

## Resisting the Matrix of Representation: Negotiating Posthuman Horror, Unruly Bodies and Alternate Constructions of Embodiment in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*

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### Abstract:

Through this article I want to argue how the genre of horror serves as a site for disintegrating the rigid physical and theoretical boundaries of the human body. "Horror" - a word derived from the Latin *horrere*, to shudder or shiver - works on the edges of bodies, making us want to jump out of our skin and reminding us of the fragile barriers between self and other. Djuna Barnes' 1936 novel *Nightwood* features characters desperately searching for forms beyond the human, sleepwalking like zombies through decaying Europe. The people who populate Barnes' world are rendered horrific through their improper gender expression, destructive despair, and inertia so intense they threaten to become fungus, but these sites of horrific decomposition are also places of possibility to imagine embodiment in a new way.

**Keywords:** Embodiment, Posthuman, Horror, Body, Gothic

### 1.1 Introduction: Locus of the Body in the Epistemology of Modernism and the Issue of the Posthuman Representation

In Modernist epistemology the notion of the "body" is and always has been a slippery, unstable category that does not easily cohere - the deconstruction of the category of the body isn't merely a theoretical move, but something immanent to our descriptions of ourselves. The "Body" and the "Human" are concepts constructed discursively and historically wielded as agents of exclusion and violence. In this article I will try to argue about the alternate materialities of Posthuman Gothic genre's embodiments articulated through literary practices, the viscerality that exceeds the ideology. In the middle of twentieth century Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote in *The Second Sex* (1949) that "one is not born, but becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 2) - an observation about the constructedness of gender that extends to the entirety of being and becoming human. One is not born, but becomes, a body - and just how those bodies are articulated, how they come to matter is of crucial importance for illuminating who and what we deem valuable and worthy and how we might rescript our relationships to each other and to the natural world. Through this article I want to argue how the genre of horror serves as a site for disintegrating the rigid physical and theoretical boundaries of the human body. "Horror" - a word derived from the Latin *horrere*, to shudder or shiver - works on the edges of bodies, making us want to jump out of our skin and reminding us of the fragile barriers between self and other. Djuna Barnes' 1936 novel *Nightwood* features characters desperately searching for forms beyond the human, sleepwalking like zombies through decaying Europe. The people who populate Barnes' world are rendered horrific through their improper gender expression, destructive despair, and

inertia so intense they threaten to become fungus, but these sites of horrific decomposition are also places of possibility to imagine embodiment<sup>1</sup> anew.

Let us now ponder a bit about another aspect of our article, Posthumanism. Posthumanism, as it relates to the relationship between human subjectivity and technology, is the reduction of the body to prosthetic so that new and alternative subjectivities can emerge. Posthumanism emerged in response to humanism's normative claims. Posthumanism understands subjectivity as disembodied information capable of existing in any number of containers. Posthumanism, then, is supposed to be post-body. N. Katherine Hayles provides the most comprehensive definition of posthumanism's relationship with the organic body in her book *How We Became Posthuman*. She writes the body is an "accident of history rather than an inevitability of life" (Hayles 2). Quite eerily Hayles sees dematerialization as natural. The posthuman seeks to leave the organic body behind and realize itself as information. Gregory Paul and Earl Cox write in *Beyond Humanity*, "Humanism," and the author of this article would argue Posthumanism as well, "is human-centred when humans are about to become extinct" (Paul and Cox 428). The reason for this problematic is that Posthumanist discourse has not made a clean enough break with humanist discourse regarding the status of the body, the naturalness or unnaturalness of prosthetic devices, and the idea of altogether leaving the body behind. In his book *A Genealogy of Cyborgothic: Aesthetics and Ethics in the Age of Posthumanism*, Dongshin Yi propounded, "Posthumanism, signalling the end of a humanism that has been anthropocentric and an inception of a reciprocal relationship between humans and sub- or non-humans, renews the request for a future-oriented literary criticism"<sup>2</sup>. By "future-oriented literary criticism" the Dongshin Yi meant "resistance to the long and oppressive tradition of representation" (Yi 4).

