

Never at Home in the City: Economic and
Romantic Exchanges in Radclyffe Hall's
The Well of Loneliness, and Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*

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In this paper I would like to discuss two famous Modernist lesbian novels—Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936). As is well known, both novels use interwar Paris as a setting for the depiction of same-sex love. I would like to explore the patterns of consumption that queer characters engage in, and the economic prerogatives they enjoy or are denied, in the context of the city and the homes they build in the city. Through this analysis, I will attempt to trace the power dynamics between queer individuals and the capitalist market, as well as within relationships of romantic love between women.

Feminist theorists have frequently pointed out the paradoxical nature of how urban spaces treat people who do not fit the norm of the heterosexual male citizen.¹ As Gillian Rose writes, in contrast to the 'feeling of spatial freedom which only white heterosexual men usually enjoy,' 'sexual attacks warn women everyday that their bodies are not meant to be in certain spaces, and racist and homophobic violence delimits the spaces of black, lesbian and gay communities.'² On the other hand, as Elizabeth Wilson has pointed out, the city also offers women the chance for independence, *flânerie*, same-sex bonding and a chance to explore one's sexuality without the threat of familial or community-based policing.

Paris of the inter-war years, the setting of both these novels, would have been an especially paradoxical city for women or queer individuals. As scholars such as Shari Benstock and Elizabeth Wilson have shown,

Paris in the 1920s and 30s gave shelter to queer subcultures (that both Hall and Barnes would have known well), and allowed women to live life on their own terms in a way which would have been inconceivable in other places, or earlier times, especially for expatriate women artists from England or America.³ As Martha Vicinus has put it:

‘But for literary English and American lesbians, Paris symbolized sexual freedom. It was already known for its lesbian subculture, thanks not only to Sand’s reputation but also to the poetry and fiction of such notable male writers as Balzac, Gautier, Baudelaire, Louys, Zola, Maupassant, and Daudet. In Paris the passing woman was embodied in the cross-dressed Marquise de Belbeuf, Colette’s lover, or in Radclyffe Hall... The Sapphic parties of Marie Antoinette were revived in Barney’s famous entertainments. The militant respectability of Rosa Bonheur was transformed into the militant demand for recognition, best embodied in Hall’s decision to write a book defending the “true invert.”’⁴

Yet this was also a city which carried the memories, and lived with the realities of a state-sponsored patriarchy. Benstock points out in *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940*, that a legal ban on women cross-dressing in public had been strictly enforced during Lepine’s prefectship of the Paris police (1900-1913), and on 3rd January 1903 a riot nearly broke out in the Moulin Rouge when Collette and the Marquise de Belbeuf enacted a love-scene. The women were nearly arrested, and forced to stop openly living together.⁵

The contradictory nature of the shelter queer individuals found in Paris is amply illustrated in both novels. As the ‘women of the left bank’ well knew, Paris was the only place where Nora Flood could fulfil Robin Vote’s ‘wish for a home,’ rather than America, or the cities in Europe that they travelled through.⁶ Paris allowed people like Dr. Matthew O’Connor, who were vulnerable to being destroyed for

being 'a horrid sideshow'⁷ (especially in the 30s, the decade of the rapid growth of fascism),⁸ to survive and express their individuality. It provides Robin Vote the space for *flânerie* that gives her a break from her dominating partners, whether from church to church, or from drinking place to drinking place.

At the same time the city is intolerant and hostile to those who dare to question the 'moral and political order' to use Lefebvre's phrase, to which it subscribes.⁹ *Nightwood* establishes the persecution of the marginalized as a salient feature of urban life, as the Doctor's tale of the rape of Mademoiselle Basquette, or the description of the persecution of Guido Volkbein's Jewish ancestors in Early Modern Rome illustrate.¹⁰ Moreover, the roles of persecutor and persecuted are clearly fluid—if Mademoiselle Basquette is assaulted for her gender, the ladies of Rome who watched the Jews being made to run for 'the amusement of the Christian populace,' 'sitting upon spines too refined for rest,' shared in the cruel laughter of the male citizens, their erect posture signifying their sharing of phallic prerogatives to power.¹¹

The world of *Nightwood* shows us that Paris in the 1920s has clearly inherited this tradition of cruelty. While Robin is in the midst of a drunken spat with Nora, a policeman, who ought to be the agent of law and order, takes her, 'by her wrist, one hand on her behind.'¹² This action mimics the putting on of handcuffs on a criminal's wrist, an exhibition of the state's power—since Robin's being 'drunk and disorderly' in public would make her a criminal in the eyes of the state, a body in need of discipline,—even as the policeman himself engages in sexual assault. Nora testifies to the fact that passersby regularly 'put hands on' Robin when she is drunk.¹³ It is probably no accident that even the canny and courageous Doctor restricts his everyday existence to one square of the city, and the lanes running off it, building a safe space within which he leads a picaresque, impoverished life, cross-dressing only within the confines of his tiny and sordid bedroom.

