"I don't know how to talk, and I've got to": Dialogue, Anonymity, and Animality in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*

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In 1914 Djuna Barnes published an interview she conducted with a gorilla named Dinah at the Bronx Zoo in New York. In this piece, written over twenty years before the publication of *Nightwood*, Barnes records her meeting with Dinah as an interview, complete with fabricated dialogue. She begins with the gleeful announcement that "A new species has come to town!" (Barnes, "The Girl and the Gorilla" 180). This lively opening sets the tone for the playful curiosity and enthusiasm that characterizes their meeting. She visits the gorilla's enclosure and instead of detailing her observations of the exotic creature, Barnes approaches the introduction as if she were interviewing a tourist. Her first question for Dinah is, "What conclusions have you come to regarding our United States?" ("The Girl and the Gorilla" 181). To which Dinah replies:

> "'There is one thing I haven't tried yet.'
> 'And what is that?'
> 'Chewing gum. Gee Whiz!'"
>
> (Barnes, "The Girl and the Gorilla" 182)

Such a quaint exchange gives the impression that Dinah's largest preoccupation was her desire to try bubble gum, when in reality she was just months away from suffering paralysis and eventually starving herself to death ("The Girl and the Gorilla" 180). Not only does the account fail to approximate her "soul and personality," ("The Girl and the Gorilla" 184) but the fabricated conversation also imposes a narrative onto their interaction. Barnes writes an assumed perspective and experience for her subject, ultimately demonstrating the perils that come with presenting the subjectivity of the Other. She attributes voice and participation to Dinah, without regard to the gorilla's actual contribution to the interaction. All the while she is aware of her domination, but

presents it in an entertaining, whimsical narrative. The imposed dialogue of "The Girl and the Gorilla" models intersubjectivity, and the related picture of the animal, in a drastically different way than what *Nightwood* suggests twenty years later. In *Nightwood*, Barnes adopts a radically reversed model of intersubjectivity in dialogue, one that eschews the impulses to dominate and presents the animal as an escape from language rather than its subordinate. Barnes's awareness of the dominating power of dialogue in the interview foregrounds some of the implications of her alternative approach to dialogue in *Nightwood.*

The dialogue of the interaction between Barnes and Dinah presents speech as a tool for dominating the Other. After Barnes's initial question is met with silence, she struggles to regain order in the conversation by continuing the dialogue internally: "I said to myself: Now we will see if, after all, the advantages of civilization do not enable me to dominate this rather unique situation" ("The Girl and the Gorilla" 182). Barnes uses what she calls the "advantages of civilization," by which she seems to indicate speech or at least interpretation of speech, to "dominate" the situation of Dinah's silence. After she begins to "freely interpret" Dinah's response, it conforms to a human register; Dinah speaks eloquently about the taximeter she encountered, her desire to try chewing gum, and her distaste for zoo food. ("The Girl and the Gorilla" 183) The surprisingly civil conversation is cut short only when "[Dinah] had to spoil it all by gravely putting an orange peel upon her head," at which point Barnes begins to describe her as "growl[ing] ominously" and "lunging" ("The Girl and the Gorilla" 183). The sudden shift in Barnes's portrayal of Dinah illustrates how Barnes uses imagined dialogue to impose a narrative

onto a potentially disorienting interaction. Barnes's perception of Dinah wavers between a "slanting bulk of a body" capable of "caressing or battling" ("The Girl and the Gorilla" 181) and weighing "less than fifty pounds and stand[ing] about three feet high" ("The Girl and the Gorilla" 183), then back again to "side-swinging, ungainly, loping" ("The Girl and the Gorilla" 184). Tracing these shifts in perception reveals how Dinah's degree of familiarity or threat corresponds with her contribution to the conversation. When Barnes interprets her response verbally and places it within their dialogue, Dinah becomes "little and quaint" and "stroll[s] about the cage" ("The Girl and the Gorilla" 183). However, when she deviates from the verbal conversation, through silence or unexpected gestures, Barnes perceives her as less approachable and familiar; she becomes a "slanting bulk" and has clumsy, "ungainly" movements. By interpreting Dinah's presence through attributed speech and dialogue, she is able to dominate the "vague" and "unfathomable" ("The Girl and the Gorilla" 180) gorilla by contriving a narrative that collapses difference.

"The Girl and the Gorilla" models the violation that comes from writing the subjectivity of the Other, a violation that Barnes cautions against in *Nightwood*. In the interview, Barnes effortlessly dominates the unknown gorilla by writing her as a participant in their conversation. Dialogue in *Nightwood*, however, is implemented differently; it departs not only from the model Barnes developed in "The Girl and the Gorilla" but also from other typical renderings of dialogue. The speakers in *Nightwood* use dialogue to acknowledge their difference from each other rather than assimilate the Other into a monolithic experience. Conversations abandon the question and answer

model of the interview; instead characters often speak for pages at a time without interruption or response. The exchanges as a whole lack the familiar "give and take" form of call and response dialogue (Thomas, 37). While the characters share physical space and occasionally directly address each other, they rarely exhibit signs of recognizable interaction, in which the participants of the conversation take turns speaking, listening, and responding. Instead, they perform obliquely related parallel monologues with little apparent relevance to what the other is expressing. Rather than "delighting" in their contributions to the fabric of a single conversation, as Bronwen Thomas suggests speakers usually do, they maintain space between one another by making tangential responses (Thomas, 38).

In many conversations, particularly the dialogue between Nora and the doctor that dominates the latter half of the novel, the characters demonstrate their inattention to other speakers and preoccupation with their own expression. The narrative voice repeatedly draws attention to the upending of typical listening behavior. The emphasis on boundaries between speakers is further displayed in the narrator's role during scenes of dialogue. The narrative intervention is minimal; utterances are merely reported rather than crafted into a collaborative conversation. When reading scenes of dialogue the narrator relies on phrases such as "he said," "she went on," and "he continued" while more reciprocal terms such as "asked" or "answered" are scarcely seen (Barnes, *Nightwood* 85-113, 120-21). Particular attention is given to the term "continued" as it is frequently used to convey a speaker's utterance. While in conversation with the doctor, Nora "had not heard him" (*Nightwood* 143), continues speaking "unheeding" (*Nightwood*

147), and speaks "as if she had not been interrupted" (*Nightwood* 149). Similarly, while the doctor speaks Nora "stop[s], as if he had got her attention for the first time" (*Nightwood* 139). Nora's unresponsiveness to the doctor's utterances does not occur as a result of an outside distraction; there is no discernible cause for her to not hear him speak. This pattern is repeated throughout the novel as a mode of interaction rather than an isolated miscommunication. Even in scenes that focus primarily on dialogue, such as the chapters centering on the doctor and Nora's conversation, the framing of speech heavily prioritizes each speaker's expression over the back and forth of a conversation. Although conventional dialogue often assumes the organizing role of the narrator in conversation, which Thomas likens to the zooming in and out of a director's camera, the narrative hand in *Nightwood* is far removed from the construction of a conversation (Thomas, 80). The narrator insists on representing dialogue as it occurs without guiding the reader towards a unified impression of the conversation.

