The experience of reality is an hermeneutic task. We can find, in a preliminary disorganization of the senses, the point of departure for the capture of the chthonian universe.

—Eugene Jolas, The Language of Night

When Sylvia Beach claims that Djuna Barnes was “one of the most fascinating literary figures in the Paris of the twenties” (112), we immediately recognize Joyce’s implied presence in such a remark. Perhaps Beach was echoing Barnes’s early assessment of Joyce’s work, an assessment of journalistic restraint that belied the young novelist’s enthusiasm for the fiction of her fellow exile. Shortly after the publication of Ulysses, Barnes complimented Joyce in her Vanity Fair article, “James Joyce,” by subtitling the piece “A Portrait of the Man Who is, at Present, One of the More Significant Figures in Literature” (65). In private, however, when Ulysses was first published in The Little Review, Barnes remarked: “I shall never write another line. Who has the nerve to after this!” (Field 108). Luckily, Barnes did not heed her own call for novelists to abandon their writing, for if she had we would now be without what is arguably the single piece of modern fiction in English that rivals Joyce’s exploration of the night world inhabited by characters estranged from their cultures.

In this exploration, Joyce and Barnes were less teacher and disciple than fellow writers working toward visions of a heretical night world. Their characters, along with the reader, experience sensual, linguistic, and social disorientation. What results may be termed a literature of estrangement in which characters

References to Joyce’s Ulysses cite episode number and line reference [e.g. (12.237)], and references to Finnegans Wake cite page and line reference [e.g. (327.33–35)]. All other references to works by Joyce cite page number only.
who are operating on the fringe of society distort physical appearances, social manners, and customs in order to create an altered perception of reality in the reader. Both Joyce and Barnes choose a sexual motif for their stories of the night world, for it is in the procreative and sexual life that the adherent to culture fulfills his or her social destiny. Joyce’s and Barnes’s estranged characters are like the Ancient Mariner who is drawn to the communal experience of the wedding feast but unable to participate in it. Social deviants like Bloom, the new womanly man in *Ulysses* and the hermaphroditic Matthew O’Connor in *Nightwood* offer a disorienting and heretical view of the psyche.

Yet the night worlds of Joyce and Barnes are different. Paradoxically, Joyce uses the culture’s body of literature to structure his Walpurgisnacht, while Barnes creates a night world that is sui generis. Although Barnes and Joyce are both highly allusive, only Joyce’s text displays its cultural erudition as it disjoins the cultural episteme; Barnes’s text forces the reader through a kind of unlearning process as her characters dispense with custom and everyday perception.

*Joyce, Epiphany, and the Association of Sensibility*

Joyce’s interest in the night world and in metaphors that define modes of perceiving that world extends far back into his career, and those metaphors are drawn from the diverse and large baggage of literary history that Joyce toted with him. Joyce’s nocturnal vision has historical roots in the medieval dream vision, but Joyce’s interests were probably closer to home, in the mystical, romantic, and symbolist writers who deliberately exploited intoxication for formal purposes, celebrating sense disorientation as a means of achieving a more radical kind of epistemological and cultural disorientation symbolized by the night world. Joyce’s personal and literary fascination with Rimbaud is of central importance in Joyce’s literary development
and his sense of place in literary history, for the poetic theories of Rimbaud inform Joyce’s early work. Oliver Gogarty (the model for Buck Mulligan) mentions in a number of printed sources that Joyce was so taken with Rimbaud as an artistic rebel and social outlaw that he imitated the poet in his manner of dress and in his attitude toward social and artistic convention. In 1950 Gogarty reminisced about this influence and emphatically stated that Joyce could be understood only in the context of Rimbaud’s work and ideas:

From Flushing I received a postcard with a photograph of Joyce dressed to resemble Arthur Rimbaud. Rimbaud’s revolution against established canons made him a god to Joyce. We must not leave Rimbaud out of the reckoning; if we do we will fail to understand the influences that fashioned Joyce. Rimbaud, disgusted with mankind, had withdrawn from the world. The logical end was for him to withdraw from all authorship because his kind of private writing would lead only to talking to himself. Joyce did not withdraw, so he ended by listening to himself talking in his sleep—"Finnegans Wake." (9)

