

Pregnant Men: Modernism, Disability, and Biofuturity in Djuna Barnes

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What you get married for if you don't want children?

T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

*God, I never asked better than to boil some good man's potatoes and toss up a child
for him every nine months by the calendar. Is it my fault that my only fireside is the
outhouse?*

Dr. O'Connor in *Nightwood*

Queer Futures and the Reproductive Horizon

Now that the heat has died down from the 2008 presidential election along with the question of whether the candidates—including Hillary Clinton—were *man* enough for the job, it seems appropriate to acknowledge another political figure whose gendered authority seems to be under scrutiny. California's governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, has rocked the Republican cradle lately by supporting stem cell research, domestic partner legislation, and, depending on the month, abortion rights. In the process he has morphed from bodybuilder to terminator to "governator." Perhaps as foreplay to his run for the nomination for California governorship, Schwarzenegger's 1994 movie, *Junior*, shows him, as Alex Hesse, morphing from terminator into progenitor. Hesse and Larry Arbogast, played by Danny DeVito, are genetic scientists who experiment with in vitro fertilization by implanting a fertilized egg in Hesse's hunky body. The plan is to bring the fetus into the first trimester, market a hormone that facilitates growth, and then terminate the pregnancy while cashing in on the new patent. The experiment works, and soon the terminator is coming to terms with the inconveniences of morning sickness, hormone imbalance, and having to buy a full-figure wardrobe. Despite these discomforts, the formerly dour Hesse likes the kinder, gentler person he becomes through pregnancy and refuses to follow through on the plan to abort. The joke involves seeing Mr. America become Mrs. America, and although Hesse becomes a mom, cross-dressing at one point as a steroid-enhanced ex-East German female athlete at a maternity hospital, the film makes sure to reinforce the idea that he is not a girlie man by introducing a love interest between him and Diana Reddin (Emma Thompson), a fellow genetic scientist. Their relationship is complicated by the fact that the anonymous donor egg Hesse has fertilized, unbeknownst to Reddin, is one of her own that she is using in her research. Thus, in the end, Hesse

has the baby that the two of them would have had anyway, and in the last scene, a visibly pregnant Reddin shows that the governor still has the right stuff.

Junior poses a question that may become more common in the genomic future: if a pregnant woman is the most natural thing in the world, what is a pregnant man? The movie's answer is that he's simply a more sensitive male, but perhaps another answer is that he is disabled. As Arbogast tells Hesse, "If this gets out, you're a freak!" It turns out that the proximity of nonheterosexual reproduction and "freakish" disability has been a common concern in a number of films and novels, including *Blade Runner*, *Coma*, *Never Let Me Go*, *Oryx and Crake*, *The Island*, *Gattaca*, the *X-Men* trilogy, and *Children of Men*, that raise bioethical questions about genetic research, surrogacy, and transplant surgery gone awry.¹

The fantastic—or comic—narrative of a pregnant man becomes one among multiple futuristic scenarios for the biologically modified natural order. Such works are usually classified as speculative or science fiction, but one could see them as disability narratives insofar as they defamiliarize the presumed normalcy of embodied life and display the nightmares of genetic futurity as the lived reality of disabled and dependent people.

If the scenario of a pregnant male has provided a freakish lens for the representation of disability, it has offered a normalizing lens on queer identity in an age of same-sex marriages, gay domesticity, and transgender parenting. Nowhere is this phenomenon more evident than in the case of Thomas Beatie, a transgender, legally male individual who is married to a biological female, Nancy. The couple had wanted a child, but when Nancy had to undergo a hysterectomy due to endometriosis, they decided that Beatie would stop taking the testosterone injections that had prevented his menstrual cycles and attempt, with the aid of a sperm donor, to become pregnant. After one unsuccessful pregnancy, Beatie became pregnant again and successfully delivered a baby girl in 2008. In an article in the *Advocate*, Beatie remarked on his then-pregnant state: "How does it feel to be a pregnant man? Incredible. Despite the fact that my belly is growing with a new life inside me, I am stable and confident being the man that I am. In a technical sense I see myself as my own surrogate, though my gender identity as male is constant." Beatie's pregnancy and his interviews with Barbara Walters, Oprah, and others sparked an outcry in tabloids and among late-night hosts, many echoing Arbogast's concern about the freakish nature of the condition. Yet in all his interviews, Beatie stressed the ordinariness of his desire to give birth and his confidence in his masculine identity.

Although he does not address Beatie's pregnancy, Lee Edelman sees such events as a symptom of a new pronatalist scenario of compulsory reproduction that challenges queer identity's historically subversive character. Edelman argues that futurity is increasingly being written around the Child, capital "C," which

¹ In an ad for Absolut vodka, an obviously pregnant male stands next to a svelte blond woman in a black dress who holds a martini glass in her hand. The incomplete phrase that accompanies the image, "In an Absolut World . . ." is completed by the image, suggesting that among those sophisticates who drink Absolut, nothing is absolute and gender becomes porous.

remains "the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (3). This family-values scenario has, of course, been operative within the religious Right for some time, but it now applies to activism on behalf of gay marriage, domestic partner legislation, and child raising that threatens to transform queer politics into something a good deal more mainstream. Edelman notes the peculiar logic of this syndrome that says if the Child represents the positive future for gays and lesbians, then queer must mean negative futurity: "[Q]ueerness names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus . . . outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order's death drive" (3). Why death drive? Because within the all-consuming logic of biological futurity, not accepting the telos of the child involves naming "what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability" (9). It is here that queer and crip identities merge insofar as "social viability" usually means "compulsory able-bodiedness" as well as heteronormativity.² In the legal rhetoric of euthanasia proponents, to be "invalid" as a subject means having a life "not worth living." Hence, by a similar logic, crip futurity might be seen as the negation of those forms of embodiment and reproduction that medicine, psychoanalysis, and genetics must reinforce and affirm. As the recent Terri Schiavo case and the controversy over the film *Million Dollar Baby* demonstrate, the nonproductive body that medical science would consign to the dustbin is always, potentially, the body we would not want our daughter to bear, the body we would not want to keep on life support, the body that, could it speak, would want not to be born.