In addition to the lack of narrative intervention in dialogue, another distinctive aspect of conversational form in *Nightwood* is the length of alternating utterances. As Thomas notes, fictional dialogue often seeks to approximates the cadence of actual human conversation by purporting to show unmediated speech that equates "story time" and "discourse time" (Thomas, 16). Such exchanges relay utterances of realistic lengths ranging from a few words to a few lines of speech at a time. In *Nightwood*, however, each delivery can consist of pages of dialogue. Particularly noticeable in the scene between the doctor and Nora is the fact that each character's verbal expression frequently extends uninterrupted over pages of continuous speech. With such an unobstructed space in

which to explore speech, the speakers are able to more fully articulate and express their subjective states. While the ample room for speaking provides space for the characters to negotiate their identities through speech, it does not readily conform to familiar criteria for collaboration. Dialogue usually stages collaboration in easily perceptible registers, such as guiding speech tags or frequent paragraph breaks between speakers, but collaboration in *Nightwood* operates under less stringent markers (Thomas, 20). The sheer length of each utterance introduces problems with retention and recall when attempting to engage with another's speech. With the speaker continuing over such large areas of text, the listener is understandably challenged to digest and respond directly to the dialogue. The unconventional cadence of dialogue in the novel indicates the existence of boundaries and space not only between the speakers' utterances, but also their subjectivities.

The unusual listening process that occurs in the novel's dialogue demonstrates the lack of digestion we might otherwise expect in lengthy conversation. The speakers often deliver abstract lines that do not seem to correspond with the subject matter at hand. The character of the doctor, in particular, displays this tendency when offering others advice. He responds with oddly figurative guidance such as "make birds' nests with your teeth" (*Nightwood* 136) or "beat life like a dinner bell" (*Nightwood* 148). In addition to offering puzzling metaphors and vague responses, characters openly denounce dialogue altogether. Robin, the mysterious and elusive woman around whom the story revolves, uses one of her very few utterances to admonish speech altogether: "'Shut up,' Robin said, putting her hand on her knee. 'Shut up, you don't know what you are talking about.

You talk all the time and you never know anything'" (Barnes, *Nightwood* 82). In her vitriolic response, Robin articulates Barnes's unease with the dominating effects of speech shown in "The Girl and the Gorilla".

In *Nightwood* the model of intersubjectivity in dialogue is the polar opposite of that in the interview with Dinah. Barnes creates parallel monologues that protect the space between individuals, precluding possession or objectification of another, to suggests a new pattern of being together. The dialogue in *Nightwood* struggles against the tendencies to appropriate the Other seen in the interaction between Barnes and Dinah. Unlike the interview with Dinah, the novel's account of verbal exchanges resists intersubjective impositions in its unusual conversational practices. Understanding the oddities of dialogue in *Nightwood*, and bearing in mind its direct opposition to the speech domination in "The Girl and the Gorilla," allows us to understand intersubjectivity in a way critics of the novel have not yet recognized.

Nightwood has been read by many as an illustration of failed communication. The prevailing reception of speech and dialogue in *Nightwood* portrays verbal interactions as unproductive and, ultimately, destructive. Scholars describe the speech in *Nightwood* as dysfunctional and opaque; some conclude it is "not working properly" (Lauretis, S117). The novel's use of speech in particular is viewed as a "repressive constraint" (Rohman, 72) to the formation of identity. Barnes's relationship with speech is generally received with anticipation of deceit. Critics point towards her "elusive narrative gap" (Henstra, 125) and "deceptive narrative strategies" (Hubert, 43) as evidence of the obscuring function of speech in *Nightwood*, which is "both stark and intentionally allusive" and "at

once lucid and obfuscating" (Lauretis, S117). The critiques of her style often take issue with her idiosyncratic renderings of speech through dialogue; the characters are labeled "liars" (Henstra, 137), and dialogue itself is studied in terms of the lies perpetuated in conversation (Singer, 69). The dialogue, particularly that of the doctor, is characterized as an "interruption" that "displaces linear narrative" (Fama, 40) and demonstrates that "words are vain" (Rohman, 71). Brian Glavey dismisses the dialogue altogether and instead privileges the use of images to resist objectification. He suggests that "the overall structure of the book is in a sense ekphrastic, attempting to fill with the endless profusion of words the void left by a black hole of images" (Glavey, 757). To consider the bulk of the novel a flood of speech meant only to occupy vacated space would be to commit an egregious injustice both to the content and form of Barnes's novel. I intend to retrieve the sprawling dialogue of the novel from its categorization as superfluous, while exploring the tensions in the novel's rendering of interaction and subjectivity.

It is true that the characters in *Nightwood* appear largely uninterested in listening to others speak, at least in the way novels have trained us to expect, but that does not render their conversation useless. As much of the novel is direct dialogue it must serve a function beyond illustrating the failure of communication, especially given how persistently the characters seek out conversation. The gaps between speakers could be read to confirm the critical interpretation of *Nightwood* as an illustration of failed communication, but I believe the novel accommodates a reading of the dialogue between characters that sees it in more generative terms. Familiar notions of dialogue lead us to believe characters are not responding to one another, but they are, as I will show,

dwelling together and achieving intimacy through conversation. The critical reception of *Nightwood* has dealt extensively with the relationship between language and intersubjectivity in the novel, but the conversation so far lacks a thorough interpretation of its unconventional dialogic interactions. The constitutive power of dialogue is not immediately evident in *Nightwood*, but paying attention to the gaps in conversation reveals the profound recognition of subjectivity between speakers. Vital, delicate work is done in the spaces between speakers, work that validates the inherent unknowability of the Other while attempting intimacy. Where critics have interpreted this gap as a failure of communication and a destructive force, I argue that this space is crucial to constructing a balance between intimacy and autonomy. In the novel's distinctive modes of dialogue, productive impasses in the flow of conversation provide a space for negotiating a kind of intimacy capable of acknowledging alterity. In my reading of the dialogue in *Nightwood*, I aim to recover the generative, productive power of speech even as it operates within the fraught dynamics of identity negotiation. Re-interpreting the dialogue in *Nightwood* as a vital space for interaction presents the characters as bravely seeking togetherness by embracing the terrifying alterity of another. Instead of understanding the characters as self-absorbed or anti-social, we are able to recognize the vulnerability and courage in their attempts to create togetherness.