Just as Rimbaud revered Baudelaire as a divine figure, so Joyce celebrated Rimbaud as a literary god. Joyce’s adoption of a Rimbaudian "dérèglement de tous les sens" can be seen throughout Joyce’s canon. In *Stephen Hero*, Stephen’s rather stilted philosophical discussion with McCann ranges over the differences between natural and artificial stimulants, with Stephen attacking McCann’s moral objections to intoxication. These notions on intoxication, or at least the sense disorientation associated with it, inform the aesthetic theories of *Stephen Hero*, and while these theories are substantially different than those of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, they provide the essential epistemological structure of the epiphanies in *Portrait*. This structure is anticipated in Stephen’s early definition of epiphany: “Imagine my glimpses at that clock as the gropings of a spiritual eye which seeks to adjust its vision to an exact focus. The moment the focus is reached the object is epiphanised”
(Joyce 1944, 211). The key to Joyce's early aesthetics and epistemology is this movement from visual blur to visual acuity, or metaphorically, from sensual disorientation to intellectual or spiritual understanding. The process Stephen describes thus resembles what Eliot would later call an association of sensibility through which a physical sensation becomes a state of mind. Eliot's statement on literary epistemology, succinctly summarized in his short essay on the metaphysical poets, advocates "a mechanism of sensibility which [can] devour any kind of experience" (247). Donne, Eliot argued, felt his thoughts, while poets writing later in the century underwent a "dissociation of sensibility" after which they generally "thought and felt by fits" (248). What Eliot praises in the metaphysical poets was "a fidelity to thought and feeling" which could best be accomplished by "transmuting ideas into sensations" or, conversely, by "transforming an observation into a state of mind" (249).

Joyce's early epistemology also suggests a traditional Aristotelian hierarchy of responses to the world—imperfect sensation leading to more perfect intellection—but it closes the gap between sensation, thought, and some kind of imaginative or spiritual awareness. In each chapter of Portrait, sensual derangement precedes or presages altered awareness and a rejection of cultural values or social customs.

In Portrait these moments of association of sensibility characteristically begin with a Rimbaudian dérèglement de tous les sens which often occurs in darkness. The pandying incident stems from visual disorientation and underscores the conflict between the perceiving individual and cultural authority. When Stephen challenges Father Dolan's action, his psychological turmoil is reflected in the image of the disorienting labyrinth of Dedalus:

He had reached the door and, turning quickly up to the right, entered the low dark narrow corridor that led to the castle. And as he crossed the threshold of the door of the corridor he saw that all the fellows were looking after him as they went filing by.

He passed along the narrow dark corridor, . . .
peered in front of him and right and left through the
gloom and thought that those must be portraits. It was
dark and silent and his eyes were weak and tired with
tears so that he could not see. (55)

Like Thomas De Quincey, who reports in *Suspiria de Profundis*
that his visionary sense was “aided by a slight defect of the
eyes,” Joyce here closely associates the concept of epiphany, or
sudden awareness, with the clouding of physiological vision.
This intimate connection between sensual derangement that
precedes the altered consciousness of self and the rejection of
cultural authority again occurs in chapter 2 as Stephen wanders
“by day and by night among distorted images of the outer
world” (99). This distortion intensifies as Stephen enters the
night world of Dublin’s red-light district:

He had wandered into a maze of narrow and dirty
streets. From the foul laneways he heard bursts of
hoarse riot and wrangling and drawling of drunken
singers. Women and girls dressed in long vivid
gowns traversed the street from house to house. They
were leisurely and perfumed. A trembling seized him
and his eyes grew dim. The yellow gasflames arose be­
fore his troubled vision against the vapoury sky, burning
as if before an altar. Before the doors and in the lighted
halls groups were gathered arrayed as for some rite. He
was in another world: he had awakened from a slumber
of centuries. (100)

When Stephen enters nighttown, the rite of passage he under­
goes is more than one of sexual experience; it is a Rimbaudian
withdrawal into “another world,” a subculture that has re­
jected the values of the dominant culture. Stephen’s dim eye­
sight and “troubled vision” precede an altered perception of
himself, particularly in relation to cultural mores and sexual
taboos.

