 90). This preoccupation with the individual god distinguished the Modernist era from any other literary period. Whether derived from the supposedly “heretical” theological Modernists of England and France or from the American Theosophical Society’s exploration of the occult as an expression

⁵¹ Eugene Webb, The Dark Dove (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975) 13.

⁵² Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, trans. Marianne Cowan (Los Angeles: Gateway Editions, 1957).

of its concern to effect *individual* change, the subjectivity of the Modernist “yearner” transformed the spiritual landscape.⁵⁴ Unlike writers and poets from previous historical periods who also struggled with the binary relationship between good and evil, Modernists sought answers to their spiritual conflicts by turning inwards and relying on their own perceptions, rather than those handed down by external authorities. In doing so, however, they unwittingly tapped into a dimension not known to previous generations. They exposed their own unconscious, an area of darkness and chaos which, as White, Coleman and Barnes well knew, lay outside of the subject’s conscious control. In seeking to remedy their existential alienation in relation to organized religion by trying to understand the personal spiritual within, they thus opened their minds to reveal not only the sexual unconscious, but the spiritual too. The unconscious spiritual, freed from the rational restraints of formal theological thought, showed itself to be as wildly free in its associations as the sexual. When Barnes, for example, inquires in the poem “The Marian Year” how one should mourn who has never seen “ . . . Mary, from the manger of her gown/ Ride Jesus down,” her unconscious mind has traveled far beyond the usual meaning of these words as signified by the Christian

⁵³ Carl Gustav Jung, Collected Works (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1968) vol. 9: 275 and vol. 10: 803.

⁵⁴ “Yearner”: Robert Penn Warren’s term for that most common of Modernist types who, like Warren himself, bears a religious temperament against a background of scientific conviction. Robert S. Koppelman, Robert Penn Warrens’ Modernist Spirituality (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1995).

faith.⁵⁵ The unconscious provides its own signification, a unique and personal language, the reading of which in the texts of White, Coleman and Barnes will show the spiritual to be intricately bound up with the sexual. The spiritual and the sexual in these three women's writing share a common bed in the unconscious, the problems of their internalized relationships of desire in one realm affecting directly their ability to relate in the other. White, who experienced sexual problems her entire life, herself admitted in her diary, "one's neurosis can get into one's religion, too" (Antonia White: Diaries, 183). She did not realize, however, although her texts will reveal, the extent to which her sexual problems which derived from her childhood relationship to her authoritarian father had shaped the way she related to her god.

The spiritual, then, like the sexual, belongs simultaneously in two dimensions. Unlike Bonnie Kime Scott's other categories relating to gender -- class, race, nation, economic stature and family type, as mentioned earlier in this chapter -- the spiritual belongs in both dimensions, namely the "reality" of the conscious, constructed world of white, western, Judeo-Christian, heterosexual male power AND the unconscious realm of the imagination. If we look at Antonia White's first novel, Frost in May, for example, it is immediately apparent that the Catholic church and its agents, the nuns at Lippington, slowly but surely structured the gendered subjectivity of the young convent girl, Nanda Grey. With their stringent application of church laws, laws created by men, nuns like Mother Radcliffe instilled in their female charges the very notions of female

⁵⁵ Fragment of Barnes poem printed in Phillip Herring's Djuna, 307.

virtue, self-sacrifice and acceptance of suffering required by the patriarchal arm of church and state. As Pauline Palmer points out in her reading of this text, the cult of the Virgin Mary and the female saints masks the male-dominated religion it promotes.⁵⁶ However, such a feminist reading of White's spiritual "training" must take into account too the unconscious and sometimes irrational-seeming spiritual influences at work in the mind of the young female protagonist. For example, why does Nanda dream that a worm protrudes from the mouth of her friend Teresa, who lies dead, her face still expressing the bliss and ecstasy she felt after having received her first Communion? (*Frost in May*, 84). And why does the author herself dream of being given a black bag containing genital fluids from a madman, which she then kisses and carries into the church while "white foaming cleansing fluid" runs down the right of the aisle? (*Antonia White: Diaries*, 226). The analysis of such unconscious and incongruous material will be found to corroborate even further the feminist interpretations of White's texts, as I shall show in chapter 2.

Methodology

This study of the spiritual journeys of White, Coleman and Barnes then will be investigated by means of two interrelated approaches -- feminist and psychoanalytic -- which I shall use simultaneously. Firstly, I shall explore from a general feminist

⁵⁶ Pauline Palmer, "Antonia White's *Frost in May*: A Lesbian Feminist Reading," *Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice*, ed. Susan Sellers (London: Harvest Wheatsheaf, 1991).

perspective the textual attempts by each of these three women writers to establish female spiritual identity in the face of social and theological pressures which colluded in excluding them as sexual women, and therefore not as full subjects, from the experience of transcendence. The emphasis on individuality and subjectivity during the Modernist period provided them with the very lacuna through which they could begin to explore their female relationship to their gods. This relationship, still considered other but the status of which these three writers would challenge in different contexts, sometimes successfully, more often not, played a crucial role in their literary creativity. In their struggle to establish their own spiritual identities, they simultaneously exposed the forces that limited the growth of women as spiritual beings and set in motion a movement to renegotiate woman's place in the ontological chain of being. "A woman has her own type of mind," Coleman wrote in "Art, Science and Religion," "her own truth to write."

Such a study enters an already active debate among feminist critics as to the nature of woman's particular brand of truth. How do women relate to the Ultimate in a specifically female way, and what particularly female contributions do they make to the spiritual enrichment of humankind? Mary Daly points to intuitive knowledge as woman's unique spiritual contribution and, calling it "ontological reason," suggests that when objective or technical knowledge without such ontological reason dominates existence, "life is deprived of an experience of depth, and . . . tends towards despair"

(“The Spiritual Revolution,” 132). For Daly, woman’s contribution therefore holds promise of a spiritual revolution as long as women are acknowledged as having the “same potential and aspiration to transcendence” as men (133). By attributing to women the possession of intuition, however, Daly faces a common problem in feminist theory, namely that of essentialization. Intuition as a female way of knowing derives from motherhood, the demands of which require for the child’s survival that the mother be able to intuit its non-verbal cues. Such essentializing would exclude non-mothers and perhaps even those females who for one reason or another reject their children, as did Antonia White her first-born, still nursing daughter, Susan Chitty, whom she farmed out initially to her parents and then, after her father died, to a home in Roehampton. At the time, White had no intuitive relationship with god whatsoever. She had rejected him. Only in her middle years, when she once again returned to the church, did White attempt to recreate a relationship with her daughter, to “earn” her back, as it were. “I’ve had her ‘on account’ ...Now the bill has come in” (Antonia White: Diaries, 198).

Such essentializing of maternal thinking as female ethics can be found in feminist theorist such as Adrienne Rich and Sara Ruddick, as well.⁵⁷ And even Bonnie Miller-McLemore’s “Epistemology or Bust: A Maternal Feminine Knowledge of Knowing,” which seeks to demonstrate the viability of the metaphor of mothering as an appropriate epistemological mode for religious thought, takes biology as destiny even

⁵⁷ Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born (New York: Norton, 1976); Sara Ruddick, Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace (Boston: Beacon, 1989).

as she denies her intention of depicting an essential category.⁵⁸ But it is in theories critical of psychoanalysis, such as those of Nancy Chodorow or the French feminists, Luce Irigaray or Helene Cixous, mentioned earlier, that such essentializing is particularly virulent.⁵⁹ In the works of the latter two writers, motherhood becomes woman's defining identity, allowing her only two ontological positions, namely one of acceptance of her role which makes her the provider of an ethics of care and nurturing, or alternatively rejection of it, in which case she represents chaos and rebellion. In both situations, these critics reinstate woman's patriarchally-defined roles rather than stepping outside of them, defining them by their biologically determined capacity to bear and raise children or confirming their inability to participate in the logical, rational interaction of language, culture and history.

While my objective with this study is to contribute to feminist thinking on the subject of female spirituality in the Modernist period, my defining of the term "female" broadens that signifier in the way that I understand White, Coleman and Barnes to have intended it. As I outlined earlier, these three writers did not seek an *essential* female identity, neither sexually, nor, I suggest, spiritually. The desire for holism, in the sense of bringing together into a unifying whole the different binaries of spirit and flesh, mind

⁵⁸ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Epistemology or Bust: A Maternal Feminist Knowledge of Knowing," The Journal of Religion 72.2 (1992).

⁵⁹ Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Signs, 1(1976) 875-99; Luce Irigaray, "Misere de la psychanalyse," Critique 30.365 (1977) 879-903.

and matter, brought together, too, masculine and feminine gender in all its complementary and conflicting combinations.⁶⁰ Thus, even as they identified themselves as female, and celebrated their female sexuality, White, Coleman and Barnes aspired always to maintain the masculine aspects of their beings, though both lots of gender traits were socially constructed. “We have been too much women,” Coleman complains to Barnes because she has not been intellectual enough.⁶¹ She acknowledges that men are “higher in the scale of being,” but claims that since she and Djuna are both male and female, and torn both ways, they too have knowledge.⁶² In pointing to the presence of both the masculine and the feminine in these three writers, I do not intend to make a case for a lesbian or bisexual identity in terms of the spiritual. Sexual preferences seem immaterial in their case. To the query, was she a lesbian, Barnes responded, “I might be anything; if a horse loved me, I might be that.”⁶³ What signified in the context of desire was not the sexual orientation of the person but love itself. For love, as we know it in the earthly sense, Julia Kristeva claims, constitutes the basis of

⁶⁰ Although the term “holism” has cliched contemporary connotations, I use it here to refer merely to the idea of the whole having an integrated reality greater than the sum of its parts. Thus, both masculine/ feminine and sexual/spiritual constitute together as unities in these three writers something more than each element confers on its own.

⁶¹ Coleman to Barnes, Sept. 24 1937, Correspondence, DB Collection (ser. 1 box 4).

⁶² Coleman to Barnes, Aug. 10, 1938, Correspondence, DB Collection (ser. 1 box 4).

⁶³ Coleman to Barnes, Oct. 27, 1935, Correspondence, as quoted in Herring’s *Djuna*, xix.

the relationship with the spiritual.⁶⁴ It is that which is a continuation of the emotions first experienced in relation to the earliest familial love-objects, and that which repeats, projects or transfers also its complications, distortions and entanglements to the other realm.⁶⁵

Kate Fullbrook in her argument for understanding morality as a product of human history and human choice, Free Women: Ethics and Aesthetics in Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction, comes closer to the feminist approach I shall take in my examination of the spiritual experience of White, Coleman and Barnes. For, if women born into "social structures they did not make, but from which they nevertheless benefit or suffer," find it hard "to alter who and what they are, what they can say, what it is possible to think and do, or *how they perceive ethical decisions*" (my emphasis), then the very recognition of moral conflict by these three writers constitutes a transformation of values (6). Fullbrook selects fiction by a group of 20th century writers, including Djuna Barnes, to exemplify the struggle "to bring to consciousness the kinds of problems, which, through their articulation, have pointed to new futures

⁶⁴ Julia Kristeva, In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith (New York: Columbia UP, 1987).

⁶⁵ Besides Kristeva, other psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Jacques Lacan, Donald Winnicott, Erik Erikson, William Meissner, Christopher Bollas, Hans Loewald, Heinz Kohut, Ana-Maria Rizzuto and Stanley Leavy also drew connections between the subject's psychic and spiritual experience. See James W. Jones, Contemporary Psychoanalysis & Religion: Transference and Transcendence (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991).

through their transformatory effect upon values as they relate to women" (7).⁶⁶ In doing so, however, Fullbrook totalizes each author's contribution to this project of revisionist ethics, reducing Barnes's offering in Nightwood to the tragedy of possessing the other in love (130). Certainly, the problem of possession and being possessed within a relationship occupied the attention of Barnes, as well as of Coleman and White who frequently discussed their own love affairs in these terms. Coleman's unpublished novel, "The Tygon," deals with this exact subject, though she refers to it simply as jealousy. However, one could claim equally, as Carolyn Allen has done, a mother-daughter love, the erotic maternal, in a new ethical configuration which allows Nora maternal control, but provides Robin with masculine freedom to which Nora defers.⁶⁷ While one may still assume this configuration a play on possession, it nevertheless provides an alternate female ethic to the Freudian (male) notion of lesbian-love as a desire for narcissistic sameness.

In spite of my reservations, however, I do perceive Hollbrook -- and Daly, too, --as having made a valuable contribution to the feminist concept of an emerging women's ethics. Holbrook's excavation in women's texts of potentially new and

⁶⁶ The other fiction writers whose works Kate Fullbrook examines in Free Women: Ethics and Aesthetics in Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1990) are Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Zora Neale Hurston, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Christina Stead, Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood and Toni Morrison.

⁶⁷ Carolyn Allen, Following Djuna: Women Lovers and the Erotics of Loss, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996) 22.

different forms of morality, of changing sets of values transformed in their application to women, begins a process which fills a corner of the larger spiritual picture.

However, ethics, morality and values subjectively gained, while an important part of the changing spiritual landscape for women, represent only the by-products of the individual woman's relationship to her god; they do not constitute the spiritual relationship itself. Thus, while this study will deal specifically with changing values related to women's sexuality, it does so from the perspective of the *relationship* with an Ultimate, whatever its form to the particular author. For White, Coleman and Barnes experienced unique and intimate relationships with their gods and sought, through their individualized interpretations of His will for them, to acquire everlasting salvation.

Psychoanalytic theory constitutes the second, but major, approach by which I frame this study. I apply it concurrent with a feminist perspective despite the generally critical attitude towards it held by feminist theorists who object to woman's position within its structures, as I have already outlined earlier in this chapter. My warrant for choosing this method for the textual exploration of White, Coleman and Barnes is both theoretical and historical. In the first place, psychoanalytic discourse was common currency in intellectual and literary circles during this era. What is more, two of these three writers, White and Barnes, possessed first hand experience of its practice as analysands, while the third, Coleman, had undertaken an intense study of the works of both Freud and Jung. All had been institutionalized and therefore were familiar with

mental illness as it manifested itself in different forms. The likelihood therefore of their drawing on this knowledge and experience in their writing, whether consciously or not, would seem high and certainly their texts bear evidence of such influence. A familiarity with the unconscious pertains in all their writings, an awareness and even assumption that goes beyond literary stream-of-consciousness, as manifest in Coleman's The Shutter of Snow and also in her short story The Wren's Nest.⁶⁸ Antonia White's description in her poem "Epitaph" of the desire for death, for example, could only have been written by someone intimately familiar with the Freudian concept of *thanatos*. In describing that impatience, that will-to-death, she writes: I wear the face of one who could not stay/ For heaven's slow marriage day/ That stamps me as death's whore and not his bride (As Once in May, 340). Her textual use too of Freudian symbols as, for example, "a tower" in the context of her father's imagining himself alone with her in the absence of a filial relationship, appear too obvious not to have been strategically placed by the psychoanalytically-savvy White (The Lost Traveller, 113).

Secondly, since psychoanalytical theory provides a theoretical framework for the exploration of the relationship between sexual and spiritual desire as it is internalized in the subject's imagination, it offers a way of thinking about the spiritual in

⁶⁸ Henri Bergson, Time and Free Will, trans. F.L. Pogson (New York: Macmillan, 1910). Bergson's notion of "psychological" time which is subjective, as opposed to clock-time which represents the measurement of duration, provided the philosophical foundation for stream-of-consciousness novels. Such novels used linguistic devices, such as parenthesis, prepositional use of participles, co-ordinative conjunctions, the imperfect tense, dots, etc. to establish the continuity of durational flux.

terms of how it is shaped and formed irrespective of its source. In this sense, it enables one to identify the ways in which the internalized shaping derives from the patriarchal structures of the societies in which these three women move and therefore, in fact, corroborates that influence as the controlling factor in both the sexual and spiritual realms. As such, I do not find its use importune alongside feminist thought and agree with Jacqueline Rose that feminism stands more to lose by ignoring woman's psychic life and its connection to the transcendent, than by self-consciously working with existing psychoanalytic structures.⁶⁹ One cannot examine sexuality without also taking into account fantasy/ imagination which includes that which we understand as spiritual, religious, or metaphysical. In perceiving psychoanalytic theory in this way, I ally myself with the thinking too of Juliet MacCannell who reads Lacan as deconstructing psychoanalysis by foregrounding "the gendered way women are constructed . . . through the valorization of a male metaphor which subjects them and makes them subordinate to the authority of the male."⁷⁰ MacCannell bases her argument for Lacan's non-phallogocentric ideology on his distinction between truth and knowledge and

⁶⁹ Jacqueline Rose, "Julia Kristeva: Take Two," Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics, ed. Elizabeth Weed (New York: Routledge, 1989) 17-33. In response to the criticism of the title of *Tel Quel's* new journal Infini representing the return of a "religious psychology or ideology," Rose quotes Kristeva as claiming that it represents to her rather the "never abandoned effort to take transcendence seriously and to track down its premise into the most hidden recesses of language. My prejudice," Kristeva says, "is that of believing that God is analyzable. Infinitely" ("Memoires," Infini 1 (1983): 44).

⁷⁰ Juliet Flower MacCannell, Figuring Lacan: Criticism and the Cultural Unconscious (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

his pointing out that the knowledge that excludes truth is always a product of discourse. Thus, Lacan, according to MacCannell, exposes the gendering of metaphor and metonymy, and the valorization of the former in the discourse of psychoanalysis. Thus, the female metonymy of family life, rooted in the mother, is subjected to the male metaphoric Law of the Father, identified with civilization and the male order, even though, as MacCannell claims, it is really only an economy, a system of different values and not *a priori* essences.

It is with this understanding of psychoanalytic theory then that I approach the texts of White, Coleman and Barnes. I no more see woman's position in this paradigm as essential, than I do man's. For in my use of it, psychoanalytic structure merely *reflects* the society in which these three writers worked, loved and sought truth, and against the pressures of which they struggled on both conscious and unconscious levels. To judge their internal, unconscious lives by the perspective of late 20th. century expectations of women would surely minimize their struggles and diminish the very contributions they have made to Modernist thought in the area of the sexual/textual/spiritual.

While many similarities exist in the lives of these three women, as I shall expound later, differences too prevail, these differences, I suggest, accounting in large part for the unique and virulent internal life possessed by each woman. Such differences have dictated my choice of psychoanalytic theory, requiring that I use the theory most applicable to the writer's psychic needs and the one that best unlocks

them. While all may be categorized as post-Freudian, each stresses different features within psychoanalytic thought and illuminates specific aspects of the relationship between the sexual and the spiritual. To illustrate this connection, I have used Lacanian psycholinguistics, Kristevan semiotics and Winnicott's object relations theory for White, Coleman, and Barnes respectively. In choosing these theorists, I have based my selection on the grounds, firstly, that White's construction of her textual self in her autobiographical writing with its overwhelming slippage in language indicated a Lacanian consciousness; secondly, that Coleman's relative silence about the undeniably traumatic loss of her mother suggested Kristevan repression; and thirdly, that Barnes's ambiguous approach to both the sexual and the sacred hinted at a *false self* that would expose itself in the process of its tracing through the levels of Winnicott's *transitional phenomena*. By selecting *post-Freudian* approaches to these writers, I do not vitiate my initial warrant for using psychoanalytic theory, viz. these Modernists' familiarity with Freudian analysis and their application of it in the text. For, through the new windows opened by post-Freudian approaches, I seek to build on that which their psychoanalytic understanding already has revealed. In taking further their own explorations of the unconscious, I investigate meanings hidden from the writers themselves, thus opening their texts to new and sometimes far-reaching possibilities.

In applying such theories of the unconscious in this study, I have to some extent written psychobiographies of White, Coleman and Barnes. While caution must be used in extrapolating from fiction to biography, of course, the fact that the fiction of all three

writers correlates with the actual events, relationships and experiences of their lives, including the affects and emotions pertaining to them, makes such readings unavoidable. Wherever possible, however, I have tried to restrict my psychoanalytic readings to the textual protagonists. Since I am making use of the authors' entire *oeuvres*, and not simply quoting from a single text, however, I am inevitably speaking about the "controlling intelligence" that drives our understanding of their work as a whole, rather than the "narrative consciousness" of the specific texts mentioned.

White, Barnes and Coleman

While each of these Modernist writers individually had grappled with her relationship to the spiritual before she befriended the other two, their meeting during the thirties as literary guests of Peggy Guggenheim at her summer home Hayford Hall in Buckfastleigh, Devon, cemented their joint fascination with truth as the crux of the sexual/spiritual/ textual dilemma. "Truth," in fact, signified a game they played at Hayford Hall, a game fueled by alcohol and laughter, but experienced with an intensity that frequently left them wounded and searching for solace as each participant's anonymous and frequently savage descriptions of the individual were read out aloud. Barnes writes that she once came downstairs after just such a game to find Coleman scrabbling amongst the crumpled papers in the wastebasket to identify the person who had represented her as having zero sex-appeal (*Chitty, Now to my Mother*, 61). While "Truth" in this context passed as entertainment, it nevertheless symbolizes the desire on the part of "The Hayford Hallions," as Coleman liked to call them, to know and

understand themselves. Certainly, the emphasis lay with the physical, which is why critical writing about the Hayford Hall period generally has celebrated the sexual as its dominating mood. "Hayford Hall was a version of Boccaccio, written for an all female cast," White's daughter Susan Chitty claims in her memoir of her mother (62). "Hangover Hall," Jane Bouche-Strong dubbed it, because of the heavy drinking by three of the four women (not Coleman) and their various male and female guests, but particularly Guggenheim's live-in lover, John Holms.⁷¹ Yet John, a brilliant and intuitive British thinker and writer, also represented for these women an intellectual and spiritual guide, a role Mary Lynn Broe ignores in favor of the sexual in her article, "My Art Belongs to Daddy: Incest as Exile, the Textual Economics of Hayford Hall." (Women's Writing in Exile). In her attempt to claim Hayford Hall as a female space -- a baronial space for the "Great Erotic Mother," in spite of the fact that all three women still struggled as daughters in their own internalized mother/child dyads and that only Coleman was capable of expressing any maternal feelings whatsoever -- Broe limits Holms's role to that of a male child, one of "God's Innocents" and "an antidote to that power of the father" (59-62). John, however, encouraged and supported White, Coleman and Barnes's search for truth, even as he shared Guggenheim's bed. Barnes referred mockingly to his visits to Hayford Hall as "God come down for the weekend," but he and she shared many beliefs and he remained an intellectual and spiritual influence even after his accidental death in 1934 (Field, Djuna, 203-205). Hayford

⁷¹ Jacqueline Bograd Weld, Peggy, the Wayward Guggenheim (New York: Dutton, 1986) 96.

Hall, therefore, while definitely dominated by female sexuality, may perhaps be more accurately defined as that transferential space in which each woman recognized in her sexuality that link to the spiritual with which she would struggle for the rest of her life. In her attempts to renegotiate the status of her female sexuality in relation to her god-image, she turned for confirmation to her most intimate friends. Thus, even after Hayford Hall, when White, Coleman and Barnes went their separate ways in search of their individual sexual, textual and spiritual identities, they remained in touch, sharing through their correspondence and visits their subjective discoveries and brushes with truth as they defined it. While their contact influenced their thinking along the same lines, that which made unique each woman's interpretation of truth and the textual representation of her search for it derived from her early childhood experiences as internalized in her imagination. White's sexual love and fear of her father, Coleman's guilty longing for the absent mother and Barnes's abuse at the hands of her entire family, including her grandmother, molded the contours of each woman's spiritual explorations in strange and complicated ways.

In the following three chapters, I shall pursue these ways along the various roads, both internal and external, that brought them from the end of the last century to their last days in the 1970s. Such a tracing will produce spiritual biographies of these three women that reveal specifically how they sought to understand their sexual suffering in terms of the spiritual and, most importantly, how they tried to determine

the relationship of both to the creation of their literary art. Their textual explorations of the problem foreground the very different concerns facing women writers -- as opposed to men -- who sought to become god-the-author of their texts. Their inter- and intrapersonal dialectics opens up the subject from a psychoanalytic perspective and perhaps broadens our knowledge of the spiritual dimensions of female Modernist writing.

Chapter Two
Antonia White's *grand Autre* (1899-1980)

A Daughter's Obedience

“Dear me, how you're growing up. It comes over me with quite a shock that you're not just a little thing any more. But you'll always be Daddy's girl, won't you?” (*The Lost Traveller*, 96).

Antonia White, like her autobiographical protagonist, Clara Batchelor, knew full well that the signifiers “Daddy's girl” held ramifications far beyond their accepted meaning of “father's favorite.”¹ Implicit in her understanding of the expression lay a sexual/textual/spiritual imperative, the flouting of which would deprive White of her father's love and remove from her world that sense of his infallibility without which, she claimed, “there (was) no security anywhere” (*Diaries*, 161, 216). Within the context of this possessive relationship, Antonia's conditioned belief that she must remain virginal and pure and submissive to the rules of her father and his Catholic Church required that she sacrifice her own will to the will of god (117). In order to fit their notions of the “nature” of woman, she must inflict pain on both her body and

¹ White admits the autobiographical nature of her fiction but describes her diaries as being more truthful and less distorted, “like a photograph of myself,” she claims (Susan Chitty, ed. *Antonia White: Diaries 1926-1957*, (New York: Viking, 1992) 137, 207 & 149. In the last fifteen years of her life, she did attempt to write a non-fictional autobiography but never got beyond recording the early days of her childhood. Her daughter Susan Chitty collected this fragment in *As Once in May: The Early Autobiography of Antonia White and Other Writings* (New York: Virago, 1983) which takes White up to and including the age of four. No biography of the author yet exists, however her two daughters each have written memoirs: Susan Chitty, *Now to My Mother: A Very Personal Memoir of Antonia White* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1985) and Lyndall Hopkinson, *Nothing to Forgive: A Daughter's Story of Antonia White* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988).

her soul, and deny herself any form of physical or intellectual gratification. Further, she must limit her literary creativity to the glorification of the Word, to the worship of Logos, as her father and his patriarchal Church interpreted it. In fact, she was, as Jane Marcus points out in the Gender of Modernism in relation to Nanda Grey, White's protagonist in Frost in May, "to regard her own creative spirit as the enemy within," a prideful ego that must be denounced as displeasing to her god (599).

Given this gendered subjectivity, Marcus thus judges White's quartet, particularly her account of her oppressive convent childhood in Frost in May, as subversionary.² By producing autobiographical confessional literature in the third person, Marcus claims, White offers women writers a Modernist position which allows them full subjecthood (598). For unlike earlier confessional women's writing in which the autobiographical protagonist "I" admits her sins and expresses her contrition, often times including a masochistic *mea culpa* intended to redeem her soul, White's texts establishes the author as a non-pleading, fully-fledged omnipotent subject, in other words, god-as-author (599). According to Marcus, it is White's refusal to ask the reader for absolution that constitutes her strategic brilliance; it is "the elimination of the authority of the listener-reader position in autobiographical narrative as a form of confession" that establishes her particularly female form of subversion (600). If White did engage in subverting the authority of the Catholic

² Antonia White's Frost in May Quartet comprises Frost in May (1933), The Lost Traveller (1950), The Sugar House (1952), and Beyond the Glass (1954).

Church, however, Marcus's thesis does not explain why the author chose to return to the very same Catholic Church in 1940, nor why she embraced her religion to the extent of becoming a postulant and lay member of the Dominican Order. Since she wrote only Frost in May of her fictional quartet prior to 1940, her other three texts coincide chronologically with her rediscovery of her Catholic faith, thus complicating, although not necessarily contradicting, the subversionary strategy Marcus asserts. Further, her constant first-person scourging of her soul and acknowledgment of her own evil in her non-fiction works, her letters and diaries, for example, cast shadows on Marcus's claim for third-person objectivity and refusal to ask absolution for her "sins." On White's deathbed, for example, she warns her daughter Lyndall Hopkinson not to touch her for she would be "touching filth" (Nothing to Forgive, 3), and in the same memoir, speaks of "all the filth in me," claiming that "at bottom, I am vile and disgusting. Sometimes I wallow in my own nastiness" (135, 141). Even in The Hound and the Falcon, her spiritual autobiography, which Marcus includes in her argument, White writes to Peter Thorp, "I am fundamentally perverted" (xi). Such comments, of course, may simply reflect the degree to which White had internalized the prohibitions imbibed in childhood from father and Church. They had become her own panopticon prison and she no longer needed any policing from outside.³

³ For a full account of internal policing, see Michel Foucault's Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Vintage, 1979) in which he describes how a state of conscious and permanent visibility is induced in the subject in order to assure the automatic functioning of power. Thus, even in the absence of observation, the subject conforms as if his or her actions were being carefully monitored.

Nevertheless, Marcus's claim for White's subversion of confessional autobiography leaves much unexplained, since for every scene bravely critical of the Church or paternal power, White appears to take an equivalent step back. Even in the most damning episode in her fiction, for example, when she implies a causal link between Claude Batchelor's power and his sexual arousal, she substitutes for his daughter Clara her best friend Patsy whom she has made a point of characterizing earlier as seductive and irresistible to men (The Lost Traveller, 278). What is more, Claude's behavior does not exceed linguistic arousal, and immediately afterwards White shows his great remorse by having him kiss Patsy's foot in the traditional act of the penitent (ibid).

In her dissertation, The Literary Impossibility of Feminine Formation: The Feminist Projects of Pardo Bazan, White, and Woolf, Julie Vandivere also claims Nanda's subversion of patriarchy in Frost in May. She at least includes in her discussion of Nanda's rebellion against the confines of her patriarchally-defined identity a caveat that tempers her claim, viz. that "(t)he impulse to rebel often capitulates to the survival instinct" (76)⁴ But even so, she judges Nanda as insurrectionary and suggests that by escaping through "the loophole of mysticism" she interjects chaos into the hierarchical world of the convent (15). Vandivere does not define mysticism and uses it loosely to describe any non-rational occurrence. However, in the sense of becoming one with god, the mystical experience can hardly

⁴ Julie Vandivere, The Literary Impossibility of Feminine Formation: The Feminist Projects of Pardo Bazan, White and Woolf, Diss. Cornell U, 1991.

be said to offer Nanda her loophole, even as she desired it. For mysticism terrified her and she feared fusion with god as much as she did sex with her father. Numerous incidents in the texts, which I shall explore later in this chapter, reveal her deep-seated horror at the possibility of such absolute union, even as, in her spiritual passion she simultaneously desired it. Thus, her fear of mysticism would seem to counterbalance Vandivere's claim and points to another factor which moderates Nanda's subversive zeal, viz. White's fear for her sanity, a factor which we can only identify through knowledge of the author's own unconscious. Vandivere and Marcus both ignore White's mental illness, yet in her fear of losing her mind lies the very element that controls the direction of her texts both fictional and non-fictional. While White's chafing and biting at the bit of authoritarian oppression characterize most of her writing, her textual opposition never quite transcends her fear nor allows her to prise herself free from its tendentious hold. For, even as she realizes, with the help of analysis, the correlation between her father and the Church, in her challenge to their sexual, textual and spiritual authority, she dares not reach beyond that knowledge into the hazy area that connects her *unconscious* sexual desire for her father to that for the authoritarian, transcendent god, himself. Intimations of such knowledge threaten her very sanity, as I shall show, and, in order to avoid "the Beast," as she terms her mental breakdowns, White oscillates between her desire "to know" and her more urgent need to protect herself from the mental chaos such "sacrilegious" knowledge may bring down upon her head. Thus, she remains the obedient daughter, "Daddy's

girl,” even as she batters open the cage door. She represses that which she must not know, burying her holistic desires for unifying truth by means of aesthetic and personal strategies that separate the sexual and the spiritual into binary opposites.

The author’s unconscious sexual link between father and god, that which Marcus and Vandivere have overlooked in their attribution of subversive feminist strategies to White, will be shown to complicate the interpretation of the author’s texts about the spiritual, hence the purpose in this study of taking note of the author’s fantasy interactions as well as those of her fictional characters. White’s unconscious, for example, disrupts young Nanda’s attempts at obedience to patriarchy in Frost in May even as it simultaneously foregrounds her desire for the same. For such obedience stumbles at that place of the Other, where the *phallus* registers as transcendent signifier and White’s father’s phallus, I suggest, as *objet petit a* signifying back metonymically via the discourse of the Church to that being of *signifiance* which Lacan sees as the third term in woman’s *jouissance*.⁵ White’s internalized experience of a sexual father “projected” onto god-the-father complicates the exploration of the relationship of the sexual to the spiritual; it repositions the personal stakes so that the spiritual call to “give oneself to god” or, as the priest tells Nanda, to “go mad for the love of God,” assumes psychic costs the author cannot afford (Frost in May, 53). “Free will,” which Marcus claims as “the dogmatic issue”

⁵ Jacques Lacan, “Seminar XX, Encore,” 1972 in Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the *ecole freudienne*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1982) 137-161.

of Frost in May, thus engenders limits beyond which the author cannot -- will not -- allow herself to go (598). In trying to hold tight the reins, however, the sexual, spiritual and textual undergo strange contortions in the unconscious, becoming entwined in an intricate way that defines White's quest for spiritual identity as holistically sexual. For, in the unconscious transference of her sexual emotions from father to her god, White transfers also the language of one to the other with the result that even when she believes herself to be expressing herself religiously, the sexual reveals itself present in the text. Thus, language betrays her. It exposes the *imaginary* at that Lacanian hole through which the subject, by means of repression and loss, enters the *symbolic* register, revealing in the process the holism of the sexual/spiritual dimensions that lies at the core of the author's desire. What we find in White's texts, therefore, is a religious discourse articulated on a sexual unconscious and, further, a sexual discourse, though never explicit, that reveals its yearnings as spiritual. Her narrative structures, whether factual or fictional, thus can be seen to pivot on the concept of "love," in all the many facets of that word as her unconscious understood it.

White's conflation of sexual signifiers with spiritual ones and her inability textually to separate these two strands of her life point to the likelihood of some sort of primal scene or formative moment that complicated those elements in her unconscious mind. She frequently spoke of the "shock" that occurred to her in childhood and most readers have assumed that shock to be her father's horror of her sexually-explicit first novel and his subsequent withdrawal of her from the Convent of

the Sacred Heart, as fictionally represented in Frost in May. Certainly, the connection between the sexual and the religious apparent here played a part in her subsequent problems and could have constituted the “shock” that “paralyzed (her) emotionally” (Diaries, 139). However, such fixations usually have their roots in early childhood and it would seem more likely that White experienced her trauma before the age of seven when she left the home of her parents to become a boarder at the Roehampton convent. White’s daughter, Susan Chitty, herself queries the truth of her mother’s identification of her shock. She points out that White’s father, Cecil Botting, had planned to withdraw his daughter when she reached the Sixth Grade anyway as he intended to send her to St. Paul’s, a prep school for students destined for university (Now to my Mother, 8).⁶ In her introduction to her mother’s dairies, Chitty offers another scenario, claiming that “Cecil may have, even if only to a small degree, sexually abused Antonia as a child” (Diaries, 8). She mentions a dream, which she claims is “recorded elsewhere,” in which White was “ritually raped by her father and actually felt him penetrate her” (ibid.). However, we know that in order to obtain an annulment of her marriage to Reggie Green-Wilkinson, the Church officially examined White and declared her a virgin in 1923. Nevertheless, White and her father did have

⁶ White so disliked her birth name, Eirene Botting, that when she started writing she adopted the pseudonym Antonia White, derived from “Tony,” her mother’s nickname for her, and “White,” Christine Botting’s maiden name (Diaries, 59). Her identification of her writing self with her mother, whom she generally regarded as silly and irrelevant, but nevertheless the love of Cecil Botting’s life, hints at the author’s desire to replace her mother in her father’s affections. White’s fictional texts are rife with examples of such desire, as I will show later in this chapter.

the ground floor of 22 Perham Road to themselves and a bathroom for their exclusive use (41). Situated between his study and her nursery, the bathroom may have been the place where she saw him “do something which should have been done in private” (174). Whether he ever went beyond that is unknown, but in her analysis diary of March 9, 1935, she writes of not being able to go to the bathroom until her husband Tom Hopkinson accompanied her and kept the door open (40). What is more, she experienced “convulsive horror” at the sound of Dr. Carroll shaking his bunch of keys, as described in her analysis diary of July 6, 1935, for she connected the click of the latch with her father’s latchkey (51).⁷ Similarly, in *The Sugar House*, she writes of the sound of keys in the lock as sending “Such a thrill of terror . . . through (Clara’s) whole body that she hardly dared to breathe . . . She shut her eyes and clutched the sheet with both hands,” until she realized that it was only her husband, Archie (213).

⁷ White underwent three periods of analysis over the course of her life: the first, 1935-1938, she undertook with the Freudian Dr. Dennis Carroll after her breakdown following the publication of *Frost in May*; the second, in 1947, with Dorothy Kingsmill, a psychologist, she suspended before it was completed because of a misunderstanding about fees. Kingsmill lived in White’s cottage at Binesfield at the time, and Antonia assumed wrongly that the somewhat informal conversations between friends was free, since Kingsmill in any case did not hold a license as a therapist. In addition, White felt some unease with Kingsmill whom she saw as being into “all that eastern stuff” having become involved with Meher Baba, the Indian holy man. Together with Tom Hopkinson, White’s ex-husband whom she later married, Kingsmill wrote a book about Baba entitled *Much Silence*; White’s third period of analysis was taken at some time after the period covered by her published diaries, namely 1957, with a Dr. Ploye, but no further published information exists in the United States at this time. (*Diaries*, 8).