The crux to redeeming the characters' determined pursuit of intimacy lies in a thorough decoding of the novel's peculiar dialogue. Even quite encompassing theories of dialogue fail to fully digest Barnes's irregular dialogue and prove inadequate in processing her distinct style. In her innovative guide to interpreting dialogue, *Fictional*

Dialogue, Bronwen Thomas resists viewing dialogue as a "transparent window into the minds" (181) of characters and instead interprets it as a device for representing the complex, at times fraught, dynamics between characters. As she writes, "Modernist writers are interested less in what is said than in the process of saying it, with all of the difficulty and self-consciousness that may entail" (32). Thomas, that is, shifts the focus of interpretation from discrete utterance to interaction. Thomas advocates literary analysis that "look[s] beyond individual utterances, or even pairs of utterances, focusing instead on whole exchanges" (79), an approach that seems promising in digesting the dialogue of *Nightwood*, but actually highlights the complications of assimilating Barnes's technique into a comprehensive model. Unlike other dialogue, even in the modern and postmodern fiction analyzed by Thomas, *Nightwood*'s speech does not capture an immediately legible interaction between characters. The conversations in the novel, as I have mentioned, do not resemble the typical form or content of dialogue in modernist novels; utterances are long and abstract, conversations lack clear direction, and listeners rarely respond directly to speakers (Thomas, 79). Thomas's model fails to account for these oddities of *Nightwood*'s verbal exchanges; the novel's unconventional dialogue challenges any attempt to assimilate it into the established critical discussion. Approaching *Nightwood* through Thomas's theory of dialogue does prove useful, however, by allowing us to locate the ways in which Barnes's dialogue departs from the usual models. By unpacking the mechanisms of Thomas's theory and noting how exactly *Nightwood* defies the usual formal rules of dialogue, we can gain a clearer conception of the work dialogue does accomplish in the novel.

Thomas emphasizes the necessity of reciprocal dialogue by arguing that dialogue "can only be understood in the context of how utterances are taken up and responded to by others" (Thomas, 174). How then are we meant to interpret the dialogue of *Nightwood*, in which listeners refuse to take up and respond to others' utterances? If we place emphasis on the response to utterance, as Thomas suggests, then instances when the audience of a speaker fails to participate (either obliviously or willfully) naturally raise questions about the social workings of the text. Thomas's model relies, that is, on the role of the listener, a role that proves puzzling in *Nightwood*, as listeners are often marked by their lack of active listening. Although the characters do, in fact, respond to one another, listeners often do not reply directly to speech and instead seem to prioritize expansion of their own expression over response to another. Because characters fail to respond to one another's dialogue, Thomas's shift from utterance to interaction complicates, rather than resolves, the question of intersubjectivity. The dialogue of *Nightwood* does not provide unmediated access of subjectivity to either the reader or other characters, even when the text is approached with Thomas's emphasis on interaction. Instead, the unconventional form of the novel's exchanges offers a new picture of the listener that challenges Thomas's model by redefining the act of listening and, in turn, reshaping the criteria for interaction.

Hemingway and Barnes

Although Thomas's model does not fully account for the exchanges in *Nightwood*, it does position dialogue as a crucial device that offers more nuanced

readings of fictional interactions. Interpreting dialogue through the lens of her theory contextualizes the idiosyncrasies I will later explore in Barnes's work. Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, which is roughly contemporary with *Nightwood* and is often considered part of the same modernist canon, demonstrates how dialogue usually works in interactions more familiar to readers of modern novels. Conversations between characters feature the reciprocal nature that is better suited for Thomas's model than *Nightwood*. The characters address one another and respond directly to others' utterances. Although the coherence of the conversation is well preserved and utterances undeniably contribute to a unified thread, a tension develops between the content of dialogue and the subjective experience of the participants. Jake and Brett, mutually frustrated lovers, freely communicate directly to one another, but Jake's internal state is not represented in their dialogue; he instead confides in the reader. Confessing to the reader, rather than incorporating his reaction in the conversation, shows the failure of their dialogue to account for subjective expression. The power struggle dynamics of dialogue, contrasted with the access Jake gives the reader, is particularly evident in the following exchange between Jake and Brett:

> "'I have to go.'
> 'Really going?' Brett asked.
> 'Yes,' I said. 'I've got a rotten headache.'
> 'I'll see you to-morrow?'
> 'Come in at the office.'
> 'Hardly.'
> 'Well, where will I see you?'
> 'Anywhere around five o'clock.'
> 'Make it to the other side of town then.'
> 'Good. I'll be at the Crillon at five.'
> 'Try and be there,' I said.

> ‘Don’t worry,’ Brett said. ‘I’ve never let you down, have I?’
> ...To hell with Brett. To hell with you, Lady Ashley...I looked at myself in the mirror...Of all the ways to be wounded...My head started to work. The old grievance. I suppose she only wanted what she couldn’t have...Then all of the sudden I started to cry.” (Hemingway, 37-39)

The dialogue of this interaction deliberately strives for a direct communication where each speaker contributes to a discernible goal. Jake and Brett collaborate to establish a plan for their meeting and speak in concrete, grounded language. The content of their exchange is largely pragmatic; they deal with times and locations to reference their shared physical reality. The only glimpse of subjective expression is shown in Jake’s request that Brett “try and be there.” In her reply (“I’ve never let you down, have I?”) she hints at the emotional content of their relationship outside of the immediate conversation, but the exchange never fully departs from the rootedness of setting a time to meet. Brett seems to provide space for Jake to insert his subjectivity in her question, but even that is an illusion of openness; the question is a rhetorical provocation. She has, in fact, let him down many times before, but dares him to admit it. Although the dialogue is pragmatically functional it does not allow space for the expression of subjectivity between participants. Instead, the characters use dialogue as a space to manipulate one another and the overall dynamic of the conversation is marked by a passive-aggressive power struggle. Rather than reacting to Brett’s provocation and acknowledging her faults, Jake turns to the reader to relay his frustration and disappointment. After their exchange Jake concludes, through the circuitous route of free association, “to hell with Brett.” He continues to address her directly (“To hell with you, Lady Ashley”), but his utterance is

delivered within the constraints of internal monologue and remains unverbalized. Jake is unable to directly express to Brett the tension he feels, but acknowledging his subjectivity in view of the reader facilitates further articulation of his internal state. He goes on to address his war wound, "the old grievance," which leads to his realization that Brett only wants what "she couldn't have." He reacts to this articulation by suddenly starting to cry. This sort of emotional expression does not make it into their conversation; it resides purely in his internal monologue, to which the readers are the only audience.