In *The Well of Loneliness*, similarly, Paris at once shelters and exposes Stephen Gordon, the 'invert.' Stephen learns to love Paris,

even if the text takes pains to establish that Stephen's 'true roots' are in her ancestral estate in the English countryside. Indeed, discovering Paris seems to function as a queer rite of initiation. Jonathan Brockett, an invert himself, shows Stephen and her governess Miss Puddleton around the city, queering French history by hinting at narratives of same-sex desire between Madame de Lamballe and Marie Antoinette,¹⁴ while Stephen in turn, shows Paris to her lover Mary Llewellyn. People on the streets of post-war Paris accept, or at least tolerate, Stephen and Mary:

'A few people might stare at the tall, scarred woman in her well-tailored clothes and black slouch hat. They would stare first at her and then at her companion: '*Mais regardez moi ça! Elle est belle, la petite; comme c'est rigolo!*' There would be a few smiles, but on the whole they should attract little notice—*Ils en ont vu bien d'autres*—it was post-war Paris.'¹⁵

Paris, in the novel, is home to various queer communities, from Valerie Seymour's artistic salon, (modelled on the famous Natalie Barney's Sapphic circle)¹⁶ to the queer bars that Stephen finds so vile and alienating.

At the same time, as the passage quoted above shows, the city dwellers do criticize and ridicule queer individuals. If the toffs in Bond Street in London had remarked, 'Look at that! What is it!' at the spectacle of Stephen looking at women's jewellery, in Paris, Stephen and Mary are unable to dance at the famous mainstream bars and restaurants.¹⁷

In my view, the paradoxical nature of the city's relationship to marginalized populations is poignantly captured in these texts if we look at the patterns of consumption that the characters engage in. *The Well of Loneliness* dwells extensively on the pleasures of shopping. The description of Stephen's solitary *flânerie* significantly involves detailed descriptions of the various shops she passes by, and dwells on the complex pleasures of buying certain goods in certain settings, such as

the buying of cheap stationery in bulk, from a wholesale shop.¹⁸

Coming from 'the leisure class', Stephen inherits a complex class position with regard to conspicuous consumption. On the one hand, shopping has been seen as a quintessentially genteel feminine activity since the advent of the department store in the late nineteenth century.¹⁹ On the other hand, to follow Thorstein Veblen's hypothesis, women's conspicuous consumption and leisure are normatively vicarious consumption undertaken on behalf of their husbands, although 'gentleman of leisure' also lives under social pressure to be a connoisseur of commodities.²⁰ Stephen's father and mother seem to follow this schema, her father forcing her mother to wear appropriately fashionable motoring clothes, even though she dislikes them.²¹ Stephen begins adult life by emulating her father, visiting the same exclusive jeweller's shop in London that her father had visited years ago as a young dandy, being recognized instantly as her father's child by the jeweller, and buying for her lover Angela a ring 'as pure,' as the engagement ring her father gave her mother.²²

Indeed spending money on buying luxuries is a way of showing her love for her partners. Her unhappy relationship with Angela Crossby, while living in her hometown in the English countryside is marked by her inability to buy plenty of presents for Angela, lest Angela's husband find out the nature of their relationship:

'For the impulse to give that is common to all lovers, was in her attaining enormous proportions, so that she visualized Angela decked in diadems worthy of Cleopatra; so that she sat and stared at her bank book with eyes that grew angry when they lit on her balance. What was the good of plenty of money if it could not be spent on the person one loved?'²³

However, in Paris, Stephen can freely buy things for Mary from the shops of the city, whether it be meals at the Laperouse, with its history of being visited by Proust, or a new car:

‘Very splendid it seemed to her now to have money, because of what money could do for Mary; in the shops they must sometimes behave like two children, having endless things dragged out for inspection.’²⁴

Stephen enjoys shopping for herself too, as the passage on her impulsive buying of stationery shows. She purchases expensive commodities and services in order to give herself satisfaction and make herself attractive to her lovers. When trying to woo Angela Crosby away from a male rival she not only buys ‘a gold bag with a clasp set in diamonds’ for Angela, but spends lavishly on herself as well—buying clothes from London, a ‘rakish red car,’ gloves, stockings, a sapphire scarf pin, an umbrella, pyjamas of crepe de Chine, a man’s dressing gown of brocade, toilet water, soap, and cuticle cream, and having her nails manicured.²⁵