Jacques Derrida in his article, "Sending: On Representation," notes that "our concepts of system and of history are essentially marked by structure and the closure of representation" (Derrida 304), and, in his usual intricate deconstructionist manner that involves the etymology of the term representation and the history of metaphysics, leads us to a recognition that representation, an act of sending an envoi by Being, exposes the split within Being and "traces of difference" of the other (Derrida 324). Highly critical of "The system of representation," Dorothea Olkowski also conducts a "search for concepts and transformational structures characterized by an abstract but fluid ontology that can make sense of difference by accounting for the reality of temporal and spatial change on a pragmatic level while providing appropriate theoretical constructs in whose terms change can be conceived" (Olkowski 2). Olkowski finds in Deleuze's "designifying practices [that] effect the ruin of representation" a path to such an ontology, which she later names, "the ontology of change and becoming" (Olkowski 30). The deconstruction of metaphysical Being and the construction of an alternative ontology are uprooting the overwrought tradition of representation, upon which most humanistic discourses - often criticized as androcentric or at best anthropocentric - have been founded. A new chapter for the humanities is thus about to open, rendering it legitimate to request a future-oriented criticism so that we can build something on "the ruin of representation."

In the introduction to *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995), Jack Halberstam notes that the Gothic novel produces symbols for "interpretive mayhem in the body of the monster" (Halberstam 3), and specifically focuses on explorations of 'Otherness' by using "the body of the monster to produce race, class, gender, and sexuality

within narratives about the relation between subjectivities and certain bodies” (Halberstam 6). Such an employment of monsters to unsettle representational boundaries continues in contemporary posthuman gothic/horror genre. Judith Halberstam, argues that “monsters are meaning machines. They can represent gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality in one body<sup>3</sup>” (Halberstam 21), while Edward J. Ingebresten explores “the use of the word ‘monster’ as metaphor and rubric in Gothic America,” where monsters become “a necessary social hygiene” (Ingebresten 2, 27).

Now at this point, the writer of the article wants to discuss a bit about the discipline of “Teratology”, which is the study of abnormalities of physiological development in human/non-human organisms and argue how the inclusion of the disfigured creatures destabilizes the entire politics of representation in case of a gothic/horror genre. Teratogens are substances that may cause birth defects via a toxic effect on an embryo or foetus. Etymologically, “teratology” comes from the Greek word *teras*, meaning “monster,” and the Latin *logy*, which in turn is derived from the Greek *logia*, meaning “a discourse, treatise, doctrine, theory”. In 18th century aesthetic and moral criticism, the word ‘monster’ signified ugliness, irrationality and all things and events unnatural. It was viewed as the antithesis of neo-classical values of harmony and unified composition. A monster portrayed an image of deformity and irregularity. In literary terms, it involved works that crossed the boundaries of reason and morality, presenting excessive and viciously improper scenes and characters. Unlike the Gothic, whose tropes developed principally in the West and then cross-culturally pollinated elsewhere, “monstrosity” is always already global concept, a product of an organized society’s attempt to classify what is “normal” or “monstrous.”

In his “Foreward” titled “What We Talk About When We Talk About Monsters” collected in the book *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology* Edited by Caroline Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning, David J. Skal sketched a very interesting picture of “monster”:

Monsters are slippery, ever-adaptive metaphors, but above all, they are natural teachers and teaching tools [...] From antiquity onward, anomalous births were considered ominous, portents of disease and disaster. Birth defects were displayed for entertainment and profit at least from Elizabethan times, first for the rabble and later for the middle classes as “educational” diversion. Monsters, ultimately, are supreme paradoxes, dreamlike constructions that attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. Monsters always end up having it both ways, which is part of their enduring appeal. They’re both living and dead, human and animal, or (in the case of cyborgs) organic and mechanical. [...] Since it is in the nature of monsters to bridge divides, it should be no wonder that they offer an (un)natural tool for cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural studies, which almost, by definition, require some crucial encounter with some kind of Other. (Skal XII from “Introduction”)

In the next section of this article, the author will try to show that how fragmentation and instability of bodies, flesh and the horrified body, monstrosity and its complex representation in Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood* (1936) contains and circulates history, performing new ways of living with the past.

## 1.2 Horrified Body as a Site of Tragic Dissolution of the Hegemonic concept of “Human”:

“The horror! The horror!” (Conrad 180) is one of the most recognizable and enigmatic lines of modernism, uttered by Mr. Kurtz, an ivory trader and one of the most inexplicable characters of twentieth century fiction, created by Joseph Conrad in his immortal novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Written just as the twentieth century was dawning, Conrad’s vision feels eerily prophetic: literary modernism reckons with new horrors at every turn as its architects attempt to write a world upended. The mechanized weaponry of World