With Thomas's approach to dialogue in mind, the dialogue of *The Sun Also Rises* reveals the contentious dynamic of Brett and Jake's relationship. Through dialogue, they attempt to get closer, all the while wounding each other as a result of their perpetual power struggle, which suppresses true subjective expression. While the unfettered expressions and direct responses contribute to a cohesive dialogue, it precludes space for conflicting internal experiences and fails to address the mutual disappointment they feel for not being what the other person wants. Although Jake and Brett reciprocate one another rhetorically, they concurrently wound each other in their attempts to be together and offload subjective expression to the narrative voice. Jake talks to the reader, an unspeaking audience who occupies a similar role as the listeners in *Nightwood*- listening without talking back.

Barnes's dialogue varies widely from the written exchanges common in novels contemporary to *Nightwood*, such as *The Sun Also Rises*. By resisting the typical structure and form of conversation, the exchanges in the novel confound inferences about the characters' dynamics. In *The Sun Also Rises* it is possible to grasp the context of the

dialogue even in isolation; the reader can reasonably infer the dynamics of the interaction and the subject being discussed. Excerpts of dialogue in Barnes's novel, however, appear disorienting and demand context, which is not readily found in the surrounding conversation. Hemingway's passages tangibly reference the location, action, and context of the conversation, but in much of the dialogue from *Nightwood* there is no emphasis on the connection between dialogue and a shared physical reality. Conversation in *Nightwood* prioritizes subjective expression without much regard to the pragmatic conventions of dialogue, as in the following exchange:

> "I said, 'What was that dream saying, for God's sake, what was that dream?' For it was for me also."
> Suddenly Dr. Matthew O'Connor said: "It's my mother without argument I want!" And then in his loudest voice he roared: "Mother of God! I wanted to be your son- the unknown beloved second would have done!"
> "Oh Matthew. I don't know how to go. I don't know which way to turn."
> (Barnes, *Nightwood* 158-159)

In this exchange there are two distinct but obliquely related lines of thought that do not overtly interact. Both the doctor and Nora elaborate on their own utterances without directly responding to one another. Nora is concerned about her relationship with Robin and asks the doctor for insight into her predicament. She continues to expand on her problems with Robin while the doctor develops his own coexisting speech. Both speakers build on their utterances by expanding the thought of their initial speech while turning inwards instead of using the dialogue as a tool to access the other. Nora opens with an anecdote that might welcome commentary, but ultimately focuses in on articulating her

own subjectivity. In her next utterance she replaces the opportunity for collaborative dialogue with an exploration of her subjective state. She uses the conversation as a tool for self-articulation, whereas in *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake turns to the reader to introduce and elaborate on his emotional responses to conversations with Brett. The doctor also uses dialogue as a space to process his subjectivity; he responds to Nora with an exclamatory epiphany, and Nora doesn't seem to mind the interruption. Alan Singer analyzes a similar exchange between the doctor and Robin's former lover, Felix, and concludes "ultimately, the doctor's response addresses Felix's question not by complying with the implicit point of the query, but rather by manipulating the question as a point of departure for his own narrative activity" (Singer, 79).

Singer may approach this passage between the doctor and Nora in the same way as the exchange with Felix, interpreting it as the doctor hijacking the conversation, but I suggest it shows a model of interaction that respects the alterity of the other. If the doctor did constantly hijack conversations for his own purpose, it seems unlikely that Nora would continue seeking him out, as she does. The doctor's abstract utterances are oblique responses that leave a respectful space for the other, not self-involved manipulations. He doesn't assume access to Felix's or Nora's subjectivity and instead relates tangentially, the only way we can approach another, by offering his own subjective experience of the topic each proposes. This instance of parallel dialogue again reveals the spaces and gaps in conversation as sites of production. The characters are not bound by listeners' ability to fully empathize with their distinct subjectivity.

The Sun Also Rises and *Nightwood* display dialogue in quite opposing ways, each resulting in a decidedly different conception of togetherness. Jake and Brett pragmatically communicate through dialogue, but the dynamics of their conversations preclude the acknowledgement of one another's subjectivity. Conversely, the characters in *Nightwood* problematize conventional dialogue but allow space in their verbal exchanges to accommodate subjectivity in a manner that is minimally curbed by their dynamic. Current readings of the novel interpret *Nightwood*'s seemingly dysfunctional dialogue as evidence of the characters' attempts to escape the potential objectification of social interactions (Glavey, 752). However, these readings have overlooked the characters' insistence on being together. *Nightwood* is, at its core, a novel about preserving identity in the face of intimacy. Viewing the social dynamics through this lens shifts focus to the novel's concern for negotiating togetherness, not rejecting it completely.

Although conversations do not seem productive in the conventional sense and characters show frustration with speech, they continue to speak and persistently seek out an audience for their expression. Nora explains to the doctor, "I don't know how to talk, and I've got to. I've got to talk to somebody" (Barnes, *Nightwood* 137). Nora's explanation here demonstrates the characters' common insistence on speaking in the presence of another. Thomas identifies the "frustration at not being heard" (Thomas, 174) as one problem characters experience with dialogue, but in *Nightwood* the speakers show varying degrees of indifference or obliviousness to their audiences. This lack of direct communication is evident in multiple levels of the conversation, from explicitly stated in an utterance to implied by the interaction as a whole. Nora's response to the doctor's

speech is unapologetically unaware: “she had not heard him” (*Nightwood* 143), but the doctor does not react to her lack of response in any discernible way. Speakers often preface their utterances with the instruction to “listen” (*Nightwood* 92, 137, 164), but don’t seem to mind when their speech is not taken up by the listener. Nora and Felix repeatedly visit the doctor and the doctor continuously speaks, at the same time condemning speech. While the characters’ insistence on delivering what could be read as monologues to a listener may seem paradoxical, it illustrates a model of interaction in which Barnes grants the speakers the ability to recognize one another’s difference without attempting to inhabit it. When one character articulates their distinct experience, the listener is not pressured to take up and respond directly to the utterance. For instance, when Nora asks the doctor why Robin is drawn to the night, he responds, “I’m telling you of French nights at the moment” (Barnes, *Nightwood* 89). The doctor persists in his train of thought without empathizing with Nora’s sentiment, and she doesn’t insist that he fully understand her point of view and provide relevant feedback.