Judith Halberstam has pointed out that Stephen uses her clothes to creatively express her sexuality: ‘Stephen literally redresses the wrongs of her embodiment by taking on male clothing, meticulously tailored and fashioned to fit her masculine spirit.’²⁶ To show the invert thus seems to me to effectively queer the dominant notion of the woman consumer prevalent in the early twentieth century—that of a heterosexual woman committed to her role in the patriarchal family, whose vanity to present herself as attractive according to the standards of hetero-patriarchy could be exploited by the capitalist.²⁷

The categorization of shopping as a feminine pursuit is further problematized by the depiction of Stephen and Mary’s *flaner*ie down shopping arcades in the early days of their relationship. Mary, the ‘normal’ woman looks into shop windows not to seek commodities she would desire for herself but to adorn Stephen, the ‘masculine’ partner, at which ‘...Stephen might laugh and pretend to be bored, though she secretly nurtured a weakness for Sulka’s.’²⁸ Thus, love of dress can no longer be neatly categorized as feminine since the masculine invert has a weakness for Sulka’s even if she performs masculine indifference.

Moreover, for in both *Nightwood* and *The Well of Loneliness* the lovers

use what the commerce of the city can offer them to build a home of their own, homes that subvert heterosexual domesticity (though the nature and extent of this subversion are questionable, as I will try to argue in the course of this paper).

For one, the Parisian marketplace offers them houses that they can turn into homes, houses whose physical presences become support systems as well as 'the museum of [the lovers'] encounter.'²⁹ Stephen knows at once that she is going to live in the house of Rue Jacob as soon as she sets foot in it,³⁰ and if Stephen works hard on designing the house, and buying furnishings from both small towns in the French countryside as well as from Paris, Mary brings flowers and birds to the house. Mary's purchases are significant because she buys sick birds from 'the terrible bird shops along the river,' with Stephen's encouragement, ('Go and buy up all the animal shops in Paris') and probably with Stephen's money as well.³¹ We are told though some ailing birds die, the number of birds keep growing. These birds seem to demonstrate a love that makes Stephen and Mary's generously share their space with other living things. If the dead birds would seem to suggest that grief and mourning are an integral part of same-sex love, as Stephen and Mary's meeting amidst the destruction of the First World War illustrates, the growing collection bright birds would suggest a the 'growing family' of a young couple, a motif made explicit when Mary brings home their pet dog, David: 'And so it had suddenly come to pass that they who had been two, were now three.'³² The queer family is able to mimic and subvert the heterosexual model of a procreative marriage in order to provide a home to the lives they rescue from an exploitative marketplace.

In *Nightwood* too, we see the queer couple buying things to build a home on their own terms. Their apartment on the Rue du Cherche-Midi begins as a testament to mutuality, chosen by Robin and bought by Nora. Nora and Robin do up their home with decorations that flout cannons of domestic taste, but are meaningful to them because they are memories of their travels together:

‘In the passage of their lives together every object in the garden, every item in the house, every word they spoke, attested to their mutual love, the combining of their humours. There were circus chairs, wooden horses bought from a ring of an old merry-go-round, venetian chandeliers from the Flea Fair, stage-drops from Munich, cherubim from Vienna, ecclesiastical hangings from Rome, a spinet from England, and a miscellaneous collection of music boxes from many countries; such was the museum of their encounter...’³³

If, as Jeanette Winterson says, ‘there is great dignity in Nora’s love for Robin, written without cliché or compromise in the full-blown archetypal language of romance,’³⁴ Barnes seems to locate the high-point of this romance in the short paragraph quoted above, in the material objects in the house which ‘attested to their mutual love, the combining of their humours.’

Also, as Mary Wilson points out, the decorations are ‘objects created not for long-term use but for a performance of permanence, whose meanings change with each passing show.’³⁵ The decoration of the house thus would seem to signify Robin’s challenge to heteronormative monogamy, just as her room in the Hotel Recamier threatens bourgeois domesticity by juxtaposing its staple artificial simulacra of nature, (potted plants, cut flowers and birdcages) with the wildness and bestiality associated with her presence.³⁶

This challenge is carried on by the Doctor’s position as a consumer of products normatively marketed for the performance of ‘natural’ femininity in his impoverished garret home—‘...some twenty perfume bottles, almost empty, pomades, creams, rouges, powder boxes and puffs...laces, ribands, stockings, ladies’ underclothing and an abdominal brace...’³⁷ Moreover, the doctor’s room refuses to conform to the norm that feminine consumption should conform to a desire to ‘beautify,’ one’s surroundings as well as oneself: ‘A swill-pail stood at the head of the bed, brimming with abominations.’³⁸

But if certain characters manage to gain a degree of subversive power in the urban marketplace, what of those who fail to acquire this power? Both novels, especially *Nightwood* narrate tales of people who fail to manipulate the marketplace in their favour.