War I leaves bodies and minds mangled and the earth rent open. The slow dissolution of European empire forces a confrontation with the horrors that colonial exploitation and the legacy of slavery have wrought, and the racist formations they leave in their wake. Freud's theories of the subconscious and the Oedipal complex suggest that horror lurks in our bodies from birth, death drives and fears of castration seething just below the surface. Where Freud is interested in unearthing the hidden depths of horror, the author of the article is curious about corporal surfaces: horror certainly works in and through the body, but more specifically, it works on the body's edges and boundaries. The word "horror" can be traced back to the Sanskrit *harsate*, to bristle. The Latin *horrere* means to bristle with fear, shudder, or have erect hairs on the skin, and in English, the word originally connoted a feeling of disgust. To be horrified is to feel your skin prickle, to be hyperaware of your boundaries and the possibility that they could be traversed.

Julia Kristeva's 1982 book *Powers of Horror* mines this etymology to similar ends, and she theorizes the abject - that which is neither subject nor object but must be rejected and cast out in order to define the body's boundaries—as a result of horror's power. Building on the concept of abjection, Sara Ahmed's defining work on the concept of disgust further articulates how much horror constitutes a process of boundary formation in the presence of something that is threateningly other: disgust "shows us how the boundaries that allow the distinction between subjects and objects are undone" and is a "slippage which would threaten the ontology of 'being apart' from others" (Ahmed 87). What if the horror to which Kurtz refers, the horror that suffuses so much of modernism, is that white male bodies have slipped and begun to recognize that the ontology of "being apart" is mere fiction? The horrified body, then, is not a site of tragic dissolution but of potential and recognition that an ontology of the human as defined, hierarchized, and demarcated from other life forms is unsustainable. Read this way, the horrified body is instrumental in deconstructing the hegemonic concept of the human body based in racializing formations which relegate Black and brown bodies to less than human. Materializing the ghost or the haunt by thinking with Kristeva's theory of abjection, Ahmed's notion of disgust, and Spillers' flesh, the horrified body contains and circulates history, performing new ways of living with the past.

Thus far, the ghost is the most familiar literary critical application of horror as theory, and it is an excellent tool for interrogating what isn't present, what won't show itself - all the invisible hands that capitalism elides and erases in its products and its ideology, the lives that history refuses to acknowledge, a name for the felt sense that to live under late capitalism and American empire is to be haunted by the sins of the past. The ghost or palimpsest or spectre is an especially useful figure for thinking about the temporal confusion of hypermodernity, the dizzying sense that generations of trauma are housed in so many of our mundane objects. Derrida's hauntology<sup>4</sup> (a portmanteau of haunting and ontology) and Avery Gordon's work on the ghost and spectrality are probably the most cited examples of thought about horror as a force of temporal disruption in critical theory circles. The palimpsest and archaeological strata are related to more material means of thinking about the presentness of pastness, the ways that previous marks and significations ghost or surface in our contemporary understanding. The horrified body is a ghostly or haunted body, in this sense - it encodes pastness, whether through vampirism or some other regurgitation or recirculation of history. But the Derridean language of hauntology can be so abstracted, and frequently so reliant on the linguistic and graphic as its point of analysis that it's a less than satisfactory basis for interrogating assumptions about embodiment.

Gordon wants the ghost to do material work - the book is called *Ghostly Matters*, after all - and she convincingly enfleshes the haunt through an extended reading of *Beloved*

(1987), probably the most iconic and analyzed ghost story of our literary era. Morrison's novel is endlessly mineable, redolent with new insight even on the umpteenth read.

Beloved seems to be a ghost, but is very much a body, wetting the bed, engaging in sexual intercourse, demanding sustenance, bearing scars. Gordon argues that we must "broach carefully and cautiously the desires of the ghost itself" in order to reckon with the "amnesiac conditions of American freedom" based on the suppression of slavery as the based upon which capitalism, "a market whose exchange relations continue to transform the living into the dead," rests (Gordon 169). The ghost is an embodiment of history, she argues, a discipline unlike other distinctly modernist social sciences because "It is always a site of struggle and contradiction between the living and the ghostly, a struggle whose resolution has to remain partial to the living, even when the living can only partially grasp the source of the ghost's power" (Gordon 184). The language of ghostliness strains at the materiality of desire and struggle, and the author of the article finds himself longing for terminology that retains the temporal instability of the ghost while making its materiality more present. Furthermore, in this article the author is much more interested in the living who are caught in the struggle with history, who are haunted - what do we call those who have recognized the ghost and gone to meet it, recognized that the very boundaries of their own bodies are determined by its absent presence? What I hope to accomplish with the horrified body is to articulate these liminal creatures on both sides of the veil, the horrified and horrifying material presence of history. Gordon closes her chapter on *Beloved* with this poetic invocation:

To be haunted is to make choices within those spiralling determinations that make the present waver. To be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects. To be haunted is to experience the glue of the "If you were me and I were you" logic come undone... the ghostly matter will not go away. It is waiting for you and it will shadow you and it will outwit all your smart moves as that jungle grows thicker and deeper. Until you too stage a shared word, a something to be done in time and for another worlding. (Gordon 190).