By speaking in front of an audience speakers in *Nightwood* construct and affirm their subjectivity through speech. An important distinction worth revisiting is that Barnes’s listeners don’t demonstrably listen to one another. They may hear the professions of the speaker, but rarely demonstrate active listening or responsive dialogue. The thread of conversation usually unravels and the “listener” does not fulfill the role we might expect of a participant in a conversation. The listener’s presence is crucial, however, to the constitution of the speaker’s self. By physically being present the listener positions the speaker within a subject-object relationship, transforming speech from

utterance to speech act. While an utterance itself does not validate the subjectivity of the speaker, performing the same utterance in the presence of an audience, who will bear witness to the speech, substantiates the speaker's assertions. By simply being aware of an audience the speakers can conceive of themselves as an entity to be expressed. Speakers seek out listeners not for input but instead for their mere presence. Although the doctor doesn't provide direct guidance to those who seek his counsel, Nora is repeatedly compelled to speak in his presence. The doctor comments on this urge multiple times in the novel; he asks, "Why don't they let me alone, all of them?...Talking to me- all of them" (Barnes, *Nightwood* 174-175). In the same way we might carry out a conversation with pets or infants regardless of their verbal feedback, the speakers in the novel prioritize the presence of the listener over their ability to co-construct a dialogue. What matters most in these instances of self expression**,** as in the dialogue of the novel, is the awareness of simply being heard. It suffices to recognize the utterance of the speaker as their self-expression; there is no need to fully inhabit the subjectivity of the speaker to acknowledge them. Without the contribution of the listener, the speaker is free to try out identifications uncontested, whereas taking up utterances and weaving them into the fabric of a collaborative conversation holds the potential to deprive them of their constructive power. When an utterance is taken up, digested by the listener, and then contextualized by the construction of a unified conversation, the speaker of the utterance loses the ability to assert their identity while resisting objectification.

Critics have understood this refusal of objectification primarily through the character of Robin. She is regarded as emblematic of a refusal of social interaction and a

rejection of humanity for abject animality. Robin is a perpetually in-between character; she constantly resides in triangulation between lovers and is referred to as "a wild thing caught in a woman's skin" (Barnes, *Nightwood* 155). Robin is "outside the 'human type'" (*Nightwood* 155); she is fundamentally elusive and escapes categorization. In his work on the tension between interaction and subjectivity Glavey interprets Robin as a withdrawn degenerate, "monstrous and inhuman" (Glavey, 759). Glavey continues, Robin "refus[es] to have a story of her own, as if to say, 'If I am to be treated as a picture I won't pretend to be a person'" (759). Such a reading of Robin leads to interpreting her story arc as "devastating and frustrating" (760). Her elusive nature is often considered indicative of a flaw in her character, but I aim to elevate Robin from her perceived position as an abject outcast by reading her as the personification of Barnes's model of togetherness. She preserves a crucial position against the incursions of others, much like the spaces for subjectivity within dialogue.

A truly functional model of togetherness must be one that accommodates Robin's insistence on preserving the essential unknowability of another. The introduction between Nora and Robin succinctly represents such a model of interaction. The structure of dialogue in the following scene resembles adjacent, alternating monologues more than one cohesive thread of conversation. Because of their relationship's prominence in the novel, we might expect the meeting of Nora and Robin to be a climactic moment. However, the introduction is sparse and momentary; it barely occupies two lines in the novel:

> "In the lobby Nora said, 'My name is Nora Flood,' and she waited. After a pause the girl said, 'I'm Robin Vote.' She looked about her

> distractedly. 'I don't want to be here.' But it was all she said; she did not explain where she wished to be. She stayed with Nora until the mid-winter." (Barnes, *Nightwood* 60)

This exchange is comprised of only three utterances, yet somehow results in Robin and Nora moving in together and beginning their relationship. Because this condensed conversation is the only insight offered to contextualize Robin and Nora's relationship it demonstrates how productive dialogue can be even when used so unconventionally. While the utterances themselves pragmatically express information, the real work of the conversation is done through the intervals between speaking. After Nora introduces herself she waits, creating space for a pause. It is this pause after Nora's utterance which provokes Robin's response. Robin goes on to express her discomfort, but goes no further in offering explanation. She "did not explain where she wished to be" and, equally important, Nora does not ask for clarification. Each is content with receiving only the information the other wishes to express. After Robin's utterance is left unclarified, without response or explanation, space is again generated from the pause that follows. Not only does the dialogue end after she speaks, but the silence that follows actively occupies space by preserving the gap where we might expect Robin's utterance to be expanded on or taken up by Nora. Interestingly enough, the space results again in Robin's action; the pause after her utterance allows space for her to act, this time moving in with Nora. The entire conversation is held together loosely by related utterances; both provide names as an introduction, but the generative quality of the dialogue is located in the space left intact between utterances.

Anonymous Intimacy

By looking closely at how Robin relates to others, without condemning her isolation, we can better understand the imperative role of dialogue in modeling intimacy. She demands the protection of selfhood in the face of intimacy and confronts the appropriative desire of others. The irregular dialogue in *Nightwood* fosters such interactions that keep the self intact while engaging the other, modeling a way of being together to remedy the objectification that Barnes identifies as the paradoxical result of attempting intersubjectivity. Robin's relationships throughout the novel, however, demonstrate the violation of appropriative desire when space between subjectivities is not afforded the protection it receives in dialogue. In the following excerpt, Nora approaches the doctor with concerns about Robin's freedom that reveal her own appropriative desire:

> "'Matthew,' she said, 'have you ever loved someone and it became yourself?' For a moment he did not answer. Taking up the decanter, he held it to the light. 'Robin can go anywhere, do anything,' Nora continued." (Barnes, *Nightwood* 161)

Nora's confession clearly displays the issue of collapsed borders as the central tension of the interactions in the novel. She reveals her efforts to assimilate Robin's subjectivity into her own- Robin becomes herself. Robin's actions sharply contrast with Nora's perception of collapsed borders between selves as she "can go anywhere, do anything" without regard for Nora. Robin's freedom of movement transgresses Nora's appropriative desire, made clear in her musings of possessing Robin: "in [her] heart lay the fossil of Robin" (*Nightwood* 61) and "in death Robin would belong to her" (*Nightwood* 63). She expands on her longing to overwrite Robin's subjectivity with her own by telling the doctor she is

"frightened" because she can't understand Robin and asking him, "What is it? What is in her that is doing this?" (*Nightwood* 92). Although he does not immediately or directly answer her question, he does eventually offer an explanation that is tangentially related to her inquiry. A couple of pages later, he poses a question that contemplates the essential anonymity of another: "When she sleeps, is she not moving her leg aside for an unknown garrison? Or in a moment, that takes but a second, murdering us with an axe?" (*Nightwood* 94). With this response the doctor articulates the terrifying alterity of another, an alterity that propels Nora's desire to possess Robin.