In *The Well of Loneliness*, another same-sex couple, Jamie and Barbara, come to Paris hoping that they will manage to survive and succeed in Paris, eke out an impoverished existence in a garret with hardly enough to eat, until Barbara dies of lung disease and Jamie kills herself the night after.

If Nora and Stephen, with American and English incomes are welcome in inter-war Paris of the weak franc, and money is no barrier in the way of securing a home, several characters from *Nightwood* are unable to successfully fashion households of their own. The doctor's dream of home, in which he is a conventionally beautiful woman, and where he can 'boil some good man's potatoes and toss up a child for him every nine months by the calendar' is an impossible one.³⁹ His reflection that he 'has to be brave, no matter what, to keep the mascara from running away,'⁴⁰ reveals both his courage and his vulnerability. Guido Volbein's setting up of a home for his wife Hedvig, in Inner City Vienna, where he can cast himself in the role of a Christian Viennese aristocrat, takes him back to his ancestral trades of 'money changing,' and thus to the very life and identity he wished to escape from.⁴¹

Moreover, if Nora and Stephen can use their purchasing power to do cement their romantic relationships, others in *Nightwood* do not have this power. This is most explicit in the portrayal of the character the authorial voice is clearly hostile to, Jenny Petherbridge. Although Jenny is wealthy, with 'the collective income four dead husbands could afford,'⁴² the text frequently calls her a 'squatter,' or a thief, one who lives on property belonging to others, thus denying her the privilege of private property, a privilege Barnes does not problematize for other characters in the novel. As Mary Wilson points out, Jenny is cast into a 'consumerist bourgeoisie identity.'⁴³ The things she has gathered from other people, out of deference to the tastes of others, threaten to

obscure Jenny herself, in the course of the long description of Jenny's belongings with which the chapter 'the squatter' begins. Her need to spend her money on the fashions others set down is brought to its most ludicrous in the Doctor's gossip that Jenny has bought 'eighty two plaster virgins...because Robin had a good one.'⁴⁴

Moreover, Jenny could perhaps be seen as the 'double' of Nora's patterns of consumption. She is cast as the villain for having been 'a dealer in second-hand and therefore incalculable emotions,'⁴⁵ appropriating Nora's love for Robin. But as Nora painfully finds out through the course of the novel (and as many scholars and critics have explored since) her own emotions partake of previous discourses of power, of motherhood, and of romantic love, and are thus 'second-hand' themselves. This is mirrored in the fact that, as Mary Wilson points out, the objects in Jenny's house, such as the left hand glove of Eleanora Duse, are often theatrical mementoes, and thus closely related to the things from circuses and fun fairs in Nora's apartment.⁴⁶ Jenny thus could be seen to function as Nora's abject and ludicrous shadow, blindly conforming to the valuations of others in a manner, yet uncannily similar to what should have been a uniquely new romance, Nora and Robin's.

Moreover, both texts show up that no matter how much cache individuals have, communities frequently bleakly fail to escape the mechanisms of the market. Perhaps close textual reading allows us to see the two texts in dialogue with each other. In the first chapter *Nightwood* speculates on the relationship between Jews and Christians in terms of an exchange of commodities: 'The Christian traffic in retribution has made the Jew's history a commodity; it is the medium through which he receives, at the necessary moment, the serum of his own past that he may offer it again as his blood.'⁴⁷ If Christian 'traffic' is the medium through which the Jew can access his past in *Nightwood*, in my view, *The Well of Loneliness* shows the heterosexual marketplace as the medium through which the invert and other queer individuals can access a communal existence that has been commodified

and made available only through destructive economic transactions, in the bar scenes.

Hall's descriptions of the bars of Paris where inverts and their lovers congregate are dominated by distaste for the pervasive decadence that Stephen sees everywhere. 'Alec's,' for example, is described as 'that meeting place of the most miserable . . . [t]hat merciless drug dealing, death dealing haunt . . .'⁴⁸ One wonders why Hall should have chosen to depict the Parisian queer bar scene thus, especially since, as Judith Halberstam has pointed out, that she and her partner Una Troubridge 'frequented lesbian bars, which were not the vile places she describes in the novel but provided a lively base for a rather flourishing community.'⁴⁹ One wonders whether, given Hall's personal politics, what is distasteful to Stephen is a lifestyle which threatens her wealthy, upper-class existence, and the ideals of 'normal' decorum that she sticks to. On the other hand, perhaps Hall wishes to engage in urban social realism, pointing out the real economic and emotional costs that queer subcultures collectively pay from refusing to conform.⁵⁰