Other epiphanies in *Portrait* are preceded by the imperfect
focus described in *Stephen Hero*. After Father Arnell’s sermon,
Stephen contemplates his soul in a “region of viscid gloom,” a
darkness inhabited by fiends and lascivious “goatish creatures.”
As Stephen prays, momentarily embracing a cultural value, he looks out upon the darkened night city enveloped in a “yellowish haze” as “his eyes [are] dimmed with tears” (136–39). The heretical reversal of this momentary embrace of the church again occurs at night in the bird-girl epiphany during which Stephen’s eyelids “trembled as if they felt the strange light of some new world. His soul was swooning into some new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as under sea, traversed by cloudy shapes and beings” (172). This famous passage, perhaps more than any other in the novel, displays the connection between sensual derangement, altered vision, and a rejection of the cultural episteme. The new world Stephen enters is one of “profane joy.” The Latin sense of pro fanum, meaning “before (outside) the temple,” would have occurred to Joyce. Outside the sacred temple of Irish culture, Stephen is neither moral nor sensual in his response. He does not deny the beauty of the girl by mortifying his senses, nor does he betray any of his former teenage lasciviousness. Seeking to become, in Cranly’s words, “a heretic or an outlaw” (245), his response is aesthetic: he pares his fingernails.

In Portrait, Joyce thus uses the night world as a metaphor for heretical perception and estrangement from one’s culture. And often, entry into the night world structurally anticipates visionary experience. In each chapter, there is a moment of sensate discontinuity that brings a new perception of reality which subverts cultural values. This discontinuous structure is purified and amplified in Giacomo Joyce, a text Joyce was writing during the final composing of Portrait and the early drafting of Ulysses (Ellmann xi). Rarely the subject of critical scrutiny, Giacomo Joyce offers us a clear illustration of how Joyce viewed the potential of a discontinuous structure similar to his collection of epiphanies. The love prose poem is a series of epiphanic occasions presented as discrete visual units. In this work, like the later “Wandering Rocks” episode of Ulysses, the normal reading process is subverted by the montage structure. The reader pauses between isolated literary units that are sepa-
rated by varying amounts of blank space. Narrative structure is imposed by the associative imagination of the reader, who is forced to make imaginative connections traditionally supplied by the narrator or author. *Giacomo Joyce* is, to use Barthes's terms, a "text of bliss" in which the reading process, anything but easy, requires the reader to reestablish continually his or her orientation to the text. This disorienting structure would become a standard literary technique in Joyce's later fiction.

Joyce's experimentation with a discontinuous structure in both *Portrait* and *Giacomo Joyce* provided him with a firm sense of how to structure individual passages and the overall structure of his next novel, *Ulysses*. The texture of individual episodes or passages in *Ulysses* is similar to that of *Giacomo Joyce*, and the structure of the entire novel mirrors a single chapter of *Portrait*. "Circe" and "Penelope" may be thought of as episodic epiphanies, or, rather, the night world in "Circe" depicts sensate derangement that anticipates the epiphany in "Penelope." In either case, the form of sense derangement associated with hallucination or hypnagogic monologue is laid out in "Proteus" when Stephen takes his epistemological ramble on Sandymount.

In *Ulysses*, as in *Portrait*, we see Stephen preoccupied with the relation of sensation to thought. On Sandymount strand, not far from the setting of his final epiphany in *Portrait*, Stephen experiments with an association of sensibility: "Ineluctable modality of the visible," he intones to himself, "at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read" (3.1–2). Stephen's thought through his eyes and his inversion "shut your eyes and see" (3.9) are epistemological experiments that anticipate the extended sense disorientation of "Circe," an episode that functions structurally much like the moments of sensual disorientation of *Portrait*. But the main activity of the episode is an intellectual cataloguing of the various epistemological problems of Western civilization as posed by Aristotle, Berkeley, Jacob Boehme, and others. Paradoxically, Stephen is thus an intellectual embodiment of the
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cultural episteme he seeks to deny or transcend. He knows what our culture knows and is even vain about his learning, but at the same time he is dissatisfied with perpetuating that knowledge in a bookish way. He accordingly abandons his role of teacher in "Nestor" and seeks to subvert that cultural identity in "Circe" through drunkenness, disorientation, and immoral activity.