Whether White's father abused his daughter or not, or even whether he desired her sexually, is of less importance to my argument than the fact that she may have perceived him thus. So, I shall not pursue any further Chitty's theory for suspecting abuse, namely Cecil's too great a devoutness to keep a mistress and his wife's frigidity, both of which Chitty claims without qualifications or even without any obvious sense of irony (8). However, I shall try to establish certain episodes, irrespective of whether or not they really occurred, that White herself seemed to perceive as sexually significant, because they indicate to me a possible psychosexual conflict in relation to her father which can be shown to have led to the distorting of the textual via the sexual, and through "projection," to a confusion of sexual/religious binaries in her texts. The particular nature of this confusion colored and shaped White's spiritual quest and revealed her struggles for spiritual identity to be specifically sexual.

"Love's" Transformation of the Textual

Two incidents of White's childhood, both of which occurred in her fourth year, are of interest for the purpose of my argument. In that year, which she considered her most formative and to which she devotes no less than 14 chapters of her autobiography in As Once in May, her father Cecil Botting, the Head of the Classics Department at St.

Paul's School, taught his precocious daughter to read and write.⁸ When she wrote on the dining-room wall, however, he threatened to pull down her knickers and strike her bare bottom with a ruler ("Autobiography," As once in May, 244). The narrative "I" describes the parental figure as wedging her in-between the furniture in his study, his face flushed, his eyes glittering with anger, but then adds disconcertingly that he wore "a curious one-sided smile as if he were in some way pleased, as well as angry," and that when he finally spoke, "his voice was unexpectedly quiet" (ibid.). She represents this "I" as being terrified, not of the spanking, for she had been beaten before, but of revealing parts of her body she knew to be "rude" (245). Nobody, not even the maid, Lizzie, who took care of her, had been allowed to see those "most secret and shameful areas," and the thought of their being exposed bare "to the person (she) most revered, and not even accidentally, but by his own hand, was so shocking that (she) felt that (she) should never survive such shame" (ibid.).

Interestingly, the rest of the scene remained blank or possibly repressed in the author's mind for White claimed she did not remember whether her father carried through his punishment or not. However her description of the incident seems intended to suggest firstly, the father's sexual arousal by the thought of his daughter's nudity and secondly, the "I's" desire to protect herself with childlike modesty. In recognizing the connection between her "rude" parts and her father's strange

⁸ Cecil Botting taught himself Latin and Greek at the age of four and was the co-author of the well-known Hillard and Botting text books on the Classics from which, her daughter Susan Chitty writes, Antonia received royalties until 1979 (Diaries, 325).

behavior, the “I” experiences her “moment of truth,” and possibly the originary source of her fear of her father’s sexuality which fear White would attempt to represent fictionally under numerous guises, for example, the scene in The Lost Traveller, where Claude, the father-figure, comes on to his daughter’s best friend, Patsy. “So white, so soft,” he murmurs to the terrified girl (278). Although White was to admit that the scene was pure invention, she claimed that it was meant “to explain things in Daddy” (Now to my Mother, 3). In her January 6, 1935 diary entry, she writes that what she hopes to consolidate in her novel The Lost Traveller is the “profound guilt about a fear of sex in the father which reacts on the child” (35). Although the sentence reads somewhat ambiguously, it is likely her fear of her father’s sexuality she sees as the source of her own guilt about sex.

While on the surface such an incident certainly may seem relatively commonplace, its resonance within White’s unconscious may be judged by the frequency with which she spoke of the shock that occurred during her childhood and which she blamed for her later writer’s block. What is more, White implies that the incident elicited in her some sort of sexual awakening for, while still accounting for her fourth year in As once in May, she describes a clandestine love affair she carried out with a certain childhood friend, Gerard on the nursery floor just outside of her father’s study. (As Once in May, 311). She writes that “the feel of Gerard’s arms around me and his warm cheek pressed against mine sent a delicious thrill all through my body, unlike anything I had ever felt before” (317). Chitty describes White as “almost (having) an orgasm,” which would seem a rather hyperbolic description for

the physical responses of a four year old child (Now to my Mother, 4). Given that the children's activities centered mainly on White's favorite toys, Mr. Dash and Spectre, it would be easier to dismiss her "delicious thrill" as no more than a feeling of illicit imitation of the grown-ups. However, later in the text, White writes of the autobiographical subject that even in Gerard's absence, she would go to sleep thinking of him and imagining his arms around her. "Sometimes," the text reads, "if I imagined hard enough, I could even produce a faint tremor of that curious inside thrill. One night I discovered that by touching the most secret part of my body which I knew it was 'rude' to touch I could produce it all on my own" (321). The "I" then begins to imagine herself doing different things to produce the feeling, one of the most effective being running through the street without any clothes on and letting strangers see her naked (ibid.). This latter activity which would occur frequently in White's dreams perhaps suggests that the author required for *jouissance* a certain amount of fear related to sexuality, a behavior pattern, I suggest, with possible links to the earlier episode in the father's study, as described above. Certainly, when the child-subject and Gerard lay in each other's arms beneath the nursery table, the possibility of the father walking in from his study added a note of terrifying titillation, though it also acted as a break preventing the four-year-old 'Eirene' from "wholly giving (herself) up to the rapture" (321).

Whatever the nature of the children's play, White's textual insertion of a snake suggests an obvious authorial attempt to introduce sexual innuendo (334). For whatever reason, White remembered the scene as sexual, or at least wanted the reader

to believe it sexual. As in the description of the spanking scene with her father, White seems to imply a precocity that registered at a sexual level as well as intellectual, suggesting a connection between language and desire that opens up an intriguing possibility within Lacanian psycholinguistics. For, if White's subjecthood is acquired at the precocious age of one through the spoken language, her acquisition of the written language at four, rather than at six or seven, coincides with her own self-described sexual awakening in relation to her father. What this means is that incestuous desire -- "love" -- and writing, specifically personal writing not approved by her father, became intricately connected so that the one interfered with the other, creating writer's block from which White claimed to have suffered her entire life (Diaries 8). Her writer's block, therefore, may be thought of as constantly recurring castration anxiety, as a deferring back to that earliest experience of sexual punishment that took place in her father's study at the age of four. It was then that the repression of the signified, i.e. incestuous desire, became "fixed" in writing. For if White's earlier *spoken* language suppressed any desire she might have had for the wholeness experienced with her mother in that earlier *mirror-stage* beyond language, her *written* language situated that desire, now transferred to the father, permanently on the page. Although, like the spoken word, the written too must negotiate the gaps between its signifiers and signifieds, its very fixidity on the page allows for a scrutiny akin to that afforded a butterfly specimen. Pinned to the page, for example, the fictional Claude Batchelor can be minutely examined, dissected, and even altered. Writing about her plans to focus on her father in The Lost Traveller, White asserts her right to place him

under the microscope: “I want *him*,” she writes, dismissing her earlier focus on Nanda and her convent education, “His life is finished: can be examined. I will *not* be afraid of him anymore. It is pure accident that we were father and child. I have a *right* to look at him, yes, sexually too” (Diaries, January 6, 1935).

Thus, although Cecil Botting encouraged his child’s writing -- she wrote her first poem, a single line, at age four in the heroic style of The Iliad, the first line of which her father had taught her to recite at that same age⁹-- he punished her attempts to express herself in her own, personal way. The scribbling on the wall, met by her father’s sexually-loaded punishment as described above, indelibly linked White’s independent art to paternal disapproval. Hence we find the traumatic scene of the father’s rejection of Nanda’s convent-school novel about “unknown vices” in Frost in May as a recurring theme rather than the originatory source of the “shock (she) had in childhood.” The sexual/textual connection had become firmly entrenched in White’s unconscious, her childhood experiences having attached to her writing sexual associations she could not explain. The “guilt about (her) writing; distaste for it; guilt at not doing it; fearful anxiety connected with it,” thus continued to frustrate the author her entire life (Diaries, 56). The *‘non’-du-pere* of White’s father, however, did not stop at regulating her textual content and style, but imposed itself also on the act of writing itself. Cecil Botting constantly corrected his daughter’s backhand

⁹ “The waves are drifting High alas. Our ship is sinking Alas now we must die.” Antonia, aged four, wrote these lines entirely by herself on a postcard and signed it from her toy poodle, “yours truly Bruce Dash esq.” (As Once in May, 234).

script, training her to produce a small, round and neat hand which, revealingly, reverted to kind whenever the sexual conundrum raised its head. For example, in a June 28, 1938 diary entry, White matter-of-factly applies a Freudian approach to her relationship with her father, surmising that she couldn't have had sexual intercourse with him because, "(a) he didn't want it" and "(b) I couldn't have endured it without mutilation" (140). But then, without any warning, she breaks out suddenly into a tantrum of rage and self-will that is mirrored in the writing itself. "Yes I will write backhand in spite of my father I WILL WILL WILL. Couldn't even write - filthy dirty beastly old man - the way I WANTED to - Well I will. You'll see. I spit on your corpse" (ibid.). No obvious textual connection exists between the two parts, but the latter section degenerates into a handwriting which her daughter, Chitty, claims was "quite alien to Antonia's usual small neat style" (141). Associated too with the process of writing was White's inability to put pen to paper unless she sat up straight at a desk as she had been taught to do by her father. While her Hayford Hall friend Djuna Barnes, carefully made-up and often wearing a negligee, wrote in bed, and Emily Coleman scribbled on her knee in an old dressing gown -- White would set out her fountain pen and paper on her desk and, with back erect, prepare to work (92). Art as well as sex, then, were to be controlled by the *Name-of-the-father*, initially identified as Cecil Botting, and ultimately, as I shall show, as White's god-image itself. "I so often feel if I try to make my own life I am opposing God's will and shall be punished even in this life by never having a peaceful mind," she recorded in her diary on December 4, 1937 when she was 38 years old (117).

Writing, therefore, elicited for White, a certain sexually titillating fear, although she claimed that it gave her no pleasure. Like sex itself, White admitted to her diary, only “the *idea* of writing” was “delightful and thrilling.” (130) With sex, the act itself was “disappointing, or disgusting or terrifying” (130). Nevertheless, in the very persistence of her attempts to produce her *own* creative fiction in spite of her writer’s block produced by the sexual tensions of patriarchal punishment, White claims her right as a sexual woman to represent her reality as she deems fit. In taking up her position as a female, sexually-desirous god-the-author, she challenges her father, the Church and the convent nuns who would deny her sovereignty of her own text. Her authorial path, needless to say, never proceeds straightforwardly. It follows a circuitous route, initially “going underground” after Cecil Botting’s punitive response to her first novel (Diaries, June 25, 1938, 140). But even underground, her writing challenges her father’s position. In The Sugar House, for example, Clara buys herself a stout black notebook “exactly like the ones her father always used for writing his lecture notes” and begins to keep a secret diary (154). White even started writing with an Eversharp fountain pen like that of her father’s, her usurpation of the tools of his trade carrying further the correlation of the sexual/ textual/ spiritual.¹⁰ White had endless trouble with pens, always breaking in new ones in the hope of lifting her writer’s block and once again regaining her sovereign position., but no pen served her as well, nor could write as smoothly, as the Eversharp she associated with

¹⁰ White owned two such pens, but claimed to want five (Diaries, 39).

him (Diaries, 232). For, her possession of this pen, this phallus/stylus, as it were, promised her deity even as it simultaneously threatened her desire to create. Only after her father's death in 1929, however, could she bring herself to use it on him. When she did, she exposed his nakedness to the world for everyone to see. As the new owner of the phallus, the god-of-her-texts, she possessed the power to situate desire wherever she pleased, and it pleased her to show it as derived, unsolicited by herself, from the father who, in factual life, withheld "love" from his only daughter.

White's texts are rife with references to her father's desire for his daughter. In The Lost Traveller, for example, Claude "kisse(s) (his daughter) goodnight, more lingeringly than he ha(s) done for many months, stroking her hair" (115). His kiss, it so happens, comes directly after his admission to Clara that "now and then, I try to fancy how it would be if you and I were not father and daughter" (113). He imagines them meeting, "you and I, in a lonely tower. I don't know why a tower. And by some spell, we have forgotten our own identities" (ibid.). Given the obvious Freudian connotation of "tower" and White's years of analysis with Dr. Carroll, it is difficult to ascertain the degree of unconsciousness in such lines. Possibly, White entertained unconscious fears that the desire originated with her and she therefore transferred to Cecil Botting her own sexual phantasies, just as later she would transfer them to her analyst (Diaries, 41, 145). In any case, incestuous feelings in both directions seem to have proliferated in her unconscious and she projected them onto the page. Jeanne Flood, in an interesting confirmation of this theme, suggests that in The Lost Traveller White implies that Claude Batchelor rejects the real sexual, writing, Clara *because* he

“incestuously desires her for himself alone.”¹¹ She writes that his demand that she be sexually pure is but “the veil of his desire that she belongs only to him” (136) and that his “demands for gestures of sorrow and consolation from her are (therefore) a personal violation”(137). Flood reads into the text a symbolic rape, which she claims Claude works out in his remembrance of his conversion experience by acknowledging his associative feelings for Clara with those of the girl kneeling next to him in the pew, whom in his fantasy he strips and rapes (136). He deals with his feelings of guilt by rejecting both the girl and his daughter, suggesting, Flood points out, the connection between his religion and his sexual violence, a connection, I suggest, that White spent her entire life trying to reconcile in herself. Even in her diaries, supposedly spontaneous accounts of White’s thoughts, she wrote of her father being “loverlike” (36) and that they “hugged and kissed like reunited lovers (50). She felt like she was “on honeymoon” with her father (56), and that “if he had been my husband, he could not have been kinder” (56). While she attempted to hold her libidinal self and her autobiographical characters to the *ich-ideal* of the innocent and passive participant, she constantly betrayed herself. Thus, while in The Lost Traveller, the “pure” Clara relating to her father was “as wary as an animal that submits to fondling from fear” (45), the “I” her younger daughter, Lyndall Hopkinson, quotes her as describing in Nothing to Forgive is presented as “at bottom...vile and disgusting” (141). Virtually on her deathbed, Antonia still had

¹¹ Jeanne A. Flood, “The Autobiographical Novels of Antonia White,” Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction 24.3 (1983): 136.

dreams about her father. “It is too obscene,” the 80-year-old Antonia giggled when Lyndall asked her mother what she had dreamt (154).

Nevertheless, she continued to hold him responsible, even going so far as to put words into his mouth. “God knows *I’m* no paragon of virtue,” Claude tells his wife, Isabel, in Beyond the Glass (26). “. . . a slow patchy flush invades (his face)” so that the reader is led to suspect that Claude harbors a secret, namely, as Isabel’s subsequent conversation implies, a love for a Cambridge friend, Larry O’Sullivan, to whom he has remained faithful for 19 years.¹² “No one ever took his place for you, did they?” she asks, to which he shakes his head (27). When she comments, “Strange that he never married,” Claude seems “about to say something, then suddenly compresse(s) his lips under the clipped, still golden moustache” (ibid.). The text is suggestive, the more so when it becomes clear that Clara received her name at Larry’s insistence and against Isabel’s wish, because of the mutual love Claude and Larry held for the heroine of George Meredith’s The Egoist, Clara Middleton. When Claude Batchelor admits in The Lost Traveller to having “a touch of Dr. Middleton . . . and, I fear, more than a touch of Sir Willoughby,” the former father to Clara Middleton, the latter, lover, one cannot dismiss the implications (114). The triangle of Larry, Claude and Clara becomes even more incestuous when Claude’s conversion to Catholicism is

¹² White based her character, Larry O’ Sullivan, on Cecil Botting’s best friend at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, Nevinson de Courcy, known to him as “Toby.” The two men remained best friends until de Courcy’s death in 1919 (As Once in May, 203).

revealed as having been instigated by the death of the Catholic Larry, who earlier had refused to be Clara's godfather on the grounds that the family were not Catholic (28). When later, in what would seem a rerun of Lacanian *objet petit a*, Claude shows affection to a temporary teacher, Callaghan, also an Irishman who reminds Claude "just a trifle of Larry" (27), Isabel seeks out Callaghan's sexual affections for herself, suggesting by inference the sexual nature of Claude and Larry's relationship (The Lost Traveller, 264).

This "forbidden" love then perhaps constitutes for Claude Batchelor the compulsion to religion which drove him to convert to the Catholic faith at age 35, taking with him into the church his wife and daughter. No doubt the conversion was sincere, but it seems likely too that he saw it as salvation for whatever "sins" he bore on his conscience. "Only God knows how much evil there is in me," he tells Isabel in Beyond the Glass (225). Whatever the nature of that "evil," Clara believed herself to have been the sacrifice offered up to the patriarchal god for her father's salvation. In White's first novel, Frost in May, which opens with Nanda Gray and her father on a bus bound for the convent at Lippington where she would spend the next five years, an old Irish woman addresses Mr. Gray with "And wouldn't it be a beautiful thing now if she was to offer her life to God as a thanksgiving for the great blessing of your conversion, sir?" (15). White always feared that her father intended her to become a nun and despite her enthusiasm for the convent life she lived in terror of the thought of becoming a "bride of Christ." By the age of nine, Nanda "had already dedicated herself to perpetual virginity," but the notion of *marrying* god filled her with

trepidation, since it was linked, I suggest, to the same fears she entertained in relation to that other god, her father (15). For, when Cecil Botting moved the family into the Church, he brought with him not only his own repressed emotions but, along with them, the intertwined sexual/textual complications I have outlined above which he and Antonia secretly held in common and which the convent and the Church with their patriarchal structures of female obedience and subservience would continue to reinforce.

“Projection” into the Spiritual Realm

In moving into the spiritual realm of the Convent and the Catholic Church, White, I suggest, “projected” onto the Christian god -- Lacan’s *grande Autre* -- all the power, anger, love, as well as the complicated sexuality, she associated with that other *autre*, her father Cecil Botting. I have termed this process “projection,” but maintained it in quotes since Lacan abandoned it as an explanation for delusions and their genesis, claiming it only as a description of the ordinary “imaginary transitivity of children” for whom no distinction exists between, for example, hitting the other and believing that “He hit me.”¹³ This latter form -- a “normal mechanism” -- which Lacan describes as simply jealousy by projection differs from that of delusional subjects, whom he suggests actually do know “something about the very thing (they don’t) want, in some sense, to know anything about” (149) The difference lies in

¹³Jacques Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book 111 The Psychoses 1955-1956, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (1983. New York: W. W. Norton, 1993) 145.

knowledge, but he offers no alternate signifier to distinguish the projection of such delusions, hence my quotes. Certainly, White must have known “something” of her repressed, in that while she did not act on it in the performative sense of living out her fantasy, she textually intimated that a *real* existed and lay at the heart of her sexually informed idea of the sacred. The *real* had tangled the sacred and the profane, and while its identity lay out of reach in her unconscious, outside of symbolization, she acknowledged its affects, namely her confusion. “There are two kinds in me,” the narrative “I” addresses her god in the poem “Sed Tantum Dic Verbo,” “So tangled in my heart/ I know them not apart,/ Nor which, in craving need,/ I call Thee in to feed” (Strangers, 157-159). In her very recognition of “the problem,” despite her inability “to know” its source or resolve its consequences, White effects the transformation of values that Kate Fullbrook, paraphrasing Karl Popper in Unended Quest, suggests results from the “changing consciousness of the fractures within accepted thought” (Free Women, 7). By addressing her own conflict of values, White brings to the attention of the reader woman’s problematic relationship to her deity and encourages questioning of the construct of theological laws that denounce that relationship as inferior. White’s need to protect herself from mental illness, however, precluded her too intimate examination of this relationship and, in order to maintain her stability, she struggled to compartmentalize her life in the way her father and the Church had impressed upon her, looking to her *ich-ideal*, now substantiated by the godhead itself, as her road to personal redemption. She could not however compartmentalize her unconscious, and though she, her father and the Church tried to

punish it into submission, its language, erupting through the signifying gaps, returned to destabilize her texts. In Frost in May, for example, when Nanda goes to bed at night, the nuns require her to sleep on her back, with her legs together and her arms crossed over her chest so that if the Lord Jesus should “take” her in the night -- “to call (her) to Himself” -- she would be “ready to meet him as a Catholic should” (35). Similarly, Nanda prays to the incarnate God, Jesus, the son: “Even in the night have I desired thee, Lord. Come, Lord Jesus, come” (83). And when White takes Him in her mouth during communion, she writes in her diary, she has “an intimate experience” (187). Some of the saints, the nuns tell Nanda, died in ecstasy when the Host entered their mouths, and “(s)ometimes, in moments of great fervour, Nanda would pray that she might die too and she would leave the chapel with a queer, giddy feeling. . . .” (Frost in May, 75). When finally she does go up for her First Communion, she feels “Our Lord Himself . . . actually present, in the flesh, inside (her) body” (84). That Nanda both desires yet simultaneously fears this experience although she has not identified it as sexual is illustrated in a dream she recounts about her friend, Theresa Leighton. Prior to the dream, Theresa, playing the role of Our Lady receiving the sacrament in a tableau of the Annunciation, is described as frightening Nanda with her look “of strained and expectant ecstasy” (83). Theresa appears “dazed with happiness,” and as she gazes at the altar, she wears a “rapt, avid look, her mouth a little open” (84). Later, when Nanda dreams of her “lying dead in our Lady’s chapel, wearing her first Communion dress and a gilt paper crown,” she sees a worm issue from Theresa’s mouth, and she wakes up shrieking (101). The

sexual implications are obvious: the communal dress and gilt crown make of Theresa the bride of god the king, the worm emerging from her orifice, the phallus which has caused her to die of sexual ecstasy in conjugal bliss with god. Even White's naming of the would-be postulant after St. Theresa, whose rapt look of ecstasy caught by the artist Bernini in his well-known sculpture which Lacan describes in his Seminar XX as *jouissance* beyond the *phallus*, indicates further the sexual/religious conflict, *eros* and *agape*, with which White dealt (Feminine Sexuality, 147). In the Lacanian context of the *Other* representing the third terms in woman's *jouissance*, White's perception of Teresa's ecstatic death is inevitable. With her father and her god both sharing the Other's place in her *imaginary*, she can envision no other spiritual "love" than that which is the product of incest. And since incest must end all life and civilization as we know it, and what is more, as Julia MacCannell points out in "Oedipus Wrecks," narrative itself, the sight of Theresa's bliss horrifies her.¹⁴ Since for White, writing remained, as it were, her umbilical cord to the spiritual, that by which she sought to reach the truth of her ontological identity as a sexual woman, she hesitated to risk its loss. Writing for her, she admitted to her diary, was praying (179). But writing, like fantasy itself, does not always lie within the author's control. When White masturbated, for example -- *jouissance* beyond the *phallus*, as it were -- fantasies of whippings and cruelty accompanied her orgasms, such images associated now with

¹⁴ Juliet Flower MacCannell, "Oedipus Wrecks," Lacan and Narration: The Psychoanalytic Difference in Narrative Theory, ed. Robert Con Davis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983).

both her father and the authoritarian, transcendent god (Nothing to Forgive, 141). Like Nanda in Frost in May, White could not keep her mind “properly gloved and veiled” (45). When communicating with her god, her discursive slippage revealed the extent to which the Ultimate represented for her an eroticized and material god. Nanda’s “thinking about religion,” for example, “was a secret, delicious joy” (19), while to Clara in The Lost Traveller, “Religion had become part of her most secret life . . . deeply concerned with one aspect of the mysterious creature” (47). When Miss Hislop of the short story, “The Exile,” steals the Blessed Sacrament from the Church, running away with it in her mouth and examining it afterwards on her wooden table at home, the effect is startlingly and sacrilegiously sexual (Strangers, 102). Such slippage, however, does not all lie in the realm of the religious; hierophany exists too, the sacred appearing within the profane, though in much fewer discursive incidents. White describes herself as needing to be “in a state of grace” with her lovers (Diaries, 22), and when Clara in The Sugar House receives a letter of best wishes from her father the first morning of her honeymoon, she experiences a sense of “absolution for a sin she ha(s) forgotten to confess” (129). In the only seduction scene in her novels, Clara’s would-be lover Marcus Gundry puts a taper to the candles with the slow, careful movements of an *acolyte* (my emphasis) (234-5).

However revealing of White’s unconscious entanglement such linguistic eruptions may seem, White did manage to hang onto some sort of order in her conscious mind as long as she maintained a strict separation of *eros* and *agape* in her personal life. For her sanity, as I shall show, she needed to adhere to “an either/or

attitude about sex and the spiritual life” and certainly the pattern of her life attests to her claim, her most promiscuous years -- her late twenties -- corresponding to her least religious (Diaries, 176). She even went so far as to twice marry men who were incapable of or uninterested in loving her sexually, namely, her impotent first husband, Reggie Green-Wilkinson and her homosexual second husband, Eric Earnshaw Smith. Even more significant for my argument is the fact that Earnshaw Smith, who claimed to be an atheist, took on the deified role her father had previously played in her life. “How often do I have to tell you that I am God?” a thinly disguised Clive responds to Julian/Antonia’s amazement at his infallible reading of her (“Julian Tye,” As Once in May, 99). His spousal but sexually safe “god” made decisions for White and guided her cultural and intellectual development, even to choosing what books she should read (Now to my Mother, 22). He signed his letters to her, “your silly old Daddy” and when one night she dreamt he suddenly become virile and started stuffing food into her mouth, she felt only repulsion, “as I would have for my father” (ibid.) In her dream, someone dropped a loaded plate in Eric’s lap injuring him in the groin, to which she responded without any sympathy, “serves you right” (ibid.). Significantly, while Eric represents White’s emotionally satisfactory, sex-free *objet petit a* to her father and to her god, his non-judgmental atheism which gradually, albeit temporarily, wins her over, alleviates some of her sexual fears. For as mentor and god, Eric is given “the keys to (her) conscience” and so without guilt she is able to pursue, though not necessarily find, sexual fulfillment elsewhere (Nothing to Forgive, 55).

Although White spent many years in Freudian analysis, her analyst, Dr. Dennis Carroll, never queried her religious concerns. "During analysis I was usually headed off when I tried to broach the subject of religion," she wrote to her 1940-41 correspondent, Peter Thorp (The Hound and the Falcon, 159).¹⁵ Such avoidance of religious discussion constituted common practice in analysis and, in any case, it is unlikely that White pushed the subject hard for she instinctively knew to keep the two apart. Experience had taught her not to delve too deeply into sex and religion. "Once I begin to torment myself with questions, the old beast begins to stir in his sleep" (97). "The Beast," for Antonia White, was the horrific experience of insanity for which she was institutionalized at Bethlem Royal Hospital in 1922-3, and which for ever after would threaten her fragile identity. It emerged for the first time when, after having borne the strain of an unconsummated marriage to the Catholic Green-Wilkinson, she fell in love with the Scots officer, Robert Legg, in whom both "religious" and sexual elements combined. Chitty writes in the introduction to her mother's diaries that "the two appear to have established telepathic powers of communication when apart" (2). In their fictional representation in Beyond the Glass, they immediately embark on an uncanny relationship of the spirit in which even

¹⁵ Although White knew him as "Peter," his real name was "Joseph" Thorp. He had trained as a Jesuit priest and had also worked in advertising. He originally wrote to White as a stranger, commenting on her first novel, Frost in May. Their correspondence ended when White visited him and his wife in Wales and, according to her daughter Chitty, declared that his wife was much nicer than he (Diaries, 346). In Chitty's earlier (1983) introduction to As Once in May, Chitty mistakenly spells his name with an "e."

clairvoyance is indicated when Clara foresees Richard's death in a flying accident (140). They themselves don't understand what is happening when they "play the game." "Are we bewitched?" Clara asks Richard (*ibid.*). They feel they belong to each other, their love inevitable, but though Clara desires him, she cannot handle the pressure when their intimacy acquires sexual electricity, and she descends into madness. The positioning in White's 1928 short story, "The House of Clouds," of a discussion of the difference between the Virgin Birth and the Immaculate conception as the penultimate text before madness descends, would seem to confirm that it is a sexual/religious crisis which has occurred to Helen/Clara (*Strangers*, 45).¹⁶ Language

¹⁶ In "Asylums of Antaeus," Jane Marcus uses White's short stories, "Surprise Visit" and "The House of Clouds" to make the case that women are driven mad by war. However, White was enthralled with the notion of war and, as a child, her greatest desire was to be a colonel of hussars. A photo of her at age seven shows her wearing a hussar hat of which she had been so proud that, like Clara Batchelor, she'd slept with it on her pillow (*The Lost Traveller*, 41). She played with toy soldiers and staged mock battles throughout her childhood and, when she married for the first time, war games represented one of the few areas in which she and her husband, Reggie Green-Wilkinson, mutually experienced pleasure (237). In *Beyond the Glass*, Clara explains to her parents that in spite of her theoretical knowledge of regiments and battalions, "During the war, you know, I couldn't get *into* it. I mean, I somehow couldn't feel any connection with it. Perhaps because I was just too young to have anyone I ever specially cared for out at the front" (148). She harangues herself for having "shut it out of her mind," and for having "not merely refused to experience it" but "turned it into a game" (187). In front of her father's display of photographs of his students killed in action, she "buried her (face) in her hands . . . praying in utter debasement: 'Forgive me . . . forgive me. Give me a chance to make up for my neglect. Put me to some test. Give me some share in your suffering'" (*ibid.*). When she does enter the "House of Clouds," therefore, "the experiment relating to the war" to which she refers belongs to the realm of her spiritual powers which she discovered in communication with Richard, and which she perceives as being the test by which through her suffering she will be able to help the parents of the war-deceased to communicate with their sons. Thus, "The House of Clouds" seems to me to have less to do with the notion of mothers producing children as cannon fodder, than with

breaks down, and in that in-between place where the *real* lies beyond grasp, conscious and unconscious mix interchangeably and drive her out of her mind. She can no longer keep discursive control as the sexual and religious become one and reveal their link to her father. In House of Clouds, when Helen sees her father, dressed “in a brown habit, like a monk,” she becomes distraught, and when he comes over to the bed to kiss her, “a real physical dislike of him choke(s) her, and she pushe(s) him away” (47). In the similar account in Beyond the Glass, Clara “whirl(s) her arms and shriek(s)” at her father, “Don’t touch me . . . Don’t touch me . . . I won’t marry you . . . I belong to Richard” (203). It is interesting to note here a metonymic connection linking her father’s brown monk-like habit with other scenes of desire in White’s life. For example, in the year after White’s incarceration, while she still recuperated under doctor’s orders, she allowed a friend of her father’s, Jim Dougal, who came into her darkened bedroom dressed in a robe (habit?) belonging to her father, to impregnate her. Dougal “appeared in the doorway of her bedroom ‘as if in a dream,’” her daughter Susan Chitty writes in Now to my Mother, and White put

the problem of the sexual and the spiritual which runs through all of White’s texts. In this case, it is the conflict between her sexual desire for Richard and her father’s wish for her to be virginal, like the immaculate Mary, who is the signified, I suggest, of the initial “M” she asks to be put on her forehead (47).

As for “Surprise Visit,” the figure that brings about Julia Tye’s relapse when she visits Bethlem now transformed into the Imperial War Museum is the wax figure of a nurse in uniform. Tye is not disturbed by men in uniform and seems mostly oblivious of the machinery of war, but the sight of a nurse’s uniform triggers all the suppressed memories of her incarceration and her fears about her present day sanity. All come together in the threatening figure of the remembered Nurse Roberts before whom she collapses, babbling “I’ll be good, Nurse Roberts, I’ll be good!” (173).

up little resistance. “On the contrary, she was rather encouraging (and) in the morning . . . was filled with disgust” (21). Still later, White became sexually and religiously involved with Benedicta de Bezer, an ex-jazz-club pianist, who clothed herself in a monk’s habit and “now church-crawled with the passion that she had once pub-crawled”(Diaries, 183-4). In the topography of the unconscious, such metonymic displacements enabled White to manipulate reality and, in doing so, appease, but also fuel, her desire for that original *petit objet a*, her father. Thus, Clara’s open acknowledgment in Beyond the Glass that her father desires her sexually (“Don’t touch me . . . I won’t marry you”) signals the collapse of her carefully constructed separation of sexual and religious discourse, and therefore the collapse of identity itself. For, in his monk’s habit representing god and his Church, Claude has brought his daughter face to face with the ungraspable and, in her encounter with it, linguistic walls collapse and language flows interchangeably on either side. Signifiers no longer signify within the context of the *Name-of-the-Father*, and absence has become present.

In spite of eating bread (the Host) with salt to drive away the evil spirits, Helen of “House of Clouds” cannot escape the inevitable sexual confrontation with her father/god (45). As if in immaculate conception, she is “charged with some force, fiery and beautiful, but so dangerous that a touch would explode it” (46). “She would let no one touch her, not Robert even” (46) The priest who comes to see her at the asylum -- the House of Clouds -- wraps rosary beads around her wrists like handcuffs (47). She cannot escape her situation. She feels as if she is in “her last agony” and

cold beads of sweat appear on her forehead (48, 49). When the nurse helps her say her Hail Marys, she is the sacrificial Christ sent by her father to die for their sins; the Virgin Mary conceiving immaculately as god, her father, leaves bruises on her thighs (49). Gender becomes ambiguous and the correlation to her sacrificial role for her father's sexuality as I have described it earlier seems inescapable. She imagines herself as a horse being ridden time and time again until she feels herself become all animal. She is "released" by the nurses, and wears a leather collar. Her room becomes a manger, and she the Virgin Mother abandoned in the stable (52). Finally, she is a fish, the sign of the Fisherman, Jesus, the sacrificial son of god the Father who in the story denies His only child water (59).

In the depth of her delirium, therefore, Helen confronts the ultimate oppressor, the patriarchal god himself whose institutional structures, the Church and convent, together with her own father, are complicit in her destruction. With language, law and order as their weapons, they have repressed her desire to the point where its power, no longer containable, has exploded through the hole of non-meaning and reduced her to a state of discursive entropy. In Beyond the Glass, when Clara's mind slips, she resorts to babbling and talking like a child (198). She remembers bits of poems in English and French, but fills the gaps "with words she makes up in a language of her own" (216). Deprived of pen and paper, she no longer writes, and when, after many months, she takes up a pencil to send a message to her father, she discovers that "she ha(s) forgotten how to make the letters (245). Significantly, it is the return of her ability to shape the letters, and to order and fix her

still wayward thoughts on the paper, that signifies her return to “health.” By re-entering the *symbolic*, she, in a sense, relives the experience of metaphoric castration and, I suggest, buries under the layers of linguistic imperatives the very knowledge that had been the core of her experience of mental chaos, namely, the sexual connection between herself, her father and her god. For the rest of her life, in guarding against the return of “the Beast,” White also protected herself from “knowing.” *Connaissance*¹⁷ and *jouissance*, like two sides of the same coin, continued to fill her with anxiety and fear.

In the end, White’s autobiographical writing about her father and her religion can be seen as an anguished expression of her desire “to know” without endangering herself as Subject in control of her own identity. In this “safe” place, her texts, White hoped she could undress her father and examine him, “yes, sexually too” (Diaries, 35), but after the publication of Frost in May, and despite the fact that her father was already deceased, she once again experienced a brush with insanity. For the place which is the source of creative art corresponds with the same place from which derives religion and desire, and no matter how distanced one from the other, they can never be entirely separate nor divorced from the individual whose *psyche* gives them

¹⁷ As Alan Sheridan, the translator of Jacques Lacan’s *Ecrits: A Selection*, points out, most European languages make a distinction between knowing (by having learnt facts from a book) and knowing (as understanding and intuition). In Lacan, he says, *connaissance* belongs to the imaginary register while *savoir* belongs to the symbolic register. In belonging to the imaginary, *connaissance*, then, also carries with it the connotation of knowing sexually, such sexual knowing bearing also the spiritual overtones of *le petit mort*.

shape. In spite of White's *verwerfung*, that is, her foreclosure of access to her symbolic world of that which she did not want to know, the refused continued to reappear in the *real*.¹⁸

Holism and Theosophy

The collision with the unassimilable signifier, which brought down upon White her mental chaos, as described in "The House of Clouds" and Beyond the Glass, explains much of the spiritual reticence noted in the author's textual protagonists. Nanda's terror of being wedded to her god in Frost in May and her inability to "give herself" to him, in spite of the priest's assurance that "God did not force His lovers," both point to her sense of proximity to that which cannot be named (54). "The only thing that God wants is the thing you are afraid to offer," the priest persists, but Nanda remains cautious (55). For even after White's "recovery" and her burial of that unknown which, in that mental state outside of the stricture of the linguistic system, she had recognized, the feel of the uncanny remained like a warning whenever she came too close. For that reason, she persisted in keeping not only the sexual and the spiritual as oppositional elements of her life, but all other binaries, male and female as well. In doing so, she even paid lip service to the Church's assignment of woman to the negative side of the binary. Thus, despite her textual foregrounding of her situation as being predicated on gender, as Marcus has claimed, White played it safe by simultaneously denouncing her own kind as "stupid, incoherent and sinful" (The

¹⁸ The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book 111, 12-13.