Parisian nightlife in the novel is clearly mediated by the marketplace. These bars are not only sites of socialization but are also the sites of commerce, the gains of which go to heterosexual capitalists, the owners of the bars. Thus, Pujol, the owner of the Ideal bar, who is 'himself the most aggressively normal of men,' forcing his wife to bear the brunt of his sexual urges 'collects' inverts, keeping an annotated catalogue of his queer customers, in order to have tales to tell his straight friends and customers when they visit his bar. At another bar, the Le Narcisse, both family and romance are mediated by economic relations as the text suggests that 'the family group' around the owner of the bar are actually engaged in sex work, and a woman who distributes roses to queer couples is 'a vendeuse,' making it clear that the bar is made a safe space for queer folk in order to gain profits. The commercialization of a hospitable space for the capitalist's benefit is made most explicit in the description of Alec, the owner of a bar where male inverts congregate: 'Alec the tempter, the vendor of dreams, the dispenser of

illusions whiter than snow; Alec, who sold little packets of cocaine for large bundles of notes . . .’ The dreams Alec dispenses are surely not only cocaine-induced dreams but also the dream of being able to assume an identity rendered invisible in the rest of the city.⁵¹

At the same time, damning the queer bars and cafe of Paris surely lead us into another trap—it makes us damn the politics of those who chose to use these bars for socializing and exploring their sexuality. This becomes particularly important if we consider the fact that as queer women, Robin Vote, or Mary Llewellyn, are doubly marginalized on the Parisian drinking scene.

The woman as the consumer of alcohol is a deeply transgressive feature in literature, even in the literature of Modernism. Indeed, any form of consumption of food and drink (or refusal of it) carries a transgressive potential when performed by a woman, as feminist scholars have demonstrated, even more so when it takes place in a public milieu.⁵² Moreover, as James Nicholls has pointed out, the literature of High Modernism shows that the bars and cafes of Montparnasse were deeply gendered spaces. In the context of his study of the writings of Joyce, Hemingway, and Rhys, Nicholls points out how Modernist writing contains ancient anxieties about the ‘perverse’ effects of women’s consumption of alcohol such as the production of ‘damaged’ offspring (which could be significant in the light of the fact that Robin’s son Guido is ‘mentally deficient.’)⁵³ Moreover, instead of being a place for camaraderie, the bar is a judgmental and exclusionary space for women: ‘If a woman seen drinking with a man is all too often assumed to be either wife or predator, then the woman drinking alone is assumed to be either desperately lonely or a prostitute.’⁵⁴

It is interesting that both novels show alcohol performing its stereotypical role as ‘home-breaker’ within the context of a relationship of love between women. Stephen manipulates Mary into leaving her for the heterosexual Martin Hallam, in order to ‘save’ her from falling into the dissipation of Parisian drinking scene. And of course, Nora and Robin fall apart over the issue of Robin’s compulsive wanderings from

home, searching for drink and amorous adventures in the bars and cafes of Montparnasse. *Nightwood* dwells at length on Nora's suffering over Robin's casually cruel and sometimes abusive behaviour, her loneliness in her absence, and her attempts to keep Robin safe from the dangers of her wanderings.

But surely, Stephen and Nora's distaste and fear of the drinking scene are problematic in their own right. These bars with the promise of a release from sobriety, monogamy, and the pains of an invisibilized existence surely have the potential for becoming heterotopic sites that radically question heteropatriarchy. As Berlant and Warner point out, urban spaces which support a sexually permissive culture, such as the locales of sex commerce, are the backbone of visible and politically active 'queer counterpublics':

'Not all who use the thousands who migrate or make pilgrimages to Christopher Street use the porn shops, but all benefit from the fact that some do. . . . It develops a dense, publicly accessible sexual culture. . . . No group is more dependent on this kind of pattern in urban space than queers. If we could not concentrate a publicly accessible culture somewhere we would always be outnumbered and overwhelmed. . . . Respectable gays like to think that they owe nothing to the sexual subculture they think of as sleazy. But their success, their way of living, their political rights, and their very identities would never have been possible but for the existence of the queer public sexual culture they now despise. Extinguish it and almost all *out* gay or queer culture will wither on the vine.'⁵⁵

The wealthy and respectable Stephen and Valerie Seymour's desire to opt out of the 'sleazy' Parisian nightlife, and socialize at home reflects their class privileges—the privilege of owning private property.⁵⁶

Even in *Nightwood*, where the text refuses to look away from the fact that the bars of Montparnasse offer little permanent consolation

to Robin Vote, the text also records Robin's individual challenge to a patriarchy that would keep her 'safely' at home. According to me, a large part of the threat that Robin offers to patriarchy is that she assumes the prerogatives of consuming freely, in a culture where she ought to be the consumed. She is introduced in the novel, framed by the gaze of Felix, as a passive 'picture,' as one who makes us 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.'⁵⁷ Robin thus ought to be an object to be consumed in order to enable a homosocial bonding between men and their 'forefathers,' but instead she fashions herself as a voracious consumer of sexual pleasures and alcohol, one who cruelly preys on others, rather than be eaten up herself, seeking momentary pleasure in the consumption of alcohol ('Ah, I feel so pure and gay!'),⁵⁸ only to wake up 'the morning after' to voraciously eat eggs—her own portion as well as Nora's.⁵⁹