This article strives to stage a 'shared word', to articulate something that allows for 'new worlds'.

I look to Kristeva's description of the powers of horror in an attempt to materialize the ghost, to grapple with how haunting operates at the level of the body. In contrast to the simple object, the abject or "the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 2). The abject is that which must be pushed out or risk this collapse of signification that would dissolve the ego; the abject thus also serves as "my safeguard, the primer of my culture" (Kristeva 2). Kristeva goes on to describe this slippery concept as that from which "my body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border" (Kristeva 3) - here she uses faeces or vomit as an example of the kind of substances which might be abject, forming a border between internal and external, self and that which must be expelled to preserve self. But the abject needn't be so clearly disgusting as excrement. In fact, the erosion of categories and hierarchies of animality is a key element of Kristeva's understanding of the abjection: "The abject confronts us, on the one hand," Kristeva writes, "with those fragile states where man strays onto the territory of the animal" (Kristeva 12). The power of horror hinges on the identification of the abject and its exclusion; in Kristeva's view, horror is what animates liveliness, what we flee from and reject to define a bounded self.

In the next section of this article, the author will discuss about Djuna Barnes' 1936 novel *Nightwood* which investigates characters living in and through the power of horror, dancing on the border between alive and dead, animal and human. *Nightwood* feature underworlds, often spaces that are literally underground or in the dark, characterized by the

presence of unctuous bodily fluids stubbornly out of place. The stickiness of disgust, that quality of horror, offers an affective, material basis for haunting.

### 1.3 Liminal, Shuddering Body-in-becoming: *Nightwood* and the Articulation of Embodiment

Djuna Barnes has historically been read as a modernist most interesting for her relations and connections to her (more famous) peers. She lived committedly a transatlantic life, exchanging citizenships and sitting at the centre of modernist social circles before fading into obscurity after the Second World War and dying unremarked. Barnes began her career as a journalist, famous for stunts like being voluntarily force-fed to give her readers insight into the experience of suffragettes on hunger strike whose bodies were being forcibly sustained by the state. She interviewed James Joyce in 1921, she was friends with Eliot and Pound, and most essentially to her legacy, she was in Natalie Barney's inner circle, a core member of the lesbian avant-garde in Paris in the interwar years<sup>5</sup>. Her satirical *Ladies Almanack* is an account of the women she knew and their foibles, written like an early-modern book of saints and juxtaposed with bawdy drawings in her own Aubrey Beardsley-inspired style. Her 1936 *Nightwood* is her most canonized work, perhaps partially because it is vouched for by a famous man: T.S. Eliot's "introduction" is invariably advertised on the cover of the book. And while Eliot and Barnes are perhaps superficially similar in their brand of erudite modernism, love for the old country, and devotion to ornate religious imagery, Barnes offers a radically different vision for the potential of the modernist body. Unlike Eliot's mournful elegy for the blasted modern male body in the "The Hollow Men," or the images of the English body etherized, impotent, and fractured in *Prufrock*, Barnes revels in dissolution and celebrates bodily atrophy. *Nightwood* revolves around the horrified and horrifying body of Robin Vote, which exerts a curiously seductive magnetism through its decay and voracious willingness to become abject, shaded with lycanthropy and cannibalistic desire.

T.S. Eliot writes that the book has a "quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy" (viii). It is the last line of his introduction, and though he clearly means it to be a compliment, he does not precisely define what he means by horror, or where Counter to Eliot's reading, which casts *Nightwood's* gender and genre defying bodies as tragic, I want to argue how horror becomes a constructive force in the articulation of queer bodies, and how the breaking of boundaries opens new models for embodiment and subjectivity. Far from being a disembodied figure of the uncanny, the subconscious, or the death drive, as many psychoanalytic critics have posited, I see Robin Vote as a highly embodied argument for the possibilities of horrification. Her refusal of heteronormative futurity, her continual association with the mouth as a site of cannibalistic consumption, and her final lupine transformation rejects the logics of confinement through language or skin that delimit and depress Dr. O'Connor and her other compatriots in Europe's queer underworlds.