Edelman's argument is not about disability, but it does raise the question of what embodied futures can be envisioned when reproduction is no longer the province of the heteronormative family, when the child no longer authorizes the narrative of biofuturity. Debates about surrogacy and in vitro fertilization invariably circle around whether such biotechnologies simply update eugenic practices that historically isolated and in some cases euthanized the deviant, disabled, or feeble minded. If social reproduction mirrors biological reproduction, the Child, as Edelman says, performs important cultural labor in securing the Holy Family against contamination (19). When reproduction occurs outside the female womb, the child that results—like Dionysus, born from the thigh of Zeus—may lead to social chaos and bacchic excess. As I will argue with respect to Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, the figure of the pregnant male is the site of such uncanny futurity—a figure feminized in his ability to bear children, queer in challenging traditional gender roles, disabled because pregnant and thus subject to medical and therapeutic care.

² On "compulsory able-bodiedness" see McRuer, 1–32. The use of the term *crip* has become, in disability rights discourse, somewhat equivalent to *queer* in gay and lesbian discourse. Like *queer*, *crip* rearticulates a term of opprobrium to expose ableist assumptions about bodily normalcy. The term also implicitly repudiates more technical or patronizing terms such as *handicapped*, *wheelchair bound*, or *differently abled*.

As my example of Dionysus indicates, the theme of male pregnancy is hardly new. It is the foundation of many western narratives—from Greek myth (the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus) to the Old Testament (Eve born from Adam's rib) to rituals of male couvade and sympathetic birthing to the early modern literature. Plato in *Theaetetus* speaks of "philosophical pregnancy" in which the corporeal pregnancy of women is contrasted to the philosophical travail enabled by Socrates.³ Eighteenth-century molly houses or gay taverns included yearly "festival nights" in which men participated in acts of cross-dressing, birthing, and lying-in as a form of gay parturition camp.⁴ As Sherry Velasco points out, the image of male pregnancy appears in numerous medieval and early modern works by Cervantes, Giovanni Boccaccio, Shakespeare, and John Dryden. In such early narratives the figure of male pregnancy rearticulates biological reproduction by positing epistemological or aesthetic creativity against female conception, gestation, and birth (in his prologue to *Don Quixote*, Cervantes describes his book as "the child of my brain").⁵ In the modernist era, however, what had been a trope for aesthetic fecundity—the male author's ability to transmit his literary legacy parthenogenetically—becomes a biofuturist potentiality. At a moment when racial science and eugenics presented brave new worlds purged of defective, degenerate bodies and where sexological discourse made visible (and pathological) a new set of practices and subjects, the spectacle of male pregnancy was enlisted to imagine futures written in biopolitical terms.

Modernist cultural representations of the pregnant male foreground the spectacle of reproduction loosed from its putative organic site in the female body and displace it elsewhere—the test tube, the surrogate womb, the male body, and, not insignificantly, the novel. I see this displacement as both a queering and a crippling of normative attitudes toward reproductive health and the futures that such embodiment implies. It also warps traditional *narrative* attitudes toward biological futurity when the family romance no longer reproduces the heterosexual family. It is in this context that I read Djuna Barnes's novel *Nightwood*, not as a baroque anomaly among stream of consciousness narratives of Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, or William Faulkner but as perhaps *the* representative modernist novel insofar as it offers an inside narrative of individuals interpellated within biological and

³ Socrates says to Theaetetus, "My art of midwifery is in general like [female midwives]; the only difference is that my patients are men, not women, and my concern is not with the body but with the soul that is in travail of birth. And the highest point of my art is the power to prove by every test whether the offspring of a young man's thought is a false phantom or instinct with life and truth" (Plato 150b). I am grateful to Page DuBois for pointing out this reference.

⁴ As Ned Ward, an eighteenth-century journalist, writes, on festival nights men would "cusheon up the Belly of one of their *Sodomitical* Brethren, or rather Sisters, as they commonly call'd themselves, disguising him in a Womans Night-Gown, Sarsnet-Hod, and Nightrale, who, when the Company were met, was to mimick the wry Faces of a groaning Woman, to be deliver'd of a joynted Babie they had provided for that Purpose, and to undergo all the Formalities of a Lying in" (Norton).

⁵ For a thorough catalog of male pregnancy figures, see Velasco 1–27.

racial science.⁶ Rather than seeing the cultural logic of male pregnancy as a simple reversal of gestation from female to male body, I see it as a diaspora of sexual and gendered identities among differently abled bodies and cognitive registers.

Throughout the Progressive Era, practical versions of eugenic theories were being applied in asylums, hospitals, and prisons where “inverts” and mental “defectives” were sterilized, incarcerated, or euthanized in the name of racial and psychological purity—not to mention national consolidation. If eugenics imagined a future of better babies and healthy families, it also constructed a past to which those deformed and disabled bodies could now be consigned. Thus the “Old World” could be used to describe both the backwardness of immigrants who refused to relinquish their cultural traditions and those deemed lower (and earlier) on some Darwinian evolutionary scale. Modernist writers often annexed their futurisms—including their linguistic innovations—to such biopolitical reforms, prompted by the writings of Francis Galton, Magnus Hirschfield, Otto Weininger, and Richard von Krafft-Ebing. These fatal alignments have made it impossible to disavow Ezra Pound’s historical poetics or Gertrude Stein’s theories of the bottom nature or F. T. Marinetti’s post-human futurism or T. S. Eliot’s anthropological interests from their intellectual pursuits of racial science and eugenics. Nor were their investments strictly theoretical:

If I had my way, I would build a lethal chamber as big as the Crystal Palace, with a military band playing softly, and a Cinematograph working brightly; then I’d go out in the back streets and main streets and bring them in, all the sick, the halt, and the maimed; I would lead them gently, and they would smile me a weary thanks. (Lawrence, qtd. in Childs 10)

D. H. Lawrence’s fusion of commercial exhibition and gas chamber suggests that within the cultural advance guard two futures were envisioned, one for racial others, persons with disabilities, and sexual inverts and another for northern European, heterosexual, able-bodied persons.⁷ The latter were provided with utopian solutions, Socialist and Fascist, for a future free of what was politely called “amalgamation.” For the former, however, there was to be no future. They represented the past, the ill formed, the animal that needed to be expunged for the “right” future to be possible. As we will see with respect to *Nightwood*, this negative future also produced a carnivalesque modernism that contests Lawrence’s draconian version.

⁶ I am echoing Jane Marcus, who points out that “*Nightwood* is the representative modernist text, a prose poem of abjection, tracing the political unconscious of the rise of fascism, as lesbians, blacks, circus people, Jews, and transvestites—outsiders all—*bow down* before Hitler’s truly perverted Levitical-prescriptions for racial purity” (230–31).