If Robin were to conform to what Nora wishes her to do, she would be rendered 'safe,' not only for the benefit of Nora's peace of mind, but also in the eyes of patriarchy. Instead of letting this happen, Robin confronts Nora, when Nora tries to keep someone from feeling up a drunk Robin, saying 'You are a devil! You make everything dirty!'⁶⁰ She goes on to take money from Nora and give it to another woman to spend on drink and 'happiness,' as she herself does:

'She stumbled and I [i.e. Nora] held her, and she said, seeing a poor wretched beggar of a whore, 'Give her some money, all of it!' She threw the francs into the street and bent down over the filthy baggage and began stroking her hair, gray with the dust of years, saying, 'They are all God-forsaken, and you most of all, because they don't want you to have your happiness. They don't want you to drink. Well, here, drink! I give you money and permission! These women—they are all like her,' she said with fury. 'They are all good—they want to save us!' She sat down beside her.'⁶¹

It is hard to make a general point about Robin's behaviour, because that would mean justifying abusive relationships or saying sexual harassment on the street is not a real concern. At the same time, it is important to recognize Robin's critique of Nora's desire to keep her safe- by keeping her safe Nora would only safeguard the 'dirty' values of patriarchy, which equate chastity and continence with being a 'good woman.' Diabolical though she is, Robin refuses to be co-opted into being a 'good woman' and instead snatches money to give to the 'beggar of a whore,' to be a transgressive eater and drinker as she is.

The workings of patriarchal discourses within Robin and Nora's relationship bring me to my final point about how the space of the home located in an expatriate city is no easy 'refuge' in either novel, and the power dynamic between lovers is inflected by the economic prerogative of actually owning the house, rather than staying in it.

Fredric Jameson, in his essay 'Is Space Political?' makes the point that the home is a site for the workings of power, rather than a refuge from the conflict ridden world outside:

'... the right to repression runs deep, and the privilege of escaping from the polis and from politics in general is supremely acted out in this separation of private life from work or public space. That it may be symbolic only of the privileges of the head of the household might be deduced from the rather different dynamic of privacy within the apartment or dwelling space itself. There, sexuality and power, or control, seem to be the not so symbolic stakes: who has a right to close his door, and upon what, is a question that goes hand in hand with the other one about the right to determine the use of the television set (or the living room).'⁶²

Jameson's analysis would seem to be restricted to the heterosexual family, but if we consider *The Well of Loneliness* and *Nightwood* carefully, we notice that the lesbian 'households' in each novel do actually have

a 'head.' Nora and Stephen are the buyers of these houses, they hold the prerogative of being the more powerful members of the family with control over the other member, in the eyes of a capitalist society and as I will try to point out, they do attempt to make use of their prerogatives, exposing disturbing aspects of their 'love' in the process.

Readers of the *The Well of Loneliness* cannot fail to notice the way in which the lesbian relationship celebrated in the novel relentlessly mimes a heterosexual marriage with well defined male and female roles. Contemplating what she can offer Mary, Stephen imagines the relationship in terms where she subtly gives Mary weaker filial relationships, 'child' and 'beloved.' Judith Halberstam has explained Stephen's role play, including her giving up of Mary, in terms of an economy of giving and taking, which is reflected in Radclyffe Hall's own relationships:

'What it does signify, however, is an elaborate system of desire in which mutuality is not a principle and in which giving on the part of the lover does not signify her own depletion or her beloved's inadequacy, or her own morbidity and her beloved's desperation.'⁶³

However, one cannot overlook the fact that the feminine 'home-maker' is repeatedly left at the mercy of the masculine provider. This becomes painfully clear in if we consider the relationship between Jamie and Barbara. The feminine partner in this couple, Barbara, is responsible for the household chores in their impoverished garret-apartment, while Jamie studies music and composes. Hall presents their eventual deaths as tragedy, but, I feel, overlooks Jamie's culpability in Barbara's death. Performing conventional masculine behaviour, Jamie cannot be bothered to co-operate with the ailing Barbara's task of keeping out the dust that damages her lungs from the flat. Moreover, her proud refusal, in her capacity as the earning member, of any financial assistance for treating Barbara's sickness, effectively causes Barbara's death.