Robin's relationships, with Nora and others, illustrate the need to preserve selfhood in togetherness to combat possessive desire. Her first partner, Felix, demonstrates the possessive impulse in intimacy from the first moment he sees Robin. His urge to reproduce himself through another is shown in his initial impression of Robin as a painting. When he first sees her she is "like a painting," "half flung off the support of the cushions" (*Nightwood* 37). Robin is introduced in a passive posture; in a constructed scene "lay the young woman" (*Nightwood* 38). Felix's repeated objectification of Robin emphasizes the possessiveness driving his relation*ship with her. He regards her as a "figurehead in a museum" (Nightwood* 41) and an "old statue in a garden" (*Nightwood* 45). Finally, when he proposes he is surprised that Robin accepts, "as if Robin's life held no volition for refusal" (*Nightwood* 46). To Felix, Robin is an object that carries the potential of reproducing himself through the deliverance of a child. Immediately after meeting Robin, Felix "wishe[s] he had a son who would feel as he felt about the 'great past'" (*Nightwood* 42). He unequivocally reveals his conception of her as a vehicle for

reproduction when he refers to "the destiny for which he had chosen her- that she might bear sons" (*Nightwood* 49). Robin responds to such oppressive objectification by declaring "I didn't want him!" (*Nightwood* 53), which conspicuously refers to either Felix or their son, and leaving the continent.

Robin's individual subjectivity is further threatened in her next relationship with Nora, who chases Robin both literally and figuratively throughout their entire relationship. During the first few lines of her relationship with Nora, Robin's experience is described as "two spirits [working] in her, love and anonymity" (*Nightwood* 60). The straightforward description of Robin's conflict expands on the model for togetherness presented in the parallel dialogue of the novel. In Robin's relationship, love is at odds with the desire to remain unassimilated into another's subjective experience, which Barnes conceptualizes as anonymity in the quote above. Not only do individuals require space for expression and boundaries between one another in *Nightwood*, but through Robin's predicament Barnes also communicates a need for preserving some amount of unknowability within a relationship. The selfhood Robin struggles to protect is represented as an anonymity that is threatened by the familiarity of an intimate relationship. While Robin shows interest in sharing a relationship with Nora she vigilantly guards the boundaries which protect her otherness. Love and anonymity are shown in conflict within Robin; her desire for Nora is met with an impulse to preserve her selfhood and its inherent unknowability. She seeks to acknowledge and respect the otherness she encounters, but hers is constantly assaulted and threatened with assimilation. Nora seeks to collapse the borders between their distinct selves in an effort

to fully incorporate Robin, even referring to Robin as "my lover and my child" (*Nightwood* 166). Nora conceptualizes Robin as her child on multiple occasions, reinforcing the self-identification she wishes to find in her. When Robin begins wandering, Nora chases her in every way she can. As she hears unfamiliar songs sung by Robin, "she knew that Robin was singing of a life that she herself had no part in" and seeks to collapse the unknown space between them by "sing[ing] them after Robin" (*Nightwood* 62). She also follows Robin literally; "she would go out into the night... skirting the cafe in which she could catch a glimpse of Robin" (*Nightwood* 65). Nora later confesses to the doctor that "after Robin went away with Jenny to America, I searched for her in the ports. Not literally; in another way" (*Nightwood* 165). The relationship between Robin and Nora begins to deteriorate when Nora is shown to be incapable of respecting the boundaries between them as two distinct individuals. When she hears Robin singing her unfamiliar songs she is "sometimes unable to endure the melody that told so much and so little, she would interrupt Robin with a question" (*Nightwood* 63). Nora is not willing to accept the gaps between herself and Robin and aggressively pursues her in an effort to make Robin known, to "dress the unknowable in the garments of the known" (*Nightwood* 145). Nora's insistence on assimilating Robin into her own subjective experience is punctuated in the description of their embrace as "their two heads in their four hands" (*Nightwood* 63). The boundaries that were well guarded through parallel dialogue are collapsed in Nora's effort to negotiate intimacy and otherness, resulting in a fusion of the two into a conjoined whole. Unsurprisingly, shortly

after the passages with this description of their relationship, Robin begins wandering the city at night and eventually begins a relationship with Jenny.

The possessive impulse that emerged in Robin's relationship with Felix and continued throughout her time with Nora culminates in her final (human) pairing of the novel, with Jenny Petherbridge. After fleeing Nora's suffocating pursuit, Robin faces more intense possessiveness in her relationship with Jenny. Although Nora's possessive desire seems to be reserved for Robin, Jenny raises the stakes of identification with another by personifying appropriation. Jenny "could not participate in a great love, she could only report it" (*Nightwood* 74) and is described as "a dealer in second-hand… emotions" (*Nightwood* 75). Jenny's interest in Robin is shown to be an amplified appropriation of Nora's desire to possess Robin; Jenny "appropriated the most passionate love that she knew, Nora's for Robin. She was a squatter by instinct" (*Nightwood* 75). Robin's entrapment with Nora is intensified by Jenny's reenactment of Nora's possessiveness. Just as Nora found Robin's unknowability unendurable, Jenny too becomes agitated by Robin's rigid boundaries between herself and another. Jenny eventually plays a similar role as Nora in her relationship with Robin. The fissure between Jenny and Robin is seen when "because Robin's engagements were with something unseen, because in her speech and in her gestures there was a desperate anonymity, Jenny became hysterical" (*Nightwood* 177). Again Robin's desire for anonymity within togetherness is the catalyst for her partner's emotional instability. The passage expands on Jenny's hysterics, "she did not understand anything Robin felt or did, which was more unendurable than her absence"(*Nightwood* 177). Recognizing Robin's

alterity presents more of a challenge for Jenny than if Robin were simply not there. Instead of recognizing her difference, Jenny seeks to incorporate Robin's subjectivity into her own.