⁷ Lawrence’s remark says a good deal about why Clifford Chatterley is in a wheelchair. His crippled condition makes possible—and necessary—his wife’s infidelity with the gamekeeper. As Jan Gordon observes, the fact that Clifford’s paralysis was caused by World War I (thereby a potentially heroic wound) is effaced by another kind of disability—his intellectualism—for which the gamekeeper’s “natural” sexuality is therapeutic (203).

In these examples, male maternity becomes a metaphor for the ways that modernism figured negative futures around the threat of nontraditional forms of reproduction. The figure of the pregnant male could be seen as a camera obscura on modernity's anxieties over violated biology and traduced nature.⁸ Dr. Schreber is the exemplar. In Freud's 1911 case study, Schreber's paranoid psychosis, as described in *Memoirs of a Neurotic*, takes the form of a messianic feeling that he must redeem the world by producing a superior race of men. In order to fulfill his destiny he must first be transformed into a woman and then become impregnated by God. Freud reads this fantasy as a diversion of Schreber's conflicting homosexual desires onto a transgendered scenario, but he (Freud) does not confront the maternity that is at the heart of Schreber's fantasy. In order to diagnose the *vehicle* of Schreber's fantasy (homosexuality as pathology), Freud must avoid the fantasy of parthenogenesis—his “womb envy”—that is the troubling *tenor*.⁹ This form of desire (and Freud's attempt to contain it within a diagnosis of “perverse” sexuality) becomes particularly salient at a moment when medical science is intervening in reproduction by attempting to stabilize gender and racial differences and by monitoring reproductive processes and potential sexual partners. Within eugenic futurity, such engineering would force women to cede control of reproduction to males and thus become ancillary to the biological order. As Freud's diagnosis illustrates, Schreber's desire to redeem the world through pregnancy is the “outburst of homosexual libido” that must be returned to heterosexual conformity (145). The specter of male maternity would be those forms of reproductive life that cannot be figured through the Progressive Era's narratives of health and improvement nor modernist aesthetics' formalism of the spatial or organic text.

Dr. Schreber is one among a small but significant modernist gallery of male characters who in various ways assume reproductive roles. Among my candidates for this category would be Ralph Touchett in Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady*, whose mysterious, lingering illness serves as a period of gestation during which, since he cannot produce a child with Isabel Archer, he may produce a surrogate by assigning his inheritance to her. Isabel is then free to choose a future for herself, unencumbered by financial concerns, a freedom she violates by marrying the Machiavellian Gilbert Osmond. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out with reference to James's bachelors, Ralph's illness represents his inability to imagine heterosexual futurity, not because he is homosexual—the category does not yet exist—but because his lack of heterosexual desire renders him invalid within the

⁸ Edelman, although certainly not speaking of male pregnancy, suggests that such negative futures, based around nonreproductive sexuality, lie outside meaning altogether: “Which is, of course, to say no more than that sexual practice will continue to allegorize the vicissitudes of meaning so long as the specifically heterosexual alibi of reproductive necessity obscures the drive *beyond* meaning driving the machinery of sexual meaningfulness: so long, that is, as the biological fact of heterosexual procreation bestows the imprimatur of meaning-production on heterogenital relations” (13).

⁹ Velasco uses the phrase “womb envy” to refer to the various ways that males have performed pregnancy, either through couvades, in which the male participates in a symbolic childbirth with the mother, to more recent popular literature surrounding male parenting. Marcus uses the phrase to speak specifically of Dr. O'Connor in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*.

terms of social viability.¹⁰ Not only is he an *invalid*, in the medical sense, he is *invalid* within the proprieties of late-Victorian sexual mores that can imagine a procreative future only within the family. Not to imagine such a future is a form of invalidism or perpetual bachelorhood. By transferring his paternal inheritance to Isabel, Ralph may produce a family in absentia, leaving Isabel—as it turns out—to suffer the grim consequences of confusing Ralph's bequest with freedom of choice.

A second and more obvious example of male maternity is Leopold Bloom in James Joyce's *Nighttown* chapter of *Ulysses*, who relives his daytime cultural and racial ostracism at night through a sadomasochistic nightmare of abjection in Bella Cohen's brothel. Wearing a corset and forced onto his knees by the "whoremistresses," Bloom endures the slings and arrows of female domination and authority. Stately, plump Buck Mulligan, in his capacity as medical student, appears on this phantasmagoric scene to pronounce Bloom "bisexually abnormal" for being about to have a baby. "O, I so want to be a mother," Bloom declares, whereupon he promptly produces "eight male yellow and white children . . . wellmade, respectably dressed and wellconducted, speaking five modern languages fluently and interested in various arts and sciences" (403). Throughout his peregrinations around Dublin, Bloom has mourned the loss of his son, Rudy, and repressed his sexual alienation from his wife, Molly. Now in his nightmare confrontation with his own femininity he becomes, as Mulligan says, "a finished example of the new womanly man" (403). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar read such fantasies of "sexual inversion" as signs of "the excesses of female misrule associated with women's liberation during the war years," excesses that Bloom casts off in the novel's final scenes by taking control of his domestic situation (334). But as with Freud's analysis of Dr. Schreber, critics like Gilbert and Gubar tend to read such scenes of feminized masculinity as signs of historical gender trouble that patriarchy strives to monitor. They do not account for the womb envy and erotic pleasure identified with female sexuality that Bloom has experienced throughout the day and that appear in their more carnivalized forms in the *Nighttown* chapter.¹¹

My third example of male pregnancy appears in Ezra Pound's "Canto XII" in which the poet repeats a story that the lawyer and arts patron John Quinn told a group of bankers about a sailor who, while in the hospital following a bout of

¹⁰ See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's chapter, "The Beast in the Closet," on James's "Beast in the Jungle" (*Epistemology of the Closet* 182–212). Dana Luciano reads Touchett's invalidism as providing James with an opportunity to "imagine a way of living other than the inherited reproductive/familial patterns which specify, but never fully manage to occupy, the space upon which they so adamantly insist" (198). When Isabel confronts Ralph with the possibility that he might be proposing to her, he responds that no, this would "kill the goose that supplies me with my golden eggs" (qtd. in Luciano 206). Luciano points out that "the 'eggs' produced are the imaginary pleasures—the pleasures of imagination itself—that watching Isabel's progress will bring him" (206). In Luciano's terms, Ralph's disability permits him to be differently "reproductive" with respect to heterosexual expectations since by not marrying he may "materialize the imaginary" through Isabel (205).