As in *Nightwood*, crises erupt over the issue of mobility—when Mary goes out on a visit to Barbara, Stephen's behaviour to Mary turns ugly, even abusive: 'You've no right to go off without letting me know where you're going—I've told you before I won't have it!'⁶⁴ But if Mary has no right to 'go off' on her own, she does not have any right to stay in the house either, if Stephen the owner of the house has decided she needs to go, as Stephen does at the end of the novel, manipulating her into thinking she has had an affair, so that Mary feels compelled to walk out, without any resources of her own. Stephen thus effectively manages things so that Mary will have to take shelter with the first person who offers her shelter, and positions Martin Hallam, the person whom she has decided is the right person to 'save' Mary.

In *Nightwood*, on the one hand, if Nora and Robin's home begins as a space of love and mutuality, the 'museum of their encounter,' slowly acquires the deathliness of the museum, as Nora tries to take Robin out of harm's way towards death ('In Nora's heart lay the fossil of Robin, intaglio of her identity, and about it for its maintenance ran Nora's blood.')⁶⁵ Like Jenny's house which is like a place 'kept exactly as it was when'—Nora moves about her own apartment, wanting to keep it fixed in the past because 'if she disarranged anything Robin might become confused—might lose the scent of home.' Moreover, as Mary Wilson writes in *Nightwood*, 'home is never just a private, personal space, but a worldly position.' In my view, Nora decisively uses her 'worldly position' to exert her power over Robin. If Robin's choosing the house, and Nora's buying it suggests mutuality, the text equally seems to suggest that Nora chooses to take possession of a passive Robin, albeit with Robin's consent:

'Robin told only a little of her life, but she kept repeating in one way or another her wish for a home, as if she were afraid she would be lost again, as if she were aware, without conscious knowledge, that she belonged to Nora, and that if Nora did not make it permanent by her own strength, she would forget.'⁶⁶

The counterpart to this gesture would be Nora's returning from Jenny's to tell Robin that 'It is over.'⁶⁷ Reader's often re-construct the plot of the novel to think 'Robin left Nora for Jenny,' but the text actually makes clear that it is Nora who finally says 'it is over,' and thus leaves Robin, like Mary in *The Well of Loneliness*, to walk out into the city, to seek refuge wherever she can, once the person who has the economic prerogative of owning the house she lives in has decided to reject her.

Where then do women like Mary, Barbara, or Robin go, and what is their version of the machinations in the city and the homes of their lovers? Perhaps, finally what we are left is the curse the Doctor has overheard:

'Look for the girls also in the toilets at night, and you will find them kneeling in that great secret confessional crying between tongues, the terrible excommunication: 'May you be damned to hell! May you die standing upright! May you be damned upward! May this be damned, terrible and damned spot! May it wither into the grin of the dead, may this draw back, low riding mouth in an empty snarl of the groin! May this be your torment, may this be your damnation! God damned me before you, and after me you shall be damned, kneeling and standing away till we vanish! For what do you know of me, man's meat? I'm an angel on all fours, with a child's feet behind me, seeking my people that have never been made, going down face foremost, drinking the waters of night at the water hole of the damned, and I go into the waters, up to my heart, the terrible waters! What do you know of me? May you pass from me, damned girl! Damned and betraying!'⁶⁸

In the public toilets, a place that is at once a private, intimate refuge, and a public, civic space, the 'I' that calls out sees herself as a bestial, angelic, and infantile presence like Robin. Her curse calls down

damnation upon a phallic, patriarchal world whose 'upright' values systematically limit and impoverish her, including in her curse the 'damned girl' who would be an instrument of this patriarchy and force her to live by these values.

NOTES

- 1 The texts I have consulted are: Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London: Virago, 1991); Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Gillian Rose, "Women and Everyday Spaces" and Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies-Cities," in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, edited by Janet Price and Margaret Shildrick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 359-370; 381-388.
- 2 Rose, 362.
- 3 Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); Wilson, 47-64.
- 4 Martha Vicinus, "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong': The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian identity," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 3, The Lesbian Issue (Autumn 1992): 487. Accessed 8 December 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178078>.
- 5 Benstock 48-49.
- 6 Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, Preface by Jeanette Winterson, Introduction by T.S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 2006), 40.
- 7 T.S. Eliot, "Introduction" to *Nightwood*, by Djuna Barnes (New York: New Directions, 2006), 11.
- 8 Benstock, 424; Jane Marcus, "Laughing at Leviticus: *Nightwood* as Woman's Circus Epic," *Cultural Critique*, no. 13, The Construction of Gender and Modes of Social Division (Autumn, 1989): 143-190. Accessed 8 December 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1354272>.
- 9 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 317.
- 10 Barnes, 24, 14.
- 11 Mairead Hanrahan, "Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* and the Cruci-Fiction of the