The desire to possess another, rendering their alterity familiar, is a drive so prevalent in the novel that it permeates not only the physical interactions of the characters, but the psychological as well. Memory is treated as an additional threat to anonymity due to its ability to objectify and write the other. Nora blames the betrayal she feels from Robin on her lack of memory: "Robin can go anywhere, do anything… because she forgets, and I nowhere because I remember" (*Nightwood* 161). In this quotation, Nora reveals memory's potential to either foster or undermine intimacy. She perceives the chasm between herself and Robin as being determined by their differing ability, or willingness, to remember. She continues, "I have been loved…and it has forgotten me" (*Nightwood* 165). Again, memory is pinned as the site of abandonment and failed relationships. Nora internalizes her failed relationship with Robin as a consequence of memory lapse and, as discussed above, the narrative perspective presents the suffocating pursuit of another as the downfall of their togetherness. These two perspectives on the relationship's failure can be interpreted as sides of the same coin when memory is understood as a tool for rendering the Other familiar. Nora feels betrayed and abandoned by Robin's tendency to forget, as memory serves as a reaffirming tie that tethers two individuals together. When remembering, one calls upon a fixed image of another, so Robin's lack of memory makes Nora question her presence in Robin's mind. Memory also serves as a tool for breaching the boundaries of difference

Robin endeavors to maintain. By creating an image of her to be remembered, Nora denies Robin the essential unknowability of an other. Alan Singer identifies the implications of presenting a person as a picture; he explains that "such an image, such a person, poses itself as an ideality... thus portending a metaphysical 'truth'" (Singer, 82). Singer argues that referring to an abstract truth creates an antagonistic relationship in which "the 'lie' of ordinary human experience stands in perpetual debt [to a remote truth]" (85). Barnes asserts the necessity of preserving selfhood and protecting otherness while negotiating intimacy by positioning Nora and Jenny's insatiable desire to encounter and know Robin fully as the transgression that destroys their relationships. The juxtaposition of space-conscious dialogue and suffocating nonverbal interactions highlights the crucial role anonymity plays in togetherness, explored primarily through Robin's character. Unlike the parallel dialogue in *Nightwood*, the lived relationships between characters expose an aggressive persistence in mastering the Other. The dialogue in *Nightwood* models a way of escaping the appropriative desire that threatens interactions, such as the one between Barnes and Dinah which initially raised the question of intersubjective domination through dialogue. Just as *Nightwood* responds to the dominating dialogue of "The Girl and the Gorilla" with a model of dialogue which preserves space between subjectivities, the picture of the animal is also reconfigured. Whereas Dinah is a violated Other, the animal in *Nightwood*, as I will show, represents an escape from intersubjective threat.

To be an animal, freely interpreted

The terror of alterity that motivates Nora, among others in *Nightwood*, to possess another speaks clearly to Barnes's choice to dominate the unfamiliar through dialogue in "The Girl and the Gorilla." Although both works confront the challenges in acknowledging another's difference, the dialogue in each is used to illustrate contradictory models of togetherness. In the interview, Barnes employs dialogue as a way of dominating the unfamiliar gorilla by literally writing over the Other in Dinah's imagined speech. *Nightwood* reacts to the appropriative potential of dialogue and proposes instead a model of intimacy which recognizes and respects alterity. The reversal of dialogue's role in negotiating difference in Barnes's work can be explored through her configuration of the animal in both texts. Dinah the gorilla symbolizes the violation of writing over and appropriating difference, but the relationship to the animal in *Nightwood*, signified by Robin's interaction with Nora's dog, displays a reversed dynamic between animality and difference.

References to animality in *Nightwood* have been interpreted as evidence of the destruction of language and Robin's descent into the nonhuman (Hutchison, 223). I argue, however, that the animality in the novel holds the same constructive power as dialogue in negotiating subjectivity. Returning to the interview Barnes conducted with Dinah the gorilla, we see how the inclusion of dialogue in her account of the meeting troubles the human-animal opposition by granting both species the use of speech. Although Dinah is quite forcefully written over in the interview, Barnes's book *Creatures in an Alphabet* captures the animal ability to escape this violation of personhood. Daniela Caselli brings attention to Barnes's obscure text with a thorough analysis of the syntax

and grammar of *Creatures in an Alphabet.* She identifies the work as an examination of "the division between language and animality...and the relationship between subject and object" (Caselli, 94). The description of the Unicorn as "mistranslated from the start" is a prime example of Barnes's rejection of language as simply representational.

> "Unicorn, the one-horned beast
> Mistranslated from the start,
> (See Deuteronomy, at least),
> An upright, but a much vex'd art"
>
> (Barnes, *Creatures in an Alphabet*)

The Unicorn is represented by language, and represents a letter of that language, but reveals the failure of language to create faithful portrayals. Because *Creatures in an Alphabet* questions the opposition of language and the animal, it is a fitting text to interpret the relationship between animal and speech in *Nightwood.* The following excerpt expands on the untranslatable quality of the animal:

> "The trim Giraffe, on ankles slight,
> Dips its crown in pale moonlight;
> But what it poles for, none can say-
> It's much too up and high away"
>
> (Barnes, *Creatures in an Alphabet*)

Much like the Unicorn, and Robin for that matter, the Giraffe presents a challenge in articulating and apprehending its individual quality. "None can say" what its motives are because it is "too up and high away." Its unreachability physically manifests Robin's desire to retain an element of anonymity in her relationships. Not only are the animals described as troubling efforts to translate and understand them, but they are also depicted

as resisting confinement in the accompanying illustrations. Each animal drawing is contained in a square frame, but the bodies of the Giraffe and Unicorn tellingly puncture the frame and extend outward. In both the illustrations and the text, the animal proves inaccessible to language. Barnes's recasting of the animal as an antidote to appropriation, rather than a victim of it, allows us to read Robin's interaction with Nora's dog as an escape from the violation of writing another that Dinah suffered.