Hound and the Falcon, xii). “A woman is more corruptible, I believe, than a man because of the slower rhythm of her life,” she wrote to Peter Thorp (xii). “And haven’t you ever noticed in men,” she continued, “that it is their female side that betrays and corrupts them?” (xii). For these reasons, she concluded, “It is a profound truth that makes Eve the CHANNEL of the fall and the church’s defects . . . due to her femaleness” (xii).¹⁹ Given such statements, it becomes difficult, as I have already mentioned, to read White as Marcus does, without qualification. It leaves too much unexplained, as, for example, why the author --“Julian Tye” in As Once in May -- remained perfectly happy in her marriage to Eric Earnshaw Smith -- the fictional Clive Heron -- though he controlled her the same way her father had done. Even though he encouraged her art and her love affairs, he could say, ‘The trouble with you, my dear . . . is that you can’t enjoy ideas for their own sake. I suppose it’s because you’re a woman and women are barbarians” (Now to my Mother, 24).

White, in fact, aspired to holistic beliefs that merged spirit and flesh, as well as male and female, but her psychic fears disallowed her from ever acquiring conviction. Although, for instance, she could write in the context of Jungian analysis, “My own trouble is obviously concerned with this animus, my male side,” she dismissed Jungian theory as being associated with “all this eastern stuff” (Diaries, 224). “There is more

¹⁹ White conducted a year-long correspondence with the Jesuit, Peter Thorp and, although we do not have his side of it, White seems to be responding to his advocating of Modernist ideas that disturbed her need for binary order and Church infallibility. Thorp, according to Chitty, gave White the book, Nova et Vetera, by George Tyrrell, the Catholic Modernist excommunicated by the Church for heresy (Diaries, 347).

than a hint of esotericism in Jung,” she claimed, announcing only the Freudians as “strictly ‘scientific’” (212). By “all this eastern stuff,” White referred to theosophy with which she had become familiar through the analyst Dorothy Kingsmill in the late forties, although as early as 1933, the year of the publication of Frost in May, she referred to Gurdjieff in her diaries (24).²⁰ Though intrigued by many theosophical ideas, White found the “occult background” frightening because she could not reconcile it with the teachings of the Church (212). But even as she dismissed it, saying for example that Ronald Moody -- the artist, Marcus Gundry in The Sugar House -- tried “to put Ouspensky over on me,” she hesitated, admitting that, in spite of everything, “there are moments when I’m uneasy” (210). It is no surprise then that in 1948, while White was being analyzed by Kingsmill, she kept a photo of the Indian holy man, Meher Baba, alongside that of the Catholic Padre Pio, next to her bed (323). Similarly with Christian doctrine, White felt herself pulled in directions counter to the strict teachings of the Church she needed to follow for her mental well-being. “I am more Spinozan than Catholic *by nature* (my emphasis),” she confessed to Peter Thorp (The Hound and the Falcon, 113). Given the Dutch philosopher’s contention that *both* mind and matter are “attributes” of god and that *both* men and women, plus everything that exists thus constitute part of “him,” White’s admission that it is easier

²⁰ George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, Russian-Armenian mystic, who founded a movement based on enlightenment doctrines through meditation and self-awareness. He set up his “Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man” at Fontainebleau, France, to which many Americans and Europeans flocked for spiritual assistance. His writings were popularized by the books of journalist, P. D. Ouspensky, one of his disciples.

for her “to think of God immanent in creation than in the Catholic Church,” signifies an underlying tendency at odds with that which she felt herself obliged to claim (113).

In the end, White’s attitude towards her situation was mired in confusion. Its very ambiguity and indecision produced that form of textuality which Marianne De Koven might characterize as unsynthesized dialectic.²¹ Throwing off the *Name-of-the-Father*, including his Church, held for White De Koven’s “terrifying appeal,” in that even as she aspired to free herself of patriarchal oppression, she feared more the possibility of punishment both in the form of rejection by her father and as a breakdown in sanity. Thus, she wrote a kind of *sous-rature*, as I have described above, a cautionary stance that represented her irresolvable ambivalence to her situation within the system of patriarchy.²² What reads as unabashed desire on the part of the paternal power figure, therefore, may be White’s direct criticism of her position in it as a woman, but seen under erasure may equally well represent a daughter’s unconscious desire projected into that text, a desire born of a child-like wish to show herself loved by a father who when he was alive withheld it behind a mask of law and punishment. *Sous-rature* thus constitutes White’s protection from her demons, and statements such as “I am so inconsistent and contradictory,” her

²¹ Marianne De Koven, *Rich and Strange* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991).

²² Jacques Derrida coined the word *sous-rature* to describe writing under erasure, by which he means the crossing out or denial of signifiers, while allowing their trace to remain in the text and thus signify presence. Thus, both word and deletion, presence and absence, exist simultaneously in the text. *Of Grammatology* (1967; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976) xiv.

escape route should “the Beast” yet again rear its ugly head (The Hound and the Falcon, 39). White’s sexual scenes particularly evidence such erasure. Despite their heavy overlay of sexual innuendo, the sexual act is rarely mentioned and in the only scene in which the lover, in this case the black sculptor, Marcus Gundry, in The Sugar House, gets as far as removing his clothes, the act is never consummated. Thus, the convent girl, now an unhappily married woman, remains pure in spite of the seduction. “Daddy’s girl” is technically a virgin, who therefore still abides by the laws of her father and the Church (The Lost Traveller, 96). In the context of Catholicism, White does not show herself to serious disadvantage either as Nanda or Clara. By self-censoring her texts, she remains the obedient daughter, the victim of life experiences, rather than the independent woman who defies patriarchal law. It is no coincidence, therefore, that her fictional writing ceased when she could no longer maintain that *ich-ideal* in the light of her two out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Only in her diaries did White attempt to “let go” of her internalized censor but, even though in these she comes closer than in her fiction to naming the Beast, her “I” seems no more reliable a subject than the “she” of her fictional texts. Since the “I” is merely the *porte-parole* of the ego and not the ego itself, what it says about itself can be counted on only in as much as one can rely on the words of Nanda or Clara. As in her fiction, White constantly edited what she had written in her diaries and read her entries out

loud to various people for their comments.²³ Her third husband, Tom Hopkinson, for example, who also kept a diary, advised her on journal-keeping, while her last love-object, Benedicta de Bezer, persuaded her to destroy the diaries of 1921-25 which chronologically would have dealt not only with her intense romantic/spiritual relationship with Robert Legg and her institutionalization, but also with her post-breakdown sexual relationship with the crippled journalist, Jim Dougal, and her father's insistence on her subsequent abortion. Since abortion is a mortal sin in the eyes of the Church, her father as upholder of the faith and her moral guide will have appeared more guilty even than she. "If one's father is fallible," she wrote in her diary entry of August 4, 1949 when she was already 50 years old, "there is no security anywhere" (216). Once again, as in the fiction, we come face to face with contradiction. The woman writer whose texts supposedly subvert Catholic patriarchy needs the infallibility of her father and by transference the infallibility of god and his Church in order to remain secure and in control of her world. It is perhaps why Antonia White, though she was able to recuperate fictionally most of her life experiences, never managed to transform the Dougal-abortion episode into imaginative text.²⁴

²³ Susan Chitty writes that her mother constantly read, reread and edited her diaries. She also gave her diaries to Dr. Carroll, Tom Hopkinson, Eric Siepmann and Mary Wesley to read, and once read aloud extracts from her diaries to Ian Henderson, a lover (*Diaries*, 10).

²⁴ For 25 years, White tried unsuccessfully to fictionalize her seduction by Dougal under the title, "My Father's House" (*Diaries*, Jan 24, 1956: 294).

By such an interpretation of White's position, I do not mean to deny her female agency nor to place her in an interminable Foucauldian prison. Rather, I wish to foreground the unique way her particular circumstances demanded that she put that agency to work in her search for spiritual identity. For, while I acknowledge Sara Maitland's assignment to White of the signifiers "battered woman," and her justification of White's return to the Church as a product of her lack of self-esteem, such an interpretation reduces White's entire life to victimhood.²⁵ White certainly never accepted her subjugation, whether from her father, her Church or her doctors, without a fight. Her financial independence through writing advertising copy and repertory acting, in spite of her father's disapproval (The Sugar House, 15), her physical attack on the doctor who committed her to a mental asylum (Beyond the Glass, 220) and her personal intimacies with girl friends forbidden by the nuns at the convent (Frost in May, 144), all point to a rebellious spirit no matter how often she expressed her heartfelt desire to be "good." Caught in her ambivalence, White was essentially mired in what later would become known as the postmodern condition. Although her mental breakdowns can be understood as *products* of her sexual and religious oppression within the context of the *Name-of-the-Father*, ironically her mental health depended on the maintenance of that same order. Her entire subjecthood, as it were, constituted an effect of the *symbolic*, and so she could only maintain her position as Subject/author able to criticize that system's working as long

²⁵ Sara Maitland, intro. 1980 The Hound and the Falcon.

as she continued to work within it. If she criticized it too excessively, however, and excavated that which the system suppressed in the *imaginary*, she ran the risk of destroying not only the system but herself as a being who speaks and acts.

Unwillingly complicit in the system then, White pragmatically protected herself even as she dared to challenge the structures on which it was based.

The Other²⁶

White's aesthetic strategy of *sous-rature* does not read as subversively as the confessional autobiography Marcus defines in White's work. White also neither wrote palimpsests nor created her own subversive language like Gertrude Stein. Nor did she "dance" at Lacan's "rim," at the interstices and gaps in her texts where the *real* lurked, as MacCannell has described Stendhal's Julien Sorel's subversion in *Le Rouge et le Noir* ("Oedipus Wrecks"). White's enmeshment in the patriarchal system of metaphor and metaphysics kept her too much in awe of "truth." God's power over her mind and ultimately over her writing restrained her from breaking out the jailhouse of language, in the same way as Catholicism, she claimed, stopped her from committing suicide (*Diaries*, 256). Her *real* agency -- and I use the signifier

²⁶ For Lacan, the Other has no Other and like "the woman" crossed out, "the Other" does not exist except under erasure (\emptyset). What does exist, however, is *an* Other, or rather, many Others, each shaped to contours projected by the subject's experience in relating to its *imaginary* others. Such Others then are particular and personal to specific subjects for whom they serve, via their *objets petits a*, as ultimate signifiers, namely god. Thus we see Antonia White's father as *objet petit a*, his *phallus* by metonymic transference conveying to her image of her own Other all that which she associates with Cecil Botting, namely his authoritarianism, his cruelty, and also his dangerous sexuality.

guardedly in the Lacanian sense as that which in being repressed is nevertheless to some extent known -- lay in her ability to play the dialectic. By foregrounding the patriarchal system that denied her spiritual subjecthood even as she chose to work more fully, even sincerely, within its gender-limiting structures by becoming a postulant, she deconstructed the very same system. In this way, she made her situation known to others, to the outside world of her readers, while simultaneously avoiding the confrontation with this dangerous knowledge herself. While White's postmodern desire "to know" her *grand Autre* thus complicates her path to spiritual self-discovery, the "Other," garbed in the clothes of the known, becomes as much an object of White's *real* subterfuge as the father whose *phallus* claims hegemony from it.

In this context, White's relationship with Peter Thorp reveals a telling correlation. For, in The Hound and the Falcon, the published letters of White's side of a year-long correspondence with Peter Thorp about her return to the Catholic Church, the author carried on a flirtation, possibly a seduction, reminiscent of her relationship with her father. In writing about the Other, she became infatuated with Thorp, an older man, a married man, and what is more, a Jesuit priest by training who took the role of her spiritual mentor (Nothing to Forgive, 160). His description of himself as "the safer and more respectful type of old gentleman," White writes, "should have put me on my guard!" but, given her convoluted relationship with her very proper and Catholic father, it served more than ever as enticement (78). Like her father too, Thorp was intelligent, or so he kept telling her (79). He corrected her

grammar and spelling -- "I apologise about 'practice' and 'practise,'" she wrote in response to his criticism -- and challenged her spiritual thinking when it differed from his (ibid.). Since she wanted to please him, as she had her father, she most often responded with what he wanted to hear in order to appear the "good" student/daughter, hence the ambivalence in much of the text. Significantly, in carrying on her spiritual correspondence with Thorp and simultaneously conducting a textual flirtation, White nevertheless remained chaste. She portrays herself as the seduced, and in words reminiscent of the possible "projection" of her own feelings onto her father, for example, she reminds Thorp that his "feelings had a long start over (hers)" since he had implied right in the beginning that she was in love with him but had been "too shy or too coquettish" to tell (78). Whatever his feelings about Antonia -- his side of the correspondence is lost -- Thorp provided her in her forties with discursive lures that elicited a pattern of behavior familiar from the days of her childhood, viz. an affective playing on the sexual/textual/spiritual intricacies which intersect the *object petit a* relationship to *le grand Autre*.

White's positioning of herself at the outer limits of that fragile and overlapping area between the *symbolic* and *imaginary* where both the *phallus* and the *Other* reside thus constituted her courage. For, in order to walk there the fine discursive line between her conscious shaping of language to patriarchal requirement and language's unconscious shaping of her, she risked her own mental stability. She chanced the writing of autobiographical fiction that inevitably would expose that very *real* she could not afford to grasp herself and, in doing so, established the sexual as

the pivot which informed her gendered subjectivity in both the spiritual and textual dimensions. Although White's path in search of spiritual identity remained uniquely hers, her emphasis on the body as the site of spiritual transformation found its echo in the texts of two Modernist writers and friends, Emily Coleman and Djuna Barnes, whose individual quests I shall outline in the following two chapters.

Chapter Three
Emily Coleman and the Absent Mother (1899-1974)

The Problem of Woman's Passion

If a single topic can be said to dominate the texts of Emily Coleman, it is the nature of woman's passion. Whether manifest as intellectual, sexual or spiritual love, woman's passion, as Coleman presents it in the fictional subject, blurs difference by showing itself to be that common denominator which underlies these supposedly distinct realms of life and connects them one with the other. Even as patriarchal forces identify woman's ontological status along the negative side of the binary scale as that which belongs essentially to flesh, matter and body, Coleman inscribes female protagonists who resist such limited definitions. They struggle to assert intellectual subjecthood and spiritual identity as inclusive of the very same woman's sexuality that the church, the state and society require them to repress in return for such autonomy. From the hospital experiences of the post-partum Marthe Gail in The Shutter of Snow to the narrative "I's" of many of Coleman's later poems, her texts show her life's work to have been focused on the inequity of binaries that render mutually exclusive those characteristics which co-exist symbiotically within her female protagonists. Even in her sixties, a tired Coleman still continued her fight for recognition of the nature of female being. In a poem about woman's ontological struggle entitled simply "Female," the woman of the poem whom Coleman addresses in second person

singular is both “married to God/ And wed to the earth.”¹ Her female thinking, Coleman describes in male terms as “redundant,” yet her intuition “breaks down a man’s mind” (1). The poet, however, momentarily despairs of ever convincing the world of the woman’s “grim worth” and she beseeches the gods of darkness and light finally to “bury the fight/ That makes her malign” and to call it a day (2). Only in the Resurrection, perhaps, will woman “know (her) own day” (2).

Coleman’s lifelong textual commitment to this female struggle derives from her own personal experiences. Like the New Women described by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg in the final chapter of her reconstruction of women’s history, Disorderly Conduct, Coleman attended one of the new women’s colleges, Wellesley, from which she graduated in 1920.² Like them, too, she was intellectually encouraged by her family, but kept sexually innocent, thus maintaining a self-described prudish attitude towards sex throughout her college years and, interestingly, a concomitant withholding of her creative writing capabilities, suggesting that even at that early stage she sensed the link between the sexual, textual and ultimately the spiritual in the

¹ Emily Coleman, “Female,” Poems, EC Collection (ser. 111.14 box 122 file 1399) 1.

² Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America, (New York: Knopf, 1985) 247. Coleman credited Wellesley with preventing her from acquiring “an inferiority complex” like so many of her female contemporaries (Emily Coleman, “Art, Science and Religion: Beyond Blake and Nietzsche,” Essays, EC Collection, University of Delaware, Newark [ser. 111 box 4 file 1007]). She identified Antonia White and Peggy Guggenheim as bearing this burden of male-constructed womanhood, and expressed debt for her own self-confidence also to her family (EC to Djuna Barnes, Correspondence, July 26, 1938, DB Collection, University of Maryland at College Park Libraries [ser. 1 box 4]).

construction of the self as god-of-one's text. Although she had confidently taken up the pen as a schoolgirl poet, she did not resume creative writing until the end of her years at Wellesley when her husband-to-be, Loyd "Deak" Coleman, "forced (her) out of her "safe platitudes" about morality.³ Her relationship with Deak seems to have liberated her both sexually and creatively, for in 1920, she wrote a three-act play entitled "The Consequences of Circumstances" and, in the subsequent decade and a half, proceeded to challenge textually the puritanical mores imbibed in her youth.⁴ Until her conversion to Catholicism in 1943, her creative work reflected her preoccupation with this sexual/textual/spiritual conundrum, but with her immersion in her newfound religion she ostensibly turned her back on sexuality and wrote predominantly of religious and eschatological matters.⁵ Such an about-face however

³ Coleman, Journals, ms., EC Collection, Nov. 26, 1932: 114 (ser.11 box 77 F631). In her early journals, Coleman uses the name, Karen, for her husband, Loyd Ring Coleman, a psychologist whom she married in 1921. The predominant spelling of his name in their correspondence (F98-108) is "Loyd," but at least one other spelling, "Lloyd," exists on an envelope. His nickname, "Deak," appears in various other forms too -- Deac/ Deeeec/ Duku/ Dookoo/ Dook (ibid.). I shall use the two most common forms, "Loyd" and "Deak," throughout this study.

⁴ Emily Tyler Holmes, "The Consequences of Circumstances: A Comedy in Three Acts," Ts., EC Collection (ser.111 box 3 file 990).

⁵ Coleman was baptized into the Catholic faith on November 24, 1943, St. John of the Cross Day, in the Church of St. Vincent de Paul, New York, having been moved to that faith by the writings of the French philosopher Jacques Maritain who, with his wife Raissa, became one of her godparents (Coleman Essay, Ts. "Reminiscences of the Maritains," 1966, EC Collection [ser.1.34 box 55 file 471] 5). The Maritains were themselves converts, he a Protestant and she a Jew. The lectures of Henri Bergson first persuaded Maritain to abandon scientific materialism and later (1906), under the influence of the mystic poet Leon Bloy, he converted. His most important

perhaps represents less an abandonment of her original concerns, as I shall show, than a continuation and expansion of them into the realm of the spiritual where, under the influence of the unconscious, she pursued her desire for unifying oneness.

While Coleman's literary output does not cling as directly and consistently to the autobiographical as that of Antonia White, much of her writing fictionally represents episodes from her own life, such as the incarceration of her mother in a mental institution, her own mental breakdown after the birth of her son, her destructive relationship with an Italian lover and her care of her invalid father.⁶ Such experiences fuel the imaginative products and provide the resonance which stamps them as authentic. What I shall investigate, however, is how such experiences, derived from internalized primary relationships, such as that of mother loss, also may shape the particular contours of the *spiritual* relationships in the texts and, further, how they may reveal as spiritual those narrative interactions that initially appear as secular. By using Kristevan *semiotics* which connects desire for that love lost at the

work, The Degrees of Knowledge, reinterprets the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas in terms of the problems of the contemporary world.

⁶ No biography of Emily Coleman exists to date. However, Coleman was a prodigious letter writer as well as journal keeper and much of the background material for this study draws on such texts held in the archives of the University of Delaware Library at Newark, Delaware. Since very little of Coleman's fictional work appeared in print, I shall also be quoting from manuscripts and typescripts of poems, essays, short stories and, particularly, her unpublished novel, "The Tygon," also preserved by the University of Delaware. The Emily Holmes Coleman Papers at Delaware contain vast amounts of material and I do not wish to suggest through this study that my own research in those archives covered it all. There remains much that I would like to explore at a later date.

onset of psychic life to religious faith's promise of redemption and return to eternal oneness, I shall show the ways in which the spiritual unconscious may have informed Coleman's texts and established her protagonist's spiritual identities as broader than the Catholicism by which the author chose to define herself.⁷ In exploring this area, however, I do not intend to minimize Coleman's Catholicism. My purpose in identifying her spiritual unconscious lies rather in establishing those influences, which interact with her mind outside of her direct control -- although not completely beyond her awareness -- as pivotal to her search for spiritual identity as a woman. Thus, whether disruptive or supportive of her feminist aims, the unconscious can be shown to constitute a major influence on her exploration of the sexual/textual/spiritual relationship as she experienced it. Since the conscious and unconscious become intertwined in her exploration, my tracing of her struggle will be similarly enmeshed rather than separated into specifically conscious actions, followed by an unconscious deconstruction of the same.

⁷ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia UP, 1987). According to Kristeva, the subject on acquiring language incurs a deep narcissistic wound, which is accompanied by a sense of mourning for that almighty, protective, and non-judgmental love that is now gone (40). Kristeva's subject mourns for what she calls that archaic "Thing," the goddess Mother. In drawing a parallel between faith and psychoanalysis, she suggests that this love, which she sees as a common denominator, is transferred to religious faith, which promises redemption and return to the eternal oneness earlier thought lost (32). Guilt "for the murderous desire felt at the onset of psychic life" plays a major role in the Christian faith, but although she terms such thinking illusion, Kristeva insists on its value to the well-being and integration of the self.

The Displacement of Desire

The unconscious, for Coleman, unlike that for White, does not appear in the form of repressed language returning in the text. In fact, it is the unexpected lack of such subversionary language that first attracts the reader's attention. Given that the infant Coleman's loss of her mother to mental illness and ultimately to an institution must surely have been psychologically traumatic, the absence of affective language on the subject in Coleman's texts invest her diaries, letters and fiction with conspicuous presence. If it were only in her fictional work that she characterized the absence of the maternal in this way, one might assume a conscious intent, an artistic decision, to make the material significant by understatement. But even in her journals and private correspondence, Coleman exhibits few emotions when writing about her mother. As a garrulous talker and a writer of great prolificacy, her relative silence on the subject of her dead mother therefore would seem conspicuous and invite speculation, particularly at those narrative points where the discourse of love plays out its affects.⁸

⁸ Djuna Barnes once said of her friend, Emily Coleman, that she would be wonderful company slightly stunned (Andrew Field, Djuna: The Formidable Miss Barnes, [Austin: U of Texas, 1985] 201). Barnes's comment reflects the general attitude amongst those at Hayford Hall who found Coleman's incessant talk and passionate zeal for discussion not only exhausting but narcissistic too. She spoke about her feelings to excess and expressed her views forcefully and often argumentatively on every conceivable subject. Ultimately, however, whatever the conversation, she would guide it to the particular themes that obsessed her, viz. love, art and religion, the very topics which this project attempts to show as inextricably linked. Her prolificacy, therefore, provides an abundance of material for my argument since as prodigious as she was in speech, so too did the sheer amount of her written material bear witness to her volubility. Coleman copiously filled letters, journals and fiction with the products of her mind and preserved most of this material until her death when it was bought by the University of Delaware Library at Newark, Delaware.

The literally dead mother thus performs a psychic role eerily reminiscent of the imaginary dead one postulated by Julia Kristeva.⁹ Her repression mimics that of Kristeva's *chora* after splitting is fully achieved and, like that articulation, leaves behind traces of the links between her erogenous zone and those of the other stored as sonorous, visual, tactile, olfactory or rhythmic affects.¹⁰ By examining some of these affects in Coleman's texts through their manifestations in conspicuous silences, absences, coincidences, disruptions or contradictions, we shall find that goddess Mother who, though repressed like Coleman's own mother, appears to shape the relationship which ties the author's characters to their gods.

The reader first catches a glimpse of the mother-figure in Coleman's unpublished novel, "The Tygon," in which she writes of her autobiographical protagonist, Frieda, that she remembered 25 years ago seeing "a crazy woman

⁹ For a full discussion of the repressed mother, see Kristeva's *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987).

¹⁰ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia UP, 1982) 8. The *chora* functions in Kristeva's paradigm much like Lacan's pure signifier, the *phallus*. Greek for "womb" or "enclosed space," the *chora* is the source of the *semiotic*, the place from which the child, male or female, moves towards the *symbolic* in order to become a speaking subject. Once the subject has entered the *symbolic* order, he or she represses the *chora* which returns only as that pulsional pressure on language perceived as silence, contradiction, disruption or meaninglessness. The *semiotic*, therefore, unlike Lacan's *imaginary*, does not constitute a language but an order of affects that suggest the presence of that which is repressed.

coming up the hill” (1).¹¹ In language remarkable for its seemingly rigid control, she writes of “the woman” that she “ran down the street and across it, and up the alley to Frieda’s back yard. There she stood, and in a moment there was white soft flesh, like Frieda’s mother taking off her corsets, and she was naked and laid her clothes on the ground, and lay down on them”(1). Frieda’s nurse pulled the child from the room, but Frieda struggled, “trying to get at the window” (1). Coleman continues the account in a voice even more muted than before, her sentences short and clipped: “The woman was walking up the alley in her stocking feet, a policeman helping her. The woman lay enormous in the alley, a great verifying presence. The people gathered round her. They took her away to the asylum” (1). Coleman’s unemotional and evenly-controlled account of “a mad woman” whose flesh reminds the child of her mother’s, constitutes one of those very “conspicuous silences” that Kristevan *semiotics* suggests indicate repression. What is more, the presence of an absence can

¹¹ The various edited manuscripts for Coleman’s novel about female jealousy, “The Tygon,” are held by the University of Delaware Library (ser. 111.1 box 104-110). My quotes are taken from Ts. vii (carbon) (box 110 file 980), her final revision, dated April, 1963. The novel is largely an autobiographical account of Coleman’s own complicated and abusive 1928 relationship with the Italian writer, Raffaele Bianchetti in Rome, but ends fictionally with “Frieda’s” murder of “Donato” and her own subsequent suicide. Coleman began the novel while living at Hayford Hall with Peggy Guggenheim in the early 30s, but despite efforts to find a publisher, the manuscript never saw the light of day. It is 55,000 words in length, and its final copy, dated April 1963, is dedicated to her first husband, Loyd (Deak) Coleman. Over the span of almost thirty years, the title which signifies a hybrid tiger/lion, changed from “The Tigron” to “The Tygon,” as Coleman feared that readers might pronounce the name incorrectly (Letter to Djuna Barnes, July 9, 1938 [ser.1 box 4]). Djuna Barnes considered it “perhaps the best novel she knew on jealousy written from the woman’s point of view” (Field, *Djuna*, 201).

be seen to exist in the emotion-filled pre- and post-scene texts which counter the main scene's flatness and provide those very affects that mark the link with the diachronically constituted presubject (In the Beginning, 8). In the first instance, Frieda's impending marriage to the sexual Donato, an Italian who has already revealed his possessiveness of her, initiates the remembrance of "the mad woman" (1), while an intimate memory of her father in which she and he, lying in the hay, put their hands in a barrel of little kittens and feel them all soft and curled up inside, follows it (2). The tactile sensation of the babies reminds her "of the crazy woman again," and in the absence of a mother cat, would seem to suggest through displacement that other absence which allows Frieda to think of herself as having no point of origin. She merely exists, the product of her father, with whom she plays in the hay and who, after the sentence referring to "the crazy woman," takes "great leaps from the rafters" onto the ground (2). Mother-father both, he is *semiotically* god, Kristeva's pre-oedipal "Mother" that still encompasses both the masculine and the feminine. Prior to the child's interpellation through her entry into language, the child has not yet distinguished the mother-figure as female but still perceives her as dual-gendered. Frieda's father who, in the mother's absence must play both roles, thus can be understood as the displaced nurturer/protector, both masculine and feminine. Furthermore, since Kristeva claims the *semiotic* as neither essentially male nor female, but rather positional, the father's internalized form in his daughter's unconscious can take up position on either side, depending on context. For this reason, too, Kristevan *semiotics*, even as it appears to mythologize motherhood, escapes the essentializing of

écriture féminine and allows for the fusing of its gender boundaries. As such, it offers the most suitable psychoanalytic key for understanding the maternal father-figure as experienced in Coleman's unconscious.

From her minimalist account of an insane woman, Coleman by means also of displacement draws a connection between female nudity and madness. The "white soft flesh" that so fascinates Frieda that she wants to see more of it, belongs to the enormous naked woman whose "verifying presence" lying in the road, establishes the proof of her madness. Woman's flesh must be covered and kept under control by corsets, if she wishes to remain sane. Yet Frieda wants to see it uncovered, perhaps sensing, I suggest, in her remembrance of her mother Hilda's flesh, intimations of that earlier mother-child relationship in which the breast lay free from constriction so that the child might nurse. Thus, would she, by association, connect the act of nursing children with madness and perceive her own child-desire for such satisfaction at the naked breast as being in direct conflict with the mother's mental health. Such seems to be the connection in the author's consciousness, for in her fictional account of mental breakdown after childbirth, The Shutter of Snow, her maternal protagonist's psychic conflict occurs in the act of nursing her child. The baby refuses to take Marthe Gail's breast and the new mother "loses it," attempting to suffocate the child beneath the blankets (29). The doctors diagnose Marthe Gail as suffering from toxic exhaustive psychosis and institutionalize her for two months.¹² In The Shutter of

¹² Coleman held the position of first-born in the family. In a letter to Gay Taylor, dated Nov. 20, 1958 (EC Collection, ser 1.53 box 66 file 543), Coleman claimed that

Snow, the connection between nursing naked breasts and madness points to the unconscious childhood trauma and also provides the underlying framework by which Marthe Gail charts her recovery. In the scene in that text in which Marthe Gail's fictional husband visits her in hospital, she confronts him with the demand that he hold her breasts tightly and "kiss them to (his) death" (160). Marthe Gail's sexuality related as it is to the oral erupts into the *symbolic*, terrifying her husband, Christopher, who immediately assumes his wife's continuing mental disturbance (162).¹³ Christopher's reaction only confirms yet again the connection between Marthe Gail's woman's desire and her insanity.

In the Kristevan paradigm, the *semiotic* in being linked to the pre-oedipal engages the primary processes. The supremacy of Marthe Gail's oral drive indicates a pooling of psychic energy at this earlier stage of her psycho-sexual experience as a result of the traumatic events of her childhood. Thus, for example, we find her fondest childhood memory as released in the throes of her "madness" related to

her mother fell ill only after the birth of her second child and was institutionalized after the third. Some difficulties also emerged after the birth of Emily and she and her mother took a respite at her maternal grandparents' home, but no documents exist in the archives at Delaware to explain the nature of Lucy Coaney's difficulties.

When Coleman gave birth to her first child by her husband, Deak Coleman, she found herself unable to nurse her son, John, and suffered a mental breakdown. She was institutionalized in Rochester, New York, afterwards going back home to her father to recuperate.

¹³ Coleman's choice of name for Marthe's husband, Christopher, plays on the patron saint of traveling, St. Christopher, who is usually depicted as carrying the baby, Jesus, on his shoulders as he ferries him across the river. Marthe, who believes herself to be the second Jesus Christ, was ferried to the asylum in her husband, Christopher's arms.

feeding chocolate almonds to her father in the hay (Shutter, 14). Twice, she mentions it, the first time in the context of making her father “smile and whistle,” and the second, in conjunction with not looking “when the bull was in the pen” (108).

Nursing has become conflated with feeding and, in this case, her desire is directed at her father, not her husband or child. Nakedness no longer registers and, instead of nursing, the act of feeding and eating takes on the pulsional pressure exerted from the *chora*. Eating becomes synonymous with pleasure, so that it comes as no surprise that even Marthe Gail’s voice in The Shutter of Snow is described in oral terms as drawing out the marrow from metal bars (23).¹⁴

Such textual incidents, together with Marthe Gail’s greedy verbosity as shown by the fluidity of her language that flows incessantly and barely distinguishes between her speech and others’, suggests perhaps that her *jouissance* manifest itself in large part as oral. In its sublimated forms of feeding, eating and speaking, as we shall see, it could provide her with the continuing pleasure of satisfying *unconsciously* and therefore safely that which was repressed and unknowable, the desire for the lost mother. In doing so, of course, she simultaneously fueled her desire, keeping alive the very object that had caused her narcissistic wound and now lay buried out of sight (Kristeva, In the Beginning, 40).

¹⁴ Coleman, herself, is described as oral. She “gobbled up all the edibles in sight.” (Herring, Djuna, 193) and, at Hayford Hall, wore the same old food-spattered sweater every day and dreamt repeatedly of hoarding chocolates (EC, Aug. 9, 1932, Journals [ser. 11 box 77 file 629]). Antonia White, after reading Coleman’s manuscript of “The Tygon,” recorded in her 1936 diary that in her love affairs, Coleman “swallow(ed) the beloved whole” (Diaries, 79).

Inscribing the Self as Flesh

The position of Coleman's female protagonists in the *symbolic*, predicated as it is by the repression in the *semiotic* of the mother and her "white soft flesh," remains always a precarious one. In The Shutter of Snow, one of the early signs of the breakdown between boundaries in the two registers is Marthe Gail's struggle for control of her written word. When she takes up a pencil to write to her father, the letters under the pencil look "like squirming moths" (20). They have yellow tails and pull desperately away from the pencil, but Marthe Gail knows that only by pinning those "moths" on the page and fixing them beneath the lead to stop their fluttering sexuality, can she prove herself sane. Coleman's description of herself as "a newly born moth" as she ascends the stairs to the ward for the "well-behaved" patients suggests perhaps that she tried to "fix" herself similarly (81). In this descriptive image of moths squirming beneath the pencil, Coleman captures the very essence of the *symbolic's* repression of the mother's flesh and sexuality. As long as Marthe does not write, the moths, like the mothers and their "white soft flesh" have free sway, and Marthe dances in the nude for the other patients (92). Conversely, however, when she starts to heal, her ability to form letters is once again restored. She immediately recognizes the significance. "Now it was all true and there would never again be doubt. She was God she was God (sic). If it could not be known by the singing this at least was proof. She could write again" (107). But such writing, of course, requires the repression of the flesh, and that is Marthe's dilemma. "The fever came upon her to write" but "the fever was (also) her distress"(107). Marthe can write

providing she inscribes herself as a non-sexual woman. But Marthe Gail sees herself not only as writer-god, but god as a woman, Jesus Christ in the Second Coming (121). “You didn’t know . . . it might be in the form of a woman,” Marthe Gail tells the other patients (*ibid.*). Ultimately, however, her decision to write, to pin the “moths,” as it were, devolves on the *semiotic*. For “over all was the tearless one (her mother) who had left (her father) when he was happy and gone into brown fields without him” and in whom she recognizes her own desperate situation (30). “It had been this, it had been this very thing,” she realized, “and he was to stand it a second time” (30). In her love for her father, Marthe Gail cannot bring herself to abandon him, as her mother had done, and allow him once again to make of his heart “a ruddy pear” offering (30). Instead, she decides to care for him, to look after him in place of the baby now disappeared in the red lights of the asylum. Marthe Gail therefore takes it upon herself to form the letters and pin the moths that will ensure her position within the Law of the Fathers. As Jane Marcus points out in her review of The Shutter of Snow entitled “Of Madness and Method,” she inscribes herself out of madness.¹⁵ The reader is never made privy to Marthe Gail’s texts, but we know that

¹⁵ “Of Madness & Method,” Jane Marcus’s review of Emily Coleman’s The Shutter of Snow, The Women’s Review of Books, 11 Aug. (1986):3-4. Marcus also discusses methods of dealing with female madness and examines Elaine Showalter’s The Female Malady, in which the author shows Charcot’s study linking hysteria to female sexuality to be an abuse of women by the camera. Texts must be mediated by the voices of the victims themselves (as Coleman’s) and not merely spoken *about* the women as objects, as in Sander Gilman’s work, Difference & Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness. Marcus also praises Jill Julius Matthews’ Good and Mad Women, which presents four case studies but expands them to subjectivity by

she wrote letters to her father and to Christopher, and that she also composed a 17-page note to Dr. Brainerd on why she should be promoted upstairs to the less controlled and institutionalized environment where the “good” patients lived (68). Such *symbolic* writing no doubt helped to convince her doctors. So too did her active cleaning and washing of the building, in other words, her performance of that which is designated female, for she knew what she must do to appear normal (194). “If she did all her work,” Marthe told herself, “then she could go home, and God would be known” (171). Marcus suggests that Marthe “turns cleaning into an art,” but it seems more likely that after two months in the asylum, she merely recognized the score and confined her neurosis to herself. That is what doctors meant by being normal, as Marcus herself points out. Repression is sanity, and Marthe Gail’s hungry cry to her husband, “I want your body, I have dreamed it in the night,” soon dies in her throat (160). By the time she leaves the asylum, her writing about being a female God and redeeming the world is silenced by the “shutter of snow,” the silence that envelopes everything which prevails within the confines of the hospital.

In writing about Marthe Gail’s experience, Coleman both foregrounds the premise upon which female normality is constructed by the suppression of sexuality and directly challenges male assumptions, particularly those of her father/god to whom she dedicates the book. By writing a text largely without punctuation, she

reconstructing the work and family lives of these women and looking at, amongst other things, their biological, psychological, and social behavior. Marcus concludes that madness is a social construct and that any behavior can be mad depending on the context.

blurs difference reconstructing the very heterogeneity that exists in the *mirror phase* in which the boundaries between mother and child disappear and the child assumes herself god. The end of one conversation cannot be distinguished from the beginning of the next, and words flow across the page without grammatical structure. No border exists between Marthe's own voice and those of others. As Marthe begins to appear more "normal," however, punctuation improves and she starts to distinguish objects and individuals as in Kristeva's *thetic phase*, which institutes the splitting of the *semiotic chora* and the beginning of signification. She now thinks more about her father than anyone else. Tenses remain confused, but Marthe remembers that her husband likes her hair wet and feigns drowning in her therapeutic bath in order to present herself to him as desirable (123). She even denies her identity as Jesus Christ in order that he will love her breasts. When he balks, however, she reverts to her godlike personage. By the time Marthe is ready for release, she has reached the *oedipal phase*. I shall discuss this phase in the next section, but it is clear that by the end of the text, mothers and their sexuality are almost entirely repressed in Marthe's mind. For example, when she tells the psychiatrist, "I want my husband," and the doctor responds with "You must learn to control that, all the married women have to," Marthe has no idea of what the woman is talking about. "What does she mean, whatever does she mean?" she worries (216).