Barnes' text begins in a decidedly gothic setting: a Viennese noblewoman, Hedvig, gives birth to a son in a red velvet canopied bed and promptly dies, leaving him orphaned in a decaying Europe that increasingly eschews nobility. Adding to the general air of decay is a fixation with blood and lineage, the material facts of birth suffusing the opening chapter and our introduction to Felix Volkbein. Hedvig manifests her place in the world through blood, Vienna flowing through her: "Hedvig had played the waltzes... in the tempo of her blood, rapid and rising - that quick mannerliness of touch associated with the playing of the Viennese..." (*Nightwood* 8). Her instrument is "sprawled over the thick dragon's-blood pile of rugs from Madrid" and the room is furnished in "rich and bloody wood" (*Nightwood* 8). Blood is the defining element of the room, as if Hedvig's body were inside out and could manifest its blood through the walls, like the military men of her country who "seem to

breathe from the inside out” (*Nightwood* 6). In this world, blood rules: as Carrie Rohman writes, “It is the physical make-up of the body here - bodily matter - that infuses aristocratic birth rights with value as cultural capital. Thus, aristocracy is materialized or rendered powerful through bodies that are “purely” bred” (*Nightwood* 134-5). And in fact, though Felix will inherit his mother’s fixation with blood as a determiner of worth and nobility, it’s all built on a lie: his father, Guido, is a Jewish Italian<sup>6</sup> who has only pretended to a barony. The aristocracy is “white and disassociated,” held together by false notions of shared blood. The opening chapter’s obsession with the proper circulation of blood sets up questions about how we delineate bodies and how’ve they come to matter, and through Guido’s deception, suggests that these received structures are riddled with lies and instabilities.

The fragmentation and instability of bodies only intensifies as our cast of characters grows. Felix, now grown, living in Berlin, and utterly obsessed with European history and nobility, goes to a café with his friend Frau Mann, the Duchess of Broadback, on the promise of meeting an Italian Count. But instead of the Count, they meet a loquacious gynecologist named Dr. Matthew O’Connor, who gives a description of the body disjointed and jumbled:

I, as a medical man, know in what pocket a man keeps his heart and soul, and in what jostle of the liver, kidneys and genitalia these pockets are pilfered. There is no pure sorrow. Why? It is bedfellow to lungs, lights, bones, guts and gall! (*Nightwood* 25).

Emotion is dependent on the arrangement of the body, manifested through the flesh and impossible to isolate from the “guts and gall.” Not only are the boundaries of the flesh and the spirit indistinguishable, the lines between human and object are increasingly unclear. Felix’s friend Frau Mann is a trapeze artist who seems to have merged with her medium:

Something of the bar was in her wrists, the tan bark in her walk, as if the air, by its very lightness, by its very non-resistance, were an almost insurmountable problem, making her body, though slight and compact, seem much heavier than that of women who stay up on the ground. In her face was the tense expression of an organism surviving in an alien element (*Nightwood* 16).

Bodies are transformable, malleable to their profession and penetrable by the inanimate. Frau Mann’s integration with her costume makes her appear almost edible:

She seemed to have a skin that was the pattern of her costume: a bodice of lozenges, red and yellow... one somehow felt they ran through her as the design runs through hard holiday candies... (*Nightwood* 16).

In an almost comically Freudian link, the doctor reacts to seeing Frau Mann’s consumable, confectionary body by telling the story of a Black performer named Nikka (sonically, a Germanification of the n-word). Nikka’s body is overdetermined by almost every possible marker of Blackness, difference, and desirability. His “ill-concealed loin cloth all abulge” (*Nightwood* 19) is the only clothing he wears, though his body is covered in tattoos; his skin is a surface for inscription. Legend has it that his penis is tattooed with the word Desdemona, a literal, literary figuration of supposed Black male desire for white women. Matthew dwells on the details of Nikka’s tattoos, directing our focus again and again to the skin, its rupture, and its significance for inscribing the body and its bounds. Jane Marcus reads Nikka’s tattoos as an invocation of the abject, citing Kristeva on tattooing as a technique for defining the edges of the body and ascribing it meaning:

*Nightwood*’s project is a remaking of gender and race categories of selfhood and it is preoccupied with skin as a blank page... Marking the body seems to enact opposite meanings, a symbolic separation from the mother as in Kristeva’s use of the term “semiotic”... But it also marks the return of the repressed savage and unconscious desire (Marcus 93).