¹¹ In a 1912 letter to Nora Barnacle Joyce, Joyce figures his novel as a kind of birth. He thinks "of the book I have written, the child which I have carried for years and years in the womb of the imagination as you carried in your womb the children you love, and of how I had fed it day after day out of my brain and my memory" (*Selected Letters*, 202–3).

drinking, appears to have delivered a child. When the sailor wakes up from his ordeal, the hospital staff present him with a child just delivered by a poor prostitute and then declare, "Here! this is what we took out of you" (56). The sailor recovers, saves and invests his money, and, having prospered, sends his child to college. On his deathbed, the honest sailor responds to his son's solicitude:

"Don't, don't talk about me, I'm all right,

"It's you, father."

"That's it, boy, you said it.

"You called me your father, and I ain't.

"I ain't your dad, no,

"I am not your fader but your moder," quod he,

"Your fader was a rich merchant in Stambouli." (56-57)

Pound draws upon the Dantean condemnation of usurers and sodomites as those who pervert nature through economic and sexual practices that prevent natural increase. Quinn's story mocks the bankers he addresses ("*Alias* usurers in excelsis" [55]) by suggesting that the sailor's belief that he has produced a child due to a homosexual encounter is a bawdy version of what the bankers themselves practice by charging interest. Like Eliot's Mr. Eugenides in *The Waste Land* who solicits a homosexual tryst with the poem's narrator, the honest sailor of "Canto XII" is identified with the merchant class whose mobility and cosmopolitanism are a threat to both heterosexual and national stability. In each of my examples, male pregnancy is linked to the conflation of material wealth and biological dystopia, whether through Ralph Touchett's diversion of his paternal inheritance to facilitate a loveless marriage, Bloom's absorption of anti-Semitic slurs about thrift and money-lending, or the honest sailor's merging of childbirth with the increase of wealth. And although it might seem a stretch to link these scenes of male pregnancy with disability, they lay bare the artifice of bodily normalcy by imagining biological reproduction as an unnatural act performed through an unnatural body.

"Impermissible Blood": *Nightwood* and the Genealogical Imperative

A more complex case of this fusing of sexuality, disability, and reproduction is Dr. O'Connor in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936). Although his qualifications as a pregnant male are not quite as overt as in my previous examples, O'Connor's queer identity is specifically organized around his reproductive desires: "[F]or, no matter what I may be doing, in my heart is the wish for children and knitting. God, I never asked better than to boil some good man's potatoes and toss up a child for him every nine months by the calendar" (91).

As a sham gynecologist-cum-psychoanalyst, Matthew O'Connor is the carnivalesque version of those late-nineteenth-century professions within which minds and bodies of women, disabled persons, and homosexuals were monitored.¹²

¹² Although he is described as a gynecologist whose primary work is delivering babies, there is every indication that O'Connor is also an abortionist.

O'Connor violates the terms of clinical practice, from his filthy room and brimming "swill pail" to his decaying obstetric equipment ("a rusty pair of forceps, a broken scalpel") and his reversal of the psychoanalytic protocols (he asks rather than answers the questions; he lies on the couch while the patient occupies the analyst's position in the chair) (79, 78).¹³ But as self-acknowledged outsider, "the old woman in the closet," O'Connor is uniquely positioned to advise one of the main characters, Nora Flood, about the vagaries of interstitial identity (78). In the novel's central scene, Nora encounters him late at night at home, cross-dressed in a woman's nightgown and wig, heavily made up, and surrounded by cosmetics ("perfume bottles, almost empty, pomades, creams, rouges, powder boxes and puffs" [78]). She has sought his counsel on the matter of her abortive lesbian relationship with Robin Vote, but his elliptical answers are as much informed by his own abject status as they are by his psychoanalytic understanding. As someone whose "only fireside is the outhouse" and who haunts the "*pissoirs* as naturally as Highland Mary her cows," he domesticates the underworld of Paris and regards his circulation within the queer demimonde as a bucolic *dérive* that if it includes casual sex in public may as easily include a stop at the Catholic Church—not, as it turns out, to hear Mass but to masturbate (91). In short, his queerness occupies narratives of both sexual abjection and domestic or institutional normalcy.¹⁴

As a cross-dressing male with maternal desires, as the doctor who "helped to bring [Nora] into the world," Dr. O'Connor combines the roles of father and mother, obstetrician and pregnant woman, analyst and analysand that medical science seeks to keep separate. By blending these roles he functions much as Tiresias in *The Waste Land* as a prophet of dystopic futurity, albeit a more Rabelaisian version. If he is *un-reproductive* as mother or doctor, he is *pro-ductive* as raconteur and storyteller, his bawdy anecdotes and salacious gossip providing much of the "matter" of the novel. O'Connor's rambling speeches refuse a linear narrative that ends with familial resolution and restoration of order. Rather, the novel's non sequiturs, baroque rhetoric, and elaborate hyperbole force attention onto the surface of language rather than elucidating some interior psychological state. Barnes's novel is the antithesis of the modernist interior monologue that attempts to render some subterranean, unchanging bottom nature or core personality. O'Connor's monologues shatter stable identities, merging scatological and theological rhetoric, vernacular and dynastic culture, ornate metaphors and performative denunciations. Such linguistic mixing is a textual version of the racial and sexual ambiguity that threatened the interwar European bourgeoisie. As I will point out with respect to Barnes's portrayal of disabled characters, O'Connor's verbal grotesquerie is a textual equivalent of the nontraditional body, the circus freak, and the mentally ill patient who cannot be assimilated into normative models of health, growth, and the statistical average. In this respect O'Connor's "child" is the text his logorrhea continually produces.

¹³ Marcus provides a lucid summary of the ways that O'Connor inverts the Freudian analytic session (231–50).

¹⁴ On *Nightwood* as a tale of urban slumming, see Herring 150–92.