In describing Marthe's journey back to "sanity," Coleman has presented the reader with a deconstruction of the process by which a woman is accepted as a

speaking and writing subject in the patriarchal structures of Western civilization. By showing the nature of her repressions, she - like Kristeva - points out the problematic relationship of women's *jouissance* with reproduction in a culture which symbolizes motherhood by the virgin birth. Motherhood, of course, is then used as the material basis for the oppression of women in general. It is telling that Coleman dedicated The Shutter of Snow to her father, for with its description of Marthe Gail's desire, it stood as a direct challenge to everything that John Holmes had tried to inculcate in his daughter about appropriate female behavior. Being a single parent responsible for a female child in a new and promiscuous age no doubt made John Holmes adhere even more stringently to traditional patriarchal mores, particularly as they related to sexuality. Although he encouraged his daughter in her intellectual pursuits, he stifled her sexual curiosity and kept close tabs on her behavior. When she and Deak decided to get married after her graduation from Wellesley, Coleman's father wrote to her husband-to-be, "Are your thoughts as clean and pure as those of the girl you are about to marry?"¹⁶ Twenty-two years after John Holmes announced her birth by telegraph, with the simile, "Emily Tyler Holmes, as pure as silk," he still presumed her innocence. Given her father's attitude towards her sexuality, Coleman's writing of The Shutter of Snow and its dedication to him suggests that she wanted him to know and understand the measure of woman's passion and specifically the passion of his daughter which he refused to see. Fathers, her dedication implies, constitute the means by which patriarchal institutions restrict woman's being and force them to deny

¹⁶ Coleman, Diaries, Nov. 29, 1932: 128 (ser. 11 box 77 F631).

a constitutive part of their intellectual and spiritual identity. It is interesting to note here, however, that although her dedication of the book to her father certainly suggests that she directed its message at him, she carefully prepared him for its contents before publication in 1930. In the intervening years between her incarceration at the asylum in 1924 and her divorce from Deak in 1930, she had experienced life in Europe and given full vent to her very powerful sexual desires. In 1929, she wrote to her father and attempted to explain her life, and thus prepare him for the American publication of The Shutter of Snow.

Other texts Coleman worked on at that time bear out her concern with woman's passion and its self-administered repression by women conforming to men's specifications. Her female characters exuded energy and a healthy sexuality. In "The Wren's Nest," a satire on the Romantic idyll, published in Eugene Jolas's *transition* in Paris, a country girl pursues a young city man who has earlier frolicked with her among the cows and periwinkles. In the city, however, her sexual passion and desire to possess the loved one frighten him off and he rejects her. Filled with vengeance, she returns home, and in a telling scene, inflames the farm bull to such a passion that he bucks a wooden fence.¹⁷ Similarly, in "The Tygon," her unpublished novel on which she started working about the same time, she develops a full-blooded female protagonist. "If there is ONE thing I want to do in my book," she wrote in her 1936

¹⁷ Coleman, "The Wren's Nest," *transition*, April 26 (1928): 215-218.

journal, “it is to show that a passionate woman is DEATH to a man who loves her, who is not equal to the strength of her emotion.”

Reconfiguring the Family

The orality glimpsed in Coleman’s earlier works as a concentration on nursing, eating and feeding finds its more complex sublimated form in the verbal appetites I shall show in the narrative “I” of Coleman’s fictionalized 1932 journal about her relationship with Peggy Guggenheim and John Holms (ser. 11 box 77).¹⁸ Unlike the journals of other years, this one adopts fictitious names for the main characters, while maintaining for the narrator a first person singular identity. In the period between Coleman’s release from her 1924 institutionalization at Rochester and the writing of her 1932 journal, she and her husband moved to Paris where she began work as Society Editor on the Paris Tribune, the European edition of the Chicago Tribune. Her relief at escaping from her father’s puritanical reach, as well as that of her country, however, may have been counterbalanced by the aching loss of the desired mother whose presence, as a trace in the father, remained back in America. I suggest this sorrow at parental deprivation because Coleman appears to have recreated in this fictionalized journal a substitute family based on the real characters in her life. John becomes the brilliant “Agamemnon” whose attention the “I” tries to monopolize, while Peggy, his lover, is reconstituted as the sexually possessive “Wendy” whom the “I” considers incapable of appreciating the poetic truth and beauty which gift of

genius the “I” believes she shares with Agamemnon.¹⁹ The narrative of their relationship however reads as Coleman’s intimate journal, complicating the assessment of the text as biographical or fictional and inevitably leading to some conflation. The fact that neither the journals prior to or immediately post-1932 were written in the same fictionalized way, suggests some conscious intent at objectifying herself and her feelings in this particular triad. For Coleman imbues her narrator with a self-conscious and greedy orality in relation to talk with Agamemnon, enabling the protagonist of the text to satisfy her *semiotic* needs for the pre-oedipal mother, that goddess Mother that is both mother/father, through the “feeding” of and “nursing” on words.

In this complicated tableau of *jouissance* and language, then, it is possible that Coleman possessed some insight into the way her unconscious led and she sought to work with it textually without paralyzing herself with its full implications. According to Kristeva, the *chora* can never be repressed entirely and had Coleman used the real names, she would have been confronted with the pulsional pressure in her symbolic language, manifest as coincidence, that Kristeva suggests indicates the presence of

¹⁸ Coleman used this journal as the basis of a skit about John Holms and Peggy Guggenheim which she entitled, “A Day with Agamemnon” (ser. 11.8 box 119 file 1073).

¹⁹ In her choice of names, Coleman draws on Greek mythology which tempts the reader to interpret Coleman’s own life narrative as a tale of revenge, like Electra’s. Certainly, some correlation exist, and even small details overlap, such as the name of Clytemnestra’s mother, Leda, and John’s favorite poem “Leda and the Swan” which he persuades Coleman to appreciate. However, while Coleman may have chosen the

repression. The very replication of the name of the man who would become the fictional substitute father, John Holms -- minus the "e" of her father, Holmes -- resonates with sonorous affect. Coleman met Holms while working as literary secretary to Emma Goldman in St. Tropez and became immediately attracted to him. When her friend Peggy Guggenheim won his affections, however, and divorced her husband Laurence Vail so that she and John could live together, Coleman's relationship with him underwent a subtle change, a reconfiguration of her position vis-à-vis him and Guggenheim.²⁰ The new family pattern gradually emerged and superimposed itself on the old. In the fictionalized journal, the narrative "I" now became the "child" of Agamemnon and Wendy, creating a triangle emotionally complicated by the unconscious pressures from the "I's" earlier repressed past. Interestingly, however, although the author changed appellations in her journal, she did not identify her real father's name, but continued to write of him as "my father" within the same text, thus intentionally confusing biography with fiction. It is likely then that Coleman, at some level, at least, knew that in recreating this fictional narrative, she attempted to renegotiate her relationship with her father while protecting her consciousness with the presence in the text of her real father.

names for specific reasons, she does not sustain the connections and the whole does not cohere meaningfully.

²⁰ For an account of Guggenheim's relationship with Holms, see her Confessions of an Art Addict (London: André Deutsch, 1960), Andrew Field's Djuna: The Formidable Miss Barnes (Austin: U of Texas P, 1985), and Phillip Herring's Djuna: The Life and Works of Djuna Barnes (New York: Viking, 1995).

In speaking of Coleman as a “child” in this relationship, I wish to emphasize the role-playing nature of such a position. Certainly, Coleman considered herself the intellectual equal of John Holms and superior in many ways to Peggy Guggenheim. She challenged him in conversation and generally acted the emancipated and independent woman that she was. However, she also frequently fell back on childhood patterns of behavior, interacting with Peggy and John as she might have done with her father and imagined mother. “Emily behaved like a spoiled little girl,” Jacqueline Bograd Weld writes in her biography of Guggenheim (*Peggy*, 96). Her outbursts and monopolization of John exasperated and tested her “parents,” and as Andrew Field notes in *Djuna*, she became “their unmanageable child who had to be humored and suffered” (200). Although the fictionalized journal does not specifically define the role of the “I” as “child,” the interactions of the three characters suggest family dynamics, and the text is rife with the displaced signifiers, “mother” and “child” but used in relation to other characters in the text. Mary Lynn Broe, in fact, argues in “My Art Belongs to Daddy” that, in refiguring the triad with Holms and Guggenheim, Coleman unconsciously turned her father into brother, the two siblings thus competing for attention from the mother-figure, Peggy Guggenheim.²¹ Since, however, no evidence exists of passionate feelings towards nor involvement with either of her brothers, John M. Jr. or William, nor of the kind of intellectual

²¹ Mary Lynn Broe, “My Art Belongs to Daddy: Incest as Exile, the Textual Economics of Hayford Hall,” *Women’s Writing as Exile*, eds. Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 1989) 53-86.

conversation with them that she shared with both John Holms and John Holmes, it seems more likely that the family reconstruction constituted mother, father and daughter.

Coleman, of course, had attached herself to a number of mother-substitutes in the course of her life, starting with her grandmother, her aunt, and even Emma Goldman, whom Guggenheim describes in Out of This World as “ador(ing),” “mother(ing)” and “spoil(ing) Emily.(79). But Coleman’s relationship with her “mother,” Guggenheim, trailing its underpinnings of superiority marked by jealousy, registered on an even more complex *semiotic* level than these. By its very affects, it deemed itself different. In the first place, Coleman’s interactions with Guggenheim were of an extremely volatile and tactile nature, and even when she overcame her anger at Peggy’s involvement with Holms, she continued to relate on a love/hate basis which frequently brought her tempestuous nature to a boil. “In one early serious rift with Peggy,” Andrew Field writes in his biography of Djuna Barnes, “Emily gave her a black eye and had to be pulled off her by Holms” (Djuna, 200). She was often downright rude to Peggy and during the summers spent at Hayford Hall when they played their after-dinner game of Devil’s biography called “Truth,” she always targeted Peggy for personal insults.²² She would play “most ruthlessly,” and once

²² Field writes of Emily’s “beloved game,” as a “devil’s biography”: “The party took pen and paper, and everyone wrote a single paragraph on a nominated feature of someone present. It might be sex appeal, appearance, taste, mannerisms. Composition and the task of reading them aloud passed in rounds from person to person. The opinions were anonymous. After shuffling they were recited to the

Guggenheim in exasperation shouted, "Emily, you've gone too far," to which Barnes responded, "That's one of her destinations" (199). Needless to say, Coleman denied that she harbored any feelings of jealousy towards Peggy, but the narrative "I" of her fictional journal once confessed: "I know I am jealous of Wendy . . . I am too proud to take her leavings"(Coleman's "leavings," in this instance, refer to Agamemnon) (85). But more often, the "I" attributed her jealousy by projection to Peggy, pointing out for example Wendy's refusal to leave her and Agamemnon alone at night. Wendy would allow Agamemnon and the fictional "I" endless literary and philosophical conversations but *only* in the daytime (81).

In reconfiguring this relationship of obviously close friends as also unconsciously oedipal, my emphasis derives from the Kristevan sense of spiritual desire as that longing for the unifying oneness experienced with the pre-oedipal mother. Since the father who nurtured AND protected his daughter represents the mother she did not know, the "I" of the fictionalized journal experiences a greater need for interaction with him. In her sublimated orality, she requires the "talk" of Agamemnon more than that of Wendy, to gratify her want of love. Thus, in the fictionalized journal, the "I" channels her passion into her conversations with Agamemnon, essentially effecting a successful Oedipal deal in which she represses her

company by the elected reader, who was, of course, never the subject of that particular round" (Djuna, 199). André Bretan called their Hayford activity, "Le jeu de la verite," while Max Ernst described it more accurately as "psycho-analysis done in public." Sometimes, personal questions were asked and if answered out of turn, the individual was punched, brought in blindfolded on all fours, and asked to guess the identity of the person who had kissed her.

emotions in return for his *symbolic* language. So much does she admire his intellectual discussions, that she hangs on his every word and quotes him to others. She is in thrall to his talk. Agamemnon thus speaks more truly than he realizes when he claims, in the context of Wendy's fear of leaving him and "Emily" alone together at night, that the latter "want(s) to do nothing but talk" (81). For, talk to that "Emily" serves the same gratification of her desire as sex, while simultaneously keeping Agamemnon safe from her intent. She spends hours in intense conversation with this figure which is both real and fantasy, excluding others from their company in order to monopolize him completely. Her orality pulses with sexuality. "I need what he has to say and I will have it," she writes in the fictionalized journal, "even if there are always women in my way" (80). In the context of Agamemnon's relationship with Wendy, she claims, "I can see that sex is not enough" for him, and proceeds to reach him through words (81). Thus, language replaces sex, and orality, linked as it is to the naked-breasted mother, the goddess Mother, repressed in the *semiotic*, offers unconscious gratification since it constantly refuels that very same desire through the functioning of language.

By textually sending the sexual underground, as it were, Coleman as author thus reveals the links between the sexual and textual which provide her with subversive agency. In effect, she attains subjecthood, the ability to write as a sexual woman, god-of-her-text, despite the absence of sex, and in doing so moves an incremental step further in her quest for spiritual identity as a sexual woman.

Guilt

The anxiety which is the byproduct of the workings of the oedipal phase is, of course, fueled by guilt and mourning. Guilt is experienced at the onset of psychic life for the murderous desire to obliterate the mother so that the *infans*, as Kristeva calls the pre-oedipal child, may enter the *symbolic* phase and acquire the subjecthood needed to participate in that civilization which is the *Name-of-the-Father*. For the child, Frieda, in "The Tygon," the *actual* physical disappearance of her mother to an asylum, therefore, must have seemed like overkill, for which a narcissistic wound would represent only half the by-product. The loss incurred in this case was a double one, experienced both on the level of the real and the imaginary, the one dependent on the other. Further, Frieda's unconscious connection of the sexuality of the mother with her madness also associated that sexuality with her father's loss, hence we find also the guilt that requires Frieda to make amends to her father. The two guilts play off each other, forcing the protagonist to choose. In The Shutter of Snow, Marthe Gail attempts to compensate her father for his loss by making him "smile and whistle" even as she asserts her right to her own sexuality (13). The two positions, however, lie in opposition, given her knowledge of her mother. How can she assert woman's sexuality when that same sexuality, as she connected it in her child-mind, created her father's pain? Contradictions abound and the child must find defense mechanisms to protect herself against such discrepancies. Projection serves the purpose and we find in the poem, "The Monster," for example, that by fictionally blaming the father for the actual death of the mother, his killing of the woman for her sexuality, the narrator

exonerates her own self for the imaginary murder. However, the child of the poem is herself dead, thus pointing perhaps to the cruelty of the psychic act which allows children to come forth as subjects of enunciation and join their father's world, only if they renounce their mothers and the sexuality associated with her. If they don't, society relegates them to the mother's world, a world of chaos, madness and non-meaning, which categorizes them as non-subjects and, therefore, as far as the *symbolic* world is concerned, non-being, in other words, dead.

In this gruesome poem, "The Monster," a man pining with lust digs up the grave of the wife he poisoned because she had committed adultery.²³ On opening the coffin, he discovers that "She was not dead who had been his wife" and, what is more, she had given birth in the coffin to a girl child who lay "black and red" at her feet. This "fruit of another's share," he puts to the knife and, in a grotesque and disturbing image of necrophilia on his wife, "eats her loins, fold upon fold."

Afterwards, "When she is quite absorbed in him," "(h)e sighs like a man, lies still like a worm." Given Marthe Gail's feelings as expressed in The Shutter of Snow of being confined in the asylum as if buried alive in a coffin and her woman's sexuality repressed in return for a male-controlled existence outside, "The Monster" assumes a damning aspect in relation to fathers. In the poem, the man literally has poisoned his wife because of her sexuality. Interestingly, however, and here perhaps we see the pulsional pressure from the *chora* disturbing the text, the father's murder of and

²³ Coleman, "The Monster," EC Collection (ser.111.14 box 122 F1343).

desire for the mother are described in the oral terms associated with Marthe Gail, suggesting the very projection I mentioned earlier. Firstly, the man poisons his wife -- "She gasps as he pours with a gentle hand/ The death portion in her soft lips and teeth" -- then "he eats her loins" until "she is quite absorbed in him." Afterwards, when he "sighs like a man, lies still like a worm," his satiation registers both on a sexual and a consumption level. Even the description of the dead child as "fruit" on which, in the last stanza, he pulls "the knife he prepared for her," suggests that in the transference of blame and guilt, the *semiotic* continued to make itself felt.

The moment of crisis in this play of transference however arose with the death of John Holms in 1934 and Coleman's simultaneous discovery of Catholicism. Holms broke his wrist in a fall from his horse and died under anesthesia as a result of his high blood alcohol level.²⁴ Coleman, who had organized the operation, felt devastated at this loss and wanted to kill herself.²⁵ Instead, "Agamemnon" disappeared from her journals and "John" arose, his name shrouded not only in terms of grief and anguished

²⁴ In Out of This Century: The Informal Memoirs of Peggy Guggenheim (New York: Dial, 1946), Guggenheim describes the series of events that led up to Holms's death on January 19, 1934. The fall had occurred five months earlier when John, his glasses misted by the late August rain, was thrown by his horse Katie, who stumbled into a rabbit hole. He dislocated his wrist and Emily galloped back to call the local doctor at Totnes. The doctor set his wrist badly and John remained in constant pain for five months, despite two subsequent attempts to assuage the pain through massage. He could barely use his wrist and so, while Peggy was out of town, Emily arranged for it to be operated on at home. The medical team consisted of a surgeon, their own general practitioner and the King's own anesthetist, who failed to notice in time that John's heart had given out as a result of the amount of alcohol in his system. His body was cremated, according to Guggenheim, on Emily's birthday.

reminiscences, but in the discourse of religion itself as the narrator started to undergo some kind of mystical communication with her god. Coleman's interest in Catholicism began the moment John died and, although she did not convert until 1943, it is significant that she did so on November 24th, St. John of the Cross Day.²⁵ While the gospel of St. John had always been meaningful to her as well as to her godparents, Raissa and Jacques Maritain, the coincidence of the name points yet again to Kristevan *signifiante*, especially since Coleman was known to cultivate coincidences and had a very active interaction with her unconscious. What is more, under the influence of her new religion, she renounced sex, left her second marriage to Jake Scarborough, since the Church considered her still married to her first husband, and returned to Hertford to nurse the first John, her father, until his death in 1950.²⁷ Coleman, of course, did not suddenly discover religion per se on John's death. Spiritual issues had long interested her, and in her journal entry of Nov. 29, 1932, for example, she recorded a conversation on religion and morals with an American college professor with whom she shared a hospital room in London (ser. 1 box 77 file 630: 129). When the woman announced, "Christianity is dead," an indignant Coleman responded, "Madam, that is a radical opinion" (129). Prior to

²⁵ Coleman, Journals, July 1936, EC Collection (ser.11 box 78 file 637).

²⁶ Coleman, Journals, Nov.28, 1958, EC Collection (ser.11 box 98 file 885).

²⁷ Coleman, Essay, "Reminiscences of the Maritains," 1966, Ts. EC Collection (ser. 1 box 55 file 471). This essay gives an account of Coleman's baptism on November 24, 1943, her painful separation from her husband, Jake Scarborough, after first trying to

Hayford Hall, she already queried the notion of evil in life and explored the occult with her friend, Sonia Himmel (Aug. 12, 13, 1932). However, as I shall show, her texts before John's death and her conversion to Catholicism reveal a somewhat different authorial consciousness than for those written after.

Suffering for the Redemption of her Soul

Proust wrote in Remembrance of Things Past that "Those who suffer feel closer to their soul," a sentiment with which Coleman could identify wholeheartedly (Swann's Way, Vol.1, 93). In her own view, she had suffered her entire life, particularly at the hands of men, and by the early thirties began textually to question suffering's purpose in relation to the ontological self. What is the meaning of suffering, she asked in "The Tygon," having shown her protagonist Frieda emotionally and physically abused by her husband? Concomitantly, given its role in suffering, what is the purpose of evil? And why specifically did women suffer in disordinate proportion to men? Since such questions led Coleman to an aetiological probing of her metaphysical world, the particular nature of her faith was predicated on their answer. Thus, as she explored textually the suffering in her life and that of her friends, she perhaps simultaneously came to grips with her ontological confusion and, in doing so, progressively shaped her religious beliefs, each time in a slightly new way, each time constructing them, I suggest, atop the repressed mother stored like an unknowable weight inside. At first, her suffering revolved around her sexual relationships. But gradually, as she came to

live celibately together in order to avoid sin in the eyes of the Church, and her confirmation as a Catholic in May, 1944, at St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York.

understand evil and suffering in psychoanalytic terms, as evidenced in her essays, she withdrew from the outside world of sex, ostensibly living the celibate life for the sake of her soul. However, as I shall show, while outwardly succumbing to the Church's demands and, of course, those of her father, her inner world still challenged its binary assumptions about her female sexuality and reconfigured her relationship to her god. Since her decision to abstain from sex coincides with her conversion to Catholicism in 1943, her suffering can be divided readily into two parts, viz. a textual exploration of pre-conversion redemptive strategy related to her art, and a post-conversion immersion in the spiritual which produced texts that reveal her search for redemption in Christ to be experienced in the very full unifying sense of the spirit/flesh and male/female holism that her outward life contradicted.

Part 1: Art and Redemption

As early as 1929, Coleman came to the understanding that for her the pursuit of Oneness must be played out in art and, further, that the production of such art if it were to reveal hidden truths about humankind required the experience of intense suffering. Assessing her life to that point, she writes in her 1929 diary, "My house is in order . . . I am ready for the suffering which I know has got to come, and will meet it and not turn from it" (309). At this stage, she already has experienced the loss of John Holms to Guggenheim and is about to obtain a divorce from Deak Coleman, marriage to whom had allowed her to escape her father, John Holmes, in the first place. In order to write "consistently good lyrics," however, not just any suffering will suffice: "It must be suffering that comes from passion," she notes, "it must be

sexual love” (ibid.). For all her readiness to suffer, however, Coleman strained under its burden, particularly in relation to jealousy which she explored in “The Tygon,” of which Djuna Barnes wrote that it was the best thing ever written on jealousy by a woman (Andrew Field, Djuna, 201). Nevertheless, she persevered, in the hope that her pain’s worth would be measured by the calibre of her art. “I have spent seven years in suffering to know the human horror,” she wrote in her diary of June, 29, 1937, “and the only hope for it is fruition in writing -- (it is) the only justification possible for the violent and tortured years I’ve been living through, which have grown steadily worse until in the last 8 months I’ve thought of suicide perpetually” (ser. 11 box 79 file 639).

Concurrent with the notion of art as product-of-sexual-suffering, however, Coleman also perceived it as a “revelation of religion” and in “Art, Science and the Unknown” describes “true” art as deriving from a Vision that “comes from the same source,” claiming that “he who is close to that source can feel in the product its origin.”²⁸ A diary entry in 1934 describes poetry as “the revelation . . . of particles of the Divine Harmony which exists in the world, and always will exist, and to which most people have, through the progress of civilization, become blind” (ser. 11 box 78 file 632:81). Poets, however, are sensitive to different aspects of it, and the best of them, according to Coleman, through their particular revelations, create worlds of which the relationship to the whole created Harmony is still not yet understood (81).

²⁸ EC Collection (ser. 111.4 box 115 file 1008).

The poet's world resembles the world of god, she writes, and has a statement of values which the poet wants exposed in the world (81).

For Coleman then, both her sexual suffering and her particular slice of religious truth were understood to exist simultaneously in her literary texts. "My book is a new judgment based on art as a revelation of religion," she wrote in "Art, Science and Religion 11" (ser. 111.4 box 115 file 1007). Thus, just as "The Tygon" contains her representation of her own torment at the hands of Bianchetti, so too does it espouse her "Truth," that particle of "Divine Harmony" to which she as a poet has been vouchsafed a glimpse. These two aspects of her imaginary life intertwine in her text, as different and yet as much part of one another as the hybrid animal which gives the work its title. Coleman wrote in her Aug. 25, 1934 journal of Antonia White's reading of "The Tygon" that though "she got the feeling of the book, the lovely mystic parts she won't get" (ser. 11 box 633: 165). She does not explain the mysticism herself, but given the title and the quotations about body and spirit which attend the book, it is fair to assume that she refers to the hybridity inherent in the universe and thus in god-created humankind.²⁹ In the first place, Coleman associates

²⁹ The following quotations introduce Coleman's unpublished novel, "The Tygon":
 "We were created that the earth might be made sensible of her
 inhuman taste; and love,
 that the body might be so dear that even the earth should roar with it."
 (Djuna Barnes)

"Lost love that flies aghast, it knows not where,
 And finds no foothold but the dreadful air." (Edwin Muir)

this hybridity with good and evil, heaven and earth, spirit and flesh, and in the second, with male and female identities. As an enthusiastic reader of Alexis Carrel's Man the Unknown, Coleman embraced his holistic concept of the New Man who would combine both ends of the Enlightenment binaries in himself.³⁰ However, acceptance of such holism presumes a purpose on the part of god, a *raison d'être* for evil, which Coleman understood as penance for the Fall of Man. Before the Fall of Man, she wrote in her essay on the despair of the Modern Age, "Art, Science and the Unknown," the sexual act was a moral one, as natural to him or her, as to a dog (ser. 111.4 box 115 file 1008). After "eating of the fruit," however, it became an act of evil so that the modern mind could not reconcile it with truth, and instead perceived it as its opposite. The artist's job as a "throwback to the animal past and a seer into the future" required his turning evil "to flower again" so that sex as a natural, moral act would be seen one day as again "identical with mystical truth" (ibid.). For Coleman, such an explanation may have lifted the burden of guilt and provided purpose. In it lay the possibility of justifying her own sexuality and also that of her mother, who suffered the consequences of her sexual relationship with her husband through childbirth and beyond that to the mental suffering which, as we concluded from "The

"My spirit before me night and day,
Like a wild beast guards my way.
My emanation, far within
Weeps incessantly for my sin." (William Blake)

³⁰ On October 30th, 1937, Coleman wrote in her journal that she had read Man the Unknown twice and that she had started along this line of thinking "two years ago" when Carrel's book had been recommended to her by Djuna Barnes (ser. 11 file 641).

Tygon," the child perceived as related to naked flesh and breasts. At this point, Coleman was deeply immersed in Freudian theory and understood evil in complex terms. She writes in her personal notes for the essay, "Beyond Blake and Nietzsche," that "infantile sexualism, fixation, female masturbation, phobias, compulsions, narcissism, sadism and masochism . . . give us a different picture of evil." What is more, psychoanalysis with its exploration of imaginary worlds beyond matter offered access to parapsychological phenomena, the pursuit of which had become of great interest to Coleman ("Art, Science and the Unknown"). As early as her Hayford Hall days, Coleman explored magic, returning to the study of the "savage" to understand the relationship between "primitive" magic and the "civilized" man's state of divine perception (ibid.). In her Aug. 9, 1932 diary, she writes of trying to "communicate with other worlds" and describes a session of table tipping with Sonia (Ginsberg Himmel) in which she felt a heaviness in her legs and tingling in her hands (ser. 11 box 77 file 629). It seemed to her that the table pushed up against them and she had the sensation of electricity in her hands (ibid.). Although Coleman does not identify the spirit with whom she tried to communicate, at that stage -- 1932 -- her mother represented the only close death and thus the most likely target of her attempt at spiritual contact.

Psychology and parapsychology thus confirmed for Coleman the kinship between spirit and flesh, mind and matter, heaven and earth as outlined by Alexis Carrel in his Man the Unknown. But whereas Carrel stopped short of including the

male/female binary in his theory of holism, Coleman, reared by her father/mother, John Holmes, and trailing, as I have suggested, pre-oedipal semiotic connections to the dual-gendered repressed mother, extended his argument to claim the individual's possession of both male and female registers. No doubt her familiarity with Jung's work on the *animus* and *anima* contributed to her assertion, though she does not use those terms. Instead, she speaks frequently of proportionate parts of male- and femaleness in both men and women. "Every women is a lesbian and every man a fairy," she writes in a 1936 diary entry, "(t)hat's what the masc-fem. business is: its (sic) fractions (ser. 11 box 78 file 637). One never sees a 100 per cent man or woman," she concludes, for "a 100 % woman would have to be an amoeba" since "as soon as there is life, there is masculinity. Energy is masculine; passivity, feminine" (ibid.). Given her own tremendous energy and vitality, it is interesting that she saw herself as being *equally* male and female. "I must try to make some fusion between the two halves of my nature," she wrote in her 1934 diary, ". . . each (half) despises the other; fears the other. The artist part of me loathes the female -- it seems to stand for every weakness. The feminine hates the artist because it thwarts its functioning" (ser. 11 box 78 file 632: 92). Coleman constantly battled her female side and bemoaned it both in herself and in others. She complained to Djuna Barnes, "We have been too much women" for she saw women as squandering their psychic energy in love rather than directing it towards their art and the pursuit of truth (Sept. 24, 1937, ser. 11 box 79 file 640e). Her battle to strengthen her masculine side took its toll however and she describes herself as having been "crucified on the tree of my

own independence” and of having “paid . . . practically with my life” for “being masculine, for being proud enough, in my spirit, to be able to give in to no man” (June 29, 1937, ser. 11 box 79 file 639). For all her criticism of femininity however, Coleman consciously sought to define the unique contribution women had to offer humankind, claiming that “a woman has her own type of mind, her own truth to write”(Personal notes for essay, “Beyond Blake and Nietzsche”).³¹ Modernist woman’s literary contribution, she believed, lay in revealing “the new sexual ethic (which would) be based on new knowledge of psychology and of woman and old fact (biological differences between men and women)” (ibid.). With the introduction of birth control, sexual love could be separated from its concomitant, motherhood, the role for which woman’s sexuality -- her own and her dead mother’s --had been shaped. For that reason, the meaning of sex would undergo change, the new holism blurring not only the boundaries between male and female sexuality, but between physical and spiritual desire as well. “Our souls would crave that which our bodies crave,” our attraction for the aspects of a particular body having its counterpart in the spiritual imagination, thus altering the way we view sex (1936 journal, ser. 11. box 78 file 637). Coleman’s argument sometimes contradicts itself, but she seems to imply that spiritual truth can be found in sexual love and that suffering for such love represents a form of spiritual purification, “a purging of evil” for the purpose of

³¹ (ser. 111 box 4 file 1007).

redemption in an after-life.³² To her, women, by reason of their intuition and therefore closer relationship to the paranormal and to god, held moral responsibility for leading men to truth through sexual love, and hence their shouldering of a disproportionate burden of suffering as the wages of Original Sin. Coleman perceived herself and Barnes as suffering with Peter Hoare and Peter Neagoe respectively for the purpose of such a purging of evil and she wrote to Barnes in that context that their suffering would put them in touch with “the Communion of Saints -- of which we have a faint shadowing on this earth -- you and I had it once or twice last winter!” (ibid.). Her reference remains enigmatic, but not surprisingly, neither man believed in the “mystic cord” that according to Coleman linked intense sexual love with god, nor did they understand jealousy “in its purest sense” as comprising “the sorrow attendant upon the knowledge that this mystic cord is broken” (“Beyond Blake and Nietzsche”). Coleman, however, was steadfast in her conviction that slowly but surely she and Barnes were uncovering god’s mystical truth and that as long as they prevented their lovers and friends “from unduly impeding (them),” they would, between them, “revolutionize the mind!” (Oct. 30, 1937 journal, ser. 11 box 79 file 641).

Until the day she converted to Catholicism in 1943, Coleman persevered in her belief that this form of sexual suffering redeemed her soul and that of her lover. Suffering became the leitmotif of her life and texts, but the pain of it drove her

³² Coleman letter fragment to Barnes, possibly Aug. 1936, DB Collection (ser. 1 box 4).

frequently to contemplate suicide. Though she impatiently hankered after death that more immediately would satisfy her desire for eternal return, like her friend Baroness Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven, however, she believed that death must be earned with life (July 13, 1934 journal, ser. 11 box 78 file 633). "Death is wealth tremendous," Coleman quoted the Baroness as saying, but even at her lowest point, felt she hadn't yet made sufficient recompense for her life (ibid.). Nevertheless, the longing for that once known sense of wholeness and unity remained. It made itself felt in the affective language of her poem, "Melville on the Land," published in The New Statesman and Nation, March 14, 1936. In it, Coleman plays on the notion of her favorite American poet out of his element on "the quiet sands," much like she, the narrative "I," in the patriarchal world of reason and law. For in the "sea/That seeks in vain to cover (him)" -- like the mystical realm of the mind that calls to her -- lies "all (his) glory." That glory refers to "The Beast of Joy," whose "honeyed lips" the "I" once touched when its "white dip/In and out of my reason's ocean/Made my heart leap with fearful motion." The connection between the ocean within the mind and without immediately resurrects for the reader Coleman's description of Marthe Gail's brush with madness as described in The Shutter of Snow. Coleman images "The Beast of Joy" as that leviathan/mother that lies below the surface of the ocean, below the surface of conscious thought, where its presence, though hidden, elicits a fearful anguish but one tinged with a stronger desire. While Melville and the narrator pass their day on land, at night "in dream" they move in ecstasy through the mind's waters

where “The memory of blackened hull/ Of a great mother rolling wide,/ And under her the sucking bride/ Of her late womb” fill them with ecstasy. In dream, whale/mother and the “I” come together in death, as one. “My soul met his” (tellingly, male though the “I” calls it mother) . . . “And as we sounded deeper, deep,/ Through minds of aeons our souls roared.” The last verse concludes, “The dream is that, the mystery,” suggesting the connections linking us back through time to an unknowable which lives outside of our conscious reach, the archetypal Moby Dick, the goddess Mother of the unconscious.

Part 11: Emily, Jesus Christ and the Goddess (M)Other

Although Coleman’s conversion to Catholicism occurred only in 1943, her special relationship and ultimately identification with Jesus Christ emerged the year of John’s death. “I fell in love with Jesus Christ personally in 1934,” she writes in her Nov. 26, 1958 diary, adding a few sentences later, “violently in love...and still am 24 years later” (ser. 11 box 98 file 885). Her feelings erupted after she had read the gospels straight through, having been challenged to do so in an argument about reincarnation in which she claimed she could not believe (ibid.).³³ “It is horrible to me,” she writes of rebirth, for at that stage she saw Jesus “only as a man” (ibid.). Nevertheless, she fell in love with him after reading his story, and admired the biblical protagonist in spite of the fact that she “couldn’t understand him” and that he “said nothing about art and didn’t believe in divorce” (ibid.). Only with her conversion to Catholicism did

³³ The writing in her diary of that year is illegible in parts and it is not clear with whom she had the argument.

Coleman derive from the story of Jesus's suffering that which would become the kernel of her belief at that time, namely that suffering -- this time, minus the sex -- constituted the requisite price man must pay to his god/father for entry into the next world. Up to this point, she still acted on her belief in the mystical connection between sex and love as described earlier and pursued that end with her usual intensity despite the inevitable pain and suffering. For, in persisting with the re-establishment of broken relationships and the reconnection of mystic cords, Coleman understood herself to be doing god's work. Her partners during this pre-Catholic time consisted, in addition to Peter, of George Barker, Humphrey Jennings and Dylan Thomas.

Coleman's transference in 1943 of her love of Jesus Christ to the Catholic Church, with its corporeal rituals and ceremonies, distanced her from that repressed maternal figure even as it perpetuated the connections by which she strove unconsciously to hold on. Kristeva writes in New Maladies of the Soul that while the driving force behind faith is the fantasy of returning to the mother draped in the attire of the mother Goddess, biblical faith specifically distances us by redirecting that desire to the Father (124). Kristeva deconstructs Christianity to illustrate how this has been achieved, pointing firstly to the stress on its Virgin Mary as unintentional revelation of that which lies behind faith, and secondly, to the taboos about sex, eating and drinking in Lamentations which are underlain by the pagan goddess Mother, from whom man can circumscribe his desire by observation of these taboos. By making god corporeal

in the person of Jesus, however, those taboo desires can now be transferred from the goddess to the son, and through identification with him, his suffering, and his faith in his father, to the patriarchal god himself. As illustration of her argument, Kristeva points to the Gospel of St. John -- Coleman's favored Gospel -- with its new system of signs which makes of the body of Jesus sustenance for the oral needs of his supplicants who may eat of his body and drink of his blood.³⁴ Thus is the unconscious desire enticed by the new semiology and transferred from the goddess Mother to the Father who has given humankind his son, "the bread of life," to consume. In the act of eating the Eucharist, the communicant is filled with Him, for "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him" (St. John 6:56). They become one, and the orality, linked with the dead mother, as we have seen in Coleman's texts, finds its unconscious gratification in the mass. In an undated poem, "Christ in the Eucharist," which Coleman sent to Djuna Barnes, the different layers of sexuality and orality underlie one another below the surface of religion like geological strata (April 3, 1958, ser 111.14 file 1172). Addressing Jesus as her bridegroom who has won her after a mad marathon, the narrative "I" beseeches Him in the opening verse, "Come to these dry lips you have cared to win." Desire on all three levels -- sexual, oral, spiritual -- permeate the words, and at the end of the poem the "I" once again picks up the triple significations by describing the wine of the mass

³⁴ See chapters 7 and 8 of New Maladies of the Soul for a full account of this argument. Although the other chapters in the book deal with aspects of the topic, the connections among them are not drawn and the book therefore lacks coherence as a whole.

as “Chalice of pain, sadly distilling you.”³⁵ Past repressions, as I have shown them in the texts to be mutated into oral desire, are mirrored in the narrator’s very words: “I ate desire,” she says, “aching for fill of you,” and continues, “Breaking between lover and will for you,” in a reference perhaps to Coleman’s own abandonment of her husband, Jake Scarborough.