- Jew,” *Paragraph* 24, no. 1 (March 2001): 36. Accessed 8 December 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43263619>.
- 12 Barnes, 83.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928; Project Gutenberg, 2006), Book 3, Chapter 31. Accessed 8 December 2019, <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0609021.txt>.
- 15 Hall, Book 5, Chapter 2.
- 16 That Valerie Seymour is a thinly veiled portrait of Natalie Barney is often noted by scholars. The most comprehensive comparative study I have been able to consult is Amy Wells-Lyn, “The Intertextual, Sexually Coded Rue Jacob: A Geocritical Approach to Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barney, and Radclyffe Hall,” *South Central Review* 22, no 3 (Fall 2005): 78-112. Accessed 8 December 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40039995>.
- 17 Hall, Book 2, Chapter 21; Hall, Book 5, Chapter 53.
- 18 Hall, Book 3, Chapter 33.
- 19 Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture* in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola (New York: Methuen, 1985); Anne Friedberg, “Les Flaneurs du Mal(l): Cinema and the Postmodern Condition,” *PMLA* 106, no 3 (May 1991): 419–431. Accessed 8 December 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/462776>.
- 20 Thorstein Veblen, “Conspicuous Leisure” and “Conspicuous Consumption”, in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; New York: Penguin, 1994), 35-101.
- 21 Hall, Book 1, Chapter 7.
- 22 Hall, Book 2, Chapter 21.
- 23 Hall, Book 2, Chapter 21.
- 24 Hall, Book 5, Chapter 40; Hall, Book 5, Chapter 41.
- 25 Hall, Book 2, Chapter 24.
- 26 Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 106.
- 27 Bowlby, “Commerce and Femininity,” 18-34. Bowlby points out that even though the owners of the great departmental stores of the late nineteenth century might have conceived of women thus, the terrain in fact was far more ambiguous even for heterosexual women.
- 28 Hall, Book 5, Chapter 40.
- 29 Barnes, 14 and 40.

- 30 Hall, Book 3, Chapter 32.
- 31 Hall, Book 5, Chapter 41.
- 32 Hall, Book 5, Chapter 41.
- 33 Barnes, 40.
- 34 Jeanette Winterson, "Preface" to *Nightwood*, by Djuna Barnes (New York: New Directions, 2006), 6.
- 35 Mary Wilson, "No Place Like Home: *Nightwood's* Unhoused Fiction," *Studies in the Novel* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 437. Accessed 8 December 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41319886>.
- 36 Susana S. Martins, "Gender Trouble, and Lesbian Desire in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 20, no. 3 (1999): 116. Accessed 8 December 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3347225>.
- 37 Barnes, 53.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Wilson, "No Place Like Home," 440.
- 40 Barnes, 58.
- 41 Barnes, 15.
- 42 Barnes, 47.
- 43 Wilson, "No Place Like Home," 440.
- 44 Barnes, 75.
- 45 Barnes, 47.
- 46 Wilson, "No Place Like Home," 440.
- 47 Barnes, 18.
- 48 Hall, Book 5, Chapter 48.
- 49 Halberstam, 96.
- 50 Wells-Lynn, 89.
- 51 Hall, Book 5, Chapter 48.
- 52 Helena Michie, "Ladylike Anorexia: Hunger, Sexuality and Etiquette" in *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 12-30; Lisa Angelella "Alimentary Modernism" (PhD. Thesis, University of Iowa, 2009). Accessed on 8 December 2019, <https://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1410&context=etd>; James Nicholls, "Drink, Modernity, and Modernism: Representations of Drinking and Intoxication in James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and Jean

- Rhys" (PhD. Thesis, Liverpool John Moores University, 2002). Accessed 8 December 2019, <http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/5631/1/403021.pdf>.
- 53 Nicholls, "A New Kind of Drunkenness: Alcohol and Modernity in Hogarth's *Beer Street and Gin Lane*," 25-51 and Nicholls, "Drink, Modernity and Modernism," 277.
- 54 Nicholls, "Drink, Gender and the Production of Literature: Jean Rhys' Early Fiction," 257-292; Nicholls, 269.
- 55 Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, from Sex in Public, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 2612-2613.
- 56 Benstock points out that the ban on cross-dressing in public systematically discriminated against working class lesbians, since upper class lesbians could afford to socialize extensively at home, and travel by private conveyances (Benstock, 48).
- 57 Barnes, 30-31.
- 58 Barnes, 86.
- 59 Barnes, 83.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Fredric Jameson, "Is Space Political?" in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, edited by Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997), 251.
- 63 Halberstam, 106.
- 64 Hall, Book 5, Chapter .48.
- 65 Barnes, 40.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Barnes, 82.
- 68 Barnes, 60.