O'Connor expresses his reproductive desires within a novel with a child at its center, but the child, rather than redeeming history, often serves as a reminder of its loss. The novel's opening lines suggest that in *Nightwood*, childbirth is not a matter of biology but of discourses about race and the body:

Early in 1880, in spite of a well-founded suspicion as to the advisability of perpetuating that race which has the sanction of the Lord and the disapproval of the people, Hedvig Volkbein—a Viennese woman of great strength and military beauty, lying upon a canopied bed of a rich spectacular crimson, the valance stamped with the bifurcated wings of the House of Hapsburg the feathered coverlet an envelope of satin on which, in massive and tarnished gold threads, stood the Volkbein arms—gave birth, at the age of forty-five, to an only child, a son, seven days after her physician predicted that she would be taken. (1)

As Joseph Boone has observed, this opening passage establishes a theme of "estrangement and permanent wandering" that characterizes this marginal society and finds its primal form in the birth trauma (238). The child, Felix Volkbein, is born not into the *heimlich* family but into perpetual alienation and dislocation, a product of his parents' aspirations for national and cultural authority. To some extent he is the prototype for all other characters in their deterritorialized relationship to family, nation, and heteronormalcy. Barnes's baroque prose with its multiple subordinate elements and qualifiers imitates the ornate features of the Volkbein coat of arms, a design whose elegance contains both the schematic memory of Hapsburg greatness and the anti-Semitism at its secret heart. It turns out that the heraldic design is utterly fabricated, a pastiche invented by the father, Guido Volkbein, in an attempt to fashion a noble lineage as a bulwark against racial memory.¹⁵ Like so much else in the novel, surface design belies uncertain origins. Hedvig Volkbein's dedication to Austro-Christian militarism is qualified by her fear that the son she is about to bear contains the "impermissible blood" of the Jew. Her husband, although steeped in Christian and aristocratic trappings, is Jewish and lives with the memory of his historic racial oppression. For early critics of the novel like Philip Rahv, who felt that Barnes simply "exploited perversion to create an atmosphere of general mystification and psychic disorder," such passages suggest that the psychic disorder has a historical referent in the anti-Semitism that haunted fin de siècle Europe and would lead, ultimately, to the death camps (qtd. in Parsons 60).

Felix Volkbein, as the child with whom the novel opens, embodies the dying embers of imperial Europe epitomized by his mother's Hapsburg origins and

¹⁵ Everything about Guido and Hedwig's life is fragmentary or fake. The family portraits that Guido displays on his walls he had found "in some forgotten and dusty corner and had purchased them when he had been sure that he would need an alibi for the blood" (7). The originals for the portraits turn out not to be a royal couple at all but a couple of actors. Guido's coat of arms is "a bit of heraldry long since in decline beneath the papal frown" (6). The couple live in a vast home overlooking the Prater that is decorated with Roman fragments, "white and disassociated; a runner's leg, the chilly half-turned head of a matron stricken at the bosom, the blind bold sockets off the eyes given a pupil by every shifting shadow" (5).

father's diasporic (Italian-Jewish) lineage. His father wears a handkerchief commemorating a fifteenth-century Roman ordinance that forced Jews to race in the public square with a rope about their necks "for the amusement of the Christian populace" (2). By flaunting this bit of sartorial display, Guido Volkbein signals a tragic awareness of his racial otherness and at the same time distances himself from the impermissible blood that is his heritage (3). Felix inherits his father's "remorseless homage to nobility" and his Viennese mother's militarism and hopes to pass them on to his own son (2). Lacking any contact with his biological parents and obsessed with history, Felix creates a mythical past based on "Old Europe," Old Masters' paintings, excellent manners, royal titles, and the Catholic Church. Because he has no authentic link to royalty, he creates a soi-disant aristocracy out of the circus and the theater, "sham salons in which he aped his heart" (11). Caught between fake aristocrat and wandering Jew, Felix is the epitome of the "rootless cosmopolitan" despised equally by Hitler and Stalin, whose home is the café, the salon, the hotel foyer and whose origins lie in the racially assimilated culture of Hapsburg middle Europe.

If Felix expresses a nostalgia for the blood of aristocratic privilege and the hierarchical authority of the sovereign, his son, Guido, is a stereotype of eugenicist degeneration theory through inbreeding:¹⁶

[A]s time passed it became increasingly evident that his child, if born to anything, had been born to holy decay. Mentally deficient and emotionally excessive, an addict to death; at ten, barely as tall as a child of six, wearing spectacles, stumbling when he tried to run, with cold hands and anxious face, he followed his father, trembling with an excitement that was a precocious ecstasy. (107)

The fact that the son of Felix Volkbein and Robin Vote, Jew and lesbian, is mentally ill is no small feature of the novel's representation of the ostracized other, a fact as important to its modernist diagnosis of decay as Benjy Compson's cognitive disability is to *The Sound and the Fury* or the czar's son Alexis Romanov's hemophilia is to the narrative of the Bolshevik Revolution. The disabled child becomes the specter of tainted blood that eugenics sought to control.¹⁷

The child's historically overdetermined existence—mentally retarded, Jewish, motherless, physically stunted—marks the novel's thematic treatment of the child as the site of dystopic futures. Unlike the romantic bildungsroman that must return the orphaned child to his familial legacy, Barnes's children—real and imagined—are perpetual isolatos who upset the domestic ideal of the stable, heterosexual fam-

¹⁶ Foucault speaks of modernity as marking a shift from a culture based on power expressed through "blood" and the sovereign's power over bodies to a "society of sex" in which "mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species" (147). Although he does not discuss *Nightwood*, the novel is a brilliant, condensed version of Foucault's formulation.

¹⁷ I have discussed the threat of infected blood with regard to hemophilia and AIDS in Davidson 35–57.

ily and the continuity of biologically reproductive futurity that is the centerpiece of much narrative fiction. And he is not the only child in the novel. The discrete object of desire in the story, Robin Vote, is often called a child, her bisexuality, sexual adventurousness, and somnambulism suggesting Freud's preconscious, infant state that exists outside or prior to socialization. If O'Connor is logorrheic, Robin is virtually mute, uttering only a few phrases in the novel as a sign, perhaps, of her pre-oedipal, pre-linguistic status. The lesbian relationship she shares with Nora is defined as one between an overly protective mother and a wayward child. Robin is figured as a child, but she is also a mother of a child—Guido—although her maternal abilities are nonexistent, leaving the child-raising aspects of her married life to her husband, Felix. As a child, Robin bears some similarity in her passiveness and blankness to a doll, which becomes an important metonym for the lesbian relationship itself and the object of charged emotional energies. Nora and Robin share a doll that they call their "child," and when she becomes angered at Nora's possessiveness, Robin smashes the doll to the floor. Later, when Robin leaves Nora for a new lover, Jenny Petherbridge, the latter gives her a doll as a sign of their new relationship (147).¹⁸ O'Connor, ever wise in the meaning of partial objects, links dolls specifically to queer identity:

The last doll, given to age, is the girl who should have been a boy, and the boy who should have been a girl! The love of that last doll was foreshadowed in that love of the first. The doll and the immature have something right about them, the doll because it resembles but does not contain life, and the third sex because it contains life but resembles the doll. (148)

This comparison of the queer and the doll summarizes the period's sexological characterizations of homosexuality as a stage of arrested (bisexual) development, but it hints at the performative character of queer identity in which the doll becomes a theatrical surface upon which "normal" sexual relations are embossed. Where Krafft-Ebing or Havelock Ellis pathologized the "third sex," Barnes views it as a form of innocence that escapes both Felix's genealogical imperative and Nora's parental restrictions. O'Connor, in his late-night analytic session with Nora, encourages her to "bow down" to that innocence, for which the doll is a partial object, and accept difference as a mode of being.