Coleman’s conversion to Catholicism on St. John of the Cross Day and the gospel version of the life of Christ in bodily terms as expressed by St. John would seem Kristevan coincidences orchestrated from the *semiotic* reaches of the *chora* itself. But such coincidences possibly extend even further along the ramifying threads in that John Holms registered with his friends as a Christ-like figure himself. Guggenheim writes in Out of This Century that he “wore a small red beard and looked very much like Jesus Christ” (79) and that being in his company “was equivalent to living in a sort of fifth dimension” (90). Djuna Barnes described him at Hayford Hall to Antonia White as “God come down for the weekend” (Andrew Field, Djuna, 203) and even Coleman’s father, John Holmes, thought him “a superman who lived in another world” (Out of This Century, 115). Peggy and Emily saw him as protector of their souls and, after his death, felt themselves “running into eternal

³⁵ The word “distilling” implies purification through the process of first heating a mixture to separate the more volatile from the less volatile parts and then cooling and condensing the resulting vapor so as to produce a more nearly pure or refined substance. Coleman probably intended it to refer to the “I” in relation to the power of Jesus’s love, but in the line’s use of the second person to whom the poem is addressed, the two become confused.

danger" (126). Holms was cremated on Coleman's birthday, January 21st, yet another coincidence, and in a poem she wrote afterwards, "The Cremation," she describes the resurrected subject in terms of that biblical son. He enters paradise, "the tomb his mother prepared for him/ Forty aeons ago" and turns towards "one heavenly Light,/ Of which He was the mirror."³⁶ For Coleman, then, Holms perhaps registered as Jesus Christ himself and she merely transferred her emotions from the dead John/Jesus to the incarnate son of god. Her move to the Catholic Church, however, brought about a personal and direct identification with Jesus and, though John continued to influence her as a presence in her mind, her later texts indicate, as I shall show, that the "I" assumed the position of Jesus herself.

Coleman's new identification had little to do with the megalomaniac feelings elicited by the earlier madness as described in The Shutter of Snow. In the circumstances of the asylum, Marthe Gail's depiction of herself as the Second Coming, Jesus Christ as a woman who would save the world, emerged out of her

³⁶ Coleman's capitalization of "Light" and her use of the signifier, "aeons," which can be found in her Melville poem as well, tie her Christianity to Gnosticism via the influence of Barnes. The notion of god as the "Light" in his heavenly realm, as opposed to the Dark of the natural world ruled by the Demiurge, but more so of "aeon" as referring to the series of ages which separate the soul from its goal, suggest her awareness of such pre-Christian beliefs. ". . . The way of salvation leads through the temporal order of the 'generations'; through chains of unnumbered generations, the transcendent Life enters into the world, sojourns in it, and endures its seemingly endless duration and only through this long and laborious way, with memory lost and regained, can it fulfil its destiny" (Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958) 53. The poem, "Cremation," was never published although it was considered for publication by the journal, Criterion, in 1937. Coleman rewrote it on April, 1956 and again on March 26, 1958.

refusal to conform to the symbolic law of the father. Only within that world of chaos and undifferentiated heterogeneity could she exist as such. In her new reincarnation, however, Coleman played her role within the context of the Catholic Church, sanctioned by the community with whom she now surrounded herself. The *symbolic* world of the fathers became her milieu and she, as Jesus, the daughter, the sacrifice to the father god, repressed along with her goddess Mother her female sexuality. All sexuality had flown, and whereas in the thirties, her suffering in love had fueled her art, now in her desire to imitate the passion of the son, Jesus, for his father god, she sublimated her considerable energy into living with and caring for her own elderly father. In returning to nurse her father in his old age, I suggest, Coleman once again resumed her “feeding” of him with all the pulsional pressure of the word intact. Only, this time, she no longer fed him chocolate almonds in the hay, but herself as sacrifice, as redeemer not only of her sins, but his as well. Thus, her Jesus-suffering took on a completely different aspect. John Holmes revived in Coleman all the antagonisms that she had felt towards him as a young girl, and she “suffered” through these years with him, “everything I had hated, avoided, misunderstood and scorned” (Nov. 15, 1958, ser. 11 box 98 file 885). Later narratives afford a glimpse of such a relationship. A 1961 story, “The Old Man,” suggests a daughter’s simple life together with her father, a life consisting of food and crosswords in which the narrator treats the paternal patient with a complex mixture of love and exasperation.³⁷ Coleman

³⁷ “The Old Man,” Stories from the Stanbrook Period (ser. 111.6 box 117 file 1040). In the late fifties and early sixties, Coleman lived in the top part of a Benedictine guest

captures this mixture in another poignant tale written in 1962, entitled "The Saint," in which a daughter caring for her dying father must run to him with the hypodermic needle every time he has an attack (ser. 111.6 box 117 file 1042). When he starts experiencing daytime attacks, however, she cannot bear to see his face contorted in pain and so he agrees to smile through his agony when his next attack hits.

John Holmes died at the age of 82 having "never looked at another woman," according to Coleman, but instead "transferred his love to his little girl" (Nov. 15, 1958 journal, ser. 11 box 98 file 885). To escape his sexual prudery, however, "his little girl" had gone "a long distance away from him in (her) mind and soul . . . until God brought (her) back the long way round through Roman Catholicism, a religion (he), true son of the 19th century, hated and feared" (ibid.). Given John Holmes's antipathy towards the Catholic Church, Coleman's suffering as Jesus to her/his father, assumes an added layer of *semiotic* meaning. In the context of Kristevan interpretation of Catholicism as I have outlined it above, the corporeal Jesus, whose body and blood the "I" consumes in "The Eucharist," for example, and with whom she identifies in the sacrifice of her life to her father, as in "The Old man" and "The Saint," when traced back *semiotically*, represents via sublimation the very female sexuality she supposedly has rejected. In Catholicism, therefore, the "I" *semiotically* triumphs over her father even as she saves his soul, unconsciously gaining from her "sacrifice" the very gratification she supposedly has forsworn. For although John

house at Stanbrook Abbey. She became a Benedictine tertiary in 1958, i.e. a sister of the third order. She could not become a nun.

Holmes “never became a Christian - let alone a Catholic,” he did pray with his daughter and near the end, said to her, “I would believe in Jesus Christ if I could” (Nov. 20, 1958 journal [ser. 11 box 98 file 885]). Coleman assumed his statement a “baptism of desire,” and considered her job complete (ibid.). On a *semiotic* level, I suggest, she accepted his *desire* to believe in Jesus Christ as simultaneously a desire to believe in her, a woman of flesh like his dead wife, Coleman’s repressed mother.

In Coleman’s novel, “The Tygon,” Frieda recalls a family scene in which she plays a game of rummy with Heidi and her father (202). Her mother has just died, and Frieda lays down a blank card. “Don’t put that in,” Heidi says, “it’s blank,” to which the child, Frieda, responds, “It is the Queen of Hearts” (202). Blank, negative, lack, this invisible Queen of Hearts nevertheless suggest that Mother of Love in which Coleman, using the signifier “God,” now “forget(s) herself completely” (Dec. 6, 1958 journal [ser. 11 box 98 file 885]). “I am able to do it (now), but I wasn’t at first” (ibid.). Unqualified, protective love and the desire for it, as Kristeva points out, lie at the root of the narcissistic child’s religious faith, suggesting that Coleman perhaps sought that love her entire life (In the Beginning was Love, 24). From her father/mother, from John Holms/Peggy Guggenheim, and from the Catholic god/Kristevan goddess to whom she devoted herself, she struggled to attract to herself particles of that transformatory love. But in her search for such love, Coleman was still to reconfigure one more familial relationship, this time a spiritual

one which would begin to resolve the psychic pain of childhood loss described in her earlier texts.

In 1942, Coleman wrote for spiritual guidance to the French philosopher, Jacques Maritain and his wife, Raissa.³⁸ Their subsequent friendship with her, their love and support in spiritual matters, played an important role in her evolving spiritual identity through the forties and fifties. Coleman's initial reconfiguration of the family pattern in her relationship with the older couple, and their approval of her, particularly Raissa's, seemed to begin a healing process. From the start, the omens appeared auspicious and Coleman, sensitive to coincidences, noted with pleasure at her baptism that her godfather, Jacques, fed her almonds ("Reminiscences," 5). Unlike on the occasion with Marthe Gail's father, when the fictional protagonist had fed him "almonds in the hay" -- a scene associated with Marthe Gail's mother's and her own incarceration -- this time the nurturing came from the "father's" side. What is more, the sixty-year-old Raissa delighted in calling Coleman, "le creme des filleules," and showering motherly love upon her godchild ("Reminiscences," 21). "C'est comme la champagne!" she described her pleasure at seeing Coleman, who at the time "did not know how fond (Raissa) was of (her)" (21). Later, Coleman would write, "I took it for granted that she loved me. I had no idea of the extent of it, nor of what I must

³⁸ Coleman letter to Maritains, July 10, 1942, in which she describes her "spiritual odyssey from atheism" (ser. 1.34 box 55 file 462-471). Coleman had been influenced by the Maritain's writings, particularly Raissa's We Were Friends Together, and thought they might be able to direct her to a priest. She subsequently met the Maritains in New York and they became her godparents, supporting her in her spiritual decisions.

have given her, how glad she would have been if I could have lived near her” (27).
 “Why don’t you come live with us, and make it four?” Raissa asked her (28).³⁹
 Coleman thought her to be joking, but admitted that she’d always wanted to, and would have moved back to America to be close should Raissa have needed her (28).
 But then in 1960, Raissa died. Raissa had always been understanding of her goddaughter, even when Coleman suffered sexually and was tempted to break her Catholic vow of celibacy (29). When she confided her sexual doubts to Jacques, however, he responded more harshly (30). But even he took her in his arms and let her weep upon his chest when he felt her suffering from overwork, teaching children from 8 to 3, caring for her father and living without a husband (21). When she refused his suggestion to give up the teaching because she felt that “God wanted (her) to bear this,” she told him she “had to become a saint” (21). Four years previously, on first meeting Jacques in 1943, he had taken her aside, looked at her earnestly and said, “C’est possible que Dieu veut nous faire sainte” (15). Embarrassed at the time and not knowing how to reply, she forgot the rest of the conversation, she claims in “Reminiscences.” What she did remember, however, was his comment to her about sainthood -- “C’est comme une famille” -- a more tellingly *semiotic* comment than he could possibly realize (15).

As early as the 1930s, Coleman had claimed that Jesus constituted “a blending of the artist and the saint” and, through her efforts to live the sacrificial life in His

³⁹ Raissa’s sister, Vera Oumansouff, lived with her and Jacques Maritain.

image, she aspired to incorporate this latter part of His identity into her own (“Art, Science and the Unknown”). To her godparents, Coleman had proved her spiritual worth. She had renounced her sexual love for her husband in obedience to the Church’s laws on divorce and had lived the celibate life. Further, she had devoted herself to the care of her ailing father, and what is more, brought him to a “baptism of desire” which would assure him of redemption in the next world. Two poems written by Coleman about this time, though undated, speak with confidence of a father’s entrance to heaven and even poke fun at his puritan habits and outlook. In the first, “My Father,” the “I” claims, “They’ll never get my father more/ Out of his winding sheet,” to suggest the rigid way with which the dead man protected his modesty when he met the “merry” men of heaven; in the second poem, “Clean Papa,” the narrator plays on the father’s fetish about cleanliness and jokes that he dreams of a paradise “where there is no Dirt” and where the “Harp is daily sterilized/ And the Saints’ Thoughts have all been Pasteurized.” She hopes however that he’ll condescend to go to the ordinary paradise “where most of the Rest of us will be” for “it’s very likely,” given “all those Masses that he hears,” . . . “he’ll reach the Golden Stairs.” With tongue in cheek, the narrator speaks of the father’s betrayal by some “Demon who delights in Dirt,” and who has dirtied the things god has made, things like “flies.” Such a poem also reminds the reader yet again of the dual-gender of the father, who took over the dead mother’s role and not only loved and nurtured his daughter, but attempted to keep clean both her house and her soul. In addition to the redemption of

her father, however, Coleman seems also to have believed, her texts indicate, that she had won the other John Holms's entry into heaven, as well. Having resisted "a horrible temptation in 1950," the "I" confesses in her journal, "something John would never have believed possible of me (in relation to him), I had this sense suddenly of his entering Heaven" (Nov. 15, 1958 [ser 11 box 98 file 885]). This entry suggests that the "I" understood her earthly suffering in resisting temptation to have opened to him the gates of the eternal Kingdom. Subsequently, she would "see" him in heaven twice more and feel assured that he was safe (ibid). By this time, mystical experiences had become common fare for Coleman. Her god frequently spoke to her or sent her signs. On one occasion, the statue of St. Augustine in St. Patrick's Square in New York smiled at her and moved, while on another, noted by Raissa Maritain's sister, Vera Oumansouff, Coleman perceived the deceased mystic poet and friend of the Maritains, Leon Bloy, pass through the living room of their flat ("Reminiscences," 16).

During the fifties, the biblical family gradually occupied in Coleman's texts the place once devoted to her self, her family and her friends. She produced, for example, a spate of theological dramas such as "Christ and Peter," "David," and "The Gospel of Mary," which never saw production. However, the period which overlaps her friendship with the Maritains, brought a certain degree of inner peace and enough psychic confidence for her to once again explore textually her family relations. After Raissa's death, she dredged up the old material, including questions of gender. In "The Stepfather," Coleman reveals through the husband figure (yet another "John")

how his possessiveness and jealousy, as well as his insistence on gendered roles for his wife Jenny and

her son, Bill, destroy their partnership (236-243).⁴⁰ Coleman perhaps seeks now reasons other than those of the Church to explain her abandonment of her husband and points to John's need to be in complete control of his wife. In order to possess her feelings entirely, he sends her son away. The power of possession had long interested Coleman. It was the subject of her novel, "The Tygon," begun in the late twenties, but she now brought the manuscript to completion and, in 1963, dedicated it to her first husband, Deak Coleman.

Jealousy, possession and control lie at the core also of her two gendered versions of a similar story entitled "The Mother" and "A Father," and written in 1961 and 1962 respectively, the definite and indefinite pronouns perhaps indicating the site of difference as Coleman now perceived it unconsciously (ser. 111.6 box 117 file 1038 & 1037). In the first case, a mad mother dependent on her daughter's care prohibits her from marrying the man who loves her, while in the second, a jealous father, reluctant to allow his daughter to marry and leave him, exhibits shock and anger when he misinterprets his daughter's presence in the room in which her fiancé sleeps. The significant difference between the male and female versions of the story lie in the daughter's ready, almost willing acceptance of her mother's desire to keep her with her always, and her adamant refusal of the same to her father who demands

⁴⁰ Coleman, "The Steppather," Art and Literature: An International Review 4 (1965): 236-243.

control of her sexual behavior also. In a final version, written in 1964, Coleman combines the two stories, with the mother being placed in a mental institution by the father and a more feminized father sobbing for not having protected his daughter from her fiancé's advances. Thus, does "a" father become "the" mother, usurping the mother's position in the daughter's life. Coleman seems to suggest that the daughter would have preferred to remain with her mother and to concentrate the love and desire she might have expended on men, onto the mother instead. That same year, however, she reworked another story, "The Visit," in which she describes a mentally ill mother visiting her daughter at school, unannounced (ser 111.6 box 117 file 1045). The child, calmly and collectedly, reboards the mother on the bus to the asylum from which she has come, raising the question of collaboration with the father in the suppression of the mother and contradicting the desire expressed in the earlier story. Later the same year, doctors operated on Coleman for a benign brain tumor and soon afterwards delivered shock treatment to her for hysteria.⁴¹

The testing of the waters appears to have revived Coleman's earliest emotions about the relationship of female sexuality to the spiritual and particularly the relationship of both to power. As early as 1932, the "I" of her journals had admitted her desire for power in her sexual relationships (ser. 11 box 77 file 630: 82) and in

⁴¹ Letter from Coleman's English doctor, Dr. W. D. Steel, June 26, 1968, explaining her medical treatment from 1964-1968. "During the Radiotherapy, she became Hypomanic and the treatment had to be discontinued, but she responded to E.C.T. and in due course her Radiotherapy was concluded . . ." E.C.T. stands for Electro Convulsive Treatment, more commonly known as "shock treatment."

1936, acknowledged her feminine passion as a masculine trait, a manifestation of genius that had about it something “foreign,” “removed from ordinary life -- unworldly and in the sphere of the mind” (ser. 11 box 78 file 637). In this almost mystical context of love, she thus judged Peter Hoare’s refusal of her passion as “setting himself against God” (ibid.). When in 1968, therefore, Coleman moved to the Catholic Worker Farm at Tivoli in New York State, and joined other powerful women, among them Dorothy Day, Peggy Baird, and Helene Iswolsky, all of whom had suffered in passionate relationships, she stepped into an empowering Catholic matriarchy that reaffirmed her beliefs about woman’s love.⁴² Here lived women whose passions, diverted into the spiritual and textual, had made them powerful figures in their own rights. Coleman brought into this group her own experiences and found in their companionship perhaps a home in which she could come into her sexual/spiritual own. For, she now turned the full force of her passion onto Jesus, producing stylistic religious paintings of Him bearing not the traditional visage of Catholic iconography, but her own elderly woman’s face. In capturing this Oneness with her god, Coleman brought all her *semiotic* emotions to bear. She merged with

⁴² Peggy Baird (Cowley) with the poet, Hart Crane, Helene Iswolsky with the Russian revolutionary leader, Alexander Kerensky, and Dorothy Day with Forster Battingham (Dorothy Day was the co-founder with Peter Maurin of the Catholic Worker movement and her autobiography, The Long Loneliness, outlines her spiritual odyssey, her conversion to Catholicism and the founding of the Catholic Worker newspaper. It also makes clear the passion of the woman, describing her sexually active life in New York prior to her conversion, including the abortion she underwent out of fear of losing the man she loved, who left her anyway. This same passion ultimately became diverted into her commitment to the community and to her god)

Him in total identification, becoming one with Him in relation to the Father.

Male/female, spirit/flesh, mind/matter, subject/object . . . all binaries combined in the god-image that evidenced the power of the *semiotic*. The linkage of this hybrid deity with the traces of that original pre-oedipal, dual-gendered m(Other) for whom Coleman had so long suffered and yearned, perhaps finally brought her peace of mind. Her spiritual quest to reach this point, as revealed through her fiction, essays and journals, had challenged those who would limit woman's spiritual self-definitions and, in the end, had showed her desire for truth to be inextricable from the sexuality through which she expressed and desired love.

Chapter Four
The Unknown Worlds of Djuna Barnes (1892-1982)

Atheist or Agnostic?

Djuna Barnes seldom spoke *directly* to anyone about the traumas she experienced as a child growing up in an unconventional and promiscuous family.¹ Instead, she camouflaged the truth of her life by refusing to fix her words. It was as if the act of saying it in bald, precise language somehow lessened its complexity and detracted from the singular and unique character of her own experience. Then, too, her pride precluded her from laying herself bare and having others gawk at her humiliation. On September 20, 1935, she wrote to Emily Coleman about an unpleasant altercation she'd had with their mutual friend, Eustace Hildesheimer, who had taken twenty guests on an after-luncheon stroll to see a badly beaten dog who lay dying in his stables.² “. . . that poor demented dog ..absolutely knew he was being looked at for what had happened to him, for his disqualification,” she wrote, “ you could see it in the way he would not turn his eyes aside, too damned to make his eyeballs turn. . . .” (ibid.). It comes as no surprise then that Barnes also protected her spiritual beliefs from gawkers and voyeurs. She possessed an innate “dislike of parading, or ‘telling on’ the innermost secret,” she wrote to Emily Coleman who had asked her views on

¹ For biographical details of Djuna Barnes's life, see Phillip Herring, Djuna: The Life and Work of Djuna Barnes (New York: Viking, 1995) and Andrew Field, Djuna: The Formidable Miss Barnes (Austin: U of Texas P, 1985).

² Barnes to Coleman, Sept. 20, 1935, Ts., Correspondence, EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2 file 11).

the occult and, in particular, why she had refused to join her friends on a visit to a fortune-teller.³ “Contrary to you,” she told Coleman, a proliferate and verbose examiner of her spiritual self, “I am happier in silence.”⁴ This silence about her personal beliefs, together with her often critical and ribald treatment of institutional religion in her texts, encouraged readers to assume Barnes’s atheism. Certainly, her irreverent descriptions of traditional faith suggested disillusion with Christian practice. Dr. O’ Connor, for instance, claims in Nightwood that “the Catholic is the girl you love so much that she can lie to you, and the Protestant is the girl that loves you so much that you can lie to her”(20). In Ladies Almanack, sainthood is bestowed on Evangeline Musset on the grounds that she brings relief to young women with inflamed parts while in Ryder, in language reminiscent of the bible, a sexually-charged Wendell is introduced by the narrator as the mock savior, Jesus Mundane.

Since, however, the tragedy of Barnes’s life both in its relation to her family and to Thelma Wood lies in the promiscuity and passions of those she loved and not in their religiosity, the inordinate amount of scorn Barnes heaps upon religion tends toward overkill and begs the question, why? Why did Barnes constantly express herself through the discourse of the church when writing about her agnostic father, Wald Barnes? Further, why do so many of Nightwood’s chapter headings --

³ Barnes to Coleman, Nov. 30, 1937, Ts., Correspondence, EC Collection,. (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 33).

⁴ Barnes to Coleman, Jan.5, 1939, Ts., Correspondence EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 41).

“Watchman, what of the night?” “Where the tree falls,” and “Go down, Matthew” -- play on references from the Bible?⁵ And why do ecclesiastical objects, unrelated to the satire, as for example the church furnishings in Nora and Robin’s apartment, dot the descriptions like so many contradictory points of lights?⁶ At the very least, some ambiguity towards the religious impulse seems to color her texts, suggesting perhaps that her views on the existence of an absolute and her own role in the universe may have been more complex than she let on. Certainly, she claimed to be interested in religion (Herring, Djuna, 221). Although contemporary critics focus largely on sexuality as the *raison d’être* of Barnes’s texts, many of those who knew her or wrote biographical studies of her life and work point to some kind of religious consciousness as her sustaining ideology, even as they struggle to define it. Andrew Field suggests that Barnes, like Nora, adhered to early Christian, Gnostic teachings, and identifies her as a Saturnian Christian who believed in man’s relationship to the

⁵ The references for these chapter titles are as follows: “Go Down, Matthew” (In a letter to Eunace Hildeshiemer, July 25, 1959, quoted in Silence and Power, ed. Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram [Chapel Hill: U of N. Carolina, 1989], p205, Barnes affirmed that it referred to the gospel song, “Go down Moses, let my people go.”); “Where the tree falls” (Ecclesiastes 11:3); and “Watchman, what of the night?” (Isaiah 21:11-12).

⁶ In Nora and Robin’s apartment in the rue du Cherche-Midi were items that “attested to their mutual love, the combining of their humours”(Nightwood, 55). Among the expected circus items were also “cherubim from Vienna” and “ecclesiastical hangings from Rome” (55). Later, Robin would acquire a plaster virgin (124). Phillip Herring lists amongst the contents of the Barnes-Wood apartment at 9, rue Saint-Romain, seven ecclesiastical pillows, a picture of Saint Stephanus painted on glass, church roses in tinsel, one church runner over the mantel, and one China virgin. There were also, he claims, many books on Catholic philosophy (Djuna, 143-144).

animal, and god's presence in him as an on-loan "divine spark" which returned on death once again to god (Djuna, 169-170).⁷ Field does not enlarge on his theory, but claims that such Gnostics abstained from flesh and marriage and advocated childlessness in the belief that matter itself was evil. If Field is on the right track (as I think he is, although Barnes's Gnosticism was much more eclectic than a narrowly defined Saturnianism, as I shall illustrate later in this chapter), such Gnosticism leaves a number of questions unanswered. It does not explain, for example, Barnes's active sexual life, nor reconcile her own promiscuity with her expectations of monogamy from Thelma Wood. Nor does it clarify, outside of incest, her rage at her father's giving expression to his libido if she too frequently vented hers. For all her sexual playing out and her identification of man's close relationship to the animals, Barnes obviously aspired to something more, since her writings attest to her leanings towards the transcendent. Catherine Stimpson points out in her "Afterward" to Silence and Power, that Barnes was "too much in thrall to a cosmology of heaven and hell, of salvation and damnation, in which earth is both testing and killing ground, to be a

⁷ Other than Field's allusion to Barnes's great-uncle Thomas Cushman Budington's 1886 book that deals with Julian, the Apostate and the relationship between paganism and Christianity, no specific textual evidence exists for Barnes's access to Gnostic teaching (170). Field claims that "the ideas were in the family," so we assume that such teachings were handed down, along with the Spiritualism of Zadel Barnes and that of her first husband, Henry Aaron Budington. Barnes received much of her education in this way. In any case, whatever the means by which she came by her knowledge of Gnostic thought, her texts are rife with its concepts, thus it is not surprising that she describes Nora, her autobiographical protagonist in Nightwood, as "by temperament . . . an early Christian" (51).

post-structuralist”(371). Thus, although she could not put her faith in a benevolent and forgiving God, she also could not accept that there existed nothing, no ultimate truth to make sense of the polarized state in which human beings flounder. The search for truth predicated all her writing; it was her aim, Cheryl Plumb claims in “Revising Nightwood: ‘A Kind of Glee of Despair.’”⁸ For Barnes was a seeker, a “yearner,” I suggest, who sought personal answers to the confusion of being. Kannenstine, in The Art of Djuna Barnes: Duality and Damnation, writes of Barnes’s “ontological bewilderment,” and places her contextually with her peers in the “human condition of not understanding” that resulted from “the collapse of traditional patterns of existence.”⁹ To Hank O’Neal, Barnes was an agnostic who “believe(d) her own ignorance,” although he acknowledges in his book, Life is... painful, nasty and short.... that she admitted to him a kinship with Ingmar Bergman’s ideas about God and religion.¹⁰ She explained no further about Bergman, but since most of his films deal with the individual’s search for faith in the midst of anguished disbelief, it is probable that Barnes perceived herself thus. In the last decade of her life, she wrote

⁸ Cheryl Plumb, “Revising Nightwood: ‘A Kind of Glee of Despair,’” Review of Contemporary Fiction, 13.3 (1993): 159.

⁹ Louis F. Kannenstine and Allan Smith, The Art of Djuna Barnes: Duality and Damnation (New York: New York UP, 1977) XIV.

¹⁰ Hank O’Neal, “Life is ...painful, nasty and short...in my case it has only been painful and nasty”: Djuna Barnes 1978-1981: An Informal Memoir (New York: Paragon House, 1990) 42, 37.

spiritual poems which O'Neal describes as "religious in a mysterious, non-secular way" (62).

On the one hand, then, we have the sacrilegious, unbelieving Barnes who ridiculed organized religion and was impatient for death as a means to terminate the terrible suffering of her life and, on the other, Barnes, the aetiological seeker, trying to create meaning out of that very same suffering as justification for having experienced it at all. Although seemingly contradictory assumptions, in fact they may each accurately reflect the inner life of Djuna Barnes, being partly the transferred products, I suggest, of her internalized relationships with her immediate family. For what Field has omitted from his designation of Barnes's religious beliefs as pre-Christian is the shaping of that Gnostic thought by its interaction with the unconscious.¹¹ Barnes's experience of familial interpsychic dynamics affected her perception of Gnostic thought as much as did that of White and Coleman their versions of Catholicism. In order to show in Barnes's texts the distortion of such beliefs and their formulation into a vision uniquely hers, I shall make use of the object relations theories of Donald Winnicott wherein religion's relationship to the internal life of the imagination exists as a continuation of childhood's intermediate area of experience, in which the author plays out relationships with *transitional objects*. In my application of this approach to Barnes's texts, the author will be seen not only to possess a religious ideology at

¹¹ For a detailed account of Gnostic beliefs, see Hans Jolas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).

the time of her earliest journalistic writings, but to develop and change this ideology in her texts over the span of her life in response to her ongoing renegotiations of her internalized relationships. The pre-Christian Gnosticism that Field detects as providing the basis of her beliefs, will undergo sea-change and transform itself into a personal and strangely materialist vision of Gnostic truth. In this context of evolving beliefs, then, I shall show her masterpiece Nightwood to represent the turning point in her spiritual life and the mature vision of her unique spiritual ideology to reside in her supposedly slight final work, Creatures in an Alphabet.

With few certain facts about the young Barnes at our disposal, it may seem presumptuous to attempt an analysis that links Barnes's psychic experience with her religious beliefs. However, as I already have stressed in the case of White and Coleman, the facts signify less than the way in which Barnes can be seen through her texts to have perceived and internalized such facts in her unconscious. The texts, then, serve as a kind of rear-view mirror back into her unconscious past and, further, provide us with a more accurate bridge to understanding her spiritual aspirations than do the external biographical facts of her life. Given this perspective, the application of Winnicott's pre-oedipal theories opens doors into a relatively unexplored spiritual unconscious, one which few critics have plumbed and which Barnes herself, notoriously lacking in introspection and the ability to formulate abstractions from her senses, refused to name.¹² I shall approach this unconscious first by examining

¹² In her journal entry of July 23rd, 1933, for example, Emily Coleman writes of Barnes, "She hasn't the faintest capacity to reason from one thing to another," and

Barnes's texts in the light of four of Winnicott's main concepts -- trust and transitional objects, the use of an object, the false self, and play in the intermediate space -- and proceed thereafter by applying the conclusions drawn from such analyses to the traces of the Other revealed in the texts.¹³ That this Other neither fits existing religious discourse, nor perhaps is convincing to readers as a spiritual alternative to such ideologies, should not negate its spiritual function in the art of Djuna Barnes.

Basic Trust and *Transitional Objects*

For Winnicott, "good enough" mothering, by which he signifies a "holding" environment with a mother who anticipates and responds adequately to the infant's needs, enables the child to begin the process of separation from the primary figure by transferring its emotions in her absence to a mother-substitute -- the *transitional object*. This *transitional object* -- a 'blanky' or a thumb, for example -- occupies an intermediate space between reality and the imaginary and signifies the child's first experience with the handling of illusion. As the child matures, this object gradually becomes decathected and new ones are acquired allowing for the manipulation of illusion in the area of play, and ultimately over the entire cultural area including art and religion (Playing and Reality, 1-6). Thus, in Winnicott's thinking, religion can be seen as an intermediate area of play in which one interacts with *transitional objects* --

suggests Barnes's insecurity when Coleman engages Antonia White in abstract conversation (EC Collection, ser. 11 box 77 file 631).

¹³ D. W. Winnicott, Playing and Reality, 1971 (London: Routledge, 1989); The Maturation Processes and The Facilitating Environment, (London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1965).

mother, father, siblings, lovers -- which are both real and imaginary (176). Since, Barnes's literary texts testify to her ability to work with illusion and to transform through imagination the tragedy of her life, Chappell's mothering of her daughter during her first two years of life, by definition, approached Winnicott's notion of requisite adequacy for the process of mothering. If this is so, it follows therefore that Barnes possessed the necessary basic trust and experience of *transitional objects* to be capable also of spiritual "illusion" in that intermediate space between the real and the imaginary.¹⁴ However, given the autobiographical nature of her fiction, its distortion of the notion of *play*, its fetishization of *transitional objects*, and the ambiguity between the *true* and *false selves* of its Djuna characters, such basic trust in Barnes bordered on the barely adequate. What is more, the repeated betrayals of trust, as expressed textually by Barnes, further undercut the foundations of the self, resulting in the constant wavering in her texts between denial of any god whatsoever and a desperate longing to believe in something that would fill narcissistically the hole in her psychic structure.

¹⁴ While the basic trust established between mother and child can be transferred to the realm of the spiritual, whether to traditional religion, nature, theosophy of one sort or another, or even to atheism, this does not mean that the children of inadequate mothers cannot also believe in Ultimacy. Positive support, whether through analysis or in interaction with other objects, can open such children to trust. See, for example, the theories of James Masterson, *The Real Self* (New York: Brunner Mazel, 1985) or those of Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1977).

In the first instance, the representation of mother/daughter relationships in Barnes's texts imply a conception of this vital bond as inherently untrustworthy. Love of the maternal kind barely surfaces, either in her early stories or her later works, and mothers neither touch nor hug their children. A vast chasm of unspoken betrayal separates girl from woman, preventing either from acknowledging connection. In "Aller et Retour," Richter holds her hands behind her back on greeting her mother after an absence of seven years and makes polite talk with Madame von Bartmann who shows herself more interested in seeing her old house again than her daughter (Spillway, 12). She does lift the child's chin with her palm, declaring her now a woman, but her conversation centers on the life-message she wants to impart rather than on her daughter's own desires. Likewise, the title story's protagonist, Julie Anspacher, possesses little understanding of a young girl's feelings. "(D)on't be ridiculous!" she barks at Anne who has asked enthusiastically whether she can see the big, black horses (Spillway, 89). The child "shr(i)nk(s) into herself, clutching nervously at her muff," while her mother returns to her reflections (ibid). The child presents an inconvenience, a complication in Anspacher's life, for whom she must find a caregiver until the child too dies of TB. Mothers in Barnes's texts forever try to pass off their daughters onto others, and the author foregrounds the burdens such daughters represent by depicting them as ill. In "Cassation," Gaya tries to transfer the care of her "idiot" daughter, Valentine, to the young girl Katya who refuses (Spillway, 20), while in "The Head of Babylon," Theeg, the paraplegic daughter of a polish farming family is married off to an older man, her entire body except for her

head subject to his desires (Smoke, 109). In the latter story particularly a sense of betrayal pervades the marriage scene, with the mother eliciting a “yes” to her inquiry about Theeg’s comfort at the exact moment the priest asks her daughter, “will you take this man?” Barnes’s description of Theeg sitting on the sofa like “some splendid and tranquil candied fruit” further points to the helpless young woman’s fate.

This attempted disposal of daughters fits generally with Barnes’s advocacy of childlessness, with Amelia’s advice in Ryder to her daughter, Julie, for example, “never, never, have children.” Field argues that Barnes’s Saturnian Christianity influenced her textual advocacy, but the Gnosticism of Marcion of Sinape in Pontus, with its emphasis on reproduction rather than sex itself, perhaps made more of a personal impression on the sexually active Barnes (Djuna, 169-170).¹⁵ Certainly, Barnes’s naming in Ryder of the matriarch, based on her grandmother Zadel, after Gnosticism’s Sophia points in that direction.¹⁶ However, Barnes also had every earthly reason to be wary of motherhood.¹⁷ If we are to believe her description of her

¹⁵ The Gnostic Religion, 144.

¹⁶ Many versions of the Sophia narrative exist, but in general she is considered the female side of the deity who without His consent impregnated herself and gave birth to the seven angels, who created the material worlds in which humankind is imprisoned (The Gnostic Religion, 134-136).

¹⁷ Carolyn Allen, in Following Djuna: Women Lovers and the Erotics of Loss (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996), writes of the *nurturing* mother/child relationship between Nora and Robin in Nightwood. However, the mother/child dyad in this case, because of the masculine freedom of the child/lover Robin to whom the mother Nora defers, functions within a different framework of power and is therefore not comparable to the situation I am describing in the context of Winnicott’s paradigm.

family in Ryder -- she admitted to James Scott, who had written a critical study on Barnes for the Twayne series, that both Ryder in that novel and Titus in The Antiphon "are my father" (Field, Djuna, 185) -- we know that Elizabeth and Zadel each played a part in the young woman's being forcefully given by her father to an older man, Percy Faulkner. The signifier "mother" ceased early on to carry the positive connotations of "love" and "protection." Sophia's pragmatic use of it in Ryder to fool Amelia into parting with her inheritance (33) and to procure Kate as an offering to Wald's lust (86) linked the term with betrayal. Its very sound -- "Mother" -- deceived the listener into lowering her defenses, its cultural messages providing the shield behind which its bearer could pursue her own often ignoble ends. "Every mother," Miranda comments bitterly in The Antiphon, "in extortion for her milk . . . Draws blood" (116). For Miranda, such blood ultimately signified death at the hands of her mother, Augusta, who held her responsible for stealing her husband's affection and for alienating her sons (117). Neither mother nor daughter blames Titus for his incestuous behavior, as Louise De Salvo points out in "To make her Mutton at Sixteen," neither recognizing the other's victimization (Silence and Power, 310). Augusta, instead, scapegoats her daughter, shouting as she beats Miranda to death with the bell, "you are to blame, to blame, you are to blame. . ." (126).