Marcus’ insight emphasizes that skin is a key site for delineating the abject. Barnes has showed us the lie of bloodlines and the foolishness of the way bodies have been formulated through the aristocracy. Felix’s introduction into the bohemian nightlife of Berlin deepens the question about how bodies are materialized, if not through the blood: through their

professions, through their emotions, through their desirability, through their skin and the ways skin becomes analogous to story, the legible, inscribable surface of the human.

Against this backdrop of bodily disruption enters Robin Vote. She exerts a gravitational pull that draws Felix and Matthew to her even as she lies unconscious on a bed, a move indicative of the mysterious power she holds over every character in the novel. Robin marks a transition from the carnivalesque inversions of the Continental underworld to a more clearly sinister, horrified and horrifying embodiment. Now in Paris, Felix and Matthew are called to Robin's bedside because the hotel staff cannot revive her. Immediately, there is something uncanny about her: an air of death and decay surround her, blocking out the frenetic liveliness of Paris that bustles just outside her window. She is so still it's as if she were already decomposing:

The perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the odour of oil of amber, which is an inner malady of the sea, making her seem as if she had invaded a sleep incautious and entire. Her flesh was the texture of plant life, and beneath it one sensed a frame, broad, porous and sleep-worn, as if sleep were a decay fishing her beneath the visible surface. (*Nightwood* 38)

Barnes makes the link between Robin and death even more explicit just a few pages later: "Such a woman is the infected carrier of the past: before her the structure of our head and jaws ache - we feel that we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers" (*Nightwood* 41). Not only does she embody death-like immobility, she is death regurgitated. Robin is thus zombie-like in her passive and immobile embodiment and return from the dead, but also somehow vampiric or cannibalistic; she has eaten death, and the blood of our ancestors coat her lips. Curiously, Robin inspires cannibalistic desire in others as well, and "our head and jaws ache" with the effort of avoiding the temptation to consume her, and in turn, create connection to the flesh of our ancestors which gave rise to our own bodies. Robin is a conduit for a cross-temporal longing, an eroticized, en fleshed representation of a desire to consume your own lineage in order to contain the histories of your own engendering. But Robin's corpse - like passivity is countered by a fierce animality. Even with her eyelids shut, her eyes are "still faintly clear and timeless behind the lids - the long unqualified range in the iris of wild beast who have not tamed the focus down to meet the human eye" (*Nightwood* 41). Her indeterminate embodiment is indelibly tied to her out-of-timeness, as if this sprawling body crosses time zones, pieces of her scattered across the earth. Felix cannot hold her attention, which "had already been taken by something not yet in history. Always she seemed to be listening to the echo of some foray in the blood that had no known setting" (*Nightwood* 48). She is has "the body of a boy;" gender cannot possibly remain legible in a body this resistant to markers of the human.

Her movement materializes her anguish, as she pursues Robin across the city hoping to be in physical proximity to an exteriorized self, enacting what it looks like to be "beside herself" with grief. This wonderfully complex sentiment also gets at the horrified body's necessary disruption of linear temporality, the experience of futurity infused with a longing for a future-precluded. The infectious horror of Robin's body is the presence of death among us, the fossils and ghosts which cannot be excised from our lifeblood. Robin's body, shrouded in a ghostly web of the past, drags in refusal of heteronormative, reproductive time. This becomes most apparent in a scene where she shatters a doll, a representation of a reproductive future. Nora recounts her horrifying display of refusal:

I would find her standing in the middle of the room in boy's clothes, rocking from foot to foot, holding the doll she had given us - 'our child' - high above her head, as if she would cast it down, a look of fury on her face... She picked up the doll and hurled it to the floor and put her foot on it, crushing her heel



into it; and then, as I came crying behind her, she kicked it, its china head all in dust... (*Nightwood* 48)

The visceral imagery of Nora and Robin's remains mixing in the guts of a single dog, the becoming-earth becoming-animal meshing of substance elegantly synthesizes the novels preoccupations with death, abjection, and animality and prefigures Robin's dramatic, inscrutable fate.

