

But because she has discovered the advantages of being herself, the protagonist refuses any resolution that does not agree with the *ich* which she has just discovered. Alone with herself again, the protagonist decides to distinguish between possibilities and necessities and to accept nothing unless it proves to be necessary for her inner *ich*.

These two novels show quite clearly that the East-German writer has freed himself from the stringent literary and political "guidelines" which seemed imposed on him by the tradition of socialist realism of the last few decades, and that he realizes that other styles and approaches for depicting reality do exist, that there are other—perhaps inner—worlds besides that of the working class. It is obvious that the East Germans are now convinced that exchanging ideas with—perhaps even taking a lesson from—authors of the capitalist world can be advantageous.

These and similar literary experiments prove that the East-German writers have finally broken out of their isolation and have joined experimenting contemporaries in the West. It will be interesting to see how long it will take writers in other socialist countries to decide—or to be permitted—to participate in the search for new themes and unconventional forms which has been going on in the Western world for some time now.

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Nightwood and the Freudian Unconscious

When Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* first appeared in 1937 accompanied by a preface in which T. S. Eliot enthusiastically endorsed the work, only a few avant-garde critics seemed to feel that a major literary event had taken place. Since that time the novel has attracted a small circle of admirers who have been awed by Barnes's extraordinary ability to infuse macabre or grotesque subject matter with haunting beauty, but the general consensus seems to be, with a few notable exceptions, that an excessive lack of verisimilitude makes it something less than a masterpiece.¹ *Nightwood* has not yet been recognized as a truly great piece of American fiction simply because we have failed to fully appreciate the fact that it does not depict human interaction on the level of conscious, waking existence. It is rather a dream world in which the embattled forces of the human personality take the form of characters representing aspects of that personality at different levels of its functioning.

The understanding of the structure of man's interior life revealed in the narrative is remarkably close to that advanced by Sigmund Freud only a few years before Barnes began work on the novel. In 1923 Freud chose to describe the distribution and interaction of the two instinctual forces which he had defined previously—Eros and Thanatos—in terms of three mental provinces. The provinces delineated in this model—ego, superego, and id—are not, Freud makes clear, autonomous entities which are completely disparate and distinct from one another, but rather modes of mental activity which overlap and intermesh. Barnes's treatment of character seems quite consistent with Freud's conception of the nature of the three divisions in our mental life. She does not present us with allegorical

figures who take on “all” the characteristics of one mode of functioning, but rather with representatives of the interior workings of the human mind at different points along the continuum of psychic experience.

Most of what occurs in *Nightwood* is in response to one character whose presence is so mysterious that it occasions endless fascination on the part of all who have contact with her. When Robin Vote first appears as a nameless American who has fainted in a Parisian hotel room, her eyes suggest “the long unqualified range in the iris of wild beasts who have not tamed the focus down to meet the human eye.”² She possesses, says her abandoned husband, “an indefinable disorder, a sort of ‘odour of memory,’ like a person who has come from a place we have forgotten and would give our life to recall” (p. 118). Demonstrating little inclination to indulge in abstract thinking and no real capacity to analyze the behavior of others, her every action is spontaneous and utterly unpredictable.

The most striking feature of Robin’s makeup is her unrestrained sexuality which finds expression in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Driven by a passion that knows neither limits or boundaries, every limb of her body seems to glow with a sexual energy that could encompass all living flesh without achieving respite from desire. Unable to maintain a commitment to any one sexual partner no matter what effort those partners make to maintain the relationship, she roams the dark world of *Nightwood* like a bitch in heat in incessant pursuit of yet another sexual experience. In the last scene of the novel, which is strangely beautiful in spite of the fact that the action described would be considered obscene by almost any standard, we find her engaged in sexual play with a dog—“crawling after him” on the floor and “barking in a fit of laughter” (p. 170).

The parallels between Barnes’s characterization of Robin and Freud’s description of the dynamics of the interior life on the level of the id are simply too extensive to ignore. The id, which Freud associated with the more vestigial portion of the brain’s anatomy, is the place where man’s primitive instincts originate. It also functions as a kind of psychic energizer which compels the individual to take action. It is, says Freud, “a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement,” and has “no organization and no unified will, only an impulsion to obtain satisfaction for the instinctual needs, in accordance with the pleasure principle.”³ Analytical or logical thought cannot occur in the id because the “laws of logic—above all, the law of contradiction—do not hold for processes in the id” (*NL* p. 104). The last of the parallels hardly needs mentioning—sexual desire is the overt manifestation of an instinctual need which the id seeks uncompromisingly to gratify.