The appropriate literary technique for "Circe" is thus hallucination, a technique initiated by Bloom's entry as he passes before concave and convex mirrors: "A concave mirror at the side presents to him lovelorn longlost lugubru Booohoom. Grave Gladstone sees him level, Bloom for Bloom. He passes, struck by the stare of truculent Wellington, but in the convex mirror grin unstruck the bonham eyes and fatchuck cheekchops of Jollypoldy the rixdix doldy" (15.145-49). The sense distortion and disorientation not only initiates the chaotic nocturnal vision of nighttown, but it anticipates the transformations through which Bloom will pass. This night landscape, perceived with distorted vision, is a product of what Eugene Jolas has termed the "language of night," a vocabulary explored by Rimbaud who first "envisaged 'the hallucination of words'" (19) that Joyce adapted in Ulysses as he "disintegrated words" (30). This linguistic disintegration is evident in Joyce's neologisms and word play while sensual disorientation occurs in the hallucinations of "Circe," which are similar to but more intense than those in Portrait. In fact, a drunken Stephen likens his distorted perception to that described in chapter 1 of Portrait. Late in "Circe," as Stephen noticeably "staggers a pace back," he admits his disorientation:

BLOOM: (propping him) Retain your own [perpendicularity].

STEPHEN: (laughs emptily) My centre of gravity is displaced. I have forgotten the trick. Let us sit down somewhere and discuss. (15.4430-35)

Stephen's sense disorientation from simple intoxication is exacerbated by his missing glasses, lost in circumstances similar to those at Clongowes:
LYNCH: *(watching him)* You would have a better chance of lighting it if you held the match nearer.

STEPHEN: *(brings the match nearer his eye)* Lynx eye. Must get glasses. Broke them yesterday. Sixteen years ago. Distance. The eye sees all flat. *(He draws the match away. It goes out.)* Brain thinks. Near: far. Ineluctable modality of the visible. (15.3624–31)

One is tempted to conclude that the hallucinations of "Circe" are prompted by the general atmosphere of drunkenness, but the hallucinations of Joyce's night world are predominately literary in nature rather than genuine. Only the appearance of Stephen's mother seems to be a genuine hallucination, for most of the others are the product of the sober imagination of Bloom, who has resisted the intoxicating wiles of Circe.

It is precisely this highly literary nature of the hallucinations that distinguishes Joyce's and Barnes's night visions. In the passages quoted above, for instance, Stephen is preoccupied with his disordered senses, but Joyce's aesthetic detachment allows Stephen to parody his earlier, and presumably quite serious, epistemological concerns in "Proteus." So, too, Bloom's fantasies are of a distinctly literary nature; farce, parody, and allusion are the basis for his hallucinations. This is not to say that Bloom's sexual transformations do not represent a genuine attack on the cultural values of contemporary Ireland, but Joyce's technique distances him from such serious questions and lets him skirt the problem of verisimilitude. Bloom's sexual transformations are a sign of Bloom's marginality in his culture.5 Notwithstanding the importance of that theme in Ulysses, Joyce's comic and literary treatment of those fantastic hallucinations provides a dominant counterpoint.

As an Odyssean figure, Bloom quite literally becomes a wandering Jew who, like the Ancient Mariner, remains estranged from the symbolic wedding feast; instead of joining the adulterous Molly, Bloom takes a nocturnal ramble in Dublin's red-light district. With its nighttime setting and Joyce's per-
vasive use of hallucination, "Circe" provided a model for the world of *Finnegans Wake* which represents a further narrowing or refinement of his night vision. Accordingly, if the structure of a chapter in *Portrait* reflects the overall structure of *Ulysses*, then *Finnegans Wake* may be thought of as an extended nocturnal epiphany. Joyce's last work thus offers the culminating estrangement from the cultural episteme, although its complexity and encyclopedic nature permit only a middle distance examination and selective discussion in this survey of his work.