Since the Gnostic Sophia, unlike the Sophia in Ryder, suffered tremendous guilt and anguish over her actions, the similarity between the two Sophias ends with

their common name.¹⁸ Barnes's mother figures, both textual and real, express neither awareness nor remorse over their treatment of "daughters." Thus, even as Barnes from a feminist perspective foregrounds patriarchal society's oppression of women through motherhood, she denies maternal qualities, such as unqualified love, nurture and protection, as essentially female. Ryder's Amelia, for example, limited by pregnancies and hence financial dependence from pursuing her own happiness, fits the oppressed woman profile, but she is barely any more a nurturing figure to her daughter than is her husband. Neither mother nor father holds the prerogative on betrayal of their daughter's trust and both possess or lack qualities attributed to both sexes.

Betrayal of trust, of course, constitutes one of the major themes in Barnes's texts and points to a relative failure of mother and child to establish the early trust which Winnicott deems necessary for the child's later ability to work with other *transitional objects*. However, we know that despite such betrayals, Barnes continued to gamble with trust, opening up her vulnerable self to love with new *transitional objects*, such as "Putzi" Hanfstaengl, Thelma Wood and Charles Henri Ford. When they turned their affections elsewhere, Hanfstaengl and Wood essentially betraying her love, she transferred her trust to art, imbuing Nightwood and The

¹⁸ In the Syrian version of the Valentinian Gnostic System, Sophia conceives passionately but immaculately, not unlike the fictional Sophia in Ryder who claimed to have conceived Wendell through the spirit of Beethoven.

Antiphon with all her considerable passion.¹⁹ That these latter decathected human “objects” never entirely lost meaning for Barnes, further points to a lack of psychopathology in the woman-child with regard to trust, as described by Winnicott in Playing and Reality (15). Barnes remained friends with all three of her ex-lovers and continued to seek her mother’s affection and approval until Elisabeth Chappell’s death in 1945. The love and protection of her grandmother in whose bed Barnes slept from the age of two to seventeen no doubt contributed to this early sense of security. “I loved (Zadel),” she wrote in a 1931 fragment called “Show Break,” “as a child usually loves its mother.”²⁰ Yet Zadel, too, was destined to betray Barnes, firstly in the sexual familiarity with which she treated her granddaughter and which I shall explore further in the next section, and finally when, with the words “It has to

¹⁹ Phillip Herring provides a detailed account of “Putzi” Hanfstaengl and his romance with Barnes which flowered between 1914 to 1916 (Djuna, 66-73). Hanfstaengl informed Barnes that he must have a German wife for his children and broke off their relationship to terrible affect. A deleted section of Nightwood suggests that Barnes felt devastated by this betrayal and contemplated suicide.

Herring also fleshes out the story of Thelma Wood’s life, her betrayal of Barnes’s love through her promiscuity, and finally her “marriage” to Henrietta Metcalf, the “Squatter” Jenny Petherbridge in Nightwood (156-170).

Charles Henri Ford’s relationship with Barnes, when he was 21 and she 39, ended when she found herself pregnant with another man’s child. Although Ford offered to marry her and keep the child, she refused. Soon after her abortion by Dan Mahoney (Dr. O’Connor of Nightwood), the relationship cooled and they went their separate ways (Herring, Djuna, 171-184).

²⁰ Phillip Herring, “Zadel Barnes: Journalist.” Review of Contemporary Fiction, 107.

happen,” she abetted her son’s forceful coercion of the teenage Djuna into common law marriage.²¹

This familiar pattern of betrayal, I suggest, took its toll on Barnes’s psyche. Although her “good enough” mothering made her capable of illusion, the peculiarities of her familial relations distorted her illusions as manifest in her texts and ultimately gave their unique shape to her metaphysical concepts. The particular experiences which contributed to this distortion occurred in that intermediate area of play between subjective and objective reality, that third area which Winnicott perceives as providing relief from the strain of relating inner and outer reality (Playing and Reality, 13). This space lies in direct continuity with the play area of the small child, in which the child learns how to relate to objects, and ultimately to the world. And it is here, in the process of play that Barnes’s conception of trust perhaps underwent disturbance and distortion while simultaneously remaining adequate enough for the author to project the conflicts of her life into art and religion.

Play and the *Intermediate Area*

If the word “mother” signified ambiguously for Djuna Barnes, as I have described it above, then the gap between “play” and its signified reveals slippage equally disruptive to psychological and spiritual growth. “Play” in the Barnes household, that supposedly safe intermediate area that Winnicott describes in Playing and Reality, registers only in the sexual mode. What is more, the mother figures of trust, Elisabeth and Zadel, in whose presence the child will participate in that creative and imaginary

²¹ Djuna Barnes: Nightwood: The Original Version and Related Drafts, 300.

play which Winnicott links to the more sophisticated cultural realms of art and religion, are themselves involved in the sexualization of play. Zadel's letters to Djuna, for example, suggest a continuation of sexual play begun between grandmother and daughter in the bed they shared for 15 years. Barnes played with Zadel's breasts which she called "Redlero" and "Kedler" and sent her grandmother a letter on February 26, 1909 with a drawing of a prostrate woman with a writing pen inserted between her legs as an illustration of how she looked when no letter came from Zadel that day²² Zadel Barnes, in her turn, drew a sketch of her breasts stretched out of shape to look like penises. "Dey's stretched orfel!" she wrote of her "pink tops" to the 13 year-old Barnes on July 9, 1905. A March 4, 1909 letter to the almost 17 year-old Djuna reads, "When I sees you sweet hands ahuggin you own P.T.'s -- I is just crazy and I jumps on oo! Like dis. Wiv dis wesusult." -- followed by a drawing of one nude woman atop another, breast to breast, and signed, "ownest lishous

²² Philip Herring, drawing on the Zadel-Djuna correspondence in the Papers of Djuna Barnes, Special Collections, University of Maryland at College Park Libraries, states that Barnes slept beside Zadel for 15 years ("Zadel Barnes: Journalist." Review of Contemporary Fiction [1993]: 107-116). Whether those 15 years stretched from 2-17 or from 1-16 remains uncertain since some discrepancy exists between the exact dates of Wald Barnes's sexual offering of his daughter to the 52 year-old Percy Faulkner, and her taking leave of the Long Island farm with him. Andrew Field names the year, 1910 (Djuna 43), which would make Barnes 17 or 18, but Mary Lynne Broe pins it down at 1909 (Silence and Power, 5). Neither specifies the month, but since Barnes's birthday fell in June, it is possible that the depiction of her age as 17 may fit both accounts. Barnes's own textual representation of Miranda's rape by Titus in The Antiphon fixes her age as 16, but in a letter to Zadel dated February 26, 1909, by which date Barnes already had turned 17, she drew a picture of herself with a pen stuck between her legs as an illustration of how she looked when no letter from Zadel

grandmother.” Herring suggests that incest is too strong a word for this bawdy correspondence, speaking of it instead as entertainment and “family fun” in line with the family’s ethos of natural and carefree sexuality (56). However, when he claims that in any case their sexual relationship is only of significance if Barnes sustained psychological damage or some sense of empowerment, and concludes that “there is no evidence that she did,” he makes too light of the experience (Review of Contemporary Fiction, 115).²³ While it is true that in later life Barnes claimed to feel guilt-free about sex, her experience of it points to considerable confusion as to its role and meaning in different contexts.²⁴ If sex equaled play, such play as quoted in the letters above correlated also with love and affection. Yet, the “playful” sex in which her brothers engaged at her expense registers as degrading and frequently sadistic. Elisha’s description in The Antiphon of how he used to “tease” Miranda by “goug(ing) my chin into the shoulder bone, and whiz(zing) my thumb into the buttock joint,” belongs to an entirely different order of fun than that of Zadel (56). The pig

came that day. It is unlikely that she would have been capable of such a drawing after her experience with Faulkner.

²³ Herring offers a more detailed description of these letters between Barnes and her grandmother in his biography of the author, Djuna: The Life and Work of Djuna Barnes, 52-59. He still sees no harm in Zadel’s seduction of her granddaughter, although he admits in this later work that Wald’s betrayal of Djuna’s love for him “caused psychological scars that never healed” (270).

²⁴ Antonia White recorded in her diary of December 4, 1937, “Djuna told me she had no feeling of guilt whatever about sex, about going to bed with any man or woman she wanted, but that she felt extremely guilty and ashamed about drinking. . . .” (Antonia White: Diaries 1926-1957, ed. Susan Chitty, 115).

and ass masks he and Dudley don before assaulting Miranda and Augusta situate the action within the discourse of the nursery, but Barnes, by making the undercurrent of family sex explicit, contaminates those nursery signifiers and suggests the deceit by which the child, Miranda was made to see her sexual abuse in the normal context of family play. "Going to play with baby?" Dudley asks Augusta, striking out at her with light rapid taps, as of a boxer sparring (87). Augusta's enthusiastic and excited response, "A Game! A Game!" indicates that the older woman still knowingly bought into the deceit, though the 60-ish Miranda is no longer fooled by Dudley's "I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house down" (86). She knows what the wolf wants, although such knowledge has come too late. She long ago opened the door to the wolf, and his beastly odor now has become a permanent fixture of her sense of smell. Door, like gate, however, will continue to register metonymically throughout Barnes's work. For example, when Augusta propositions Miranda -- "Come, play me daughter" -- Miranda refuses, claiming that though once, "I . . . loved thee," after her rape, after "the unmuzzled bone drew down the hood of flesh," "A door slammed on Eden, and the Second Gate" (103). Still, she hungers for her mother's love, and she sees in death the possibility of its consummation, for "Love is death" and "Murder's as near to lust as flame to smoke" (104). Augusta fearing her daughter wishes to kill her, accuses Miranda of wanting to "lay/ me ticking down, ten cities deep!" but Miranda demurs, "Nay, sparrow/ I'd lay you in the journey of your bed/ And un-bed you, and I could, in paradise" (126).

For Barnes, then, play perhaps could not be distinguished from sex, nor sex from love, nor love from incest. Winnicott writes in Playing and Reality that the inherent excitement of playing derives from “the precariousness that belongs to the interplay in the child’s mind of that which is subjective (near-hallucination) and that which is objectively perceived (actual, or shared reality)”(52). However, “if, as in seduction, some external agency exploits the child’s instincts and helps to annihilate the child’s sense of existing as an autonomous unit, . . . playing (is made) impossible” (52). As we know, play was never impossible for Barnes who continued to “play” creatively in the *intermediate space* of her fictional writing. She was able to escape this fate precisely because the seductions which exploited her play took the guise of play itself, thus entering into Winnicott’s *third space* between internal and external reality -- her literary work -- as a major dimension of her experience with *transitional phenomena*. (In making this claim, I refer to those sexual experiences with Barnes’s grandmother, mother and brothers as I have described them, and not to the father’s possible rape or his sexual bartering of her to an older man. These latter incidents belong to the earlier topic of trust and betrayal which has different ramifications, namely violence, guilt and a sacrificial sense of atonement, subjects with which I shall deal later in this chapter). On the topic of autonomy, however, the correlation fits less well. As *Magister Ludi*, the supposedly omnipotent author controlled the action of the fictional play, establishing the rules and setting the odds, but since her notion of play had been instilled from without, that is, by her family, she knew no other way to play. With the exception of the journalistic essays and interviews that were assigned,

virtually all her fictional work dealt with one or another aspect of the sexual theme that dominated her life. Sexual “playing” in Barnes’s life remained indistinguishable from any other kind of play, and transferred itself in the direct line of *transitional phenomena* into her texts, and ultimately, we shall see, into her notions of the spiritual world. One of the few “play” scenes of the child Julie in Ryder shows the 10 year-old girl lying in bed playing at being pregnant and calling out, “Wendell! Wendell!” as she “clutches to her breast a rag doll thrown from the door . . . by the strong paternal arm of Timothy, who was God and The Father” (95). Even in her earlier stories, “A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady,” “The Little Girl Continues,” and “Dusie,” for example, the-little-girl-who-tells comes across as precocious in her story-telling-play, for she balances with precarious daring between childish innocence and sexual knowing. As Carolyn Allen points out in “Writing Towards *Nightwood*,” these are seduction stories of the older “madame” by the younger narrator (Silence and Power, 58). Thus, “playing” in this form, i.e., story-telling, is essentially a means of seduction and, as such, derives from a family tradition of story-telling as sexual play. Just as Ladies Almanack, for example, may have been written both for the entertainment of a sick Thelma as well as for her titillation, so too did Wendell’s stories in Ryder, as told to his children, Julie and Timothy, both entertain and arouse. In “The Beast Thingumbob,” for example, Wendell recounts the sexual relationship of The Beast with the tender-hoofed, ten-breasted woman whom he loves. The chapter ends with the suggestion, through the allegory of a pouncing cat in the dreams of a sexually-aroused Julie, of a seduction/death as the cat falls from the bird-scattered tree (117-

122). Interestingly, however, Julie's arousal -- "the little seeds that go up and down in the dark" -- has been elicited not only by Wendell's play-story but by her reading of a young girl's death in a tale that earlier, when Sophia attempted to read it aloud to them, Wendell had demanded she skip over, lest it made him cry (122). This death, then, that Julie reads by a round kerosene lamp, is itself become the forbidden fruit, the erotically charged love-object that arouses Julie. But once darkness descends, and she falls asleep, she is "tor(n) away from her beloved" and the seeds die. In her dreams, only the preying cat appears, he whose fall from the ledge of her window she notes with surprise, but has "no one to tell it to" (ibid).

Whether or not such an attempted seduction ever occurred to Barnes is of little relevance to our study since by the very process of reading the book we have entered into Barnes's *intermediate space* and must, like the "good enough mother" or the psychoanalyst, participate in her imaginary world if we wish to understand her. In a sense, we as readers collude with the author, accepting what she writes as both subjective and objective, internal and external, fiction and autobiography. In the safety of the *intermediate space*, the text is both.

The Use of an Object and Fetishes

At this point, then, we have established that Barnes, although capable of religious belief because of the minimum trust established in infancy through her relationship with her mother, will be hindered in her conceptualization of it by the infusion of sex into her play area, which she, in the process of decaecting, will transfer to other areas of illusion, namely her art and religion. What is more, this eroticizing of these

cultural areas derive not from her own autonomous play, but from external sources that impose their agendas on her so that they become her own whether she wants them or not. Barnes's moral ambiguity, as witnessed in most of her texts, is thus partially a product of that confusion about autonomy and can be seen in the ambiguous rage she exerts in the *intermediate space*. Herring points out that she was both sexually attracted to her father and Zadel, but "felt deeply betrayed and hurt by what she came to recognize as rape" (Djuna, 269). As a child may express hostility towards a neglectful mother by smashing her "blankey" or "teddy" against the floor in the safety of the *intermediate space* she shares with the mother, so too does the author "smash" her human objects within the safe confines of the literary work. She *uses* her objects, not merely *relating* to them but destroying them and in seeing them yet survive, so testing the limits of reality and illusion. The text thus becomes part of a shared reality, a thing-in-itself which is not-me and not-him-nor-her, yet both they and I know what it is I do to them in my illusionary world. That they "do not retaliate" but instead tolerate such violence confirms for the child the object's existence as separate and not-me, and thus the subject's healthy distinction between illusion and reality (ibid).

Since we know however that Elizabeth Chappell threw her copy of Ryder out the window in disgust (O'Neill, "Reminiscences," Broe's Silence and Power, 357) and that Thelma Wood hit Barnes in the mouth, knocked her down twice and threw a cup of tea at her when she first heard the author's representation of her lover in Nightwood (Herring, Djuna, 165), it could hardly be said in Barnes's case that her

loved ones did not retaliate. The reactions of Barnes's "family" -- the equivalent of a mother destroying a "blanky" or harming the child -- complicated her notion of herself as an autonomous human being and thus contributed to a wavering sense of the distinction between her needs and that of others. Herring, drawing on Coleman's opinion expressed in a January 8, 1940 letter to Barnes, writes that Barnes "used her friends, always taking and never giving, seeing any opposition to her wishes as abusive and disloyal" (Djuna, 252). For that reason, it cannot be claimed that Barnes maintained a healthy distinction between reality and illusion in relation to these *objects*. However, she continued to test the distinction, and in 1958 shocked her family with the publication of The Antiphon.

For Barnes as author/child, brimful of internalized anger for betrayed love, such manipulation of her characters' thoughts and actions provided release for feelings denied her in external reality. Writing enabled her to vent her fury over her exploitation and victimization which in real life she was powerless to redress. So, like the traumatized WWI veterans of Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle, she returned again and again to the details of her pain, hoping each time she relived the scenes of betrayal in her texts, she would make personal sense of their meaning.²⁵ In keeping with Winnicott's theory, then, her repeated *use* of her objects served not only for revenge but to explore also the *reality* of their existence, as if only by *destroying*

²⁵ Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, trans. & ed. James Strachey (1920. New York: Norton, 1962).

them in this *intermediate space* could she truly know the who, what and why of their being. Her destruction of Miranda in The Antiphon partially served the same purpose, for by this point in her life, Barnes truly sought to know her real self .

Barnes's repeated explorations of incest through the use of autobiographical objects in her stories, plays and novels helped her to deal creatively with the source of her pain. However, her sometimes tentative hold on reality as described above found its expression in her fetishization of one of her *transitional objects*, which provided her in the absence of the loved object with the associated sexual and emotional gratification. Her use of the object dog in the *intermediate space* of her text and the transference of this use into her personal adult life, particularly as it relates to her sexual activity, suggest that Barnes experienced at least some confusion between illusion and reality. In an early poem, "Lullaby" (Herring, Djuna, Frontispiece), Barnes writes:

When I was a young child I slept with a dog.
I lived without trouble and I thought no harm;
I ran with the boys and I played leap-frog;
Now it is a girl's head that lies on my arm.

Since we know that the child Djuna slept with her grandmother with whom she exchanged sexual affections, the first line of the stanza reads ambiguously, the connection between dog and love-object suggesting that her later love for a girl, rather than a boy had its genesis there. For Barnes, dogs connote sexual love of the kind that is free and natural and, as such sexualized "beings," whether male or female, they make numerous appearances in Barnes's texts. Thus, when the cuckolded Don

Juan B. C. in "Run Girls, Run!" admits to his promiscuous lady that he weeps "for a whelp crying 'Mother!' high on a spear's end" (256), and the story's next impregnated "girl," the "dog-faced" Nancy resorts to "loud barking, a beagle pointing herself by the scruff of her neck" while men "like hounds" hunt her (259-59), the reader cannot avoid the sexual connotations emanating from the texts (Djuna Barnes: Nightwood: Original Version & Related Drafts).

Each dog-as-signifier is a fetishized *objet petit a* signifying back to the sexual mother, the "bitch" who "pupped" her sons but cast on her daughter "the privy look of dogs/Who turn to quiz the thing they've dropped" (The Antiphon, 12). But the source of this desire goes beyond the mother to the Dog, her mate, Barnes's father, who as god of his private world, like Wendell in Ryder, disposes of his seed with abandon, but not his love. His cruelty -- he whips Barnes and once lowered her threateningly into a well (Herring, Djuna, 52) -- made her turn to Zadel for comfort, and transfer her sexual feelings to her affectionate and loving grandmother, the "dog" of the poem, "Lullaby." In a home in which "natural" animal sexuality constitutes the emotional currency of the household, to be a dog whether male or female suggests the height of lovability, and since Barnes's *need* for love was immense throughout her life, she took every opportunity to play the dog, using the signifier whenever she referred to free sexuality. For example, she signed her letters to her lover, Thelma Wood, "dog-girl" and named her female love-object in Nightwood after Peggy Guggenheim's dog, Robin. She once inscribed a copy of Nightwood as "memories of

Dog Boy,” and in a draft epigraph to The Antiphon, wrote “This my story, its crying of a woman and a Dog” (Field, Djuna, 226).

Saxon said of his sister, Djuna, that she had “gone to the dogs,” and Marion Bouche claimed to “hear in (Djuna’s) bones the barking of a dog.”²⁶ Even if such meaning were commonly understood at the time, Barnes’s excessive use of the analogy extends that meaning further, channeling it along avenues which signified more personally to the author’s unconscious. Thus, for example, Nightwood’s original title, “Bow Down,” besides the religious implications of worship, denotes also the sexual going down on the loved object, which position on all fours equates to that of the dog as well as providing its onomatopoeic significance. The juxtaposition of religion and sex, of god and dog, in this title, taken together with the final scene of the novel depicting Robin in a chapel “bowing down” to Nora’s dog, offers readers a glimpse into the author’s evolving spiritual conception. When Emily Coleman queried her on the meaning of the last scene, she replied, “Let the reader make up his own mind, if he’s not an idiot he’ll know.”²⁷

Barnes’s denial of the sexual implications of this last scene was ignored by most readers of the novel, including Peggy Guggenheim, Edwin Muir and Coleman (Herring, Djuna, 224). Barnes’s lack of awareness about the implications of her

²⁶ Barnes to Coleman, June 28, 1935, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 10).

²⁷ Barnes to Coleman, July 11, 1935, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 11).

writing amazed Emily, yet given the author's limited autonomy in relation to her *transitional objects* as described above, she may well have been unaware of her sexual intimations. They were just automatically there, "natural." She certainly did not experience guilt for them. Sexual guilt lay beyond her ability and she never admitted feeling guilt for any sexual act in which she'd participated. Like Nora, she was "shorn of self-reproach or self-accusation" (53). Despite such disclaimers, however, Barnes's texts are rife with references to guilt. What is more, her very preoccupation with the topic points to her ambivalence and provides the bridge that ultimately connects her psychosexual life with her concepts of the spiritual. By examining these texts, I will show the aetiology of Barnes's ambivalence, namely, the *False Self* which, deferring back psychoanalytically to an ego distortion in childhood, led her to obsess about good and evil.

False Self

Barnes's celebration of free love in Greenwich Village and Left Bank Paris of the twenties and thirties convinced readers and critics of her unencumbered and natural relationship with her own sexuality. Her sexual affinity with similar free thinkers such as Natalie Barney, Emily Coleman, and Peggy Guggenheim further confirmed for them her freedom from the guilt and self-consciousness of bourgeois mentality. Yet, when Ladies Almanack, Ryder and Nightwood appeared, few critics missed the moral ambivalence that permeated the texts. While Ladies Almanack might be a celebration of lesbianism, an inside joke written for Natalie Clifford Barney and her lesbian friends, as Susan Lanser has claimed, it also served, according to Cheryl Plumb, as a

warning about the limitations of earthly love.²⁸ Like Ryder and Nightwood too, Ladies Almanack was both an attack on middle-class sensibilities AND a foregrounding of the absence of ontological meaning in the lives of those practising free love. Contemporary critics of Nightwood struggled to reconcile the two seemingly opposite poles of the narrative voice that simultaneously derided as it sought sympathy and understanding from its readers for the situations of its characters. Early criticisms pointing to the spiritual crisis in Nightwood, such as Graham Green's recognition of "a sick spiritual condition," were speedily discarded, baby and bathwater thrown out to make room for the new criticism which accused Barnes of becoming prudish in her middle age, though she continued to have affairs, even an abortion, and to shock people with her sometimes obscene language.²⁹ Shari Benstock explained Nora's disapproval of Robin's promiscuity by claiming her character to have been drawn from a patriarchal heterosexual rather than a homosexual perspective, a claim which would seem to imply that heterosexuals hold the prerogative on true love and fidelity, this, in spite of the evidence of Ryder.³⁰ In "Modern (Post) Modern: Djuna Barnes among the Others," Donna Gerstenberger

²⁸ Susan Lanser, "Speaking in Tongues: *Ladies Almanack* and The Discourse of Desire, *Silence and Power*; Cheryl Plumb, *Fancy's Craft: Art and Identity in the Early Works of Djuna Barnes* (Selinsgrove: Asusquehanna UP, 1986).

²⁹ Graham Greene, "Fiction Chronicle," The Tablet, clv111 (nov.14, 1936): 678-679. "A sick spiritual condition may have gone into this book, but it is rare in contemporary fiction to be able to trace any spiritual experience whatever, and the accent, I think, is sometimes of a major poet." Douglas Messerli, Djuna Barnes: A Bibliography (New York: David Lewis, 1975).

claimed Barnes's work as a deconstruction of the modernist emphasis on epistemology, the last scene of Nightwood with its "quests, chapels, altars, madonnas, the sacrificial gesture of toys and flowers" mocking the modernist search for cultural meaning (Review of Contemporary Fiction, 3 [1993]: 33-40). But deconstruction also does not fully explain the moral ambiguity the reader senses in Barnes's texts. Catherine Stimpson, quoted earlier, has argued that Barnes lived "too much in thrall to a cosmology of heaven and hell, of salvation and damnation . . . to be a post-structuralist." For that reason too, it is unlikely that she mocked the Modernist spiritual search in its entirety. We know from O'Connor's discussions in Nightwood that she ridiculed Christianity, but Christianity does not represent the full sum of spiritual faith in the Modernist era. In any case, when Coleman in questioning her beliefs pointed out that in Nightwood, "the Doctor does not quite believe (in god) and says so," Barnes responded, "Well, the doctor is the doctor, (he is)not me."³¹ Later in this chapter, I shall discuss Barnes's Gnosticism in detail, but for the moment, I want to point out also that epistemological enlightenment constitutes the very crux of Gnostic thought, knowledge offering the only means by which to overcome the forces of evil in the world.³² Since *ignorance* of the divine spark in humans rather than human immorality per se represents evil in pre-Christian thought, Barnes's textual

³⁰ Shari Benstock, Women of the Left Bank (Austin: U of Texas P, 1986) 258.

³¹ Barnes to Coleman, Sept. 20, 1935, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 11).

³² Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, 174-176.

struggles with notions of good and evil, between Nightwood's Nora and Robin, for instance, assume mental contours which predicate the nature of the physical. Thus, Nora's "awakening" of Robin's mind, for example, can be understood as her attempt through love to bring the first shaft of enlightenment to her purely physical lover. As Coleman was quick to point out to Barnes in the context of her relationship with Thelma Wood, however, she awoke her lover before she was ready, thinking her better than she really was.³³ At that stage, Nora, like Barnes, immersed herself in eschatological searching. Her frequent and ardent wish for death as a revelation of knowledge contradicts Gerstenberger's claim that Barnes *mocked* the quest for truth and knowledge. While death as a means to bring to an end a life of suffering plays a part in her two attempted suicides, we know also that it signified for her something erotic and desirous, "knowledge" that caused "the little seeds to go up and down in the dark," as mentioned earlier.³⁴ If desire to "know" meant death, Barnes embraced that desire with all her passion. "Love is death come upon with passion," Nora says in an early draft of Nightwood, "that is why we say love is wisdom, as death is wisdom; I love her as one condemned to it (sic)" (Djuna Barnes Nightwood, 294).

³³ Coleman to Barnes, possibly Aug. 1935, Letter Fragments, DB Collection (ser. 1 box 4).

³⁴ Barnes attempted suicide on February 10, 1939 by swallowing eighteen Veronal tablets, which she subsequently vomited. Phillip Herring writes that "the episode caused a nervous crisis which resulted in several hospital visits" (Djuna, 246). In the late 1970's, she again swallowed all the pills on her night table, though somehow she missed the sleeping pills. Herring writes that "Barnes told Jane Strong that she woke up the next morning feeling better than she had for years" (296).

Nora, like Helena of Barnes's play, "To the Dogs," knew that desire led to death, and death to knowledge, surely an indication that she at least possessed epistemological desire even if the knowledge she sought from death did not fit the expected norms. Like Felix, O'Connor and Robin, Nora desired a god, but redemption was denied her and them by the culture which dismissed *untermenschen* from inclusion in spiritual life. The Jewish Felix's espousal of Christian identity, the transvestite Doctor's "Mother of God! I wanted to be your son..." (150) and the lesbian Robin's taking of the Catholic vow (45) all point to their ontological aspirations even as they simultaneously allude to the impossibility of changing that which disqualifies them from redemption by the reigning culture, namely Jewishness, transvestitism and lesbianism. When Emily Coleman wanted to cut Felix's story from Nightwood, Barnes insisted that he was necessary to Robin's narrative in order to show that neither marriage nor motherhood could change her essential nature.³⁵ A lesbian was a lesbian irrespective; a Jew a Jew no matter how many times he intermarried with Christians or practised the Christian faith.³⁶ Barnes's choice to make this point of a

³⁵ Barnes to Coleman, Nov. 8, 1935, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 12).

³⁶ Cheryl Plumb points out in her introduction to Djuna Barnes Nightwood: The Original Version and Related Drafts, that Barnes stated in her application for a Guggenheim Scholarship in 1930 that she planned to undertake two projects: (1) "to research the relationship of the Jew and the Court for a book in progress whose chief figure is an Austrian Jew," and (2) "a creative religious history" (1X). At the very least, then, we know that Barnes *intended* to represent *someone*'s religious development.

Jew, whom she represents as effeminate and lacking in sex appeal, rather than an ultra-masculine specimen of mankind, appears at first glance, ineffective. But since she required her “male” to serve a number of discursive purposes in the novel, in fact the Jew offered her the perfect trope for the purpose. Like the lesbian – and women, in general -- he represented the Other ostracized not only by society but supposedly by the Christian god himself, who denied him ontological subjecthood. What is more, his effeminacy, vouchsafed by the “scientific” texts of the time, such as Otto Weininger’s Sex and Character, made him, like the lesbians and the transvestite in the novel, holistically male and female simultaneously.

In the impossibility of redemption, as Barnes saw it at this point in her life, lay the crux of her beliefs about the afterlife. For, to believe in redemption signaled not only an adherence to Christian faith, but also an assumption of guilt. Barnes, however, never experienced guilt about her sexual relationships; her behavior felt “natural” to her no matter how others might judge it. She was, as it were, born into that familial world of free sexuality based on Zadel Barnes’s suffragette ideas. For years, she wrestled with this problem, for she could not conceive of the existence of a god without the notion also of guilt. In the title story of Spillway, for example, a guilt-free mother, who has borne a child by another man while convalescing in a TB

Guggenheim Scholarship in 1930 that she planned to undertake two projects: (1) “to research the relationship of the Jew and the Court for a book in progress whose chief figure is an Austrian Jew,” and (2) “a creative religious history” (1X). At the very least, then, we know that Barnes *intended* to represent *someone’s* religious development.

sanitarium and in keeping the child there infected her with the same disease, returns home to her husband in the hope that he will induce in her feelings of guilt (87-99). Since the woman expects an imminent death, she hopes that guilt will inspire remorse, which in turn will lead to faith and hope in everlasting redemption. In the same collection, a veterinarian in "The Doctors," a married woman who reads and studies the spiritual life, cold-bloodedly takes a lover as an experiment and forbids him any feelings of guilt or suffering, thus depriving him of belief in god (72-79). In the end, "his heart (is) the heart of a dog" (Spillway, 79). "We have fashioned ourselves against the Day of Judgment," Dr. Katrina Silverstaff remarks, echoing Barnes's view of the Christian connection between this world and the next, namely guilt and redemption (73).

For Barnes, then, sexual guilt lay outside the limits of her emotional experience. The free love philosophy of her family had inured her to moral doubts and to the debilitating ravages of self-examination about her sexuality. Wald and Zadel, however, could not protect her from outside influences that imposed a different morality on her and made her question *not* her sexuality but her lack of guilt about its expression. For what she feared most was that her lack of guilt derived from an inability to know good from evil, and that therefore she would never attain redemption. That she desired redemption would seem indicated by the attempts of her Djuna characters to assume guilt they did not feel as a means to acquire forgiveness. For example, Julie's endeavor in Ryder to identify with the guilt of the textual heroine Arabella Lynn who at five years of age sees her heart as "a morass of

evil” and who “ask(s) forgiveness for her multitudinous sins”(106-7) is undercut two pages later by the same Julie, “all voluptuous sixteen,” who, “more innocent than (the dovecotes),” “lies and looks up at Wendell” (109). Similarly, in The Antiphon, does Miranda offer up her “throat for slashing” (95). She submits to her father’s sexual attentions with the words, “if my father wills it . . . ”(ibid).

The moral confusion arises from the mixed messages of the mother figure who, although herself caught up in the free-love world of Hobb’s Ark, bestrides its fecund “naturalness” without conviction. In Ryder, the pregnant-again Amelia expresses to her daughter, Julie, her remorse at getting herself “in the way of doom and damnation by being natural” (96). Such “naturalness” does not come “naturally” to Amelia’s “nature” which, Kate tells Wendell, is “decent” (171). When Kate tries to kiss her, Amelia hides her face, “because,” Kate informs Wendell and his mother, “she has a spirit and a clean heart, and would not soil herself with the conditions of an imperfect soul” by adhering to Wendell’s “notions about women loving one another when they were not meant to love one another” (ibid.). Amelia has been deceived and seduced into her husband’s polygamous world. As a young woman, in her innocence, she had “judged him greater than (her) judgment,” only to discover, she tells Kate, “that beneath the shadows of his wings, corruption br(ed)” (150). Wendell is not unaware of his wife’s true disposition. He has “a most high esteem for (her) irreproachable and correct nature,” but such esteem has little effect on his appetites (151). Amelia is as entrapped as her children by Wendell’s philosophy of animal love. For Elizabeth Chappell, the effects of that philosophy remain with her long after she

divorces Wald Barnes but, even in the early days, her conflicted resentment makes itself felt as she hits out at everyone except the source of her unease, her husband. Thus we see Julie's attempt at evoking guilt in herself, as described above, and Miranda's flogging of herself at seven with briars cut from the hedge (The Antiphon, 77). As Dudley says to Augusta about her daughter, she's "beat(ing) her(self) to your favour"(ibid). For, if sex procured love for Barnes from Wald and Zadel, Elizabeth Chappell demanded of her daughter guilt and atonement for hers. She held her daughter responsible for stealing her husband's affections, and punished her by withholding her forgiveness, as in The Antiphon. For Augusta, Miranda rather than Titus represented the devil and, as Louise de Salvo points out, she blamed her daughter for her own rape.³⁷

It is not surprising then that Barnes experienced conflicting emotions about her sexuality. On the one hand, she claimed it as natural and therefore guilt-free, and on the other, as cause for guilt and suffering. If the *True Self*, associated as it is with the primary processes, reveals itself through the "spontaneous gesture," then Barnes's own natural and free-loving ways, like those of her father and grandmother represent her *True Self* (Winnicott, "Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self," The Maturation Processes 140). Certainly it was this self that made her capable of experiencing love and enabled her to express herself creatively. However, if she desired her mother's love, and The Antiphon suggests that Miranda did, she must

³⁷ Louise A. De Salvo, "To Make her Mutton at Sixteen: Rape, Incest, and Child Abuse in The Antiphon," Silence and Power, 185.

“bow down” and express her guilt and contrition. Only then will she be redeemed in her mother’s eyes and therefore become worthy of her love. For that reason, Barnes continued her care and financial support of Chappell despite her personal resentment, and thus also continued until her mother’s death to oscillate between her natural and her compliant identities, that which Donald Winnicott has termed her *True and False Self*

For Winnicott, the *False Self* emerges as a means to acquire a mother’s love and attention. The child is seduced into compliance with the mother’s own gestures by maternal rewards and thus learns to hide his own inner reality and to react to environmental demands in a false, compliant way (146). Thus, we find, in Nightwood, Nora’s unexpected disapproval of the promiscuity of her lover, Robin. Similarly, in the narrative voice of Ladies Almanack and Ryder, we detect a critical perspective that reads like a subtext to the celebration of free-love. Barnes, always a reluctant self-examiner, refused to explore the contradictions in her self. Yet despite her public stand as a free woman, her maternally-acquired moral resistance continued to reveal itself at propitious times. When Emily Coleman, for example, attempted in her proposed critique of Nightwood to equate Nora’s sexual stealing of Robin from Felix with Jenny’s theft of Robin from her, Barnes indignantly crossed out the offending sentences. In the margin next to Coleman’s “What ‘right’ did Nora have to Robin, that Jenny did not have?” Barnes wrote, “No.”³⁸

³⁸ EC, “An Essay on Nightwood,” Ts., DB Collection, (ser. 1 box 4).

1935, and admitted a desire to take ether “with the same results as John (Holms)” (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 10) “The entire human enterprise is a mistake . . . the journey not worth the ride” (ibid.). Only her art mattered and it was this, the production of her creative best, that ultimately kept the split between her two selves under control. Her art, and Elizabeth Chappell’s conflicting emotions about her *own* moral convictions, prevented Barnes from experiencing the non-existence, which according to Winnicott results from an extreme case of *False Self*. “The world’s strongest weak woman,” Barnes called Chappell, continuing nevertheless to seek her approval, for she wanted and earnestly desired redemption (Field, Djuna, 192). It is no accident, in Ryder, therefore, that the open legs towards which Arabella Lynn runs in search of forgiveness belong to her mother.