Nightwood was written at a transition point in eugenicist and sexological discourses, although the date of its origin is in dispute. Begun possibly as early as 1927 and published, with the help of T. S. Eliot, in 1936, it clearly chronicles Barnes's

¹⁸ There are many dolls in *Nightwood*, representing to some extent the interstitial realm between childhood and adult, human and nonhuman. The doll, as a replicant figure, parallels the circus figures whose costumes, fake titles, and showmanship ape the audiences before which they perform. The trapeze artist, Frau Mann, is sewn into her costume such that she ceases to obey human form: "The stuff of the tights was no longer a covering, it was herself; the span of the tightly stitched crotch was so much her own flesh that she was unsexed as a doll. The needle that had made one the property of the child made the other the property of no man" (13).

passionate love affair with Thelma Wood, which began in 1921 and ended in 1929.¹⁹ Despite the fact that many of her contemporaries and friends (Mina Loy, Natalie Barney, Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot) absorbed eugenicist theories, Barnes is not known to have been interested in movements for racial purity, but her novel's cast of queers, cross-dressers, disabled persons, and racialized outsiders nevertheless seems drawn from one of Alphonse Bertillon's or Cesare Lombroso's catalogs of "defectives." The period during which *Nightwood* was composed saw a shift from theoretical to more negative applications of eugenics through the increased use of incarceration, euthanasia, and sterilization that would lead to the Nazi "final solution."²⁰ Felix Volkbein's sham aristocracy and nobility ape the racialized and sexualized characters' perverse relationship to eugenics taxonomies. Against the imperative to categorize and monitor bodies, Barnes creates a world, as Jane Marcus says, of "merging, dissolution, and, above all, hybridization—mixed metaphors, mixed genres, mixed levels of discourse from the lofty to the low" (223). Barnes's characters, far from being a sideshow to the main event, are the primary agents of the novel who accept their outsider status and form what Joseph Boone characterizes as a "demimonde of the 'inappropriate'" (234), the centerpiece of which is the circus.

Most of the characters are, in some way, connected to carnival and theater as a sign of their marginal relationship to the dominant society. Significant events occur in dressing rooms and backstage areas where the divisions between reality and fantasy, body and costume, human and animal become confused. The false Baron, Felix Volkbein, frequents the circus because its denizens defy his acquisitive temperament: "The circus was a loved thing that he could never touch, therefore never know. The people of the theatre and the ring were for him as dramatic and as monstrous as a consignment on which he could never bid" (12). Through Dr. O'Connor, we meet Nikka, the black tattooed bear wrestler, Frau Mann, the trapeze artist, "the Duchess of Broadback," and others, "gaudy, cheap cuts from the beast life, immensely capable of that great disquiet called entertainment" (11). In a world where characters are already marked racially or sexually, the circus provides a richly embroidered backdrop for that inversion of roles that Mikhail Bakhtin characterizes as carnivalesque. Felix's obsession with royal titles is mimicked in the circus performers' adoption of titles: Princess Nadja, Principessa Stasera y Stasero, and King Buffo. Nora Flood is a publicist for the Denckeman Circus in New York and meets her love interest, Robin Vote, in front of the lion

¹⁹ Robert McAlmon reports that Barnes and Thelma Wood, the prototypes for Nora Flood and Robin Vote, spent time in Berlin along with Berenice Abbott, Marsden Hartley, and McAlmon and lived near Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for the Study of Sexual Sciences. According to McAlmon, they encountered a number of transgender individuals in the streets of Berlin, but Barnes did not accompany the group on its late-night forays into what Deborah Parsons calls "the fluid space of an itinerant and liminal subculture" (Parsons 70).

²⁰ The precise date that Barnes began to write *Nightwood* is unclear. According to Cheryl Plumb and based on entries in Emily Coleman's diary, the origins of the novel could have begun as early as 1927. It is clear that the novel was well under way in 1932, when she was living at Hayford Hall, Peggy Guggenheim's summer residence in England.

cage. Robin leaves Nora for Jenny Petherbridge, whom she meets at a performance of *Rigoletto*, an opera with a hunchbacked court jester in its title role. On another occasion, Robin meets Nora during an evening at Count Altamonte's, where the attendees are described as "living statues" (13). O'Connor's speeches themselves always seem to be dramatic monologues, full of quotations from plays (perhaps for this reason Eliot compared the novel to Elizabethan tragedy). Felix provides the best gloss on the value of carnival performativity when he claims that "[o]ne's life is peculiarly one's own when one has invented it" (118). Readers may hear vestiges of Wildean aestheticism in this remark—and indeed Felix does seem to be a kind of deterritorialized dandy—but it achieves particular historical valence in the context of Weimar-era disruptions.

Perhaps most important in reinforcing the sense of the carnivalesque are the many references to animals. Robin is described as a "beast turning human" (37), and elsewhere Dr. O'Connor describes her as "an eland coming down an aisle of trees . . . a hoof raised in the economy of fear" (37). Like the animal trainers and sideshow characters in Tod Browning's movie *Freaks*, circus performers often resemble the animals they tend ("the men smelling weaker and the women stronger than their beasts" [11]). In the novel's last scene, Robin demonstrates her abject status to Nora by getting down on all fours in front of Nora's dog, barking and crawling after him "in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching" (170). The obvious inversion of the word "God" in "dog," the fact that Robin performs this act while in a chapel, suggest the ultimate reversal of theological and sexual values implied in the eugenicist term *degeneration*. With respect to our concern with biological futurity, such moments call into question species identity and blur the boundaries between human and animal, animate and inanimate, sacred and profane. Robin's much analyzed imitation of a dog seems less a sign of her lesbian abjection, as critics have said, than a fulfillment of O'Connor's injunction to Nora to "bow down" to an animal nature her rational human nature repudiates.