In *Finnegans Wake* Joyce exhaustively employs every form of disorientation discussed in the introduction of this book. The novel is a dream vision, which, by convention, is an imaginative distortion of daytime sense experience. Essentially, Joyce's journey into the nocturnal world is conceived as an extended subversion and mythopoeic re-creation of the central myth of our culture: the fall from innocence. Joyce describes the fall from grace through a descent into the hypnagogic world of H.C.E. The fall of Humpty Dumpty and the hangover-inspired disorientation that causes the fall of Finnegan become farcical correlates of the biblical myth in the Christian episteme. The private subversion of the cultural archetype is reinforced by the linguistic playfulness for which the novel is famous. In "The Ondt and the Gracehoper" section, for instance, public myth and private word play are combined within the context of the larger archetype of the fall from grace. Beginning with a well-known parable in which the grasshopper becomes a gracehoper, that is, a fallen creature hoping for grace, Joyce embarks on an etymological and entomological flight. The parable itself all but disappears in the multilingual puns that catalogue insects and insect body parts. While there is hardly a section of *Finnegans Wake* that does not, to some extent, follow this pattern, one chapter is of particular relevance to this study.

The standard, early explications of the novel agree that "Night Lessons" is the central chapter of "the densest part of the *Wake*" (Tindall 171) and perhaps the "most difficult" chapter in the novel (Campbell 62). This chapter, which describes the evening study session of the children of H.C.E. and A.L.P.,
is a program of lessons covering a wide range of traditional disciplines in the Trivium and Quadrivium of medieval studies: Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Music, Geometry, and Astronomy. The text itself is composed of four parts, which include the lesson, marginal glosses by Shem and Shaun types, and footnotes by Isabel. It is the use of multiple texts that, to a large degree, accounts for the difficulty of the chapter. Like Coleridge’s competing texts in “The Ancient Mariner,” marginalia and notes in “Night Lessons” compete for the attention of the reader. But in *Finnegans Wake* the reader must listen to four distinct voices whose views on cultural knowledge are at odds with each other. The Shaun voice, initially on the right-hand side in small caps, is solemn, scholarly, and tends to sanctify the lessons. This mental attitude is opposed by the smart-alecky voice of the Shem-type character, who undercuts the seriousness of the exercise. His iconoclastic ally is the sister who, in mock scholarly fashion, supplies humorous footnotes. The difficulty in reading the passage goes beyond the normal linguistic challenge of the novel, for the reader must attempt to balance four differing views on cultural knowledge. As if the reading problem were not already difficult enough, Joyce, near the end of the chapter (293.1), reverses the location of the Shem/Shaun glosses. Further compounding the reader’s disorientation, Joyce adds a number of Sternean embellishments to the text. A musical Staff appears in the Shem marginalia (272.130):

\[ \text{\textbf{B.C. minding missy, please do. But should}} \]

Words literally expand and contract (299.36):

\[ \text{greater THAN or less THAN the unitate we} \]

Sigla appear in the footnotes (299.36):

\[ * \text{The Doodles family, } \text{m, } \Delta, \text{-}, \text{x}, \text{e, } \text{A, } \text{E. Hoodle doodle, fam.?} \]

Geometrical diagrams describe the mother A.L.P.’s womb (293.12):
And the chapter closes with Isabel's sketch of a nose being thumbed at the "anticheirst" (308.30-32):

1 Kish is for anticheirst, and the free of my hand to him!

2 And gags for skool and crossbuns and whopes he'll enjoyimsolff over our drawings on the line!

The "Night Lessons" chapter thus provides a radical example of linguistic disorientation in the tradition of "The Ancient Mariner." At the same time, it points to the striking difference between the texture of Joyce's and Barnes's work. While both authors disjoin the cultural episteme through a descent into the night world, Joyce's nocturnal visions reveal great erudition and cultural knowledge even while they subvert this knowledge.

Barnes's Nightwood and the "Evacuation" of Custom

While Barnes, like Joyce, is interested in portraying the phenomenon of sense disorientation and a collapse of social values, her presentation of altered consciousness has more lyric intensity with less use of word play and dramatic farce. Nightwood is a sympathetic portrait of those who by their nature, specifically their sensual or sexual nature, depart from the culture's customs and values. Barnes was intimately associated with the sexually liberated crowd of Paris in the twenties and thirties, and her art is centrally concerned with formulating a language and imagery
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of the night that subverts cultural value. The night world, as a concept, was attractive to Barnes throughout her career. At the age of nineteen, in 1911, Barnes published a poem in Harper's entitled “Call of the Night.” Anticipating the bestial sympathy expressed in the final scenes of Nightwood, the speaker in the poem addresses a canine companion:

Dark, and the wind-blurred pines,
With a glimmer of light between,
Then I, entombed for an hourless night
With a world of things unseen.

