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Sub-Versions of History in Three Twentieth-Century Novels

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SUB-VERSIONS OF HISTORY
IN THREE TWENTIETH-CENTURY
NOVELS

BY
GABRIELA SCHALOW ADLER

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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1988

MASTER OF ARTS THESIS

OF

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APPROVED:

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ABSTRACT

The novels Nightwood, Genoa, and One Hundred Years of Solitude take intriguing approaches to history which seem to question and subvert certain dominant socio-cultural attitudes. Not only are we asked to re-view history and its narrative identities, but also to re-consider related issues such as the place of women and desire in history; the body in history; the problem of textuality (history/literature); and the status and identity of the human subject.

Traditional humanist criticism is unsatisfactory in considering these problems, so the critical perspective used here derives from Bakhtin and several poststructuralist and feminist theorists. After discussing significant terms (history, discourse, body) and the critical approach in general, a chapter is devoted to each novel. Here the critical response is reviewed, and the way the novel interacts with the topic is traced, with more specific discussion of relevant theories.

Although quite different from each other, all three novels have in common a challenge to authority and the suggestion that there are ways of viewing history and the human subject which differ from the dominant. They invite us to rethink what it means to be human and insist that this cannot be separated from historical, social, cultural,

political (including sexual politics), and linguistic considerations. All three writers could be said to deconstruct history, revealing repressions and forms of "otherness" they consider significant. While disturbing, the questions they raise are important and potentially liberating.

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INTRODUCTION

For centuries history has played a varied and significant role in literary works and it continues to engage the attention of writers and critics. My purpose here is to examine three 20th-century novels (Nightwood, Genoa, and One Hundred Years of Solitude) which are preoccupied with history in ways that question and subvert certain dominant socio-cultural attitudes and values. This treatment of history as problematic also raises and illuminates other significant issues, as the following brief summaries indicate.

Djuna Barnes's Nightwood is about a group of outsiders, expatriates and Europeans, living on the Continent between the two wars, and it traces their relationship with a young American woman. By emphasizing history and weaving it into her narrative, Barnes makes provocative observations about the absence of women in official, that is patriarchal history, about the relation between history and desire, and about the "otherness" which can be located even in history.

Similarly, Paul Metcalf's Genoa calls attention to what is marginal or "other" in history and human society. Metcalf achieves this through his carefully organized conglomeration

of textual fragments written by others and sutured together with his own narrative pieces. The book is superficially a meditation by a troubled man about Columbus, Melville, and his own family history, particularly his brother, and what their relationships might be to each other and him. More substantially though it concerns itself with the questions of how to place the body and desire in history (or how history situates them), and this is seen from a strictly male orientation. It also examines textuality, since the juxtaposition of historical and literary (fictional) texts makes their status problematic.

In Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude the relationship and status of history and literature are explored further in a lengthy family chronicle set in a small Latin American country during a tumultuous period. In the course of the narrative certain questions about reading and criticism are also raised. Rather than choosing an exclusively male or female viewpoint, Garcia Marquez embraces both, and through his use of repetition in names and human characteristics as well as events, he considers the problem of the (human) subject.

All three writers present, in widely differing contexts, a vision of dis-continuous history and dis-continuous subjects, marking a radical departure from the status quo. I am not aiming to create here a "unity" in this literary diversity, but rather to trace the distinctive

paths each writer takes. This task will be guided by certain critical perspectives, but before discussing the bigger picture it may be helpful to explain some of my terms.

Rather than offer definitions which I fear would be too reductive or restrictive, let me suggest certain characteristics and a sense of the ground from which these notions arise. When I use the term "history," I think of it less as the actual events of the past and more as an archive of the past which has become an important discourse complete with its own set of discursive ideas, classifications, and practices (such as rules of inclusion and exclusion).

History there described is an inescapable feature of organized social life. As a discourse it encompasses philosophical and ideological issues, some of which will be raised in connection with the novels. I am not confining myself to literary history because these novelists themselves have a strong sense of the socio-cultural and political implications of history. However, I do emphasize history here as writing, as textuality, and agree with Bakhtin that the "real" world and the work exist in a process of constant exchange. The real world enters the text as part of the creative process, and remains as the work is renewed in successive readings. The text also enters and enriches the "real" historical world (Dialogic 254).

The dominant, familiar forms taken by history, which we can call patriarchal, monumental, idealist, an autonomous

system of "Truth," seem to me to be what these novelists are writing against. They push us to think of that "history" in an ultimate sense. As Derrida has expressed it, in the last analysis it is the history of meaning which confronts us (Positions 49-50). And in their own subversive ways these writers then suggest that "history is substitution, signifier, figure, difference, text, fiction" (Leitch 58).

Just as "history" is no longer a simple and untroubled term, "discourse" becomes equally problematic in relation to my discussion here. Western culture views discourse from an idealist perspective, as a repository of truth formed through the exercise of reason to serve knowledge. One can gather various facts which already exist in the world and package or discover them in discourse (Leitch 145). The works of Barnes, Metcalf, and Garcia Marquez compel us to reconsider this attitude and entertain alternatives.

Although it may seem simple and obvious, it is vital to keep in mind that discourse, all speech and writing, is first and foremost social, its primary condition being dialogue.

Whenever dialogue takes place, it involves the positioning of speaker and audience; from the outset there are implications of power relations at work. Many discourses exist, and are distinguished by the types of institutions and social practices in which they are shaped, and also by the positions of speakers and listeners (Macdonell 1).

In the case of history it is easy enough to see its institutionalization by both the State and the Academy. Historiography is recognized as a specific form of writing and usually viewed as part of the objective order, as a given. But Metcalf suggests that history writing is both more and less than this; it is a pose. Barnes suggests that the female desire which has been repressed in it is about to erupt and disrupt the present order. Garcia Marquez suggests that history writing needs to re-create itself into a new identity.

All three writers show how history has practised certain kinds of exclusions. This is a feature of discourse, which focuses on certain objects, advancing selected concepts at the expense of others. We see this occurring in literary studies as well, where such areas as popular literature and women's writing have long been relegated to the margins (Macdonell 3). Djuna Barnes is just one example. In humanist discourse, "literature" is defined as "full, central, immediate human experience," and based on the assumption that something recognizable as human experience or human nature exists outside linguistic and social forms. The author then puts this experience into words (5). One of the most unsettling questions these three authors ask concerns the human subject, because they have moved off the comfortable old humanist turf.

By "subject" I mean more than a generalized concept of a thinking, acting human being. People are "subjects" because they are subjected to some particular notion of an identity. This subjection needs to be interrogated and should include consideration of the role discourses play in situating people in their "places." Subjection works through ideologies (practices) which have a material existence and which include discourses. Ideological practices directly affect language, thought, and the body (Macdonell 101-2).

It is very significant that the novels under consideration here direct attention to the physical being as well as the intellectual configuration of the subject. Francis Barker describes how the 17th century saw a change in the representation of the body, presenting a progressively more private and marginalized image. The result is that the body has been effectively hidden from history. By "body" he means neither a hypostatized object nor a simply biological machine, but "a relation in a system of liaisons which are material, discursive, psychic, sexual, but without stop or centre" (12). It is neither more nor less than a social construct, and as such has profound implications for the issues of gender and sexuality (Turner 5).

Barnes and Metcalf in particular are engaged in dis-covering the body in history, in exploring both how the body has been acted upon by society, and how it has reacted. It is no coincidence that Matthew O'Connor in Nightwood and

Michael Mills in Genoa are physicians. All three writers are concerned with the construction of the subject, and this necessarily focuses on the material as well as the intellectual. They all show us elements of disorder and deviance-- Robin's hysteria, Carl's mental and physical suffering and sociopathic behaviour, the Buendias' terror of the child born with a tail and Jose Arcadio's insanity. Turner reminds us that "all social structures which institutionalize inequality and dependency are fought out at the level of a micro-politics of deviance and disease." Since the body is a powerful metaphor for society, it is appropriate for disease to be the most salient metaphor of structural crisis, and all disease is a form of disorder, in a literal, symbolic, social and political sense (114). Barnes, Metcalf and Garcia Marquez write about bodies rebelling against the social and political orders which seek to regulate them, and in doing so present shifting views of the human subject which challenge traditional humanist assumptions.