Not long after her unexplained appearance in the hotel room in Paris, Robin accepts Baron Felix Volkbein’s proposal of marriage without giving any thought whatsoever to the consequences of her action. The “Baron,” who knows that the title was fabricated by his father, tries desperately to present himself as a member of the European aristocracy. He becomes obsessed with “what he termed ‘Old Europe’: aristocracy, nobility, royalty,” and spends much of his time searching for the “correct thing to which to pay tribute: the right street, the right cafe, the right building, the right vista” (p. 9). His every gesture is governed by his conception of place and function in society, and his whole demeanor is that of a remarkably constrained individual. He even admits on a number of occasions that Robin is in tune with forces in the human psyche that he is but dimly aware of, and is simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by her blatant sensuality.

In Freudian psychology the superego develops when the child toward the end of the phallic period begins to internalize the demands of the parents. Since the imagined expectations of the parents tend to be exaggerated, the superego, in an attempt to force the individual to live up to the "ego-ideal" derived from the parents, imposes rigid restrictions and demands which cannot ultimately be met. Felix's unremitting efforts to mold himself in terms of his idealized conception of his father suggests that the superego is clearly dominant in his personality. The exaggerated interest in societal forms is also commensurate with Felix's role in the novel in that one of the primary functions of the superego is to represent internalized cultural values.

Jenny Petherbridge and Nora Flood are, like Felix, victimized by Robin's insatiable desire. Both are drawn inexorably to Robin, and yet each is unable to win anything like a lasting commitment from her. Viewed on the continuum of psychic experience Jenny is a superego type like Felix. She suffers "from some elaborate denial" (p. 65) and is incapable of deriving any real pleasure from the sexual act (p. 68). The influence of the superego is not as great, however, in Nora's psyche. She feels, for example, no obligation to make moral judgments and no sense of being related to or defined by society (p. 53). Her vague sense that there is something wrong or reprehensible in Robin's behavior suggests that the superego is more active in her consciousness than it is in Robin's, and it is this which leads Nora to seek advice and counsel from Dr. Matthew O'Connor.

Functioning like a Greek chorus made up of terribly astute analysts with a penchant for poetic statement, Dr. O'Connor comments upon the behavior of others with a precision that invokes both fright and awe. Intimately acquainted with the irrational and yet fully conscious of the dictates of society, O'Connor, like the Freudian ego, strives to establish equilibrium between the two warring factions. One of the fundamental differences between the ego and the id, says Freud, is that the ego has "a tendency to synthesize its contents, to bring together and unify its mental processes which is entirely absent from the id" (*NL*, p. 107). O'Connor, who comes "upon thinking with the eye that you fear, which is called the back of the head" (p. 83), incessantly attempts to "synthesize" or "unify" the various levels of mental functioning he sees in operation within himself and others.

When Nora pays him a visit in his apartment, which has the appearance of a scene from the dream world which even the most healthy of us would tend to repress, she asks him to tell her everything he knows about the night (p. 79). What follows can easily be read as a rambling discourse on the nature of the life of the id. When Nora notes that something seems to happen to a person's identity when asleep, O'Connor says, "Let a man lay himself down in the Great Bed and his 'identity' is no longer his own, his 'trust' is not with him, and his 'willingness' is turned over and of another permission. His distress is wild and anonymous" (p. 81). Since the id has "no organization and no unified will, only a compulsion to obtain satisfaction for the instinctual needs" (*NL*, p. 104), the concept of the "self" as a distinct entity imbued with the power to direct and control mental activity or behavior does not exist in the id.

The power of the superego, says Freud, is greatly diminished in sleep, and so the opportunity to obtain satisfaction for instinctual needs in the fictive world of the dream is proportionately enhanced. When our beloved sleeps beside us is she not, O'Connor asks, "moving her legs aside for an unknown garrison? Or in a moment,

that takes but a second, murdering us with an ax? Eating our ear in a pie, pushing us aside with the back of her hand, sailing to some port with a ship full of sailors or medical men?" (p. 87). In response to Nora's request that he imagine what the experience of physical death would be like in sleep, he says: "But what of our death—permit us to reproach the night, wherein we die manifold alone" (p. 97). Death as we normally conceive it is the loss of self or identity, but if bodily processes cease when consciousness is operating on the level of the id there is, no matter how horrific it seems, no distinct, definable self or identity to be lost.