Redemption

The principles of guilt, suffering, and redemption that evolved from Barnes’s relationship with her Christian mother combined with the Gnostic notion of salvation picked up from her father’s side of the family to ultimately shape the author’s conception of spiritual belief, as described in her early stories, “Spillway” and “The Doctors.”³⁹ Her “sin” and her subsequent fall from innocence had brought in its wake

³⁹ The basic myth, generalized from its various versions, claims salvation to be attainable through the process of gathering in or recollecting the shards of Light dispersed in the world when the lowly powers, derived from the deity’s Divine Realm of Light, created the cosmos (Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, 42-80). These portions of Light trapped in foreign elements have become diluted in the cosmos and dispersed over the generations as shards of mixed Light (59). Knowledge of the origin of such shards comes only through supranatural revelation and illumination, brought to the

a lifetime's worth of suffering from which Barnes sought salvation, only to be disappointed when her saviors, god's messengers, failed to redeem her soul and bring her to everlasting love within god's embrace. The notion of redemption intrigued Barnes and her examination of its promise and failure in Ladies Almanack, Ryder, and Nightwood provides the thematic link which connects one text with the next. In each case, the would-be savior/messenger, replete with the trappings of divinity, fails to provide the means or knowledge by which man and woman may be saved and transcendence attained. In Ladies Almanack, for example, Lady Evangeline Musset, her very name reminiscent of evangelism, holds out hope of salvation to her amorous sisters excluded from god's love and redemption by their homosexual love, as illustrated on page 10 by god's lightning striking two women in an embrace. Musset is god's "ambassador," "proof of earth," as Christ was "the proof of God" (80). Nevertheless, she fails in the end, despite her sainthood, her indestructible tongue and the inscription on her burial urn that reads "Oh ye/ of little Faith"(84). Like the saints before her, she dies renouncing the world which in her old age, she could no longer enjoy.

individual bearer of the Light by the deity's messengers (Jesus, for example) who are sent at different times to wander the world and history announcing the call (45, 79). The content of the call begins, "I am a word, a son of words, who have come in the name of Jawar. The Great Life called, charged and prepared me" (80). On receiving the message, the subject awakes, shaking, and remembers its heavenly origin and the transcendent history of man. Redemption is promised and practical instruction given on how to live henceforth in the world" (80).

Wendell Ryder as Jesus Mundane in Ryder similarly disappoints those who sought redemption in his credo of free love. Like Evangeline before him, Wendell represents the earthly life. Before his story even unfolds, the narrator has warned us that his “rendezvous is not with the Last Station (i.e., Resurrection), but with small comforts” which he proceeds to dole out to women, children and animals alike (3). With this restricted purpose, he brings only suffering in his wake, for the adherents to his faith, stuck there by the needs of the children they have borne for him, desire more than the limited comfort he can offer. But Jesus Mundane “knowest not” of anything transcendental, neither of “what (he) speakest” when he speaks of god, nor of “the station . . . that (god) go(es) to meet (him) in”(5). Like the *archons* who rule the universe for the *Demiurge*, he knows nothing of the shard of Light within him.⁴⁰ His ignorance is such that he is destined to disappoint. Even the animals see through him, and as they close over him, like a wave, they seem to deny his physical existence (242). The narrator’s thrice-repeated query, “Whom should he disappoint now?” mimicking Peter’s three-time denial of Christ perhaps, denies also his “divinity.” For having “drowned, and ar(isen),” his facing of an ultimate judgment seems implied in the fourth “And whom should he disappoint?” which stands free of the qualifying “now” in the timeless zone of Chapter one’s almighty “I” (ibid.).

⁴⁰ The universe, the domain of the *Archons* and their leader, the *Demiurge*, is like “a vast prison whose innermost dungeon is the earth” (The Gnostic Religion, 43). Around the earth and above it are cosmic spheres, other worlds, ranged like concentric enclosing shells and ruled by the Law of Nature, which is alien to that of the deity of Light (43). Each *archon* bars the passage of the souls that seek to ascend

To the failure of the two preceding saviors was to be added that of Nightwood's Robin Vote. Thelma Wood's failure to redeem, through love, the soul of the faithful and monogamous Djuna confirmed for the author the ideological formulations begun in Ryder and Ladies Almanack and now to be found in Nightwood. If Evangeline Musset arrives on the scene as god's ambassador and a saint, and Wendell Ryder as his *other* son, Jesus Mundane, Robin Vote trailing the odors of the past emerges from the text like "The Second Coming" envisioned by Yeats.⁴¹ Animal become human, she it is who, as the "beast, its hour come round at last,/ Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born."(90). She first appears on the page as if waking up from a dead sleep, "born" amidst a jungle wilderness "trapped in a drawing room" (Nightwood, 35). The new savior promises nothing, yet everyone who comes in contact with her has expectations and seeks to make of the unusual young woman his or her own personal redeemer. Matthew, like the biblical prophet, Moses, "goes down" to warn his people against the worshipping of false gods, but they do not listen. "I've not only lived my life for nothing," he says of having used his life as an example of "going down" in the sexual sense, "but I've told it for nothing" (165). Robin's power over others, as James Scott points out, is unwilling,

after death, in order to prevent their escape from the mundane world and their return to the world of god (43).

⁴¹ "The Second Coming," 1920, William Butler Yeats: Selected Poems and Three Plays, 3rd ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1962) 89-90.

unconscious and indifferent.⁴² She lives her life according to her nature and, when Nora upbraids her for her promiscuity, accuses Nora of “mak(ing) everything dirty” (143). For Robin can no more see wrong in what she does than can an animal. “She knows she is innocent,” the doctor tells Nora, “because she can’t do anything in relation to anyone but herself” (147). She cannot be the past for Felix, nor the eternal Love for Nora. She cannot save anyone, for she lives in her own world, a primordial world in which she is destined to behave in a certain way, hence the disillusioned Nora’s attempt at awakening her.

Robin’s world was but one of the many unknown worlds that the texts suggest constituted Barnes’s personal conception of the metaphysical universe, a series of worlds about which Barnes formed the spiritual philosophy that would sustain her through the second half of her life. That she possessed a philosophy in the first place is attested to by her handwritten comments to Coleman’s unpublished review, “An Essay on Nightwood” (DB Collection, ser.1 box 4). Coleman wrote that Barnes had “worked through to original philosophic truth . . . the only one of our generation who has done so,” this in response to her earlier argument which read, “If there is no reason for enduring life, why do we do it? Let us take the shortest way out; let us have the courage. Otherwise, let us find (or listen to) a philosophy” (8). In the margin of Coleman’s text, Barnes wrote, “this is what I meant,” and in her attached comments to Coleman calls her words, “vastly noble and brave”(point 23).

⁴² James Scott, “Nightwood: The Poetic Novel,” Djuna Barnes (Boston: Twayne, 1976).

Coleman's essay overflows with references to Barnes's spiritual philosophy as manifest in Nightwood, but since Barnes refused the essay, most critics have ignored it assuming that Barnes's objections were based on Coleman's religious interpretation of the novel. Phillip Herring, for example, claims that "Emily Coleman loses her critical astuteness by applying what is essentially a Christian interpretation to Nightwood" (Djuna, 205).⁴³ However, if one examines the original manuscript with its critical comments and markings made by Barnes, it is immediately apparent that Barnes's objections relate specifically to Coleman's inaccurate quotes and to her unflattering comments about Nora and Robin. Most of her spiritual interpretations remain untouched. Barnes herself saw Nightwood as a "soliloquy of a soul talking to itself in the heart of night" and wrote to Coleman, referring to William Blake's drawing of souls departing from their dead bodies and rising above them towards the heavens, that she had "striven to give that soul, that essence, but without the bodies below it."⁴⁴ She attempted to write, she said, "the essence of the thing," comparing it to "eating a bouillon cube without the hot water," and suggesting that the novel might be more meaningful one day when people knew more about "the place from which the cube is compiled" (ibid.). Given such statements, it is not surprising that Barnes appears to have accepted a great deal of Coleman's spiritual observations of the

⁴³ Barnes rejected institutionalized Christianity, but many Gnostic concepts pre-figure Christianity enabling Coleman and Barnes to share certain spiritual understandings and beliefs, as their correspondence shows.

⁴⁴ Barnes to Coleman, Oct.30, 1935, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 12).

novel. She wrote “Good” in the margin of the following description of Nightwood by her Hayford Hall friend: “It is a religious poem. It is more religious than anything of our time. . . . Because she has felt more deeply what damnation is. Religion is not “resignation”. . . . It is a fighting submission to the will of God. The Doctor is fighting the Devil. . . . But he is never deceived . . . as to Who (sic) God is; and who he is” (10).

To return to the worlds mentioned at the start of the previous paragraph, and ultimately to “Who God is?” Barnes appeared to have believed in the existence of millions of different worlds, which co-existed alongside one another but outside of temporality. Thus, different ontological *chronotopes*, as it were, whether primordial like Robin’s, or of a more cerebral or spiritual cast, existed simultaneously.⁴⁵ On October 30, 1937, Coleman wrote to Barnes, “There are Unknown Worlds which you go into (in Nightwood and in your paintings) which have never before been discovered: regions of the mind. The reason Nightwood drove me mad was because I felt that. And no one that I have ever known, outside of you and John (Holms) does know it. Those who know don’t know what to do about it, except you do know and

⁴⁵ A *chronotope* is Mikhail Bakhtin’s term for a person’s consciousness in time and space and is part of the process of *architectonics*, the project of building by which we create ourselves through our relations to others and to our other selves created as refractions of ourselves as seen through the eyes and values of others. We do this by entering each other’s *chronotope* and then returning to our own, our *answerability*, i.e., the particular way we respond, creating our uniqueness. See The Dialogic Imagination, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) and Art and Answerability, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, Slavic Series (Austin: U of Texas P, 1990).

have done. But it's nothing to what you can do" (EC to DB, Correspondence, DB Collection [ser. 1 box 4]). Later in the same letter, she wrote that since feeling this psychic connection with another physical sphere, she was more "settled in life, more patient for death." Barnes responded to Coleman's revelations about other spheres on November 30, 1937: "You see now why one must be secret? One must not betray that place or it will heal up, and you'll know nothing more of it clearly. Only so few, a John, you and one's secret book that one day becomes public, but still secret if written as it should be." She continues, "Why did I just say 'will heal up?' That's exactly it, it just came out. The wound in the side of Christ." (EC Collection, Correspondence [ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 33]).

Not one for spelling things out, Barnes does not give us many facts. We do not know the "secret book" she planned to write, nor do we know the details of her "place" that Coleman had intuited. However, the spheres or worlds which she mentions have their genesis in Gnostic teachings. "Worlds," in this context, signify the chain of closed power-domains that represent the demonic family of worlds (The Gnostic Religion, 51). The numbers of such worlds depend on the particular version to which one refers, 7-12 in Hellenistic Gnosticism, but multiplying to as much as 365 to form "the demonic system to which unredeemed life is banished" (52). The "soul seeks an escape but only passes from one world into another that is no less world," each world representing so many degrees of separation from the Light (52). These tenets of Gnosticism, under the influence of Barnes's psychic experience of her

family, emerge in her texts transformed and uniquely hers. Her beliefs evolved into their particular shape and their variation from existing doctrines as a direct outcome of her intimate relationships internalized into psychic experience. In the following pages, I shall proceed to outline Barnes's text-revealed beliefs as straightforwardly as is possible given the veil Barnes insisted on drawing to diffuse her truth even when she most attempted to convey it. Strange as such beliefs may seem in their extreme materiality, as I shall show, given her conflicted moral identity and her experience with trust as described earlier, they do not come as a surprise or shock. For Barnes, apprehension was a physical process; she understood through her body rather than her head and thus formulated her beliefs from the concrete, material entities that filled her consciousness. "In her concentration on the physical," Coleman wrote in her Nightwood essay, "(Barnes) flings wide doors to heaven" (2).

The Universe of Djuna Barnes

By the age of about 40, her major loves and losses behind her, Barnes had given up on saviors and personal guilt for her redemption. However, she seems to have accepted the notion of Original Sin, albeit in a very different and personal form which I shall explain. To start at the beginning, however, Barnes's approach was an holistic one, a post-Enlightenment rejection of the dualisms that brought suffering to all who teetered on that side of nature *not* approved by religion. Thus, the ultimate truth for Barnes, her texts suggest, comprised an all-inclusive modality, one which incorporated good and evil, spirit and flesh, mind and matter. It was, I suggest, the God/Dog, she visualized, no more, no less.

(1) God/Dog

If “God is what we make him,” as Matthew claims in Nightwood, Barnes perceived him as a projection of her animal-father, the bearer of both punishment and love, the source of both fear and security, the Hound of Heaven. He it was who in “The Biography of Julie von Bartmann” falls on all fours and admits he is “The Beast” (Field, Djuna, 184) and who in Ryder appears in Amelia’s dream, after she has given birth to his black (dead) baby, as “a great fair ox of a Black Beauty” demanding that she accept him as part of her notion of god (99). Along with Barnes’s fetish about dogs, as described earlier, the evolution into her ultimate truth of such a dual figure of power seems likely. For the dog (god backwards) represents that dark side of the god-image which is the other face of god or the chthonic spirit, its form of expression, though not the whole of it, the animal sexuality with which Barnes identified her father.⁴⁶

It was at the time of writing Nightwood that Barnes became committed to the holistic thinking which molded her ontological approach. It was a time, not coincidentally, during which she also studied the work of the New York doctor, Alexis Carrel, whose book, Man, the Unknown, she recommended to Charles Henri Ford and to Coleman who, as mentioned in the previous chapter, read it at least twice. Carrel, who saw the times as treating the individual like a machine and appropriating his “moral, religious and aesthetic functions” (272) advocated rejecting

the dualism of Descartes, and wrote that “Mind will be replaced in matter,” “The soul will no longer be distinct from body” (279). “That good Doctor Carrel knows,” Barnes told Coleman in a letter dated Sept. 20, 1935, “that we think with our whole body, live and have our being in the whole” (EC Collection, Correspondence [ser.1.2 box 2-6 file 11]). For Barnes, everything had its opposite. It is how we understand the whole, since like an “after-birth” or “shroud,” it reveals the other.⁴⁷ “Don’t I know,” the doctor tells Nora in Nightwood. “that the only way to know evil is through truth? The evil and the good know themselves only by giving up their secret face to face. The true good who meets the true evil . . . learns for the first time how to accept neither; the face of the one tells the face of the other the half of the story that both forgot” (138). Thus did Barnes perhaps perceive the two faces of god, not as independent and separate entities, but joined, neither one nor the other but one *in* the other.

(2) Original Sin

At the time of writing Nightwood, Barnes had become aware of her own fall from grace. Her experience with Thelma Wood epitomized by Robin Vote, in a sense her alter-ego, had brought her face-to-face with her loss of innocence. Knowledge had evicted her from the state of animal innocence which once she had enjoyed and now only suffering remained. It was but a short step for Barnes to transpose into another

⁴⁶ Carl G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, ed. Aniela Jaffe, trans. Richard & Clara Winston (London: Collins, 1971) 192.

⁴⁷ Barnes to Coleman, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser.1.2 box 2-6 file 10).

realm her own experience, thus making the Original Sin of which Adam and Eve became aware after eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the very incest by which she herself had been betrayed. Prior to such knowledge, the first man and woman mated with pure and innocent pleasure with the Chthonic face of the father-figure which was both male and female. Thus love of god signified sex with god, and every subsequent human coupling thereafter wafted into the present, through physical love, the odors of that original, animal mate. It was the reason Robin could be described by the author as “the infected carrier of the past,” her “every movement . . . reduce(d) to an image of a forgotten experience; a mirage of an eternal wedding cast on the racial memory” (Nightwood, 37). After the Fall, however, and the attainment of knowledge, the purity and divine oneness of such animal life was forever lost, and humans thereafter must struggle to recapture glimpses of that which once was theirs. When Robin in the last scene of Nightwood goes down on all fours next to Nora’s dog, it is that animal purity within the dog with which she is trying to communicate (169 -70). But it is too late, she has lost her connection with her past, reminded by Nora’s presence of her new “knowledge of good and evil” and hence her historical connection with god. Thus, Robin’s change is not one of evolving humanity, but in the Gnostic sense, a change away from humanity towards the Light. Robin’s final collapse on the floor, “her face turned and weeping,” suggests the trauma of that loss and Barnes’s own ambiguous feelings given her *True*

and *False Self* (170). Thus is man “born damned and innocent from the start”

(Nightwood, 121).

Barnes entitled the chapter in which this scene appears, “The Possessed,” but in keeping with her Gnostic beliefs about the mundane world, it is possession by man, not animal, which constitutes spiritual danger. The dog in its innocence cannot infect Robin with its animality, but she in her “humanity,” can endanger it, for her partial knowledge of good and evil makes the same actions on her part, a choice of evil. Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s The Possessed, of which Barnes’s library at the time of her death contained two copies, confirms this interpretation.⁴⁸ It opens with an epigram taken from Luke 8: 32-37, in which a herd of swine assume the devils of a man’s mind and become so distraught, that they violently run down the hill into the lake and are drowned. This narrative follows satirically a verse by Alexander Pushkin, from The Demons, which reads in part, “. . . We have lost our way./ Demons must have taken over,/ whirling, twisting us astray.” In the light of these extracts, one perceives Barnes’s own personal dilemma in which her earlier incestuous relationships, enjoyed with the freedom of the innocent “animal,” now are understood by the new knowledgeable her for the evil they represent. Thus, her sorrow, like Robin’s, stems as much from the tragedy of lost innocence as from any guilt incurred by her new awareness.

⁴⁸ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (New York: Penguin-Signet, 1991).

Coleman referred on a number of occasions to the sexual aspect of Barnes's belief about the Fall. In her October 30, 1937 letter to Barnes about the latter's lover, Scudder Middleton, Coleman stumbles on what Barnes's texts would later confirm: "why did you say he was a relative," she asks, ". . . does a relative mean sex? If not why should you have felt such a sex-passion for Scudder and also for Thelma who was also 'your family.' Family means sex? I suddenly knew it. The original 'family.' The garden of Eden. Something wrong."⁴⁹ In her essay on Nightwood, she speaks of Adam's Fall as "one truth" (9), and later in the same essay, claims that in Barnes's preoccupation "with man's brute past . . . she comes upon his future," namely "The unicorn -- half-beast, half virgin. Human hunger for the past -- the earth" (15). Coleman then goes on to quote from the text, "The flesh that will become myth!" to which she adds the rider, "Adam and Eve" (ibid.). Coleman's elliptic comments suggest that, like Barnes, even she found it difficult to state in the bald terms of rational, grammatical sentences, the connections she sensed in Barnes's difficult novel. What is clear, however, is that Nightwood intimates humanity's beginning, which, cloaked in the darkness of time, has become myth. By returning the myth to its physical state, as I have described above, Barnes foregrounds her belief that desire for a lost paradise of mystical oneness is the flipside of the desire for a physical, sexual oneness with god. Through her bodily intuition, she was able to represent fictionally "the desire to know" as the yearning to return also to the state of *physical*

⁴⁹ Coleman to Barnes, Correspondence, DB Collection (ser. 1 box 4).

bliss with god, as intimated but not spelled out in psychoanalytic theory. In so doing, she confirms herself the very connection on which the methodology of this dissertation is based.

(3) Death and Resurrection

Given this yearning to return to sexual bliss with god, death for Barnes represented a reward earned, namely, the opening of a “gate” -- with all the earlier sexual connotations that Barnes associates with that signifier -- through which one might pass to the much desired original state of physical oneness. Death, thus, carried within it the seductive call of the ultimate *jouissance*. It lured Barnes to quit this life by her own hand the sooner to acquire the spoils of suffering, which she perceived as the wages of Original Sin. But, Gnosticism forbade it and, in the final analysis, she held out, continuously struggling against the suffering to which she felt she was destined.⁵⁰ She seemed to believe that each person had his or her suffering proportionately allotted, and that to bow out before one had completed the required stint might rob one of one’s paradisaical rewards.

Suffering in this world, then, was to replace in the second half of Barnes’s life the earlier guilt she struggled to experience; suffering would buy the redemption that her *False Self* guilt could not. At death she would pass through the “gate”

⁵⁰ Manichaen Gnosticism, which fused Buddhist, Zoroastrian and Christian elements with its own teachings, advocated instead of suicide refraining from love and the begetting of children in order to bring the natural world to an end as quickly as possible (The Gnostic Religion, 106, 231).

backwards, moving down through time from her coffin through the dark earth's passageway to join the original source of animal life, where once again, Nora could bed Robin ("die now and you will be mine forever," Nightwood, 145) and Miranda, her mother ("Nay, sparrow./I'd lay you in the journey of your bed,/And un-bed you, and I could, in paradise," The Antiphon, 126). Such a paradise of Resurrection, "the second duel" as Nora describes it in Nightwood, beckoned Barnes and held out hope, but without support for her convictions other than Coleman, her feelings frequently wavered and she suffered the doubts of the damned. "Sometimes in the night, when I wake in fear and trembling," she wrote to Coleman, "I think of TSE [Eliot] and the God he has by the hand and wish I could accomplish it" (July 25, 1938).⁵¹ But she could not believe in Eliot's god, no more than she could have faith in the goodness of mankind. Coleman remained a true and supportive friend, one who shared many of Barnes's fears and desires, but by the second half of 1938 Barnes saw herself as spiritually isolated. "I feel as if we were two Sharons (sic) pushing off the 1st and only boat," she wrote Coleman, "and now you have gone female, and I am all alone bailing the beastly canoe trying to get to Lethel!" (Aug. 7, 1938).⁵² Here again,

⁵¹ Barnes to Coleman, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 36).

⁵² Barnes to Coleman, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 37). Charon is the ferryman who conveys the souls of the dead across the River Styx to the lower world, where, "After being judged, the dead souls remained in Hades or were sent to the happy Elysian Fields or to the dismal land of Tartarus" ("Styx," World Books, 1979 ed.). In the Elysian Fields, the souls of the righteous existed after death (Dictionary of Mythology, 52) while in Tartarus, according to Virgil, the souls of those who were exceptionally depraved were punished (ibid. 141). Lethe is the mythological river of hell "whose waters were imbibed by the souls of the dead which

Barnes's fragile conviction would seem to contradict itself. She assumes her damnation as a given and desires to reach Tartarus so that she might drink of the waters of the Lethe and so forget her past suffering. Yet Barnes told her Swedish interviewer, Folke Isaksson, that she believed that one must pay with suffering in life in order to reap the reward (Dagens Nyheter, Feb. 25, 1963, as recorded in Field, Djuna, 245). Such opposing sentiments complicates the task of stating factually an author's beliefs, but Barnes's own insistence on the interrelatedness of opposites gives, in her case, added confirmation to this non-absolute reading of her spiritual yearnings, as does her ambivalence between her *False* and *True Self*.

(4) Different Worlds

If Barnes's spiritual vision encompassed a god/dog around which existed millions of god/dog differently-proportioned worlds, each with its own moral structure based on that proportion, the particular unknown world to which she felt she had access lay in the nethermost regions of that spiritual universe. Barnes's representation of herself as a ferryman to the lower world in the above quote, as well as her description in a letter to Coleman of Nightwood having been written under a Svengali, suggest that she saw herself as a medium or even a Gnostic messenger through which this unknown world could be revealed through her art to those who wanted to see (Dec.2, 1937).⁵³ Art, she had written Coleman, "as you know . . . is not dealt out by you or me, but is put

had been confined in Tartarus for a certain period. Those who drank forgot all that they had previously known." (ibid, 86).

⁵³ Barnes to Coleman, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 33).

into our hands by some sort of magic or miracle" (May 5, 1935).⁵⁴ "Only the best reader will understand it, like initiation, which is not for everyone, the others will let it go" (Letter to Coleman, Nov. 30, 1937).⁵⁵

The signifiers, "lower world," "Svengali" and "magic," all point to a specifically structured world, namely one of demonology. "O Djuna," Coleman wrote on October 30, 1937, "I understand so much in you which was hitherto not revealed to me: your great secrecy about the things of your spirit (it is because they are 'of the party of the Devil without knowing it' [Blake] and one dare not tell them); your interest in Magic, Spells, Charms, Witchcraft, Mysteries."⁵⁶ Barnes, of course, never stated precisely what she felt about these subjects except to say in relation to evil in fortune telling that "it should only be exposed in art, and then only by the best artist - when it is done for money, it becomes (for me) a brothel of the spirit." She continued, "In exposing it in art, it is lifted back into its own place again, given back to itself, tho also given to the reader, the eye" (Letter to Coleman, Nov. 30, 1937).⁵⁷ In so saying, she essentially confirms the common space from which derives both

⁵⁴ Barnes to Coleman (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 10).

⁵⁵ Barnes to Coleman (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 33).

⁵⁶ Coleman to Barnes, Correspondence, DB collection (ser. 1 box 4). According to the teachings of the gnostic, Saturninus, the Devil "is an angel who is an enemy of those angels (that created the world) and the God of the Jews" (The Gnostic Religion, 132). Their antagonisms are described as "a kind of private feud within the camp of the lower powers" (133).

⁵⁷ Barnes to Coleman, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 33).

religion and art, namely the psyche, which, of course, is also the place in which internalized personal relationships play themselves out, the three so interrelated that they infect, infuse and permeate one another .

Although Barnes remained cautious in her expression of spiritual belief, it is suggestive that one of her favorite books was Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough, which Coleman referred to as "Djuna's book on magic containing the Goathead" (Letter to Barnes, Oct. 30, 1937).⁵⁸ In the same letter, Coleman connects The Golden Bough with Barnes's drawings of horned goats sitting in heaven, but she is not explicit enough for the reader to identify her exact implication. If Barnes, like Coleman, believed magic to be the *primitive* soul's means of reaching a state of divine consciousness, that would explain her need, as a medium, to pursue this darker side of spirituality as part of the whole of her revealed world. In addition, Gnostic teachings also claim magic as the antidote to the power of the world rulers, the fallen angels who created the cosmos, thus providing further reason to explore its potential (The Gnostic Religion, 132). Certainly, Barnes's texts contain numerous references to the devil. In Nightwood, Nora suggests the existence of devils, and surmises that such devils enter "the uninhabited" by which she refers to those "pure" people, like Robin, in whose souls god has not yet taken up residence (148). In fact, Robin accuses *her* of being a devil, and says, when Nora tries to take someone's hands off her, "you

⁵⁸ Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion (1922. New York: Macmillan, 1952); Coleman to Barnes, Correspondence, DB Collection (ser. 1 box 4).

make everything dirty" (143). In The Antiphon, the devil's shadow which Jack wants Augusta to see through the window of the playhouse is that of her husband, Titus, but Augusta acknowledges only the devil in her daughter, Miranda (77). In both cases, the Djuna character herself represents the devil.

This terrible world then of incest, degradation and devilwork which, through her art, Barnes aestheticizes and reveals to her readers veiled in the lyrical and mystical phrases of her artist's consciousness, is that place perhaps which Barnes claimed would "heal up" if it were ever to be spoken to the world out straight (letter to Coleman, Nov. 30, 1937).⁵⁹ Certainly, to speak of animals, devils, and sodomy in relation to the spiritual life would be an act to court disaster, one which well could "heal up" the "wound" through which, like a suffering Christ herself, Barnes had access to the inhumanity of humankind. Seen in this light, Barnes stands outside of such a world. Like Nora in Nightwood, she perceived herself as having access to but not being part of what she described in such intimate detail, her positioning of herself perhaps another indication of the tenuous nature of her own identity, i.e. her *True Self*

After Nightwood

If Barnes's relationship with Thelma Wood disavowed her finally of hope of redemption through love, it also convinced her of her role as medium to her readers between their world and that unknown "bestial" sphere to which she had access through her experience. By turning "evil" into "good" through her art, and bringing

⁵⁹ Barnes to Coleman, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file33).

a particular truth to the consciousness of her readers, Barnes sought her role in the universe. “Unless I do really good work,” she wrote Coleman on June 28, 1935, “(I) can see no sense in this (life).”⁶⁰ “Good work” for Barnes correlated with getting at the truth, through the revelation of knowledge, and revealing it to those who could see. She also perceived in this role the possibility of her own redemption. It was a kind of spiritual bargain. She told Hank O’Neal, “I always thought that if I did anything wrong, if I took a pencil that didn’t belong to me, if I was dishonourable in any way, in any fashion, then I would be unable to write a word” (O’Neal, Life is . . ., 80). As early as The Book of Repulsive Women, Barnes already “dealt” with God:

What altar cloth, what rag of worth
Unpriced?
What turn of card, what trick of game
Undiced?
And you we valued still a little
More than Christ. (“In General,”5)

“Those who cannot conceive a bargain cannot be saved or damned” (Nightwood, 47), and Barnes, despite her previous disappointments, still very much desired to be saved. Thus she proceeded over the next three decades to write spiritual poems that further explored her eschatological visions. Few were ever completed and many were burnt, but Field speaks of the remaining fragments as “Emily Dickinson in Hell” (242). For Barnes continued to use horrible and grotesque images in her verse, images that revealed the truth she’d agreed to expose in return for redemption. Such images,

⁶⁰ Barnes to Coleman, Correspondence, EC Collection (ser. 1.2 box 2-6 file 10).

therefore, were not a reflection of her consistent impulse to shock, as Phillip Herring has concluded, but perhaps of a deal she had cut with god and to which she adhered until the last days of her life (Djuna, 306). Although Herring admits that the images of some of Barnes's spiritual poems were also indebted to the Metaphysical poets, he de-emphasizes their mysticism. The unpublished "The Marion Year," for example, he perceives as expressing interest "more in the iconography of Italian Renaissance painting than in religion, per se" (307)

How should one mourn who never yet has been,
 In any trampled list at Umbria?
 Nor yet in any Tuscan village seen
 The Unicorn thrust in his dousing beam,
 Nor Mary from the manger of her gown,
 Ride Jesus down.

As we know from The Antiphon, however, when Augusta spoke of pushing four children from her *list*, Barnes signifies by "trampled list at Umbria" not iconography but a woman's genitals that have been well used by love (37). Similarly, the unicorn, as a mythical animal/virgin, in "thrust(ing) in his dousing beam" is involved *not* with Italian Renaissance painting but with sexual intercourse. The two images lead logically therefore to the incestuous spiritual sexuality of the last two lines in which from beneath Mary's gown, which acts like a manger for her son, she "Ride(s) Jesus down." Read at this level, the verse queries how anyone could mourn as damned those who engage in animal sexuality and incest if they haven't experienced or seen such passionate love themselves. Thus Barnes merely continues in the same vein her earlier belief in different worlds which we may glimpse but not judge since we know

not the moral structures which have given them shape, nor understand therefore the predetermined behavior of their inhabitants. For “Man cannot purge his body of its theme,” she wrote in “Rite of Spring” “As can the silkworm on a running thread / Spin a shroud to re-consider in” (Work-in-Progress, Grand Street, Spring, 1982). Barnes’s “theme” was incest, and it invaded every aspect of her life and work, including her “religion.”

In advocating the withholding of moral judgment on those whose actions derive from pre-determined worlds, Barnes skates close to the moral relativism which, as Kate Fullbrook points out in Free Women: Ethics and Aesthetics in Twentieth-Century Women’s Fiction, has been a problem for feminists wanting to alter cultural values (2). For, while moral relativism provides the space in which to challenge traditions that have kept women subservient, Fullbrook claims, it also angers feminists who desire “to secure the foundations of ethical thought” and sometimes precipitates them into backwards leaps into “biological or historical determinism, into mystic, or at times, even totalitarian thinking” (ibid.). To illustrate her point, Fullbrook calls attention to the texts of Shulamith Firestone, for example, in which rage at women’s ill-treatment gives rise to the desire for female supremacy and an ethics of complete female separation (ibid.). Barnes, however, does not restrict her argument to women and, to a certain extent, merely expresses what female philosophers such as Simone de Beauvoir would advocate some years later, viz. a greater understanding of morality as a product of human history and the availability of choices for those positioned by such history. But, whereas the absence of a philosophical ground

denied moral absolutes in such feminist thinking as de Beauvoir's, for Barnes the existence of a deity made her advocating of moral relativity all the more ethically unusual. Morality, according to Barnes's understanding of Gnosticism, was predicated on knowledge of humankind's spiritual past, knowledge vouchsafed individually and subjectively through personal enlightenment by truth. In this context, then, evil equated with ignorance, rather than a desire to flout the precepts of the deity, and derived in varying degrees from the relative absence of "Light" from the predetermined world into which the subject was born. As such, it explains Robin's lack of sexual guilt in relation to Nora in Nightwood and offers a way of thinking about ethics and its relationship to the deity that in its tolerance and understanding makes Barnes's texts, I suggest, worthy contributions to the ongoing feminist ontological project.

Barnes continued to explore ethical territory in her fiction throughout her Patchin Place period. Although, little completed work survives, fragments of texts, such as those from the "long poetic work in cantos," have been collected (Field, Djuna, 242). They were never put in final form, but in 1965, she had finished the 13th canto. In 1968, she sent a copy of poems she had completed to Faber and Faber and described them as a kind of "resurrection pie" of songs and observations on life by Don Pasquin, and gave them the provisional title of "Satires" (243). Whether any of these comprised her "spiritual poems" as described by Hank O'Neal (Life is ..., 62) or Francis McCullough ("Reminiscences," Silence and Power, 367), remains unclear, but it is interesting that she should base her final work, Creatures in an Alphabet on an old

series, "the black alphabet," on which she'd worked at this same time (Field, 244).

Given Coleman and Barnes's epistolary discussion of magic and other worlds, "black" signifies meaningfully in this context, and even more so since Barnes dedicated this last work to her friend Coleman, the only one she could count on to understand.

Although Field calls the work "slight," -- and it does lack Barnes's usual catachresic brilliance -- in fact, it represents the same truth that Barnes had been struggling to convey in both her poetry and her novels since her twenties. She had tried to represent it through men and women (Wendell Ryder, Evangeline Musset, Robin Vote and Matthew O'Connor) now she would turn to the animal life with which she felt most comfortable. Thus, for example, she goes through the alphabet showing each animal performing according to type, predestined to its world, its behavior including that relating to love and sex fated by its ontological origin. In the process of doing so, however, she foregrounds her own subjective interpretation of each animal life to show its irrelevance to the animal who can no more change its behavior than it can its spots. For example, "The Hummingbird hovering, is always going home/ By flying in a single spot/ Its striving fast to think its not" correlates to her personal view of life as purposeless activity designed to make us forget the inevitability of death. It is not, of course, the hummingbird's view of life. Similarly, "- Somewhat sullen many days,/ The Walrus is a cow that neighs./ Tusked, ungainly, and windblown,/ It sits on ice, and alone" may be "a hard-lined engraving of how Djuna Barnes saw old age," according to Field, but it is also the Walrus's natural position (244). We err when we judge the inhabitants of other worlds by the

standards of our own, despite their common features. And to attempt to change them, to break them of their fate like the English girl in Nightwood who made nests with her teeth that the birds liked so well they stopped making their own, is also to destroy them (127-8). For although “The adder in the grass can hiss/ The lynxes in the dark can kiss/ (and) Each otter holds his otter’s hand,” all three love and hate differently, according to “how the Lord has planned.”

No dog exists in Barnes’s bestiary. However, her lion who eats its victim who is itself constructed of what it eats points to a different aspect of Barnes’s philosophy of worlds, namely, that of past worlds within us. While her use of Elizabethan, Chaucerian and Metaphysical literary affects in her texts may seem merely a rendering of the past in the High Modernist tradition advocated by Eliot, Barnes’s notion of her self as constructed of the past was a literal, rather than a figurative one and derived from Gnostic sources.⁶¹ For the author, men and women are possessed of all the worlds through which they have lived, into infinity, and when they die, they pass *backwards* through all their previous worlds, reliving their accumulated past in reverse. Thus did Barnes write in the poem “Transfiguration,” later renamed “Fall-out Over Heaven” for Eliot’s 70th birthday:

⁶¹ The temporal-spatial dimensions of Gnosticism which so interested Barnes depict, besides the numerous worlds in the universe, also aeons (The Gnostic Religion, 51-53) “Whole series of ages stretch between the soul and its goal” and escape can only be achieved by passing through them all (53). This concept of return through worlds and generations clarifies Barnes’s sense of predetermined suffering, which cannot be shortchanged through death, but must be fought one world and one life-span at a time. Hence the anguish of time to unredeemed souls and the terror of the times that have to be endured.

To Moses's empty gorge, like smoke
 Rush backward all the words he spoke.
 Lucifer roars up from the earth
 Down falls Christ unto his death.

The verse produces the cinematic effect of film running backwards to its source.

However, the source for Barnes depicts not merely maternal origin but the source of all life itself so that after death, when the film rewinds, we supposedly return to that source via all the earlier lives from which we have been constructed. Barnes describes in the poem, "Quarry," how the process begins at the moment of death when one first checks the direction of where one is going: "I unwind duration from the tongue-tied tree/ Send carbon fourteen down for time's address" (The New Yorker, Dec. 27, 1969). And then, when one sees "the capsized eye of sleep," "I sowl (sic) the soul and slap its face/That it fetch breath" (ibid).⁶² As a baby's bottom is smacked at birth so that it may draw breath to start on its journey in life, so is the face of the soul slapped at death that it might draw breath and thus begin the return journey home.⁶³

⁶² "Sowl" is a dialect variant of the word *soul* which Barnes uses as a verb, which recalls "the practice of going about on All Soul's Day singing and begging for Soul Cakes" (Nancy Levine, "Works in Progress," 198). "Sowling," according to Levine, is one of the methods by which Barnes "raises the soul to consciousness, through song." The primary meaning, however, she claims is obstetrical, deriving from an obscure dialect which translates the verb "to sowl" as "to pull, seize roughly, etc. by the ear or ears." Thus the poet uses a midwife action to grasp what is essential to her self, the "soul" of painful memory and to slap it awake (ibid.).