The readings I discuss here result from studying the texts in combination with a critical perspective which derives from Mikhail Bakhtin and several contemporary French and American theorists who can be grouped as poststructuralists. I have also drawn on the work of feminist critics such as Susan Gubar, Patricia Tobin, and Hélène Cixous; they explore the effects of the patriarchal

structures in which we all read and write. I find them all helpful because they are engaged with the idea of history and its necessity for understanding cultural productions, never accepting it merely as a given. In the interests of brevity, I will not attempt to give detailed outlines here of each theorist's work, but rather discuss specifics in relation to the literary texts in the following chapters. I hope to convey here in a more general way the attitude or approach which emerges collectively from their thinking to influence mine.

There is a strong focus on the text as a representation, a complex system of signs, together with a sense of the impossibility of knowing absolute truth. Thus, even historiography can be viewed as a form of writing subject to the difficulties and problems of fiction or autobiography. One is given to search texts for ideological positions posing as objective facts or for exposures of such operations, and also to formulate questions about the operations of power and the status quo in a given text. Such strategies are useful, for example, in exploring the feminist implications in Nightwood.

Of course, the central influence on poststructuralist critics is Jacques Derrida. His thinking on "difference" in language, which can be construed as meaning dissimilarity, dispersal, and postponement of meaning, and his critique of the "center," open up new and unsettling vistas of

interpretation. Bakhtin's theory of dialogue is not incompatible with this, and has in common with Derrida's an emphasis on the unfolding of meaning in infinite contexts. Together with his ideas on the carnivalesque in literature as a subversion of authority, Bakhtin provides direction in understanding how literary works might be challenging the status quo.

From a somewhat different perspective, Michel Foucault suggests other ways of conceptualizing history through his critique of power, with applications to literary criticism being quite evident. His tactic of questioning the ground and authority of traditional history in the search for what may have been hitherto repressed is enormously helpful to my readings of these three novels. When the identity of history is challenged, an equally important issue comes to the forefront, namely the whole question of identity, of the human subject and of the constitution of a "self." Descombes discusses this vital linkage, which I pursue in my reading of Garcia Marquez.

All the theorists upon whose ideas I draw bring to their task the awareness that we each read with a particular set of assumptions and experiences, that is, we have our own histories which can shape interpretations. They challenge the belief that texts contain fixed or absolute meanings which can be discovered with the "correct" critical tools. Rather, they encourage readings that might uncover

"realities" other than the normative, and they never lose sight of the political dimension in literature which extends to the sexual, cultural and economic realms. Perhaps what attracts me most to their work is the serious questioning of authority I see there, and this makes them sympathetic guides to the three novelists under consideration.

In the next three chapters I will discuss Nightwood, Genoa, and One Hundred Years of Solitude respectively. I will review the critical response to each novel, and then attempt to trace the way each work interacts with the topic of my study and how, in this process, it presents its own set of intriguing concerns and insights.

CHAPTER ONE

Nightwood

The novel--as Bakhtin more than anyone else has taught us to see--does not lack its organizing principles, but they are of a different order from those regulating sonnets or odes. It may be said Jacobson works with poetry because he has a Pushkinian love of order; Bakhtin, on the contrary, loves novels because he is a baggy monster. (Dialogic Imagination, p. xviii)

In her novel Nightwood, Djuna Barnes demonstrates a profound and disturbing consciousness of history. She saturates her text with overt references to history, subtle literary historical devices, and many indirect questions and speculations about what constitutes history and what its effects may be. This involves an exploration of the politics of gender and the power of institutions and even hints at a history of otherness. In order to examine these issues, I will organize my discussion into four sections.

I. "I have a narrative, but you will be put to it to find it"

One way to begin discussing this complex work is to consider its relation to and place in (official) literary history. I am convinced that Nightwood and Barnes are historically important. Long before the current interest

among theorists in re-viewing history and its implications, Barnes made radical statements in her novel in such a way as to challenge critics and defy easy categorizations. Some effort of the imagination and intellect is required to appreciate this work in all its fullness.

Nightwood is not generally considered a major work in the American literary canon. In discussions of expatriate writers of the 1920s and 30s Barnes seldom figures prominently, if at all. Her work has gained what might be called a cult following. Only in recent years can we note increased attention by academics, resulting in a few books, journal articles and acknowledgement in literary reference books. I suspect that the upsurge in feminist criticism and women's studies is at least partly responsible. Compared to the veritable industries based on her contemporaries (like Hemingway or Fitzgerald) the critical response remains sparse. It is true that the novel is considered by some to be difficult, even obscure, but that is hardly a justification for neglect. I wonder if novels involving lesbianism and sexual ambiguity are likely to find much favour in the, still, male-dominated literary establishment.

Admirers of the novel issue what might be termed a minority report, seeing it as a bright star in the constellation of modernist works. They too display a historicist sensibility. Hayden Carruth once declared, "If I were required to name one author who represents most

completely the motives and goals of the literature of that time (Between-the-Two-Wars), I would name Djuna Barnes. And if I were required to choose one work that draws together...the primary substantial issues and stylistic intentions of that literature, I would choose Nightwood. [Djuna Barnes] came closer than anyone else to the heartbeat of western culture at that moment" (Gildzen).

For Louis F. Kannenstine, "few works so intensely distill the anguish of the American abroad in Paris in the twenties and thirties...Nightwood also appears to stand as an exceptional summation of the literary climate of the period, a high point in its formal and stylistic experimentation" (DLB 152-60).

While agreeing that a text is in complex ways the product of its time, I think that categorizing Barnes as a modernist tends to circumscribe the range of readings possible for Nightwood. Conventional classifications are convenient, and Nightwood does display "modernist" qualities like alienation, rebellion against bourgeois society, stylistic innovation, interest in modern psychology and European artistic movements such as surrealism. However, grouping texts by period is an exercise in generalization (and involves repression of differences) which leads to assumptions and expectations about the "meaning" of the texts. For example, James B. Scott groups Barnes with Joyce and Eliot, two giants of modernism. He states that they

followed a "double vision which implied a nostalgia for man's heritage, as well as his ability to believe in, and to hope for, the actualities of a here-and-now real world." Nightwood retains "a thematic tension between the longed-for certainties of the past and an unpalatable present" (17). Despite its consciousness of history, Scott finds in the text a "timeless applicability" (19). It seems to me that pious sentiments like these are being questioned rather than confirmed by Barnes, as I hope to show later on. She is nothing if not irreverent, and seriously destabilizes the literary historical position of her book, much as she does that of history in her story. It's also clear that Nightwood is not particularly palatable to the "authorities" who established the modernist canon, so that it may be more fitting to use the term "postmodern."

Critics have remarked on the novel's lavish literary-historical display, which begins with two chapter titles provided by the Old Testament and goes on to draw freely from the antique. They frequently associate the work with the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, and find echoes of the metaphysical poets, 18th-century fiction and the 19th century (Kannenstine, Art 104-5). Parts of older literary texts are actually incorporated into this one through the vehicle of O'Connor's monologues (e.g. Barnes 103). Scott notes that her contemporaries also drew on the literature of the past, and felt compelled to look backward (18). I

maintain that looking back is not necessarily an act of reverence. Modernism by now has also taken on the trappings of a "tradition," and devotion to tradition rather suffers at Barnes' hands, as we see if we examine a traditional symbol. Nightwood turns the tables on what came before, and by implication, on contemporary classifications.

In Nightwood, birds figure frequently and in so many contexts that any unity or specificity of meaning vanishes. There is Robin's name, of course, as well as birds that could signify homelessness, heraldry, nature, freedom, and the soul. Jenny resembles a bird of prey. Like the signifier robbed of its monolithic certainty, the bird flies in many directions; that may be its purpose, to point to relative and/or multiple rather than absolute meaning, and perhaps to indicate subtly the random movement of desire, another issue in this novel. Alan Singer finds Barnes' metaphors radically different from the metaphors of linear-representational narratives. Her language insists on continuously revising perspectives and "substituting one identity among differences for another in an infinite process of emergent meaning" (67). He points out that all the characters are liars (69), and that the lie in Nightwood extends the problem of knowing into an "aesthetic practice whenever literal representation is made ambiguous by figurative language." The novel denies the authority of the literal/figurative dualism commonly found in conventional

novels. In the description of Robin, for example, the metaphors of earth, oil of amber and decay do not refer back to any authenticating context which holds the truth of her character (72).

Whether the novel is an example of high modernism, or of postmodernism or nonmodernism as Douglas Messerli implies, is not crucial for my purposes here. Such distinctions permit readers to form coherent theories about the book's place in the literary landscape and so are helpful, but one does not want to be too strictly bound to them. It may be useful now to look briefly at the surfaces the novel presents, and then to examine these more closely for the meanings they suggest.