Mist, the dust of flowers,
Leagues, heavy with promise of snow,
And a beckoning road 'twixt vale and hill,
With the lure that all must know.

A light, my window's gleam,
Soft, flaring its squares of red—
I lose the ache of the wilderness
And long for the fire instead.

You too know, old friend?
Then, lift up your head and bark.
It's just the call of the lonesome place,
The winds and the housing dark.

Though the mature, poetic prose of Nightwood lacks the youthful intensity of these verses, the same passion for the night world pervades her later fiction. Like Joyce’s night scenes in Portrait and the Nighttown episode of Ulysses, Barnes’s Nightwood has an atmosphere of labyrinthine disorientation that reflects the psychological state of the cultural outcast.

The sensate derangements in Nightwood—Felix Volkbein's blindness in one eye (9), Robin Vote’s somnambulism which gives her a synesthetic “touch of the blind” (42), Nora Flood’s "derangement in her equilibrium" (51), and Dr. Matthew O’Connor’s Tiresias-like pronouncements on the “night combed with the great blind searchlight of the heart” (93)—tend to be derangements of the visual sense. The characters in
Nightwood grope blindly on the fringes of Parisian society; their disordered senses reflect their social and cultural disorientation. The world of Nightwood is one of dreams and nightmares in which marginal characters become entirely estranged from the culture:

And what of our own sleep? We are continent a long time, but no sooner has our head touched the pillow, and our eyes left the day, than a host of merry-makers take and get. We wake from our doings in a deep sweat for that they happened in a house without an address, in a street in no town, citizened with people with no names with which to deny them. Their very lack of identity makes them ourselves. (87–88)

The half-dozen characters in Nightwood are sleepers, “proprietor[s] of an unknown land,” (87) distant from that inhabited by normal citizens whose identity and knowledge is culturally founded. This disjunction is perhaps most clearly seen during Robin Vote’s awakening in “La Somnambule,” a chapter that draws Barnes’s attitudes and techniques into sharp focus. Dr. Matthew O’Connor, an unlicensed gynecologist, has been summoned to the bedside of the young American woman, Robin Vote, who has fallen into a deep, fainting sleep from which she cannot be roused: “On a bed, surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers lay the young woman, heavy and dishevelled” (34). Her body exudes a fragrance of decomposition as she slumbers in the embrace of some primal sleep:

The perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the odour of oil of amber, which is an inner malady of the sea, making her seem as if she had invaded a sleep incautious and entire. Her flesh was the texture of plant life, and beneath it one sensed a frame, broad, porous and sleep-worn, as if sleep were a decay fishing her beneath the visible surface. About her head there was an effulgence as of phosphorus glowing about the circumference of a body of
water—as if her life lay through her in ungainly luminous deteriorations—the troubling structure of the born somnambule, who lives in two worlds—meet of child and desperado. (34–35)

The two worlds that Robin inhabits, one of innocence and the other that of a cultural heretic, are not as contradictory as they might seem. Moving among her fellow humans as a somnambulist, Robin, a “beast turning human” (37), is a creature of the night who develops no human ties. Estranged from the fellow men and women of her society, she has no cultural basis for establishing human contact. According to the doctor, she is innocent of social intercourse because “she can’t do anything in relation to anyone but herself” (146). Culturally, she exists in a kind of preconscious realm devoid of racial memory, or, as the doctor puts it much later in the novel, “as if the hide of time had been stripped from her, and with it, all transactions with knowledge” (134).