In the final scene of the novel Robin's uncanny somnambulist embodiment resolves into something entirely non-human, or more-than-human, her becoming-animal literalized in her final act. Now living with Jenny in America, Robin has taken to wandering the countryside where she knows Nora's childhood farmstead is located. Robin walked the open country... pulling at the flowers, speaking in a low voice to the animals. Those that came near, she grasped, straining their fur back until their eyes were narrowed and their teeth bare, her own teeth showing as if her hand were upon her own neck" (*Nightwood* 177). This physical encounter with an animal being marks an unusual level of assertion and action for Robin. The sympathy between her body and the animal's intensifies: one day, she hears Nora's dog, and follows it to a dilapidated barn, where she proceeds to fight it, dog-like:

And down she went, until her head swung against his; on all fours now, dragging her knees. The veins stood out on in her neck, under her ears, swelled in her arms, and wide and throbbing rose up on her fingers as she moved forward... Then she began to bark also, crawling after him—barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching. The dog began to cry then, running with her, head-on with her head...and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head, until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees. (*Nightwood* 210-11)

Robin lowers herself to the ground to meet the dog and begins snarling and growling, becoming increasingly dog-like until they collapse together, limbs muddled, all eyes red with tears. It's also the first time we've seen Robin cry, or emote at all. After years of wandering, half-dead, she chooses an embodiment: dog-woman. This cross-species identification and longing toward becoming-animal resists hierarchies that position the human body as fixed, normative, and above all other life forms. Deleuze and Guattari call becoming animal a modality of molecularization, a resistance to the way the human has overvalued the singularity and hyper-individuality of an organism; by embracing a morphing physicality that recalls humanity's inherent animality, you become-animal only in the collective, allying yourself with a "complex aggregate: the becomings-animal of men, packs of animals, elephants and rats, winds and tempests, bacteria sowing contagion" (Deleuze and Guattari 243). That Robin's animal form is the dog holds yet more significance: the concept of the wolf man or werewolf is one of the oldest images of monstrosity, referenced in some of the earliest recorded proto Indo-European legends. The transformation is painful, and often focuses on the horror of feeling hair push out of human skin, the boundaries of the body becoming literally fuzzy as skin gives way. Deleuze and Guattari develop their theory of multiplicity through animal-becoming by critiquing Freud's analysis of the famous Wolf-Man case:

In the Wolf-Man's dream it is the denuded tree upon which the wolves are perched. It is also the skin as envelope or ring, and the sock as reversible surface. It can be a house or part of a house, any number of things, anything... The body without organs is not a dead body but a living body all the more alive and teeming once it has blown apart the organism and its organization. Lice hopping on the beach. Skin colonies. The full body without organs is a body populated by multiplicities. The problem of the unconscious has most certainly nothing to do with generation but rather peopling, population. It is an affair of world-wide population on the full body of the earth, not organic familial generation. (Gilles and Guattari 30)

Where Robin has been isolated, she is now united in a world-wide assemblage of becomings; what could be read as a horrific transformation, a degradation into dog-being, is in fact a rebirth for Robin from the brink of death into a world of embodied connection. Deleuze and Guattari also tie their population-oriented vision of wolf embodiment to an earth level consciousness which rejects “familial generation,” much more interested in being a part of a rhizomatic conglomeration of being than in linear, temporal concepts of reproductive time. Once again, Robin’s embodiment anticipates this critique, as she performs her rejection of heteronormative family and teleological time well before her full transformation into wolfishness.

Thus Robin’s becoming-dog functions not only as a prescription for transmuting the boundaries of the human by embracing the animal, but as a commitment to the powers of horror to offer an alternative to Matthew’s melancholic relationship to language. Robin has already staked her anti-language position, in a rare moment of volition as she snaps at Jenny, whose prattling is a signal for her detestability: “Shut up,” Robin said, putting her hand on her knee. “Shut up, you don’t know what you’re talking about. You talk all the time and you never know anything. It’s such an awful weakness with you. Identifying yourself with God!” (*Nightwood* 82).

The final chapter is called “The Possessed,” perhaps the most overtly ‘horror’ imagery of the entire novel, and its language is markedly less ostentatious and more physical, more direct. As in the beginning, we’ve got a gothic setting par excellence, a “decaying chapel” and the yelping of a dog in the night which sets the edges of Nora’s body aquiver: “Nora bent forward, listening; she began to shiver.” The transformation takes place in a chapel, improbably full of Catholic iconography in the American west complete with “a contrived altar, before a Madonna, two candles” (*Nightwood* 178), imagery steeped in the substitutional possibilities of the Eucharist, the becoming-flesh of the words through a form of sanctioned possession from beyond the grave. Robin’s abjection, her literal lowering, is emphasized again and again: “Robin began going down. Sliding down she went; down, her hair swinging... then head down, dragging her forelocks in the dust...” Robin’s becoming is a becoming of the mouth: the dog’s mouth is “open, his tongue slung sideways over his sharp bright teeth,” and barking begins her transmutation. She whimpers alongside him, “crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head” (*Nightwood* 180), repeatedly aligning her mouth and its functions with that of the dog’s. The power in horrification lies not only in exceeding the edges of the human or acknowledging the animal within but in repudiating the idea that it is through language and telling that we become. The horrified mouth is an organ for nipping, biting, sucking, whimpering, crying, consuming, tasting, a site of alchemy where language, sustenance, sex meet and mix and become inextricable - it gives us form, literally the site for ingestion of everything that makes our bodies matter.