Unlike a traditional novel, Nightwood appears fragmented, with little continuity or plot. Chronology is established at the start only to be dissolved later on. A linear narrative gives way to a collage of events and non-events, some sequential, others not. Whether there is a hero or main character is debatable, and probably a matter of the reader's own sympathies. A case could be made for Robin or O'Connor, but it would not be clearcut. The characters are drawn with little detail, not much is revealed about them, and there is little "character development." We can even accuse Barnes of using clichés and stereotypes (e.g. the Jew) in a rather banal story about the vagaries of love.

O'Connor's monologues do much to raise the book above the level of the ordinary. They are verbal collages, seeming to pour from him in random sequence and yet possessing an elusive quality of cohesiveness. In this example we also see a fascination with the notion of difference: "One cup poured into another makes different waters; tears shed by one eye would blind if wept into another's eye. The breast we strike in joy is not the breast we strike in pain; any man's smile would be consternation on another's mouth. Rear up, eternal river, here comes grief! Man has no foothold that is not also a bargain..." (32) and so on. The language in Nightwood is striking and unusual whether the voice is O'Connor's or the narrator's. This is not everyday speech; it does not permit the eye to move quickly and smoothly along. (Singer's comments quoted earlier help to explain why.) We see it in the devastating description of Jenny Petherbridge, who "had a continual rapacity for other people's facts; absorbing time, she held herself responsible for historic characters. She was avid and disorderly in her heart...somewhere about her was the tension of the accident that made the beast the human endeavor" (67).

Kannenstine states that Barnes' purpose is "to make language develop backward...to the point where contemporary usage becomes recharged with the lost vitality of past forms" (Gildzen). Since she challenges the notion of progress in various ways throughout the book, it would be

fitting for her to use archaic language for this purpose as well. ("Is not the gown the natural raiment of extremity?...why should not the doctor, in the grave dilemma of his alchemy, wear his dress?" 80) As far as the implied nostalgia Kannenstine attributes to Barnes, I do not see it in the language or elsewhere, except as something to be parodied.

Readers who prefer the reassurance of the realistic novel will be disappointed; in fact, they may find Nightwood quite disorienting, which I think is one of its purposes. Others may find her techniques both pleasing and fascinating; however, I doubt that popular appeal was ever a consideration. The rejection of realism in Nightwood indicates rebellion against bourgeois values, much as traditional novels often seem to reaffirm them. As Coward and Ellis explain, realism does not occur "naturally," which would make it somehow true and unassailable. Rather, it is a form which society constructs for itself and believes to be "real" (35). Once doubt has been cast on realism, it is a short step to question, as Barnes does, the revered status of history, family, church, medicine--all male-dominated and exerting great power on the lives of women (and men).

II. "Her attention...had already been taken by something not yet in history"

Instead of realism, the novel offers surrealism and raises questions about desire and psychoanalysis. This aesthetic movement was still influential during the period Nightwood was written, and although Barnes was not a member of that group it is not unreasonable to read surrealistic elements into her work. Surrealism evoked the unconscious and disrupted the conventions of reality (Duplessis 79). Both activities are evident in this text whose title focuses on a point of great interest for the surrealists, the night, which was considered a liberating force, freeing the unconscious from the hypocrisy and restraints of the day. A remarkable chapter, "Watchman, What of the Night?" is a rambling meditation on that dimension where desire moves unfettered.

"Let a man lay himself down in the Great Bed and his 'identity' is no longer his own..."(81)

"He lies down with his Nelly and drops off into the arms of his Gretchen. Thousands unbidden come to his bed" (86).

Many scenes and images in the novel appear surrealistic: Nora and Robin meeting for the first time at the circus, and the lioness bowing (54); Robin's eyes alight in the dark (64); the eland in a bridal veil (37) and other combinations of the human and bestial; Nora's detailed and tangled dream of her grandmother and Robin (62-3). One could

argue for a Freudian influence here, and it is probably no coincidence that Vienna provides one setting for the novel.

In Freud's view, instincts and drives do not exist solely in a pure or physical state but are mediated through fantasies or images by means of their object language. The goal of the surrealist project was to bring this object-language of the unconscious to the surface. These objects then speak to us of desire and of the fantasy-satisfaction of desire (Jameson 98-9), for example, Barnes' use of dolls to express longing. This device is just one of her methods for revealing what has formerly been repressed, to make us aware of repression. Such writing is the antithesis of stereotype. The stereotyping of which I accused her earlier may be an attempt to contrast with and make the surrealist currents in the book all the stronger. Barnes could draw upon objects at that time because, as Jameson tells us, they still had some human significance, some trace of labour, some expressiveness, since they were the products of an economy that was not yet completely industrialized (104). Some mystery remained, and surrealist writing could take advantage of that. In Nightwood the message is also direct: "In the passage of their lives together every object in the garden, every item in the house, every word they spoke, attested to their mutual love," followed by a catalogue of these things (55).

The satisfaction of desire is most adequately expressed in surrealism by "mystery." The sense of mystery indicates an expansion of being and "release from the repressive weight of the reality principle," a transformation of life which recaptures its original reasons for existing. Most often this mystery is released in the experiences of dream, love and childhood (Jameson 102-3), all of which are strongly present in Nightwood.

A significant departure from "mainstream" surrealism is Barnes' representation of female desire from a female consciousness. Like all art movements, surrealism was dominated by men, and even representations of women and their sexuality were expressions of male desire presented as universal. This is not to say that Barnes or anyone for that matter can avoid using patriarchal modes of discourse and representation, since these are dominant, but her work reveals a search for another way to speak.

Another aspect of Nightwood, related to the subject of desire, is the book's distinctive illumination of its historical moment. Jameson states that the novel always tries to reconcile the consciousness of writer and reader with the objective world at large. When we judge novelists we are judging the moment of history they reflect and on which they pass sentence (42). Barnes avoids direct references to contemporary political and even cultural matters, but she does mention dates (1880, 1920, 1923, 1927)

and in various ways presents and probes her time so as to reveal its implications from a female perspective. Because such an approach is unusual, it brings with it some challenges.

The characters in Nightwood are obsessed with history and described in "historical" terms (e.g. Nora's appearance evokes U.S. history, 50-1), but most often it is the idea of history which exerts fascination, rather than any particular event, and emphasis rests on personal matters. These two spheres intersect in an interesting way in Robin, whose puzzling actions make her seem not quite "normal." The pattern of her conduct suggests that she is an old-fashioned hysteric. Before dismissing this as a far-fetched notion, it benefits us to consider that a writer who is not above naming a legless girl Mlle. Basquette is capable of establishing a playful dialogue between history and hysteria. The root of hysteria means womb; history is both the tomb of the past and the womb which makes the future possible. Curiously enough, other characters are directly described as hysterics--Felix moves with a "humble hysteria" (11); Jenny attacks Robin in a hysterical fit (76)--but this term is never applied to Robin. Instead, she shows the classic symptoms throughout the story. Felix does imply that Robin may be "a little mad" for her errand, which entails interrogating the past and uncovering the "darker" aspects of her humanity (122).

For this part of my reading of Nightwood I am indebted to Jan Goldstein's article about hysteria in 19th century France. Traditionally a disease suffered by women, from classical antiquity on its chief symptoms have been convulsions and spasmodic seizures. In later centuries other common symptoms included fainting and trance-like states (210-11). (Robin, "La Somnambule," displays these.) This illness long defied neat classification. However, Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot, beginning in the 1870's, placed the seemingly random symptoms of this disorder into a system of positive laws. He claimed that a hysterical attack has four parts. The first stage is "tonic rigidity;" the second, movement resembling circus-like acrobatics; and third, dramatic emotional states like terror, love and hatred. The final stage is a "delirium marked by sobs, tears, and laughter, and heralding a return to the real world" (214).

Putting aside political questions raised by this systemization of mental illness, it matters less whether Charcot's view is "correct" than that it is available as a theory. Barnes has, whatever her intentions, incorporated this structure and dispersed it within the narrative of Nightwood, and all four stages can be located in the text. Robin's initial fainting spell, or the section "La Somnambule" constitute stage one. Stage two appears in her emotional swings from Felix to Nora to Jenny and various strangers. It can be seen as well in the circus acrobats in

a literal sense, and in the strong dramatic shifts in the story. Dramatic emotional outbursts come from the women and O'Connor, forming the third stage. Robin's final scene completes stage four. Her ritual in the decaying chapel is open to many interpretations, delirium being one.

The novel as a whole expresses hysteria; Robin is merely the primary locus of its possibilities. Kannenstine states that an archaic meaning of "wood" is madness, "being out of one's mind, a condition which merges with being beyond or out of time" (Art 125). If hysteria is present, the next question we might ask is O'Connor's "How did it happen?" and we might add, what is its significance?