In the scene of Robin’s awakening, it is Dr. O’Connor, the physician who has no social sanction for his practice, who delivers Robin from her fainting sleep. During this metamorphosis and birth, the doctor reveals his own marginality as he takes advantage of the unconscious young woman:

Felix saw that [the doctor’s actions were] for the purpose of snatching a few drops from a perfume bottle picked up from the night table; of dusting his darkly bristled chin with a puff, and drawing a line of rouge across his lips, his upper lip compressed on his lower, in order to have it seem that their sudden embellishment was a visitation of nature; still thinking himself unobserved, as if the whole fabric of magic had begun to decompose, as if the mechanics of machination were indeed out of control and were simplifying themselves back to their origin, the doctor’s hand reached out and covered a loose hundred franc note lying on the table. (36)

In a curious way, Dr. O’Connor’s response to Robin Vote is much like that of Stephen Dedalus to the bird-girl in Portrait.
Because of his sexual preference, the doctor is not tempted by Robin's sensuality and provocative posture. Like Stephen's gesture of paring his fingernails, the doctor's rouging and powdering of his face is an autistic and artistic act, a kind of social nonsequitur—the stuff of Leopold Bloom's hallucinations in "Circe" regarding Henry Flower, the "new womanly man."

But the difference between Joyce and Barnes is clear in this scene. Doctor Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante O'Connor is a real "hermaphroditic Irishman" (Weisstein 7) who puts on real make-up and really steals a one-hundred-franc note, whereas Bloom would fantasize such social transgressions. And, replacing thoughts for deeds, Bloom would feel guilty for imagining such illicit actions, while Barnes's character feels not the slightest compunction. The doctor is both practitioner and poet; he is as truly an atomizer of perfume as he is an anatomizer of the night.

The doctor's soliloquies, overheard by Nora in "Watchman, What of the Night?" and in "Go Down Matthew," offer such an "anatomy of night," Barnes's original subtitle for the work (Field 212). The soliloquies illustrate an agile, intellectual association of sensibility that contributes significantly to the linguistic disorientation of the text. The doctor's harangues move from obfuscation to clairvoyance. Substance and sheer fabrication are at war with each other; truth and falsehood compete. Kannenstine aptly summarizes the method of the doctor whose definition and exploration of the night marks his social estrangement from the cultural episteme:

What actually happens to the narrative as a whole follows from the function of thought sensations and images throughout, from a gradual breakdown of rational and sequential perception. Just as an image emerges from a stop between uncertainties, a dark but universal insight comes out of the static and timeless situation that Nora and the doctor are eventually trapped in. (95)

The text moves from sensation to intellection to abstraction within a single sentence, so that it becomes impossible to isolate various levels of response to experience as we can do so readily
in writers like Joyce or Conrad. For the doctor everything occurs in the imaginatively fertile realm of the Prophet of Darkness. The incomprehensible and the comprehensible are yoked to create for the reader a prose poem of fascinating linguistic disorientation.

When Nora Flood enters the doctor's garret at 3 A.M., she enters a setting of estrangement: "So incredible was the disorder that met her eyes. The room was so small that it was just possible to walk sideways up to the bed; it was as if being condemned to the grave the doctor had decided to occupy it with the utmost abandon" (78). Residing in a kind of death chamber, the doctor languishes in a room cluttered with miscellaneous rusted, dirty, and disused medical paraphernalia, with the make-up and soiled underclothes of the transvestite, and with a "swill-pail [that] stood at the head of the bed, brimming with abominations" (79). The doctor himself is nestled in the dirty linen of his bed, nightgowned and heavily rouged, evidently expecting someone besides Nora. In the middle of the night, the doctor has, according to the narrator, "evacuated custom" and has gone back to the female half of his hermaphroditic nature. The doctor explains his transformation in his soliloquy, asserting that "the night is not premeditated" but a series of unstructured sensations that subvert the order superimposed by the intellection of day. The night is a time when personal identity is altered and we each enter a "Town of Darkness," a "secret brotherhood" that cannot be articulated in the light of day. The doctor's utterance, his "nocturnal vision," reflects this incomprehensibility as language itself undergoes an "evacuation of custom":

His heart is tumbling in his chest, a dark place! Though some go into the night as a spoon breaks easy water, others go ahead foremost against a new connivance; their horns make a dry crying, like the wings of the locust, late come to their shedding. (81)

When reading the Doctor's soliloquies on the night, one is tempted to dismiss them as poetic utterance (or even nonsense)
that has no clear, ascertainable meaning. But, as in many recent modern texts, the language of Nightwood hovers between denotation and connotation; it simultaneously creates meaning but denies paraphrase. The text, in a sense, competes with and subverts itself. The doctor’s soliloquies exist on the fringe of meaning just as the characters of the novel live on the shadow-line of society.