Carrie Rohman's work on animality in *Nightwood* lends itself to a reading that reframes the animal as the locus of subjective recognition. Rohman closes the gap between human and animal and asks us to reinterpret the category of human altogether, which provides more room for interpreting Robin's behavior and accommodating her desire for anonymity. She argues that "Barnes's novel refuses the displacement of animality onto marginalized others" and suggests the "novel formulates a scathing critique of language as that which forces the unknowable into the realm of the known" (Rohman, 57). She interprets Robin as "represent[ing] the refusal of organic repression as a necessary condition for the achievement of human subjectivity. Rather than abjecting animality, she seems to include it as a necessary part of her humanity" (66). Her insight here allows Robin's interaction with Nora's dog to be interpreted in ways other than, as Glavey suggests, a refusal to "pretend to be a person" (Glavey, 759). Rohman continues, "Robin's character undercuts the traditional notion that human and animal are separate realms and calls for an expanded definition of humanity that includes characteristics usually disavowed in Western culture" (Rohman, 67). By unearthing Robin's "openness toward alterity that defines her and... redeems her," Rohman diagnoses the other

characters of the novel as "doomed to suffer the disappointments of symbolic systems that repress, constrict, and ossify experience" (81). Carrie Rohman counters the common reading of Robin as emblematic of abjection and a refusal to be human. Instead she suggests "the animal serve[s] to revise what counts as human," which is accomplished by "troubl[ing] humanist subjectivities by privileging a kind of animal consciousness" (Rohman, 57). One explanation she offers for Robin's draw to animality is that "these animals do not rely on the human specular economy to 'see' Robin" (68), unlike Jenny and Nora who are relentlessly and desperately trying to apprehend her. Although Robin is often interpreted synonymously with "abjecting animality," Rohman argues that "she seems to include it as a necessary part of her humanity" (66). Locating Robin's "animal phenomenality" (58) within her humanity as Rohman does offers a new lens that urges us to rethink the human category altogether. She goes on to argue that "elevating the nonhuman, the undecidable, the nonlinguistic, the animal" is the "posthumanist triumph of Barnes's novel" which "ultimately revises the category *human*" (81). Such an expanded definition is made possible by what Rohman refers to as Robin's "rhizomatic, schizophrenic, and amorphous" mode of being which refuses to be collapsed with another (74). This generative view of Robin is helpful in accounting for her identification with animals; she longs for their ability to escape language.

Rohman's reading of the novel provides a more expansive conception of human subjectivity, one that is capable of accommodating alterity. However, expanding the human category alone does not benefit the characters' attempts at intimacy. She rightly places Robin in a posthuman category, but she is the only one who seems to occupy that

space. Rohman situates Robin on the periphery of social interaction and, in her reading, others do not suddenly learn to embrace this new category to which Robin belongs. The model of subjective expression I locate in dialogue allows us to regard the interactions between Robin and others as less ostracizing and divisive. Throughout the novel characters continue to seek out one another in an attempt to negotiate difference and intimacy; it is often overlooked that Nora is present in the final scene and the animal with which Robin interacts is Nora's dog, a surrogate for Nora herself. Robin seeks Nora as an audience in the same way characters throughout the novel seek a listener for their dialogue. Nora's presence, the presence of a listener, allows Robin to conceive of herself as a subject to be expressed. Rather than viewing the final scene as a descent into animal abjection, I suggest it depicts an alliance between animality and the space for subjective expression in dialogue.

To fully appreciate the significance of her interactions towards the end of the novel, we must acknowledge that Robin demonstrates the same desire to be listened to (and not necessarily heard) that her fellow characters display in their insistence on speaking in front of others without requiring response. Robin does not unknowingly wander into Nora's territory; she "now headed up into Nora's part of the country" and "circled closer and closer" (Barnes, *Nightwood* 177). Her journey to Nora is one of the only instances shown where Robin wilfully seeks out another human instead of aimlessly wandering away. Nora acknowledges Robin's difference in her appraisal of their relationship: "I have been loved," she said, "by something strange" (*Nightwood* 165). By calling Robin "something strange" Nora is finally allowing her the anonymity she

requires as an individual. In the same utterance Nora shows a keen awareness of the way in which she violated Robin: "she wanted...to throw a shadow over what she was powerless to alter... and I, I dashed it down" (*Nightwood* 165). At long last Nora comprehends Robin's need to protect her distinct subjectivity by refusing to articulate it. Nora realizes that Robin desires interactions that honor alterity and refuse appropriation. Not only does she identify the root of tension in their relationship, but she also accepts responsibility for assaulting Robin's selfhood by "dash[ing] it down" to render it more recognizable. Because Nora is now aware of the ways in which she has assaulted Robin, she interacts with her differently in the concluding scene. One defining difference in their final interaction is that Nora does not verbally address Robin; in fact it is emphasized twice that she "did not call" (*Nightwood* 178) when she heard the barking that would lead to her discovering Robin. Instead, she begins to run towards the noise "blindly" and "without warning, plung[es] into the jamb of the chapel door" (*Nightwood* 178). Her chaotic, abrupt entrance into the building positions Nora in a disoriented state when she first sees Robin. Throughout the novel until this point, Nora deliberately seeks out and follows Robin, but here she resembles Robin's wandering in her disorientation and blind running. In response to Nora's entrance, "at the moment Nora's body struck the wood, Robin began going down. Sliding down she went; down" (*Nightwood* 179). Robin waits for the cue of Nora's arrival to begin her performance of self through the interaction with Nora's dog:

> "She struck against his side...he let loose one howl of misery and bit at her, dashing about her, barking, and he sprang on either side of her...then she began to bark also, crawling after him...The dog...running with her, head-on with her head.

> Soft and slow his feet went padding...she grinning and crying with him...until she gave up...the dog too gave up...his head flat along her knees." (Barnes, *Nightwood* 180)

In light of Nora's presence in the scene I believe we are meant to interpret this demonstration as Robin's utterance, in dialogue with Nora. In this mode of being, she is finally given the space between subjectivities to construct her identity. There is no additional dialogue or action from Nora; she is being the listener shown in Barnes's model of dialogue, recognizing but not inhabiting the speaker's subjectivity. Robin rejects speech and instead barks, utilizing an expression that is indecipherable to others as her only defense against the threat of violating her anonymity. Their interaction mimics the pattern of dialogue in the novel: there is plenty of space for each expression and utterance (in this case actions) are not woven into a totalizing fabric. Each participant is satisfied with acknowledging, not understanding, the presence of the Other as they actively negotiate boundaries. In her performance, Robin demonstrates to Nora the possibility of recognizing the Other, with all of the terror that entails. The dog howls, barks, and bites at Robin, but by engaging the horror she is able to relate to the dog on the other side of terror; they close the scene curled up next to one another (*Nightwood* 180). Robin's interaction with Nora's dog fulfills the model of dialogue Barnes presents; each one is able to face the terrifying alterity of another and contribute utterances that are heard and recognized without being fully understood. Through her remarkable depiction of the tension between intimacy and anonymity Barnes urges us to pursue a mode of being together that protects selfhood by revering the unknowability of the Other. Following her model we might learn to embrace togetherness while accepting terrifying

alterity not as a hindrance to togetherness, but as evidence of the stunning feat that is achieving intimacy.

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