One consideration, minor at best, is that Barnes is mocking psychoanalysis, which has been accused of being anti-historical. Nightwood repeatedly insists on a consciousness of history. More importantly, Goldstein suggests that "the flowering of hysteria in the late nineteenth century was coincident with and a pathological by-product of the bourgeois value system of patriarchal authority and sexual asceticism." Viennese hysterics provided Freud with much of his material when he devised the principles of the psychoanalytic method. His explanation for the upsurge of hysteria was that if the illness was "the somatization of repressed sexual wishes and fantasies, then the social and cultural factors which encouraged and enforced the relegation to unconsciousness of these highly

charged mental contents also encouraged the spread of the disease." Freud identified these factors as "civilized sexual morality," by which he meant that ethic which put work and advancement before pleasure, which demanded sexual abstinence before marriage only for women, and which held that a "proper" woman was effortlessly chaste, with no interest in, or desire for, sexual satisfaction. Thus, in Goldstein's view, hysteria "was a protest made in the flamboyant yet encoded language of the body by women who had so thoroughly accepted that value system that they could neither admit their discontent to themselves nor avow it publicly in the more readily comprehensive language of words" (212-3).

Hysteria is a complex subject and one risks oversimplification here, as well as excessive enthusiasm for a theory, not unlike the doctors mentioned in Goldstein's article. Once hysteria was given a formula and a place in medical discourse, those physicians interested in it "found" more hysterics than did their counterparts (220). Still, this reading of Freud provides a viable interpretation of Robin's "peculiar" conduct and is not in conflict with other factors in the novel. One could argue that even in the 1920s, and still in our own day, the bourgeois value system exercises considerable control over the bodies of women.

When Robin enters the story she is very young, and in her initial passivity offers herself up to the status quo,

"as if Robin's life held no volition for refusal" (Barnes 43). She marries and has a child, moving trance-like in the roles prescribed for her. "Civilized sexual morality" becomes an oppressive burden and she rebels. Like the animals to which she is often compared, Robin is non-verbal; that at least is the impression the text creates. Very rarely are her words quoted, even though she is occasionally mentioned as speaking "in long, rambling, impassioned sentences" (68). She has no official language, her words are absent from the page as women have, for the most part, long been absent from official history. Instead, she acts out her rebellion in her movement "down" and away from socially approved modes of existence. We could say she is repressed and consequently rebellious. Her behaviour is hardly circumscribed in her search for sexual freedom, but Robin pays a price in suffering, both her own and her lovers'. Felix and Nora are distressed by her attempt to become "healthy" by exploring her desires and defying conventional morality. Ironically, even the "bohemian" Nora is a bourgeoisie at heart. Robin suffers because of her conflict with social codes which label her behaviour as unacceptable; she may reject them but they continue to haunt her. She embodies an important perspective on the historical condition of women. The end of the novel, seen in these terms, makes a strong statement about the modern woman's slow progress in the struggle for genuine autonomy and

against patriarchal domination. Instead of seeing real "progress" over time, she has been moving backwards, experiencing frustration in her attempt to speak for and of herself.

The rebelliousness in Nightwood is not confined to the characters. Robin may not have a voice, but the author does. As Hélène Cixous observes, the act of writing, for a woman, can be viewed as an act of reclaiming her body. "Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" (880), an apt description of Robin's condition. In perhaps a small way, Barnes' writing here is a heroic gesture, a reclamation of woman's body and her history. Her text suggests, though, that this is a history conceived differently from the familiar form, a history which Cixous describes as new, "a process of becoming in which several histories intersect with one another." Personal, national and world history blend with the history of all women. Its expression is marked by a writing which is anti-authoritarian, "an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another" (882-3). This process is dialogue at its best, as expounded by Bakhtin.

In Robin's "sickness" we may discover other implications about "history," by now a highly problematic term. She is a site of libidinal forces seeking expression and satisfaction, and she rejects conventional social restraints. Her lovers try to limit and direct these forces

partly for their benefit. Similarly, history might be thought of as not well-ordered but a series of random, sometimes irrational events which are given boundaries and meaning by those who have some power over that process. Coming from quite another context but expressing a similar view, Erich Auerbach speaks of the difficulty of representing historical themes, as "the historical comprises a great number of contradictory motives in each individual, a hesitation and ambiguous groping on the part of groups." Thus, for example, Old Testament figures produce a more direct, concrete and "historical" effect than those of the Homeric world, "not because they are better described in terms of sense...but because the confused, contradictory multiplicity of events, the psychological and factual cross-purposes, which true history reveals, have not disappeared in the representation but still remain clearly perceptible" (20). Auerbach and Barnes are remarkably similar to current poststructuralist theorists in their critique of "true history."

III. "And I, who want power, chose a girl who resembles a boy"

Here I will expand my discussion of the feminist aspects of Nightwood, raised in the preceding section. Robin may not be powerful in a conventional sense, but she produces strong nonverbal signs of protest through her

behaviour and mode of dress. It is significant that she appears in 1920, the year American women won suffrage. The pun on her name may be ironic, pointing to her alienation and impotence, since as an expatriate she is not in a position to exert this new political power. There may also be some doubt about the promises of this new privilege, or it may emphasize the unconventional choices and gestures Robin Vote does make. Robin's visual messages are rich in implication, and a useful essay by Susan Gubar on cross-dressing illuminates the issue.

Gubar states that clothing plays an important symbolic role in the way women respond to their confinement in patriarchal structures, and she shows how, at the turn of the century, female modernists appropriated male clothing because of its association with freedom. Cross-dressing is not only a personal or sexual statement, but also social and political, and clothing became a political issue in the suffrage movement (478-9).

Her argument then moves into the artistic sphere, where women's writing and painting depict the female cross-dresser as a "heroine of misrule" who wants to prove herself man's equal. This woman's presumptions may sometimes create a "tragic sense of contradiction" between her female body and masculine attire, or result in a glamorous being who transcends these polarities and calls into question the categories of culture. "Inversion," the pseudoscientific

term used since the late 19th century to describe homosexual desire, (and used in Nightwood), is in Gubar's view an attempt by women to invert the traditional system of privileges which bestows primacy on males. However, inversion undergoes several displacements, into a synonym for "per-version and a means of con-version and sub-version" (479).

In Barnes' work, Gubar sees the attention to cross-dressing as "a dream of prophecy and power" (493), and the novel itself as an "anatomy of transvestism" which suggests that salvation can occur only through the subversion practiced by the invert (497). Rather unfortunately, in my opinion, she also seems to favour what I have come to think of as the doom and gloom reading of Nightwood, where Robin and O'Connor are neither masculine nor feminine, belonging nowhere, quite alone (498). It is also possible to see them as both masculine and feminine, belonging somewhere or everywhere, in a condition of excess rather than deprivation. And Robin at least is desired and loved by an assortment of characters. At any rate, Gubar does point out an important element in the transvestite world of Nightwood--here the cross-dresser is not attempting to become his/her opposite; rather, s/he becomes an artifact, like a doll (499), and the doll can be understood as figuring in the object language of desire. Gubar observes that the inverts of Nightwood attempt to return to

prehistory, to those primal forces usually repressed by cultural categories. The cross-dressers who embody our "irrational, secret desires" reflect that wildness which "can only be hidden, never obliterated, in the forest of the nightwood that is sexuality" (500-1). Again we see desire, particularly female desire, as a secret or ignored area in history. Robin, whose cross-dressing expresses a need for power and visibility in the world, makes a strong statement when the force of her sexuality, her unconscious, is released. There is even a subtle suggestion that history itself is seductive. In 1936 this was hardly commonplace, although it appears in scholarly discourse now.

To complete this part of the discussion, we move to Gubar's phrase about the "dream of prophecy and power" associated with the cross-dresser, because it touches on another troubling aspect of that by now thoroughly slippery concept of history. How are the characters of Nightwood prophetic? The book is in part a product of its time, the interwar period, and a superficial reading would tempt us to see in the final section a sign of the catastrophic events which were soon to occur in this world. However, this text often enough illustrates Nietzsche's statement that "the things of the past are never viewed in their true perspective or receive their just value; but value and perspective change with the individual or nation that is looking back on its past" (19). To view Nightwood as a

simple mirror of its times is unsatisfactory, first because Barnes' work is not that reductive, and also because her friend Janet Flanner recalled the atmosphere of France in the 1920's as being quite "normal." Life was lived as though peace were natural and lasting, and this pleasant state lasted until 1938, providing an environment conducive to literary pursuits (DLB 152-60). To read into Nightwood a prophecy of war tends to typecast the characters as "moral degenerates" whose own failures predict world catastrophe, a rather bourgeois judgement of the kind Barnes would parody. Still, several critics have favoured this view.