"There Is More in Sickness than the Name of That Sickness"

Thus far critics have devoted extensive attention to the novel's feminist, lesbian, and antiracist features, but they have not attended to its representation of disability, either as a set of characters within the novel or as a diagnostic tool for testing attitudes about bodily normalcy. On the one hand, Barnes trades in rather typical stereotypes of impairment as character flaw, Guido's mental illness and his father's monocular vision being the most obvious.²¹ On the other hand, disability underlies many of the characterizations of marginality in the novel, making it a kind of *ur*-identity for the stigmatized body—from Nikka's tattooed body to Robin's dementia. Despite his fake credentials as a doctor, Matthew O'Connor offers an excellent diagnosis of the social model of disability. Speaking of Guido's mental illness, he notes:

²¹ Felix not only wears a monocle, he has sight only in one eye ("his blind eye had kept him out of the army" [9]).

His sanity is an unknown room: a known room is always smaller than an unknown. "If I were you," the doctor continued, "I would carry that boy's mind like a bowl picked up in the dark; you do not know what's in it. He feeds on odd remnants that we have not priced; he eats a sleep that is not our sleep." There is more in sickness than the name of that sickness. In the average person is the peculiar that has been scuttled, and in the peculiar the ordinary that has been sunk; people always fear what requires watching. (120)

Instead of regarding Guido as a "defect" or "retarded child," O'Connor treats him as a field of potential, a reminder of the "peculiar" that the rational mind must repress. O'Connor anticipates current theoretical accounts that regard disability not as the name that medicine gives to impairment but as those limits that the "average" person imposes on the nontraditional body and cognition. His remarks recognize the anxiety—what Ato Quayson calls "aesthetic nervousness"—over bodily contingency that disability occasions among able-bodied persons. As O'Connor concludes, in a remark that could apply to many of the marginal figures in *Nightwood*, "[P]eople always fear what requires watching."²² Since all the characters in the novel are the objects of a scopic regime, whether as theatrical actors or cross-dressing freaks, they "require watching." O'Connor's play of words on "require" suggests that persons with disabilities require policing and monitoring. At the same time, their strangeness and oddity fascinates and amazes—requires that we watch.

A second modality of disability in the novel is as a metaphor for excessive or liminal existence. Barnes describes Nora's desire for Robin during the latter's late-night perambulations as that of an amputation: "As an amputated hand cannot be disowned because it is experiencing a futurity, of which the victim is its forebear, so Robin was an amputation that Nora could not renounce. As the wrist longs, so her heart longed, and dressing she would go out into the night that she might be 'beside herself'" (59). Robin has begun to "wander," both literally into the city and sexually into other relationships, and Nora stays awake at night like an anxious parent, experiencing her lover's absence as a phantom limb. In Barnes's complicated figure, disability is a marker of absence, but it is also a marker of lesbian desire insofar as the body from which Nora feels alienated is like her own. At one point Nora acknowledges that Robin has been both "my lover and my child. For Robin is incest, too; that is one of her powers" (156). Hence when she goes out at night, Nora is "beside herself" with anxiety for the beloved but also one with the beloved as an aspect of herself. Freud regarded homosexuality as an arrested

²² Quayson calls this anxiety "aesthetic nervousness" to refer to moments when "the dominant protocols of representation within the literary text are short-circuited in relation to disability" (15). The primary form that this takes is the interaction between disabled and able-bodied characters, but such nervousness may extend to "tensions refracted across other levels of the text such as the disposition of symbols and motifs, the overall narrative or dramatic perspective, the constitution and reversals of plot structure, and so on" (15). I find Quayson's phrase useful for speaking of how Barnes's baroque prose style, while not specifically engaged with the depiction of a disabled character, nevertheless annexes through verbal excess those qualities of the uncertainty that attend nontraditional bodies.

stage in the evolution of normal sexuality out of its bisexual childhood nature, but Barnes repudiates this logic. As she puts it in a letter to Emily Coleman, "Well of course those two women would never have been in love with each other if they had been *normal*, if any man had slept with them, if they had been well f— and had born (*sic*) a child." To the heterosexist logic that equates fulfillment with male intervention, Barnes responds that this is "ignorance and utterly false, I married Robin to prove this point, she had married, had had a child yet was still 'incurable'" (qtd. in Plumb xviii). Barnes's mocking use of queerness as disease ("incurable"), of heterosexuality and ableism as cure, undercuts how biologicistic theories of normative sexuality and embodiment reinforced a heteronormal ideal whose default is reproduction. As one of Eliot's cockney pub denizens says to Lil in *The Waste Land*, "What you get married for if you don't want children?" (42).

Eliot's speaker's question states in demotic terms the poet's elegiac theme of unproductive nature, but whereas the author of *The Waste Land* bemoans the aridity of sexual relationships, Barnes sees pronatalism's compulsory character as a ruse to isolate and marginalize. Despite these differences in evaluation, Eliot's admiration of *Nightwood* stems from the way Barnes figures the crisis of post-Hapsburg Europe through images of debased, abjected bodies that bear the full weight of historical loss. In one crucial passage Dr. O'Connor is trying to describe Felix Volkbein: "There's something missing and whole about the Baron Felix—damned from the waist up, which reminds me of Mademoiselle Basquette, who was damned from the waist down, a girl without legs, built like a medieval abuse. She used to wheel herself through the Pyrenees on a board" (26). O'Connor sees Felix (whose false baronial title mimics the doctor's own fake medical credentials) as the inverted reflection of Mademoiselle Basquette, whose missing legs damn her from the waist down, the more so because they render her vulnerable to abuse:

[A] sailor saw her one day and fell in love with her. . . . So he snatched her up, board and all, and took her away and had his will; when he got good and tired of her, just for gallantry, he put her down on her board about five miles out of town, so she had to roll herself back again, weeping something fearful to see, because one is accustomed to see tears falling down to the feet. (26)

Mademoiselle Basquette's vulnerability as a disabled woman is the other half of Felix's disability as a Jew in pre-Nazi Austria. O'Connor's response to this story is to see her pathos in terms of how disability unsettles the usual image of suffering: "Ah, truly, a pin board may come up to the chin of a woman and still she will find reason to weep. I tell you, Madame, if one gave birth to a heart on a plate, it would say 'Love' and twitch like the lopped leg of a frog" (26–27). In his elaborate metaphor, O'Connor reduces love to an involuntary muscle, one that, like Nora's phantom-limb relationship to Robin, is both separate from the body yet able to live an independent life. On the one hand it is a figure of the endurance of affect—the idea that even in the most reduced circumstance, the heart has its reasons of which reason is unaware; on the other hand, it is a figure of abjection that we see everywhere in the novel—the body without organs, the body violated, and most importantly, the disabled body subject to the able-bodied sailor.