⁶³ In Gnosticism, the human being constitutes flesh, soul and spirit, his flesh and soul both "products of cosmic powers created in the image of Primal Man, with appetites and passions from each sphere that make up the astral soul of man, his 'psyche.' Enclosed in the soul is the spirit or 'Pneuma' or 'spark,' a portion of divine substance" (The Gnostic Religion, 44). Given this proximity of divine spark or spirit

Thus, Robin, for example, would return to the animal life from which she was in the process of emerging, and proceed beyond that to the “earth-flesh fungi” of which she, as the “infected past,” was constructed (Nightwood, 34). Through the various stages of primordial life telescoped backwards, man eventually reaches his origin and, in paying homage to his past in this way, as Felix commented to the doctor in Nightwood, pays homage also to his future (39). For the Resurrection is “the beginning of that unendurable curve towards our lost distance,” and the individual will be born again into yet other worlds, better or worse than her last, in which the traces of that last will linger like so many lost memories projected into dream. Thus does one find in disturbing the lover mid-dream “the waking smile of the hyena on (her) face . . . as she leaves the company of her dream” (Nightwood, 87).

For Barnes, our worlds all interconnect. We are characters in other people’s worlds, and they in ours, our dreams drawing them down into our dank, primeval depths. “Robin is not in your life,” Matthew tells Nora, “you are in her dream, you’ll never get out of it” (Nightwood, 146). While Barnes never was able to escape Robin/Thelma’s dream, her intuitive understanding of it and her ability to place it in a philosophical context served as the lifeline she needed to sustain her spirit through a long and painful life. She remained always a seeker after truth, and despite the traumas of her childhood such as the betrayal of trust and the contradictory maternal

with soul or psyche, and with the appetites and passions of each sphere, it inevitably must be diffused and diluted by both (59). Thus, we understand the incestuous experiences of Barnes’s personal “sphere” mixing with her “spirit” to color her vision of her god as incestuous.

and paternal messages regarding love and sex, she nevertheless persevered in her struggle, as revealed in her texts, to establish a personal answer to the meaning of existence. This struggle, then, is not merely the minor quest that Phillip Herring has described in Djuna, but a lifetime's search for spiritual significance in an ontological wasteland (205). Her texts bear witness to this search and in their emphases on sexuality and incest confirm the interrelatedness of the spiritual and sexual realms in the psychic construction of the author and her commitment to holistic beliefs. As Coleman and Edwin Muir said of Barnes, she was a most "human" mystic (Coleman letter to Barnes, June 29, 1937).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Coleman to Barnes, Correspondence, DB Collection (ser. 1 box 4).

Chapter Five Conclusion

“Writing the Body Spiritual”

White, Coleman and Barnes’s textual pursuit of spiritual subjecthood predicated on a sexual unconscious, as I have shown in the previous three chapters, constitutes “writing the body spiritual.” Like Gilbert and Gubar’s “sexual linguistics,” “writing the body spiritual” describes a gendered approach to textuality but it extends gender, firstly, in its definition, by including masculine/feminine holism and, secondly, in its reach, by incorporating within its sphere of influence also the spiritual. In the first case, as we have seen, the approach to gender by which these three writers sought to reconcile both their culturally ascribed male and female characteristics led them to textual identities that cannot be described in simple binary terms. They deplored, for example, their “feminine” addiction to the intricacies of love relationships that brought them immense suffering and diverted energies they felt should be spent in writing, yet drew on that same suffering for the material upon which they constructed their texts. They needed their “feminine” qualities as much as those they were conditioned to consider as “masculine,” namely intellectual energy and self-centered commitment to their work. In the sense of gender, then, they thought of themselves as both masculine and feminine, and through their texts advocated that position. White and Coleman’s fictional protagonists, for example, Clara and Marthe Gail respectively, present themselves as both “male” and “female” when their “insanity” liberates them from societal pressures (Beyond the Glass and The Shutter of Snow.)

Clara becomes first the Virgin Mary, then Jesus Christ, while Marthe Gail personifies both simultaneously as the female Jesus, son of that Jahweh who has “trifled” with her father (Shutter, 13). Thus, in “writing the body spiritual,” gender is extended holistically to be masculine and feminine inclusive, its relationship to textuality or linguistics, therefore, not essential but an assumption of a position that the writer, with the degree of agency her independence and role as a New Woman allow, makes to suit her purpose.

In the context of “writing the body spiritual,” the extension of gender’s influence to the transcendent realm derives from that same holism I have described in relation to masculine and feminine qualities. The “female” quest for spiritual identity, as revealed in the writings of White, Coleman and Barnes, blurs the binaries between body and soul, spirit and matter, holy and profane, showing their spiritual yearnings to be intimately entwined with the sexual. However, whereas in each author’s early womanhood, her textual struggles to bring body and soul together as one mirror the struggles in her own life, in the later years, life and text appeared for all purposes oppositional. The biographical details of all three Modernist authors attest to their sincere commitment in the second halves of their lives to their respective religions’ insistence on separation of *eros* from *agape*. Barnes secluded herself in Patchin Place, choosing to renounce the world in accordance with her pre-Christian Gnostic beliefs, while White and Coleman attempted to live the celibate lives demanded by their Catholicism. While age, no doubt, played some part in their sexual withdrawal, their continued textual expression of sexual desire evidences their “suffering” of this

physical deprivation rather as a conscious *intent* in return for redemption.¹ All three, for example, remained sexually explicit in their texts and we know that Coleman not only separated from her second husband in order to avoid committing sin through sexual relations with him but, in her fifties, renounced yet another unidentified man for the same reason. Of this latter object of her love, Coleman writes in her essay, “Reminiscences of the Maritains,” that she did not betray her baptismal vows, but that she struggled for two years before she finally could bring the relationship to an end (30). White, too, battled in her late forties to resist her sexual drives, her relationship with the exotic jazz pianist and religious painter, Benedicta de Bezer, ending only when White became a Dominican tertiary. Such conscious sacrifice of sexual gratification attests to the great influence on these authors of their religions’ teachings and their desire to live by such teachings in the second part of their lives in order to acquire salvation and eternal life in the spiritual realm.

Yet, even as they shaped their lives to these binary contours, psychoanalytic theory reveals in their texts the persistence of that very same earlier espousal of sexual/spiritual unity. Thus we find underlying their eschatological investigations a

¹ Age, as well of course as the tragic experiences of sex in her life, certainly played a part in Barnes’s later abstinence. Many of her Patchin Place poems, such as “When the Kissing Flesh is gone,” speak with disdain if not disgust about the grotesqueries of the flesh of men in old age. But if the indignities done to the body in old age make the narrative “I” exclaim, “What! Kiss the famine of an old man’s mouth?” they do not necessarily preclude the “I,” whatever her own age, from responding sexually to the spiritual Other of indeterminate age. (Nancy Levine, “Works in Progress: The Uncollected Poetry of Barnes’s Patchin Place Period.” Review of Contemporary Fiction 13.3 [1993] 194-5).

preoccupation with an anthropomorphic god in a spiritual realm in which the relationship to the divine signifies also as sexual. Their fictional characters therefore aspire not only to the post-Resurrection spiritual unification promised by their respective religions, but to the sexual oneness with which the spiritual coexists in pure and perfect harmony. They wanted love in its entirety. "Give me the Whole of You," the narrative "I" in Emily Coleman's poem "Friendship" pleads with her god.² In their pursuit of such wholeness, each author's "female" character sought to express that sexuality which constituted her spiritual being as much as did her intellect. Marthe Gail/ Frieda, Nanda/Clara and Julie/Miranda, for example, express those sexual and spiritual affects, influences or drives, which are the products of their particular childhood internalizations. Amongst White's female characters, as we have seen, the unconscious association of father and god elicited simultaneous sexual connections which manifest themselves in the ambiguity between her spiritual and sexual discourse. In Coleman's texts, the repressed desire associated with maternal guilt about nursing revealed itself in the displaced orality of protagonists who, like Frieda, craved talk or, like Marthe Gail, hungered to have her once milk-filled breasts passionately kissed by her husband in acknowledgment of her identity as the female Jesus Christ. While, in Barnes's writing, the animal promiscuity of Julie and Miranda's incestuous father/god together with his daughters' need for their mother's love and moral acceptance creates a spiritual tension which expresses itself in the

² Coleman, "Friendship," 21 June, 1963, ms. Poems, EC Collection (ser. 111.14 box 122 file 1384).

texts as both a desire for death's gratification and a fear of its sexually destructive nature.

The Unconscious

The unconscious, then, can be seen as a pervasive, powerful and persistent influence in the writings of White, Coleman and Barnes. It shapes the contours of the spiritual beliefs that obtain in the texts and offers an explanation for some of the contradictions that complicate our reading of their works. The authors' childhood experiences internalized according to their unique perceptions of their relationships provide us with the means to make sense of the hidden semantic weight we sometimes sense beneath their religious or ontological symbols. It helps us, for example, to decipher their metaphors and metonyms in ways that extend their meanings beyond the apparent discourse. The signifiers, "Eucharist," "love," "dog," "eat" and even "talk," for instance, alert us to meanings that derive from the personal and transcend unconsciously the accepted signifieds of those words. The reader will find this particularly in relation to catachresic metaphors which, in their disparate contexts, produce new meanings if we know their unconscious referents. Barnes's writing is full of such tropes -- catachresis, second-order references -- which by their use, add new frames of references to words and reconstitute their meaning into insights for which no new words yet exist.³ To take just one instance, the Doctor claims in

³ For general examples of catachresis in Barnes's texts, although not sexual/spiritual ones, see Alan Singer, " 'The Horse who knew to much': Metaphor and the Narrative of Discontinuity in *Nightwood*," Contemporary Literature 25 (1984): 66-87.

Nightwood that “life (is) the pastures in which the night feeds and prunes the cud that nourishes us to despair” (83) Now, if we follow by association the signifieds in the unconscious, the new frames of reference lead from “cud” to “cow” to “bestiality” and “father,” while “prune,” in conjunction with “cud” and its associations, leads not only to the “trees” of the text, but also to “children,” whom if cared for like trees are made beautiful and strong. However, we know too that the “Night” that “feeds” and “prunes” the “cud” for the cows and the children symbolizes also the very Beast, who is father/god and whose feeding has little to do with food. His “nourish(ing) (them) to despair,” therefore, becomes at once more meaningful for, unlike trees, these children are not being cultivated to reach towards the Light. Our new knowledge of the referents of the unconscious thus changes the way we read the text and adds another dimension to our understanding of the diegetic levels of the author’s narratives. Knowledge of the spiritual unconscious that underlies the texts contributes also to the illumination of specific literary cruxes. It provides a possible explanation for why, in Nightwood, for example, satire of Christianity seems to coexist with a tragic yearning for spiritual connection. Robin, Felix and the Doctor all aspire to intimate relationships with the Christian god. But the church’s demand that in return for such intimacy they deny a major part of their personal identity -- that which it is impossible to give without also denying their very selves -- complicates their yearning. Complications and contradictions therefore constitute part and parcel of the influence of the unconscious and are not necessarily the outcome of the

technical, structural, or stylistic oversights they may appear at first glance. For example, the inconsistency of the narrator's point of view regarding sex in Ladies Almanack, Ryder and Nightwood, when taken in the context of internalized experience, can be seen rather as a product of the conflicting forces of the unconscious.

Similar products of the unconscious may be considered the fear, guilt and lack of trust experienced by White and Barnes's characters in relation to god. Displaced into the spiritual realm, such affects, if taken at face value with no reference to the unconscious, often seem inappropriate or excessive responses in the new context. Nanda's fear of the "strained expectant ecstasy" in Teresa Leighton's eyes as she plays the role of Our Lady receiving the news that she will conceive a child through the Holy Spirit, for example, appears strange, as does her amazement at Teresa's look of bliss when the latter receives the Host on her tongue (Frost in May, 83). Both affects appear somewhat uncalled for in the convent context as we have got to know it up to this point. After all, the nuns have prepared both Nanda and Theresa for the experience of god with biblical stories that recount the joy of those who give themselves up to their Lord. With knowledge of the unconscious, however, we sense in Nanda's reactions the presence of the uncanny. It colors the text and provides the feel of something disturbing but nevertheless familiar that lies just beyond the young convent girl's reach. For in the unconscious, where this union with god trails connections with a union with the father, lies the source of Nanda's fear and her discomfort at the sight of such spiritual bliss. The unconscious, then, may shape,

direct and even distort the way a fictional character perceives and experiences her relationship to her god. For that reason, it cannot be divorced from those other elements, such as historical and cultural influences, that contribute to the spiritual search and with which it may sometimes do battle. It thus constitutes a major element of White, Coleman and Barnes's spiritual struggle and an integral part of their aesthetic practice.

Inevitability and Doubt

From the above it can be seen that the fictional women of White, Coleman and Barnes's texts were deeply and unavoidably influenced by their internalized experiences. The unconscious lay beyond their control and, unlike the silkworm who "on a running thread" could "spin a shroud to reconsider in," they could not deny the nature of their beings as they experienced them in their fantasies (Work-in-Progress, Grand Street, Spring, 1982).⁴ Their expression of their sexuality in relation to the spiritual thus seems inevitable, necessary almost as a representation of their bodily truth, their own reality. Their bodies "speak," as it were; they express the language of love that desires fulfillment from their gods in a returned love that accepts them whole. Such inevitability constitutes a primary characteristic of White, Coleman and

⁴ Barnes wrote at least 500 drafts of the poem, "Man cannot purge his body of its theme" and considered it, in January 1979, "the most important one she ha(d) ever attempted," suggesting that the topic of ontological existence bore a significance in her thinking that extended the more generally assumed interest she expressed in sexuality per se. Nancy J. Levine, "Works in Progress: The Uncollected Poetry of Barnes's Patchin Place Period," The Review of Contemporary Fiction 13.3 (1993) 188, quoting from Hank O'Neal, "The Barnes Diaries: Djuna Barnes, September 1978-February 1979" (ms. of Life is painful, nasty and short . . .), 61.

Barnes's "writing the body spiritual," and carries within it the understanding that such bodies constitute equally the products of His creation. Thus, for example, we see the narrative "I" of Coleman's poem, "This Love Cannot Divide Me from my Good," reminding her deity that after all it was He who created sexual love in the first place (EC Collection ser.111.14 box 122 file 1465). Gnosticism, of course, attributes creation and all that is related to earthly life to the Demiurge rather than to the god of light, but Barnes's transformation of Gnostic tenets as a result of her internalized experience draws the two together so that her protagonists also consider themselves created by one and the same god, body and soul both. Nancy Levine, for example, in her article about the uncollected poetry of Barnes's Patchin Place, describes Barnes as joining "the excremental vision to the vision of a spiritual quest" (Review of Contemporary Fiction, 194). However, Levine's choice of poems dealing with excretion and genitalia suggests that the critic perceives Barnes as ridiculing the spiritual. However, our knowledge of Barnes's conflation of the two gods suggests the author merely represented in her texts that which she sensed as fact, viz. the comingling of the sacred and the profane.

Given the historical, cultural and personal conditions that conspired to discourage their questioning of woman's ontological position, it is hardly surprising that "doubt" becomes a correlative to inevitability and, as such, another related characteristic that distinguishes White, Coleman and Barnes's "writing the body spiritual." By doubt, I mean that insecurity about sexual/spiritual holism expressed as contradiction by the narrative consciousness in some of their texts. For, even if the

authors' own experiences convinced them that the body belonged in the spiritual arena as much as did the mind, and that, for example, the transvestite doctor of Nightwood despite his sexual predilections loved his god as much as any other Catholic, no institutional support yet existed for such views. White, Coleman and Barnes were surrounded by official denigration of female sexuality and religion's traditional scapegoating of the same. Thus, we find in the texts that while the sexual energy of a female protagonist may engage with the spiritual in the temporal-spatial dimensions of her imagination, she simultaneously admits to a certain concern about that which she does. The "I," for example, that aspires in White's poem "The Key" to enter the rarefied world of her father/god beyond his study/celestial walls, also admits in "Sed tantum dic verbo" her confusion about the dual sexual nature of her presence at the Host's Communion feast (Strangers, 1, 157).⁵ Clothed in her nakedness, she claims, she cannot make distinctions between opposites and does not know even whether she sides with life or death (157-158).⁶ Doubt about her sexual and spiritual desires abound even as she boldly asserts them. For this narrating consciousness, like that of Barnes's Ladies Almanack or Coleman's The Shutter of Snow, feels insecure

⁵ Given White's insinuation of her father's feelings towards her, as suggested particularly in "Autobiography," As Once in May, one cannot dismiss the sexual implications in the description of the heavenly realm that reminds the reader of the father's study which Eirene Botting dared not enter unless invited by her father, Cecil.

⁶ White complained to her 1954 diary, about reviews of Strangers, that not one critic even referred to "Sed tantum dic verbo," suggesting perhaps that she assigned some special significance to this poem about the narrative "I's" inability to separate the sexual from the spiritual in her relationship to her god (Diaries, 281).

about her ontological position, her acceptability to her god as a sexual human being, though she argues hopefully for her right. For even as she expresses her ambiguous desire, her linguistic relationship involves “talk” with a deity who, she has been taught by Catholicism, repudiates the very bodily love for which she pleads. Certainly, many of the female protagonists in these authors’ texts had every reason to doubt their gods’ goodwill. I have outlined earlier the betrayals of trust suffered by Julie (Ryder) and Miranda (The Antiphon) at the hands of their father/gods, but Nanda (Frost in May), too, in addition to such betrayal, experienced abuse of trust at the hands of the nuns -- god’s wives -- who upheld the patriarchal laws of family, state and church. The nuns read Nanda’s private letters, spied on her relationship with her girlfriends and reported to her father her moral behavior, as interpreted by them. In turning to god through the Catholic Church, therefore, Nanda essentially engages the very perpetrators of her victimization, those who uphold their actions in the name of god

(56) It comes as no surprise then that Antonia White confessed to her diary, “I don’t trust myself. And I don’t seem able to trust God. It is so difficult not to think of God as waiting to catch me out” (227)

Such doubt and inevitability, however, do not cancel each other out. They coexist uneasily in an inter- and intra-textual dialectic in which each viewpoint endlessly seeks confirmation of its position. In the 1954 (revised June 4, 1962) poem, “Friendship,” for example, Coleman’s narrative consciousness wishes in the first verse that earthly/spiritual conflict could be put aside and “The human being could reside/

As John with Jesus as his Bride - /That we could drink this total joy,/ Soothing our heart-beats verily” (ser. 111.14 box 122 file 1384). But in verse 11 of the same poem, she pleads with Jesus to “purify me wholly/ Keep my birth and death apart.” The two positions seem the obverse of each other yet, even so, a dialectical relatedness can be identified in the “total joy” of the first and the “purify me wholly” of the other which bring body and spirit together in both cases. This relatedness, then, suggests that in the writing of White, Coleman and Barnes, we deal not with mutually exclusive positions of doubt and inevitability, but ones which are inevitably linked in the sense that the existence of one predicates the existence of the other. Thus, for example, if we assume doubt about sexual/spiritual holism to imply belief in god’s denial of the sexual element of spiritual love, then that very denial which simultaneously affirms spiritual love’s attachment in the first place to the sexual from which it must be liberated, also affirms doubt’s counterpart. In other words, the acceptability to god of the expression of the spiritual in sexual terms, even when doubted, is deemed also inevitable, in that the sexual exists, “natural,” as it were, created by god himself even as He supposedly desires humankind to deny it. Doubt and inevitability, therefore, do not exist as polarized positions, but frequently overlap. Even so, no easy and straight-forward path exists for tracing the direction of the author’s textual intentions about the spiritual. The way is littered with contradictions and inconsistencies. Fictional characters, like their authors themselves, must often compromise and renegotiate their positions in order to survive in a world frequently inhospitable to their needs and desires as sexual, spiritual and literary subjects. What

is more, such positions may change in accordance with even the slightest relational shifts as they affect the particular author. White, Coleman and Barnes's sources of interaction with patriarchy were numerous and varied, and since patriarchy itself is not an essentialist term, as Lisa Rado points out in Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism, their textual responses to their contacts with it fluctuated accordingly.⁷ Women do not engage with some monolithic structure that consistently subjects and represses them nor, of course, do all men at all times personify this category in their thoughts and actions. As we know, for example, John Holms encouraged Emily Coleman in her sexual, textual and spiritual subjecthood, even as Jacques Maritain exhorted her to spiritual heights at the expense of the sexual. Such shifts of influence may correlate in part to the gradations of assertiveness we find in the different texts. "Melville on the Land," for example -- begun in 1932 -- expresses, in the narrative "I's" identification with the whale's desire to return to the "great mother rolling wide," a correlative sexual/spiritual return. But in Coleman's later autobiographical prose work about the Roman Catholic Church, "The Delights of Death," begun in 1947 during her close friendship with Jacques Maritain, she sticks to a theological perspective that draws firm distinctions between the sacred and the profane, (ser. 11 box 111 file 982-983). Her female subjecthood as god-the-author-of-her-text in this latter work, therefore, appears dependent on her rejection of her earlier sexual self, whereas in the former, corresponding to the

⁷ Lisa Rado, ed., Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism (New York: Garland, 1994) 12.

influence of John Holms, her identification of herself with Melville as the poet who “touche(s) the honeyed lip” of “the Beast of Joy” and speaks of love and a heart that leaps at the sight, suggests a more confident assertion of her sexual/spiritual authorship. Such textual fluctuations in convictions, confidence and energy can be found in all three Modernists’ works.⁸ But the very persistence into the authors’ old age of the presence in the texts of such holistic desire indicates that the tendency and aspiration towards sexual/spiritual holism remained for them an ongoing struggle. They never gave up and, in spite of the directions of their own lives, continued to search textually for the answer to that spiritual question that caused them the most suffering, viz. their religions’ demand for the separation of the sacred from the profane.

Vulnerability and Protectiveness

The influence of the spiritual unconscious and the coexistence of inevitability and doubt, then, constitute the main characteristics of White, Coleman and Barnes’s aesthetic practice that I have termed “writing the body spiritual” and which expands the relationship of the sexual/textual to include the dimension of the spiritual. These features dominate their texts and point to the particularly Modernist sensibilities of the three authors whose autobiographical characters negotiate their narratives in search of meaning even as they foreground the inadequacies of the institutional contexts within

⁸ A number of the authors’ texts, of course, do not engage the question of the sexual, textual or spiritual at all. For example, White wrote two books about cats for her

which they must search. Contradictory, conflicting, both desirous yet fearful of the knowledge for which they quest, White and Coleman bargain with Catholicism, while Barnes grapples with her own Gnostic faith, suggesting the very agency that the signifiers “unconscious” and “inevitable” would seem to deny. This inferred lack of agency is further undercut by yet another couple of characteristics common to all three authors’ texts, viz., the very vulnerability of the female protagonist’s art when it ventures into the sexual conundrum, together with her attempts to protect it from the forces that would separate her from the truth to which it provides access. Nanda of Frost in May, for example, knows instinctively to keep secret her novel about sexual “vices,” but the snooping Mother Radcliffe ferrets it out on the grounds that she is saving Nanda from her own self-will and self-love (219). Nanda’s father considers her writing, “disgusting and vulgar filth” and wants to control the parameters of her creativity so that she may never move beyond the innocence of the little girl he would like her to remain (215). In spite of such humiliations and punishments, however, Nanda’s desire for textual truth remains an ongoing pursuit, and when we move into the next novels of the Frost in May quartet, we find her fictional successor, Clara, continuing to write, but only in secret. Her writing goes underground, as it were, into her black notebook (The Sugar House, 163). Although such writing still induces guilt in Clara, she does not suffer from that paralysis of mind that renders her impotent every time she tries to write anything designed to be read by others (ibid.).

Nanda/Clara's secret books, like the author's own diaries, therefore, become also the sites of contestation in which agency is effected.

For Barnes's Miranda in The Antiphon, the threats she experiences about her sexually-explicit writing derive from her own family, whose sexual histories are intimately tied up with hers and who thus fear her exposure of their brutality. "May God protect us!" Augusta exclaims to her daughter, "I wonder what you'll write/ When I am dead and gone" (115). Set up by her sons who would like to rid themselves once and for all of both mother and daughter, Augusta kills Miranda and, accidentally, herself as well. In so doing, she stops her daughter's pen for good and so frees the family from any further embarrassment the victimized woman may cause. Louise De Salvo notes in Conceived with Malice that Barnes's own mother felt exploited by her daughter's writing and that she perceived the evil perpetrated, not as Djuna's victimization within the family, but in her obsession to write about it and make it public (251). Not surprisingly then, the family went through Djuna's papers in search of texts they considered exploitative of them and actually went so far as to burn a manuscript Barnes had begun to write (247). As we know, however, Barnes could not be threatened into silence and she continued to write as she had always done, with sexual and spiritual passion. Hence, we find in "The Marion Year," the incestuous image of Mary, the mother of god, "riding Jesus down" as she holds him in the "manger of her gown" (Herring, Djuna, 307).

Of the three writers, Coleman suffered perhaps the least direct intimidation for her textual expression of her sexuality, but even so she felt obliged to

explain to her father before publication of her first novel The Shutter of Snow in 1930 that she no longer fit his image of the pure young woman writer. Her fictional protagonist, Marthe Gail, however, confined to the hospital, must struggle for the very means to express herself in writing, suggesting that at some level Coleman may have felt likewise hampered. When one of the patients, Mrs. Fearing, refuses to give Marthe Gail her pencil, she threatens her with death (19). But even with the pencil in hand, Marthe finds herself caught in an institutional trap: by her ability to write, she knows herself to be god -- "I am the poem of the earth, that contains all manna and release," she announces (135) -- but when she attempts to write as a *sexual, female* god, as I have pointed out before, the letters under her pencil are like moths squirming (20) It is no coincidence, I suggest, that this delusional experience occurs as Marthe attempts to write to her father in the hope of proving herself god.

The vulnerability to suppression of that female aesthetic production that dared to represent the sexual as an integral part of the truth vouchsafed the writer through her position as god-the-author can be seen as a constant cause of concern to White, Coleman and Barnes. Each must battle the cultural forces, predominantly the church and family, as we have seen, that would deny her the power of the word and the right to her own representations of its truth. But even more than church and family, I suggest, these three Modernist authors feared the power of the medical establishment that claimed the god-like right to make judgments on their sanity or lack thereof. For in the labeling of their mental health lay the doctors' ability to deprive them not only of their pens and thus their art, but also that connection to enlightenment which each

believed her art to provide. The odds, therefore, were highly stacked against them. The risks to their chances of personal redemption, lay over and above the risk to their self-identity as professional writing women and to whatever literary acceptance already existed for them as woman on the basis of their non-sexual writing, viz., White's translations from the French, and Coleman and Barnes's journalism.⁹ For the sake of this god-given conduit, as they believed it to be, the authors therefore needed to proceed textually with utmost caution. For, while they might risk the disapprobation of their beings, they dared not chance the endangerment of their art. As described earlier, each writer believed the creative process to be connected to a mystical force which directed her thoughts and led her words towards truth. Dictated to or touched by the "Eternal Hand," she felt its presence, a presence whose loss she could not contemplate. Nothing could be worse than being cut adrift from this life-force that communicated with her through the written word. Thus, we find both Coleman and White's female protagonists, Marthe Gail in The Shutter of Snow and Clara in Beyond the Glass, for example, suppressing their sexual selves in order to appear sane and thus keep hold of their writing, albeit in secret. In the authors' direction of their characters in this way, they foreground the very process by which

⁹ Much of White's income derived from French translations. She won the Denyse Clairouin prize in 1949 for her first translation, Maupassant's A Woman's Life, and went on to complete 34 further titles, many of them the novels of Colette. She also translated Alex Carrel's Reflections on Life, written after Man the Unknown, and published in 1952; some of Barnes's journalistic interviews have been assembled in Djuna Barnes Interviews, ed. Alyce Barry (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1985); Coleman wrote for The Paris Tribune, in the Twenties, but her work has not been collected.

female mental health is culturally constructed and by doing so reveal “normality” as an artificial measurement that requires the assumption of masks and disguises. In order to escape the confines of the asylum, then, Marthe Gail pretends to the dutiful and cleanliness-conscious behavior of the housewife who sweeps and washes her way home. Clara, for her part, resumes her role as the once-again pure, obedient daughter to her father, Claude, her restoration to “health,” tellingly indicated by the return of her ability to write just as Claude taught her, i.e. by the exclusion of her real self from the text. In both cases, the very foregrounding of the conflict achieves the transformation of values to which the authors seem to aspire, for, unlike their fictional protagonists, they themselves continue to express their art as sexual women, at least until well into their forties. Each author inscribes herself out of madness, as does Barnes through her production of the prose-verse, The Antiphon. Ironically, the therapeutic treatment prescribed by Barnes’s doctor – to record the daily events in her life – unwittingly led to her writing the very narrative about her family that they wished to make her forget (De Salvo, Conceived with Malice, 222). From Barnes’s perspective, her brothers had conspired to have her institutionalized because they wanted their sister to renounce her notions of herself as a creative genius (221). They wanted her to stop her textual efforts at self-expression and to write instead something “normal” and “ordinary,” like journalism, so that she might attain commercial success and they would no longer have to worry about supporting her (ibid.). Her brother, Thurn Buddington, having read the completed play, The Antiphon, for the second time, perceived it as yet another symptom of Barnes’s

mental problems. He accused her of being “fixated” on something long dead, seeing in her obsession with her betrayal, rather than the betrayal itself, a problem that would destroy her life (211). His accusations about “fixation,” the psychic damming-up of libido, are implied also in Augusta’s indictment of Miranda, as I have quoted earlier, although the fictional character does not apply the psychoanalytic term, but speaks of the “evil” of Miranda’s exploitation of the family’s past. For all three authors, then, the specter of mental illness and incarceration loomed like a threatening shadow over their every literary effort. For that reason, their challenging of their sacrificial roles constituted dangerous textual territory, their persistence in pursuing the truth, surely an attestation of their bravery.

The texts of White, Coleman and Barnes could not have been more different from one another in style. Coleman aspired to simple and unadorned narrativization, White to the accurate journalistic presentation of facts. Barnes, for her part, drew on past literary traditions and language that frequently obscured her meaning. Yet, as I hope to have shown through the discussion of common attributes found in the texts, the authors are linked in a mutual pursuit that identifies in their work, whether poems, short stories or novels, what I have described as “writing the body spiritual.” By fictionally highlighting the relationship to the spiritual of the other, the feminine, and the flesh -- positions condemned to the negative sides of the dualisms by the patriarchal system -- and then showing those positions to be comprised in large part by their supposed opposites, White, Coleman, and Barnes assert their own “female” argument. Their representation of the conflict, even as their fictional characters fail to

achieve its solution, effects the transformation of consciousness and indicates the particular form of power which comprises agency in “writing the body spiritual.” In focusing on woman’s desire for spiritual sustenance and acknowledgment that does not simultaneously deprive her of the sexual component of her identity as god-the-author-of-her-text, White, Coleman and Barnes deploy an aesthetic approach that reveals the integrated sexual/textual/spiritual dimensions of “female” being.

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Publications:

Review. *Abram Esau's War. A Black South African War in the Cape, 1899-1902.*
Bill Nasson. Canadian Journal of African Studies: University of Montreal, Winter, 1994

Reviews published in The Seattle Times (1982-1996):

Loukoum: The “Little Prince” of Belleville, Calixthe Beyala, Sept. 1, 1996
House of Glass, Pramodya Ananta Toer, Aug. 18, 1996
Dust and Ashes, Anatoli Rybakov, March 17, 1996
Painted Desert, Frederick Barthelme, Jan. 21, 1996
Horseman, Mike Nicol, Oct. 22, 1995
Arranged Marriage, Chitra Baneerjee Divakaruni, Oct. 8, 1995
The Wedding and The Richer, the Poorer, Dorothy West, Aug. 27, 1995
Under the Feet of Jesus, Helena Maria Viramontes, July 30, 1995
The Master of Petersburg, J.M.Coetzee, Jan. 1, 1995
Alan Paton: A Biography, Peter Alexander, Oct. 2, 1994
The House on R. Street, Sheila Kohler, Sept. 4, 1994
On the Contrary, Andre Brink, Aug. 28, 1994
Innocents in Africa, Drury Pifer, July 3, 1994
In No Uncertain Terms: A South African Memoir, Helen Suzman, Dec. 26, 1993
The Wives of Bath, Susan Swan, Nov. 14, 1993
The Bungalow, Lynn Freed, Feb. 28, 1993
Fear, Anatoli Rybakov, Dec. 13, 1992
Ancestral Voices, Etienne Van Heerden, Sept. 20, 1992
An Act of Terror, Andre Brink, Jan. 26, 1992

Jump, Nadine Gordimer, Jan.3, 1992
This Earth of Mankind, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Nov. 13, 1991
Brief Lives, Anita Brookner, Sept.1, 1991
Peter Doyle, John Vernon, Aug.4, 1991
Worlds Beyond My Control, Jane Lazarre, June 16, 1991
And They Didn't Die, Laretta Ngcobo, May 12, 1991
Nampally Road, Meena Alexander, March 24, 1991
Prized Possessions, Avery Corman, March 3, 1991
Age of Iron, J.M.Coetzee, Sep. 9, 1990.
Ties of Blood, Gillian Slovo, July 1, 1990
The Colorist, Susan Daitch, April 8, 1990
Homework, Margaret Livesey, March 25, 1990
First Light, Peter Ackroyd, Jan 7, 1990
Running to Maputo, Albie Sachs, Sept. 2, 1990
Temporary Sojourner and Other South African Stories, Tony Eprile, Oct. 22

1989

Summer People, Marge Piercy, Sept.10, 1989
Second Fiddle, Mary Wesley, Aug. 20, 1989
The Men's Room, Anne Oakley, July 2, 1989
Last Call, Harry Mulisch, June 11, 1989
Nervous Conditions, Tsitsi Dangarembga, June 4, 1989
Best Intentions, Kate Lehrer, Sept.20, 1987
The Paper Door, Shiga Naoya, July, 1987
Sphinx, D.M.Thomas, Apr. 12, 1987
The Interpreter, Natascha Wodin, Nov. 16, 1986
Anagrams, Lorrie Moore, Dec. 21, 1986
Home Ground, Lynn Freed, Oct. 5, 1986
Winter Journey, Ronald Frame, July 6, 1986
Bright River Trilogy, Annie Greene, Feb. 24, 1985
The Grass Rain, Eduardo Garrigues, Jan. 27, 1985
The Green King, Paul-Loup Sultzer, Aug. 26, 1984
Teaching a Stone to Talk, Annie Dillard, Jan. 30, 1983
Blood River, Barbara Villet, Jan.2, 1983
Isak Dinesen: The Life of a Storyteller, Judith Thurman, Nov. 14, 1982
The Stone Flower, Alan Scholefield, Oct. 3, 1982
The St.Petersburg Affair, Olga Ilyin, Aug. 15, 1982

Reviews in Seattle Voice:

Tell My Horse, Zora Neale Hurston, Dec. 1982
Asking for Trouble, Donald Woods, March, 1982
July's People, Nadine Gordimer, Oct. 1981

Conferences:

"The Other Barnes: The Spiritual Correspondence of Djuna Barnes and Emily Coleman." Conference paper to be presented at the "Conference on Christianity and Literature," Seattle University, May 2-3, 1997.

"The psycho-spiritual in the literary analysis of Modernist texts." Conference paper presented at "The Trace of the Other," International Conference on Literature and Religion: Westminster College, Oxford, England, September 12-14, 1996.

"The Language of Literature: Postcolonialism's Ultimate Frontier." Conference paper presented at "After Empire" Conference, University of Tulsa, March 24-27, 1994.

"The Politics of an Interracial Culture in the New South Africa: The Writer's Perspective." Co-organizer, South African Writers' Panel, African Studies Association Conference, Seattle, Nov. 20-23, 1992.

Teaching Experience:

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SISAF 444 "Literary Representation as Identity Politics in an Evolving South Africa." Part-Time Lecturer, Spring 1997.

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HA&S 262C "Beyond Black and White: The History and Literature of Conflict in South Africa." Instructor, Winter, 1995

HA&S 263A "Supplement or Rival: South African Literature vis-à-vis History." Instructor, Spring, 1994

HA&S 263A "South African History through Literature." Instructor, Spring, 1992

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History 452 "South African History through Literature." Substitute Instructor (Professor Aldon Bell), Fall, 1990

Guest Lectures:

"The literature of resistance in South Africa," April 15, 1996.
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“Drama and Literature in Southern Africa,” scheduled May 7 & 9, 1997.
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Encyclopaedia entry on South African writer, J.M.Coetzee, Collier’s Encyclopaedia, scheduled April, 1997

Founder and Moderator, Modernism Colloquium, UW, 1995-1996

Reader/evaluator, South African writer, J.M. Coetzee, *Modern Language Quarterly*, April, 1995

Co-ordinator, Reviewer Lists, University of Washington Press, 1993

Co-ordinator, Literary Division, “Perspectives on South African Arts and Culture,” a program of the African, African-American and Caribbean Arts Council of the Seattle Art Museum and Rakumi Arts, Seattle, Aug.5-8, 1991

Literary Co-ordinator, Bumbershoot Arts Festival, 1983

Co-editor, Bumbershoot 1983, *Literary Arts Magazine*, 1983

Theater and Book Critic, *Seattle’s Child*, 1981-82.

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