James Scott refers to Barnes' philosophical stance expressing despair, the opinion that "the entire human enterprise is an atrocious but alluring mistake" (20). Elizabeth Pochoda also sees flat despair at the end of the novel. She considers Robin ridiculous in her attempt to "crawl back into the beast world," left with only wordlessness and failure (188).

An alternative reading would take into account the ambiguities which characterize the novel. In terms of the surrealists' purposes, Robin's beast world is not such a bad thing. In addition, Kenneth Burke in his essay on Nightwood advises readers to be aware of the author's modes of "dignification," which can be paradoxical, so that the apparent corruption of a character could actually represent higher values (245-6).

Although pain and despair are certainly present in the novel, this may be viewed as a reaction to a particular human (personal) situation at that point in time. Such anguish has meaning even if quite un-prophetic, and it is open to interpretation. In fact, despair can have unexpected dimensions. In Jameson's discussion of Ernst Bloch, he points out that, be it personal or historical, despair is an emotion oriented to the future, as much as hope is. It projects nothingness and futility, rather than "the all." Bloch found horror and "the black emotions" precious, inasmuch as they "constitute forms of that elemental ontological astonishment which is our most concrete mode of awareness of the future latent in ourselves." Rather than the Freudian unconscious which is oriented around the past, Bloch proposes a different type of unconscious formed by the future, a "not-yet-consciousness...a tidal influence exerted upon us by that which lies out of sight below the horizon, an unconscious of what is yet to come." It generates psychic energy, a power Goethe called "demonic," a drive pushing forward (129-33). Let us turn for a moment to the text:

"One has, I am now certain, to be a little mad to see into the past or future...it may also be the errand on which the Baronin is going" (122).

"Cannot a beastly thing be analogous to a fine thing if both are apprehensions?" (125)

In Nightwood, downward movement is paradoxically a form of progress. It is not unthinkable that the despair at the end is also a form of progress redefined, because it is linked to the future. Early on, Felix finds Robin's attention taken by "something not yet in history" (44). In her, forces of prehistory, history, the present and the future seem to coexist. She is an expression of the Nietzschean emphasis on "forgetting" and awareness of the future. Her final scene is a moment of intensity which shatters that notion of progress which was the Victorian ideal. Perhaps the "prophecy and power" exist within that intensity, that awareness, that suggestion of other ways of being.

In a technical, "writerly" sense, the final chapter contains another but related kind of power elucidated by Alan Singer, whose article focuses on the catachrestic quality of the text. He sees in "The Possessed" an anticipation of new contextual meanings working as "an analogue for the continual sliding of the literal sign under the figurative sign throughout Nightwood" and thus articulating "an authorial reflexivity that complements the production of the text itself." This chapter reminds readers that "we are in the presence of a self-examining imagination, alive through the transformational character of Barnes's prose" (84).

IV. "She could not offer herself up"

Nietzsche's statement that "history is still a disguised theology" (49) is explored by Barnes in order to discover what this may mean for women. In Nightwood, history and theology are linked in that both involve patriarchal control and both make claims to possessing the "truth." The tattoos which cover the body of Nikka the Nigger appear to mock history and religion, or at least their effect on people, and at the same time emphasize their importance by their mere presence in his skin. The chapel on Nora's property is in a state of decay; O'Connor frequently parodies the apostles and prophets; the "Watchman" chapter can be read as a mock sermon filled with declamations on history. As Burke notes, "the motives of Christian vigil become transformed into the 'nightwatch' of women like Nora in love or like Robin prowling" (248).

Robin converts to Catholicism from "an inscrutable wish for salvation" (46), and goes "forward and down" before the Church, as Felix does before history, but "she could not offer herself up." Refusing the surrender required of the faithful, she dwells instead on her height and on women in history rather than seeking a more appropriate devotion for a convert.

In Judeo-Christian tradition, one of the dominant views of woman portrays her as a source of sin and evil, and not surprisingly, her religious role is quite restricted. Both

religion and history have maintained the anonymity of women. A few exceptions among women exist, but these too usually depend on males for their identity and prominence. Robin is described several times as anonymous. Her inability to submit to traditional theology is a form of rebellion against patriarchal controls. Her conversion is necessary for it shows her as a seeker, and gives greater impact to her subsequent rejection and subversion of traditional religion. An appropriate direction for her may then be "out of time," to a condition resembling a pre-historic state. She is often associated with the primitive, the supernatural, sorcery, witches, and ancient powers. We might conclude that the only time women were not oppressed or ignored was in that mythic prehistoric period when the goddess reigned. However, this seems unsatisfactory since Barnes does not succumb to nostalgia anywhere else in the text. More likely, she suggests that it is essential to move outside the status quo and beyond (patriarchal) representation, to cast off the burdens of traditional history as Nietzsche proclaims, not to become ahistoric but to make history serve (female) human beings.

Hayden White finds in The Use and Abuse of History the argument that "history can serve life by becoming a form of art." Turning history into a science destroys its life-giving function (352). Thus, the only transcendence that one can hope for comes from art, which provides it "not

only by creating the dream but by dissolving the pseudo reality of the dream that has atrophied" (343). Barnes is highly critical of religion, but by her act of producing her text, she takes a strong position on the value of art. And White's statement is especially appropriate, as it implies a certain impiety, a mixture of respect and irreverence, since the process involves movement and change, questioning, judging, taking chances, instead of adhering to some permanent model of "Art." Where better to dream than in the nightwood.

Another "dream that has atrophied" is the Hegelian view of history which Nietzsche criticizes. In his discussion of history and theology, he objects to the view of a period (his present) as an "old age" of man, in the way that theology posits time moving toward an end of the material world, with man the high point of creation. The power of history is worshipped and men see themselves as the culmination of all past time and part of an inexorable process.

Barnes parodies this by undercutting pride and arrogance and presenting characters in all their human weakness. If her motley group is meant to represent civilization at its peak, the situation is indeed woeful. Instead, O'Connor reminds, "Be humble, like the dust" (147). No one here has evolved into a godlike being. As the ending in Nightwood makes clear, the human creature is still driven

by "uncivilized" impulses. Robin, the "beast turning human" (37), reveals what convention has labeled unsavory, that other past beyond which man has supposedly progressed: "There is not one of us who, given an eternal incognito...would not commit...all abominations" (Barnes 88). She stands in contrast to Nietzsche's humans, who have been turned into "shades and abstractions" through the banishment of instinct by history (29). As Benjamin reminds us, "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted" (258-9).

Social pretensions are deflated in the pseudo-aristocracy of the earthy circus characters; "noble" passions like the love professed by both Jenny (who is portrayed mercilessly), and by Nora (who becomes increasingly melodramatic) are exposed as being suspect. "None of us suffers as much as we should, or loves as much as we say. Love is the first lie" (Barnes 138). The body always keeps us anchored to the earth--"There is no pure sorrow. Why? It is bedfellow to lungs, lights, bones, guts and gall! There are only confusions..."(22). Barnes undermines the privileged position of history and its accompanying idealism, and seems to be in agreement with Benjamin, who wrote: "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the

exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight... One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are 'still' possible in the 20th century is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge--unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable" (259).

Barnes also criticizes the linear concept of history through the devices in Nightwood, where history is as disrupted as the other aspects of the text, or one might say history itself erupts as the perpetual "other" of the text but in the text, as a relay to the unsettling perspectives presented there. The Volkbeins' attempts to maintain the illusion of continuity are defeated by Robin. The substance and structure of the novel proclaim rupture and discontinuity. I think one could change the order in which the chapters appear with little ill effect. The disjointed lives of uprooted characters, the non-linear narrative and dissolving chronology, O'Connor's non-sequiturs, and unpredictable crises all make for a certain "disorganization." Singer has remarked on this as well. Rather than seeing it as a negative quality, he treats the disjuncture as "the threshold of interpretation." Such narrative discontinuity often coexists, for example, with

imagistic coherence, suggesting "new criteria of relatedness" (79-80). In Nightwood the image becomes productive in its own right. Its significance lies "in the new connections it fosters and not in transcendence to an already contextualized meaning." Traditional criticism presents image and character as transcendent, but in Nightwood they are "contingent and mutable" (81). (I do not think this necessarily contradicts my use of White's comment earlier, because that particular form of transcendence implies mutability and productiveness.) Barnes then is not simply dismissing history or humanity as not worth her time, as some critics have inferred. Instead, she indicates through the very texture of her writing that there are truly "other" ways to see and be, and in her book she probes a "history" of otherness. Like Nietzsche, she thinks history is necessary for life, as a teacher (12), but its lessons do not support the status quo. One of the strongest statements made in Nightwood is the impossibility of standing securely within the condition of truth. The surrealistic techniques contribute to this, as does a sense of relativity applied not only to history but religion, gender identity, and the rules of sexual conduct. Some examples from the text illustrate:

...that's what we call legend and it's the best a poor man may do with his fate; the other...we call history, the best the high and mighty can do with theirs. (15)

past time is relative to us all. (157)

Do things look in the ten and twelve of noon as they look in the dark? (85)

No one will be much or little except in someone's mind.