By reading *Nightwood* against the backdrop of Fascism, Marcus and others have usefully shown how the novel's carnivalesque treatment of an alternate society of Jews, queers, and disabled persons must be read within the context of Hitler's and Mussolini's rise to power in Europe as well as through the period's use of medical science in the name of racial purity. The child born with a cognitive impairment becomes, in the public mind, the logical outgrowth of aristocratic inbreeding and women's independence. In *Nightwood* there is no redemptive, atavistic survival or folkloric tradition waiting to redeem the shards of fragmented culture. The modernism of *Nightwood* rests in its exposure of the cultural logic whereby bodies and affective states are marshaled into categories of ableness and heteronormativity. Barnes strikes at the heart of how those categories are normalized by presenting us with a transgender obstetrician who wants to become pregnant, a lesbian mother who is more a child than her own child, and a heterosexual Jewish male who wants his mentally retarded son to be the next czar. If these scenarios sound like variations on Freud's case studies of sexual delusion, they also constitute the family-values ethos of Barnes's Rabelaisian fiction and pose a different (and more sympathetic) assessment of those "hooded hoards" and neurasthenic women that populate modernist texts.

Legal Fictions

In her book *Pregnant Men*, the feminist legal theorist Ruth Colker argues that restrictions on reproductive freedom for women are hampered by the fact that the Supreme Court refuses to regard that freedom as gender based. "Put simply, there are no pregnant men to which we could compare women to show gender-based treatment. All pregnant people are treated alike; it is irrelevant (to the Supreme Court) that all pregnant people are women" (128). In the early 1990s, when Colker's book was written, this formulation may have seemed unremarkable, but today, with the increased use of genetic engineering, surrogacy, and in vitro fertilization, the question of pregnant personhood is a good deal more complex.²³ In order to deal with gender discrimination around pregnancy and reproductive health, as Colker observes, "We need a way to talk about *pregnant men*" (128). If we could, she observes, we would see that many of the legal claims for equal rights do not take female biology into account, nor do they take into account the misogynist nature of groups that oppose abortion and support violence against women and doctors at abortion clinics. Colker uses a legal fiction—a pregnant male—to situate a legal reality that ultimately disempowers women by ceding reproduction to males.

My (admittedly) hyperbolic view that male pregnancy is a form of disability is a way of talking about repro-futurity outside its heteronormative frame. Doing so illustrates what happens when reproduction is removed from female biology and shifted discursively onto other bodies. I am not saying that we should seriously consider male parenting as equivalent to childbearing—as popular self-help

²³ Velasco notes that adding to the de-gendering of pregnancy is the return of various forms of couvade in popular parenting literature with titles like *Birthing Fathers: The Transformation of Men in American Rites of Birth* or *Pregnant Fathers: Becoming the Father You Want to Be* (8).

books seem to be doing lately—but that in speaking about male pregnancy we are also implicitly describing a close relationship between disability and sexuality. We might say, adapting Stuart Hall, that disability is a modality through which sex is lived.²⁴ The castration complex, to take one example, involves aligning a missing limb with an attitude about male sexual potency—and by extension the lack of that potency in women. The fear of losing that limb, in Freudian thought, translates into the fear of becoming a woman. Or as Dr. O'Connor says of Nora, "she [is] one of those deviations by which man thinks to reconstruct himself" (53). Historically, the merging of disability and sexuality has occurred through the pathologizing of the "invert" as mentally defective and by sexualizing the cognitively disabled person as a sexual threat to the gene pool. The castrating of mental patients during the eugenic 1920s when *Nightwood* was written is only one version of a more pervasive form of negative eugenics based around the control and monitoring of disability.

What Colker diagnoses as a problem with legal equality theory applied to women's health also applies to queer politics in a moment of reproductive futurism. The new queer family-values ethos that Edelman critiques in *No Future* uses the seemingly egalitarian claims for male pregnancy and the integrity of the child to remove control of female biology from women while reinscribing heteronormativity onto queer culture. As I have indicated, cultural producers have been talking about pregnant men for some time, albeit from a rather different metaphoric vantage. The figure of the reproductive male in modernism, as Drs. Schreber and O'Connor illustrate, indicates how negative futures were being written around homosexual men. But we need to distinguish between the two doctors by thinking of how their two authors—Freud and Barnes—figured that futurity. For Freud, Schreber's paranoid delusion that he must become a woman and become impregnated by God is a form of homosexual panic, the result of oedipal anxieties regarding Schreber's father, who was a doctor, and his own doctor, Flechsig (this staging of homosexual panic as "doctor panic" is one of Freud's less acknowledged contributions to disability studies). For Freud, Schreber's gender-bending fantasies of impregnation and pregnancy are pathological signs of mental illness that necessitate institutionalization and analysis. For Barnes, on the contrary, Dr. O'Connor is comfortable as "the old woman in the closet" whose "wish for children and knitting" stand in stark contrast to Felix's rigid code of masculine filial piety or Nora's rather bourgeois notion of lesbian monogamy. O'Connor's acceptance of his oxymoronic position as female-male gives him a queer perspective on Nora's bourgeois normalcy—her desire to create Robin as a faithful spouse—and on her need to "bow down" to her own sexuality. Where Freud sees disability, Barnes sees an alternate ability; where Freud sees deviant homosexuality, Barnes sees a spectrum of sexual identities in a world facing a Fascist and eugenically controlled future.

In my introduction I posed a question that pertains to the new biopolitical order: If childbirth in women is nature, what is childbirth in men? Is it, for exam-

²⁴ Hall's remark, paraphrased by Paul Gilroy, is that "[race] is the modality in which [class] is lived" (qtd. in Gilroy 85). Gilroy, speaking of 2 Live Crew, adapts Hall's comment to say that "gender is the modality in which race is lived" (85).

ple, disability? By framing the question this way, I want to call into question the usual binaries of nature/culture, reproduction/production, that have dominated sex roles for centuries and ask whether in a world in which reproduction is being increasingly divorced from gender the default of nature is not culture but rather disability, read as the defamiliarizing condition for the spectacle of bodily normalcy. We could complicate this chiasmic ratio further by asking: If the birth of the male child into self-consciousness is the ground of the bildungsroman, what happens when that birth is literalized in and through the male body? Does this alter the ideological course of narrative as a recuperative vehicle for family values and pronatalist futurity? What eugenics attempted to secure within the heteronormative family, novels like *Nightwood* explode into the biofuturistic scenarios of William Burroughs, Octavia Butler, Samuel Delaney, and Margaret Atwood—and ultimately pop culture films like *Junior*.

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