A phrase-by-phrase exploration of the possible meanings in the passage above demonstrates the abstract associationism of the doctor’s anatomy of night, in which metaphorical meanings compete with each other:

His heart is tumbling in his chest, a dark place!

The first sentence establishes the connection between the night and human emotions. The line also suggests, through the words “tumbling” and “dark,” that night is the realm of passions and emotional chaos, and prepares the reader for the birth imagery that follows.

Though some go into the night as a spoon breaks easy water,

This introductory clause combines several competing images and metaphors. Breaking water with a spoon suggests the birthing process (with the unorthodox tools of the unlicensed doctor) but also calls to mind breaking wind or urination and, by extension, the pail brimming with abominations at the head of the doctor’s bed. This mixture of tropes is repulsive except to those like the doctor for whom the evacuation of custom is compulsive.

others go head foremost against a new connivance;

The main clause continues the birth metaphor and also suggests the abandonment necessary to plunge into the night world. This phrase “head foremost,” unlike the phrases which emphasized the bodily, the sensual, and the excremental, suggests an intellectual plunge into darkness.

their horns make a dry crying,
The word "horns" suggests the pain of birth and also carries sexual and musical overtones. "Horns" also suggests that the "connivance" may be demonic. "Dry crying" is an oxymoron that, to the hermaphrodite, suggests the sterility of the birth process.

like the wings of a locust, late come to their shedding.

The simile is poetic embellishment, but it is also in keeping with the transformation of birth and the doctor's practice of changing identity and clothes which is a surrogate birth for him.

The above interpretations are purposefully tentative, for the passage defies a definitive paraphrase. The reader of *Nightwood* and the doctor's soliloquies in particular may choose between competing reading processes: passive enjoyment of the abstractions or an active dissection of the doctor's associative utterance. Barnes exploits this process of breaking down "rational and sequential perception" (Kannenstien 114) throughout much of the doctor's soliloquy, and his language thus reflects his subject.

The competition between opposing forces in the doctor's nocturnal vision is essentially Blakean. He asks Nora "to think of the night the day long, and of the day the night through" (84), for he knows there is no progress without competing, contrary states, without "thinking with the eye that you fear" (83). An understanding of the night world comes only after developing acute nocturnal vision, sensitive to the nuances of shadow and darkness:

Listen! Do things look in the ten and twelve of noon as they look in the dark? Is the hand, the face, the foot, the same face and hand and foot seen by the sun? For now the hand lies in shadow; its beauties and its deformities are in a smoke—there is a sickle of doubt across the cheek bone thrown by the hat's brim, so there is half a face to be peered back into speculation. A leaf of darkness has fallen under the chin and lies deep upon the arches of the eyes; the eyes themselves have changed their colour. (85)
The doctor advocates disjoining the cultural episteme through an immersion into the destructive element of the night world. Only through a courageous descent into the night can one, conscious or dreaming, become “the proprietor of an unknown land” (87). It is in the night world of dreams that we move beyond the codes of cultural perception into the heretical space of the culturally estranged.

The nocturnal visions that both Barnes and Joyce evoke in their works create an epistemological disorientation that is shared by both character and reader. But differences in mode are clear. Joyce seeks sensate and linguistic disorientation as much for the sake of literary play and parody as for cultural criticism. As a comic writer, Joyce distances himself from the portraits he draws. Barnes, in contrast, maintains a lyric intensity through her confessional tone and Elizabethan diction. This lyricism and tragic seriousness, apparent in Dr. Matthew O’Connor’s final deranged utterance, “now nothing, but wrath and weeping!” (166), clearly delineates the essential difference between Barnes’s and Joyce’s nocturnal visions. Barnes’s vision ends with tragic desolation while Joyce’s Ulysses concludes with affirmation and the qualified triumph of human love.