(129)

She couldn't tell me the truth because she had never planned it; her life was a continual accident. (135)

This destabilization includes the Volkbeins, (Guido I and Felix) who are associated with a model of history which is continually discredited in the text. They illustrate Nietzsche's contention that "as long as the past is principally used as a model for imitation, it is always in danger of being a little altered and touched up and brought nearer to fiction" (15). Their fraudulent lineage is mockingly exposed, Felix has a blind eye, and his son is retarded. In Felix, history is also linked to circus and theatre, implying that it shares with them the qualities of illusion, entertainment, and perhaps art; in short, it is also spectacle. This suggests that while truth may indeed exist somewhere, it is not so readily and unequivocally apparent.

As European Jews the Volkbeins are in a vulnerable position. In a futile gesture to gain acceptance, they worship the "great past" (a term implying a discourse, institutionalization) which ironically includes the persecution romanticized by Guido's black and yellow

handkerchief. All three "bow down" to history in an act of subservience. In sharp contrast, Robin's bowing down is an attempt to reach beyond this version of history and the oppressions of society into not only her own unconscious but also the historical and social "unconscious." Felix's history, an "interminable flow of fact and fancy" (44) puts her to sleep. Its patriarchal nature makes it doubly oppressive to Robin, victim of "the destiny for which he had chosen her-- that she might bear sons who would recognize and honour the past" (45). Robin eventually rejects this domination by abandoning him and their child, turning to various love affairs in an attempt to release what has been repressed in herself. Nowadays this may be viewed as somewhat less shocking, and an understandably angry response to oppression, but this text is not so simplistic. This is not a case of good guys versus bad guys. Gender roles become blurred in terms of behaviour. Robin's sexual adventuring and emotional wanderings are usually categorized as male characteristics, while Felix's gentle and solicitous care of Guido shows a nurturing quality generally considered feminine. These qualities develop in response to Robin's challenging of Felix's "history," and show that her way, though it is painful and open to criticism, is also productive. Repression itself is presented as historical; Barnes never suggests that its absence would necessarily mean a state of joyfulness and light.

v. Conclusion

By focusing on history and related issues, Barnes moves beyond the abstraction or the monolithic idea to Nora's question: "How do you live...?" (90) This novel explores not only what history might be but also one's relation to it-- whether inside or outside for example-- and to the institutions and conventions with which it is intertwined. The result is potentially liberating, but not in a naive sense of "living happily ever after." Nightwood is rich in ambivalence as it challenges authority and the status quo, showing that revealing the repressed may be frightening, unpleasant, and beautiful (or that the bourgeois "ugly" must now be made "aesthetic"); that "freedom" is as elusive and problematic as "history"; and that the search and its terms must continually be reformulated.

CHAPTER TWO

Genoa

In the formal proclamation signed by the President, designating October 10 as Columbus Day, the President saluted the "bold and adventurous navigator who left Europe in 1492 in search of new lands and first recorded the sighting of the North American continent.

"He represents a spirit, the spirit of the Renaissance which contributed to the development of America," Mr. Reagan's statement said. It added: "Along with Galileo, Copernicus, and others, Columbus symbolizes a quest for knowledge, a willingness and fortitude to go beyond what is accepted as truth in the name of progress." (Evening Bulletin, Providence, RI, Sept. 28, 1983)

Paul Metcalf's Genoa is the least "popular" of my three texts, although it is taken seriously and respected by the critics who have responded to it. I chose it because of its intriguing approach to history, including the use of historical texts, and its complex, comical perspective. As far as I know, only Allen Thiher discusses this historical dimension. The other, and major source of commentary is a 1981 issue of the Review of Contemporary Fiction devoted to Metcalf (and Hubert Selby), focusing mainly on his documentary style. The writers aim for an overview rather than examining particular areas. While they maintain a general tone and approach, taking Metcalf's style and language as a "whole," I prefer to concentrate on certain

aspects of just one work, and discuss these in terms of theories I find especially pertinent. Given this, it seems that one cannot discuss Genoa without mentioning collage/montage, anatomy/physicality, and archaeology, which these critics include and which I hope to develop from my own perspective.

Another critic writes about Metcalf's modernism, and seems to suggest that Genoa hovers outside this category. Robert Von Hallberg states that modernism can be seen as a style which affirms transcendence and continuity. Scratching the surface of those historical variations and diverse languages reveals the "configurations true art always traces." Genoa pushes this modernism "over the edge" (182). The adherence to "timeless" values is a touchstone of traditional criticism, and I think Metcalf's book seriously questions this. Von Hallberg's tentative steps argue for considering this a postmodern novel, if a classification must be used, as Metcalf is working toward something "other" than affirmation of tired humanist clichés.

All the commentaries I could find about Metcalf are written by men, which brings me to another aspect of the text. Genoa seems strongly male-oriented, not only because all the significant characters are men, but because of its point of view. In any novel the point of view affects the project of representation in diverse ways, for example, the focus on an issue could be broad or narrow, or it could

shift frequently. With regard to gender, the point of view might range from inclusive to restrictive. In this respect Genoa is quite different from the other two books under discussion, and allows us to trace a critique of patriarchy from yet another perspective.

The compelling issue in Genoa is the intertwining of history and the body-- history as discourse and as text (and highly problematic at that), and history as a force which inscribes itself upon the body. Because it is such an unusual novel both in its construction and content, those entrenched critical methods based on formalist analysis or traditional humanism take us no further than Von Hallberg's conclusion that this is an "outrageous" book (183). Genoa is a multivoiced interweaving of many texts which achieves its effects largely through indirection. To appreciate its subtleties and subversive implications, and to clarify puzzling and significant issues, I turned to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault. Their ideas are complementary and firmly grounded in historical consciousness and seem well-suited to reading Genoa, but are also applicable to other texts and cultural productions.

Bakhtin's work on carnival and parody provides fruitful direction in understanding the implications of certain stylistic devices and of representations of the body in Metcalf's novel. Foucault's essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," directly addresses the intersection of the body

and history. He suggests that an alternative to traditional history is genealogy, which "is situated within the articulation of the body and history" (148). He has also referred to genealogy as "history in the form of a concerted carnival" (161).

I should note that on the inside cover of Genoa, Metcalf himself refers to his book as genealogy. What he means by this is of course impossible to establish with any certainty, and not one of my concerns here.

I hope to show first the carnivalesque elements operating in Genoa, and then the carnivalesque method of history which is practised with provocative results. This strategy will take us outside a traditional humanistic reading (people are always the same everywhere; suffering is part of the human condition), to consider instead a notion of the human subject which emphasizes difference, ambivalence, and flux.

1. Bakhtin's Carnival

In his studies of the genres of antiquity and the Middle Ages, Bakhtin uncovers in certain forms of writing a carnival attitude which has its roots in popular culture. The distinct characteristics of carnival are traced in the developments of literature over considerable time, showing certain influences which are present even in modern writers such as Dostoevsky, who is studied in detail. Bakhtin takes

pains to show that a carnivalistic work of the Middle Ages is of course not identical to a modern work. Carnivalization is a generic tradition which is renewed and reborn in a unique manner in the work of individual authors (Problems 133).

Carnival is a complex cultural form in which the "normal" rules and systems of life are suspended. It eliminates social and physical distances between people, and vigorously celebrates the body. It is a liberating force; its eccentricity "permits the latent sides of human nature to be revealed and developed in a concretely sensuous form." Abstract philosophical questions are put on the concrete plane of the body, and specifically its orifices. Carnival celebrates change and process; never allowing closure, it makes authority precarious. It involves a crowning and discrowning movement which is intensely ambivalent, each act being contained in the other (101-3). In the carnivalized novel, everything is taken to its limits, including ideas and fates of the characters (139).