#### 1.4 Conclusion:

My primary objective in this article is to provide a set of articulations that’s generative for other scholars regarding the futures of the body and the human, to speak possible attachments and arrangements of embodiment so that we might recognize them in our encounters with art and in our own visceral experience of the world. In reading *Nightwood* we find an articulation of embodiment that shows us the power of the liminal, shuddering body-in-becoming, the material wisdom accessible through an embrace of the horrified.

#### Notes and References:

1. Proponents of the embodied cognition thesis emphasize the active and significant role the body plays in the shaping of cognition and in the understanding of an agent's mind and cognitive capacities. In philosophy, embodied cognition holds that an agent's cognition, rather than being the product of mere (innate) abstract representations of the world, is strongly influenced by aspects of an agent's body beyond the brain itself. See RA Wilson and L. Foglia's "Embodied Cognition" (2011), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
2. In *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles, a leading figure of posthuman theories, gives the following explanation of posthumanism, which deserves a long quote:

First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals. (2-3)

The posthuman view that Hayles delineates above disclaims the notion of "the liberal humanist subject" (3) that enforces the strict distinction between subject and object, or mind and body. But Hayles's delineation, highlighting differences of posthumanism from humanism, might render posthumanism as an extension of humanism that in turn becomes "the original prosthesis".

3. Halberstam in *Skin Shows* views the monster's body as the place of such substitution and refers to the skin as "the ultimate boundary" (Halberstam 7). Thus, quoting *The Silence of the Lambs* as an example, she writes, "fear no longer assumes a depth/surface model; after this movie (but perhaps all along) horror resides at the level of skin itself" (Halberstam 163). "[I]n the modern horror movie," she continues, "terror rises to the surface, the surface itself becomes a complex web of pleasure and danger; the surface rises to the surface, the surface becomes Leatherface, becomes Demme's Buffalo Bill, and everything that rises must converge" (Halberstam 163). In this way, Halberstam, like Ingebresten, employs monsters "on a principle of substitution," and continues to inscribe into them the tradition of representation.
4. The word first appeared in Jacques Derrida's 1993 book *Specters of Marx*, in which the philosopher said that Marxism would haunt Western society from beyond the grave many said it was confined to. It is the idea that the present is haunted by the metaphorical "ghosts" of lost futures. The concept asks people to consider how "spectres" of alternative futures influence current and historical discourse, and acknowledges that this "haunting" - or the study of the non-existent - has real effects. Derrida considered the idea of hauntology to be an essentially political one, but it can be applied to apolitical things. See Buse, P. and Scott, A. Eds. *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*. London: Macmillan, 1999.

5. Natalie Clifford Barney held a Friday salon in Paris for the first six decades of the 20th century. Beginning in 1909, the salon was hosted 20 Rue Jacob in the Latin Quarter, and the pavilion and the columned Temple of Friendship in the garden became iconic sites of modernist performance. She explicitly featured women's work that otherwise went under-appreciated in the male-dominated modernist circles of Paris' expatriate artist community (though Eliot, Pound, and Valéry were frequent attendees too, and Joyce and Rilke and Fitzgerald and all the major modernist players also made appearances). In 1927, Barney founded the Académie des Femmes in response to The French Academy's refusal to honour women writers.
6. Guido and Felix's Jewishness, and Barnes' often uncomfortable replication of ideas about Jews as inherently placeless and lost, self-hating, or racially pre-destined for melancholy, has been the subject of much scholarly work. See Maren Tova Linett's *Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness* (Cambridge, 2007), Lara Trubowitz's article "In Search of 'the Jew' in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*" (*Modern Fiction Studies* 51.2) and to a lesser extent, Katherine Fama's "Melancholic Remedies: Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* as Narrative Theory" (*Journal of Modern Literature* 37.2) and Jane Marcus, "Laughing at Leviticus" (in *Hearts of Darkness: White Women Write Race*).

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