The position of the ego is precarious, according to Freud, because it "is designed to represent the demands of the external world, but it also wishes to be a loyal servant to the id, to remain upon good terms with the id, to recommend itself to the id as object, and to draw the id's libido onto itself" (*NL*, p. 108). In his interaction with Nora, O'Connor is a loyal servant of the id in that he readily accedes to her incessant demand that he reveal his experience on that level of functioning, but he also strives to represent the external demands of the world by attempting to convince her that her requited love for Robin is self-destructive. Feeling defeated in his effort to make Nora appreciate the dangers involved in maintaining any ties with Robin, O'Connor begins to lose his own tenuous psychic balance. Freud asserted that when the ego is forced to recognize its weakness in the face of the passions of the id it breaks out into neurotic anxiety (*NL*, p. 109-110). When O'Connor is last seen in the narrative, drunk and despondent in his favorite Parisian cafe, he is showing all the signs of neurotic anxiety (pp. 165-66).

Much of the popular criticism of Freudian theory that has been published in recent years, like that of Norman O'Brown, Herbert Marcuse, and Philip Rieff, has taken issue with Freud's allegedly pessimistic conclusion in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that the dictates of society will inevitably frustrate the gratification of instinctual needs, and that man is, therefore, a creature divided against himself.⁴ Although *Nightwood* is not written in the didactic mode, Barnes appears to have arrived at the same understanding of this very basic human dilemma. In the dream world of the novel Robin does have the opportunity to gratify her instinctual needs with minimal observance of the forms of society, and the consequences are clearly disastrous. All major characters are drawn irresistibly to the level of experience which Robin represents, and each suffers some irremedial loss. After she divests herself of the demands of the superego, or that whole complex of forms and values known as "civilization," she simply returns to that state of being which our apish ancestors must have known before any of those forms and values evolved in the first place—she is intensely aware of and responsive to physical stimuli but has apparently lost all capacity to "think." She is an animal—pure and simple.

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NOTES

¹See Joseph Frank, *The Widenng Gyre*, (New Jersey: Indiana University Press, 1963), pp. 24-48. Alan Williamson, "The Divided Image: The Quest for Identity in the Works of Djuna Barnes," *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, 7 (1964), pp. 58-74.

²Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (New York: New Directions, 1937), p. 37.

³Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis*, trans. W. J. H. Sprott (New York: Norton and Co., Inc., 1933), p. 104. Subsequent quotations from this course bear the page reference in parentheses after the abbreviated title *NL*.

⁴Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death* (New York, Vintage Books, 1959).

Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962); *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1961); *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (London, Hogarth Press Ltd., 1961).

A Note on Camus's "The Guest"

Albert Camus's well-known work "The Guest" is a nearly perfect short story, which ranks with the best of Maupassant. It has been included in so many anthologies, both in French and in translations, that it is familiar to most college students today. For many readers, however, the end of the story remains an enigma. As a result of submitting this story to the most acid of all "laboratory" tests (i.e. the classroom), we have arrived at a conclusion that differs from that of most critics.

"The Guest" centers on Daru's intention of granting self-determination to the Arab, of giving the latter the choice of going to Tinguit and to prison, or of going to the nomad region and to freedom. At this point, it will probably appear that the Arab is incapable of making a decision. Since, after all, he has not read the seven hundred plus pages of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, he is unaware of the existential implications of his action. The clue to the Arab's decision, however, is provided by Germaine Brée, who emphasizes the fraternal relationship between Daru and the Arab ("a dignity in their silence, a mutual respect in their attitude").¹ This dignity and this mutual respect, then, engender the sentiment that will furnish the ultimate solution of the story, but it is important to review the origin and the development of this fraternal relationship.

It is Daru, and not the gendarme Balducci, who suggests that the Arab's hands be untied so that he might drink the mint tea. And it is again Daru who kneels in order to loosen the bonds of the squatting Arab, who "watched him with his feverish eyes."²

Later, when they are alone, the Arab is drawn to Daru by his laconic speech in the same inexplicable manner that Marie, Céleste and others are attracted to Meursault. Readers of *The Stranger* will readily understand the following cryptic exchange of words. It begins with the Arab's query: "Why do you eat with me?" To which Daru responds: "I'm hungry" (p. 99). The act of eating with "them" is, of course, one of the primary taboos of any racist. The Arab, then, immediately senses the absence of any racial prejudice on the part of Daru.

Still later, before going to sleep, the Arab, without revealing any outward emotion, twice enjoins Daru to accompany him on the journey to prison the following day. (The Arab assumes that Balducci will conduct him to Tinguit.) His