Bakhtin devotes much attention to the serio-comic genres of the Socratic dialogue and Menippean satire. Rather than attempt to recapitulate his full discussions here, I will draw on the carnivalistic elements he enumerates which have a direct bearing on Genoa.

Bakhtin: In the serio-comic genres, focus is on the present. Historical figures are contemporized and put into contact with the unfinalized present (Problems 88).

Genoa: Columbus and Melville are orchestrated into a 20th century narrative. They both become linked to Carl in numerous and complicated ways. On the "concrete" level of language this happens not only through juxtapositions but also the repetition of words or phrases in the various fragments associated with different characters, e.g. heaving and rolling (7). In effect, they use each other's "word." Parallels are constructed: voyages of Columbus, voyages of Melville, voyages of Carl; psychological exploration by Melville, by Carl, and by Michael. All of this is put into the context of the present moment as Michael surveys this wide-ranging scene from his attic position.

The repetition of words and images (archetypes) and parallel constructions to link different times and characters raises some questions. A traditional reading would conclude from their presence that Metcalf is reaffirming the "universality" of the human condition, which transcends time and space. In my reading, it is also possible to see these devices as indicators of difference and contradiction. Three characters made sea voyages, they experienced difficulties, but not in the same way, whether in a physical, spiritual, cultural, social or economic

sense. Each incident, each life, has its own very particular historical context.

Bakhtin: There is a multiplicity of tone, rejecting stylistic unity. Extensive use is made of letters and manuscripts, parodically reconstructed quotations, and a mixture of prose and poetic speech (89).

Genoa: All these devices appear in the text, with the addition of newspaper articles and fragments of a shopping list. A striking visual parody of quotation (158) defies reproduction here. Parody and its implications are significant to my discussion, and will be treated in more detail further on.

Bakhtin: There is a "dialogue on the threshold," fostered by the presence of extraordinary situations which force a person to cut through superficialities and focus on what is profound and important (91).

Genoa: This point is exemplified in the intense writings of and about Melville, in the voyages of Columbus, and in Carl, whose life is a series of crises. These three are placed into dialogues with each other by Michael, whose entire "story" (the text) is a threshold dialogue. For most of the novel he is in his attic, seated at or moving near a makeshift desk which was once a door. There, during a crisis, he wrestles with questions of great importance and is on the threshold both literally and figuratively, "the

beginning of a journey such as I have never before taken" (33). The superficialities which he eliminates are domestic, which could be taken as a comment on family life.

Bakhtin: "Daring and unfettered fantasies" serve as opportunities to provoke and test the truth, to reveal ultimate questions. "Experimental fantasticality" includes "observation from an unusual point of view, from a high altitude, for example, coupled with radical changes in the scale of observed phenomena" (94-5).

Genoa: Fantasies play a part in some of the Melville texts, where they involve such ultimate issues as death (19). Many of Carl's adventures have a fantastic quality. He is connected with cannibalism, becomes a pilot with no prior training, and is stricken with bizarre ailments. Michael's manipulations of the texts also seem like fantasy, as he constructs intricate connections among matters formerly unrelated, in his pursuit of answers. Some of this is rather funny. His shifting points of view do not permit the texts to retain stability. He becomes "unstable" as well. While concentrating on the body, he experiences various sensations. He drifts into space above the house (107); his head becomes huge, "body and legs are one" (37), and he is "transformed" into a sperm cell (53). These devices focus attention on the perception of the body, on its constitution, and on the perception of "reality." Metcalf's comic touch is evident here as well, poking fun at the

super-masculine character. The transformation and reduction of Michael to a sperm cell creates a goofiness that mocks the vanity and pretensions of patriarchy.

Bakhtin: Various unusual moral and psychic states, such as insanity, "unrestrained daydreaming, unusual dreams, suicide," are represented. Their significance lies in their destruction of the "epic, tragic integrity of a man and his fate." He no longer coincides with himself, is no longer finalized. This opens up a new vision of man (96).

Genoa: We find numerous references to insanity in Melville's family, in Queen Isabella's family, and in Carl. Melville's son commits suicide. Michael's out-of-body experiences are dreamlike, taking him beyond the bounds of his "character."

To further explore the carnivalesque elements of the novel and to better understand the vision of man Bakhtin is concerned with, it is necessary to focus more here on the figure of Carl. He is in many respects a man living in the margins, where scandalous scenes and eccentric behaviour are situated. His periods of insanity and connections with the underworld mark him. He gets into fights in bars, goes to jail, and finally kidnaps and murders. He also gambles, which is a carnivalistic activity, with its sudden changes of fate and its threshold connotations (Problems 143). Carl drifts from place to place, seldom having a fixed address. He was conceived "out of wedlock" (29), that is, outside of

"proper" bounds. His writing while in the mental ward is outside linguistic bounds. His sexuality encompasses practices within the bounds of bourgeois social values (heterosexuality, marriage) and those outside these bounds, homosexuality and sado-masochism. His medical problems are always extraordinary. Carl's body is an obsession in the text. Sometimes it is attractive, with strong animal qualities; at other times it is grotesque, often monstrous. Far from reassuring, his body appears "as though composed of epicenters, randomly contiguous with no single center, the parts loose, accidentally associated" (7).

This carnivalesque body should not simply be dismissed as a crazy misfit. Carl is a man who no longer "coincides with himself." Because throughout the text a number of parallels are established between Carl and Columbus and Carl and Melville, some of these carnivalesque implications affect the other two figures as well. Carl's physicality and position as rogue are significant points which require more attention.

In one of his essays, Bakhtin discusses three prominent types from medieval parody which have great significance for the later European novel. These are the rogue, the clown, and the fool. They create around themselves their own special world, with a vital connection to the theatricality of public spectacle. They are more than they appear to be, and an essential feature they share is the privilege of

being "other" in the world. Theirs is "the right not to make common cause with any single one of the existing categories that life makes available." They see the underside and falseness of every situation (Dialogic 158-9).

Human relations are filled with hypocrisy and falsehood. The reigning ideology does not sanction "healthy, natural functions of human nature," so these are treated as uncivilized and "contraband," bringing duplicity into human life. (The term "human nature" is usually loaded with humanistic baggage which I find problematic. However, I suspect that in Bakhtin's thought, while perhaps somewhat nostalgic, it is not a pious sentiment and so repays our interest.) "All ideological forms, i.e. institutions, become hypocritical and false, while real life, denied any ideological directives, becomes crude and bestial." The rogue acts to oppose and expose convention and its associated hypocrisy. These three masks (rogue, clown, fool) are highly significant in the struggle against "the inadequacy of all available life-slots to fit an authentic human being," because they permit creation of confusion, teasing, parody of another's words, and the revelation of a personal life, even down to its unsavory secrets (Dialogic 162-3).

One major bourgeois institution whose falseness and hypocrisy is exposed through Carl (and through Melville) is the family. Far from being the harmonious cornerstone of

society, it is shown in every instance to be troubled and fragmented, breeding death and insanity. In the Spanish family Carl joins, they are busy killing each other over politics. The "family" he forms with Bonnie and the kidnapped child is cruelly parodic, a family of death.

Carl also challenges the hypocrisy in psychiatry, a significant institutionalized discourse. Because perspectives shift with the multiplicity of texts in Genoa, we lack the coordinates which allow for fixed definitions of sanity. Given Carl's experiences, one might be reluctant to simply label his response to the world as "insane," though he is clearly troubled and lives outside the bounds of conventionally correct behaviour. Michael's careful reconstruction of Carl's life and attempt to understand him by involving him with unlikely historical figures might well be seen as a parody of psychoanalysis.

I think that when Bakhtin speaks of the "authentic human being" he is by no means referring to a unitary subject, but one which exists dialogically, unfinalized, in constant interaction within itself and with the world outside it. Such a subject, decentered and not privileged in the humanistic sense, emerges in Genoa. In Carl and in other characters we find an awareness of the body, of desire, of the multifaceted complexity of the human being which includes qualities society frowns upon. This puts them in conflict with authority. We are reminded again that the

critiques of history and of identity are two parts of the same problem (Descombes 109).

Michael's attention to Carl's body has already been mentioned. He is also absorbed in describing his own sensations, and body-awareness in Melville's texts, with an emphasis on grotesque and monstrous aspects. This carnivalized body functions in part as an indicator of repression. It is important to keep in mind the problematic relation between carnival and the modern novel. I have been using Bakhtin's insights into earlier literary forms to illuminate my reading of a contemporary work. But as Allon White points out, carnival has, over the centuries, been moved from the mainstream to the margins of life. The appearance of what we may identify as carnival elements in modern texts is not necessarily a straightforwardly joyous manifestation of bawdy/bodily impulses, but a way of revealing certain repressions which have become institutionalized in contemporary society. An example may be found in Carl's war experiences, which are extensive. Although he could doubtless be described as heroic, Metcalf includes a great deal more. In the Japanese prison camp, Carl not only witnesses atrocities which appall him, but is forced to participate and at one point is made to beat one of his own men to death. He recalls, "I really lost my mind: I can't help it, it was a wonderful sensation" (127). Such admissions are greeted with revulsion by most of us, and

certainly by the establishment which bestows honours on war heroes. Official versions of history gloss over this forbidden ground, but Metcalf uncovers it.

It is appropriate to recall here Metcalf's deep awareness of ambivalence which he reveals early in the text. Remembering Carl, Michael thinks of "the meaning of the word 'Teratology,' the medical term for the Science of Malformations and Monstrosities, from the Greek 'teratologia,' meaning 'a telling of wonders'" (7). Although our contemporary use of "wonderful" seldom has unpleasant associations, Metcalf reminds us in his text that narrative is also the disclosure of the monstrous, the transgressive, the ab-normal.

II. History--Wonderfully Told

In a sense, Genoa constitutes the margins around another text which is implied. It is a work of archaeology, displaying the repressions which are pushed to the margins of the social text. Michael's status as an M.D. and fascination with teratology reinforce attention to the body while pointing to the margins, where he and his interests exist. He no longer practices medicine, working instead in an automobile plant (raising the question: which one is crazier, Carl or Michael). This refusal to practice could be construed as a kind of repression, and his crisis in the attic is an examination of what has been repressed. Perhaps

he is no longer a "healer" because to heal is to "make whole," which in its traditional sense has no more value for him. His experience of the body (84, 113-4) reveals a thoroughly discontinuous, decentered organism, swept by random intensities which modern society does not allow into its concept of wholeness. Much of his awareness is unpleasant and frightening ("a monstrous, choking fear," 110). We are left to wonder if this is so because repression made these things worse, or because he learned his fears so well. Monsters exist in the margins, where Michael relentlessly seeks them out. "I think of us as a nation of prurient neuters...relinquishing the Body (Earth), seeking to escape it, save only to peer at it naughtily" (153).

There is a historical awareness here too. Michael and particularly Carl reveal much that contemporary society prefers to ignore. In Carl we see the defeats suffered by the body, and the way it fights back. The body in the Renaissance (in Genoa's Columbus texts) does not seem to find itself struggling against quite the same restraints. However, Bakhtin points out that the Renaissance viewed the body in a different light than the Middle Ages did, and was considerably more repressive. Grotesque realism (suggested also by Carl), does not fit into the Renaissance aesthetic (Rabelais 29). And Metcalf also tells us that Pierre, a book involving incest, was published "without question-- but that was earlier, the pioneer days," while in 1900, adulterous

Master Carrie was suppressed (163). We could surmise from this that different times allow different "versions" of the body to exist. If we would know more about our history, we could look to our literature, to its inclusions and exclusions. (I do not mean to imply here that every form of behaviour should be practiced in the interests of liberation or "wholeness"; that is too simplistic. The point is that discursive conceptions of health and wholeness have both a historical dimension and social and pragmatic aspects which need to be examined.)

The intersection of history with the body in a carnivalized context is a subversive tactic, and invites us to consider a different conception of history, much as we confront here a different notion of the human subject. The treatment of history in Genoa is marked by parody, which is an aspect of the carnival attitude. For example, the extensive use of quotations, largely dealing with historical texts and themes, is a parodic device. It is unusual for a contemporary novel to consist mostly of such diverse fragments, which contribute to its appearing an avant-garde text.

In an interview with John O'Brien, Metcalf's opinions of contemporary life touch on this matter. He feels that in our time, "some historical wheel has turned, the traditional epic approach has gone hollow, irony must enter the presentation of the heroic." This historical change has

something to do with "ours being a spectator's rather than a participant's culture: radio, television, sporting-watching, the innumerable highs of drugs, TM, yoga, etc.--the image that I used earlier, in talking of Michael Mills: everything is projected on a screen, and we trip, and watch." Nowadays, "that removed, contemplative, observer's spot, that used to be the unique retreat of the artist and the poet, is now the most democratic locale: it is inhabited by everyone" (RCF 253). I don't know whether Metcalf regrets this or not, but there is a hint of Bakhtin's "discrowning" movement here, with art both losing and gaining in privilege. The fragmentation and diversity which Metcalf's spectators gaze at are different from a medieval person's experience, but as a technique they have a long history, as Bakhtin shows-- and some similarities become apparent.

In the Middle Ages, infinitely varied forms of quotation were used, raising the question of reverence or irony on the part of the quoting writer. In some cases, quotations were plainly emphasized as such, in others they were hidden, or distorted, or reinterpreted. "The boundary lines between someone else's speech and one's own speech were flexible, ambiguous, often deliberately distorted and confused. Certain types of texts were constructed like mosaics out of the texts of others" (Dialogic 68-9). The Latin literature of the Middle Ages has influenced the modern novel, "where one does not often know where the

direct authorial word ends and where a parodic or stylized playing with the characters' language begins." That "complex and contradictory process of accepting and then resisting the other's word, the process of reverently heeding it while at the same time ridiculing it, was accomplished on a grand scale throughout all the Western European world, and left an irradicable mark on the literary and linguistic consciousness of its peoples" (77-8).

Laughter as a sociohistorical cultural phenomenon present in verbal expression works through parody to break down certain limits. Historically, laughter was able to remain outside "official falsifications" which were characterized by seriousness, conventionality and hypocrisy. Language forms infused with laughter (such as parody) subject point of view to reinterpretation. "There is a continued passing beyond the boundaries of the given, sealed-off verbal whole (one cannot understand parody without reference to the parodied material, that is without exceeding the boundaries of the given context)." The effect of laughter is to strip "the object of the false verbal and ideological husk that encloses it" (Dialogic 236-7).

I think that in Genoa such parodic laughter is present; sometimes it has a bitter ring, sometimes a genuine silliness. Von Hallberg calls this a "mad" book filled with "hilarious" contrivances, like the connections Michael makes between Hart Crane and Mrs. Melville suffering from hay

fever, or biscuits associated with Carl and Columbus. However, Von Hallberg considers Genoa "more a pastiche than a parody" (182-3), and here I disagree. Metcalf is ridiculing some powerful institutions and ideological positions in this text. Laughter is his best device, since it creates no dogmas and cannot become authoritarian. It has the capability of becoming a form of critical historical consciousness (Bakhtin, Rabelais 95-7). As a lens through which we may examine questions involving history, it has great appeal.

Michael's narrative, interspersed as it is with "real" historical fragments, is a parody of historical writing which puts into question the authority of texts, both historical and literary. In the interview with O'Brien, Metcalf speaks of his feeling that "influences may be 'in the air,' so to speak, and it is possible for a writer to be influenced by books he has never read. Any writer, in a given place and time, swims in inherited currents common to other writers of the same place and time, whether he is aware of this or not." He expresses this in Genoa in the fragments of knowledge he gives to Carl, who quotes verbatim from the Journals of Lewis and Clark (RCF 237-55). Here Metcalf seems to be simultaneously affirming the importance of texts and deprivileging them.

The parody extends to characters, and Carl in some respects parodies Columbus. Columbus had courage, ambition,

a sense of adventure; he exceeded the bounds of geography, and according to one contemporary, the bounds of truth. He was greedy and ruthless, heroic and persuasive. He was also sensuous and a lover of beauty. Carl possesses these qualities as well. He is an adventurer who gambles, steals, and kills, as did Columbus. Neither man is portrayed simplistically, and neither is spared. An essential difference between them is the fact that one has been declared a madman and criminal, and the other is a cultural hero who is celebrated annually. It seems that shifting standards of judgment operate here. Columbus has been transformed, "historicized" into a hero. The parody of traditional history in Genoa reveals this kind of ideological operation which is the justification of colonialism. Parody serves to ridicule what is given. Here, the nobility of the colonialist enterprise is exposed as greed, brutality, and exploitation.

The quotation from President Reagan's proclamation (at the beginning of this chapter) clearly illustrates the popular ideology regarding colonialism. The voyages of exploration and the conquest of new lands and peoples are seen as a search for transcendental truth and as progress. Every year this is celebrated officially as Columbus Day. Ironically, even a general encyclopedia tells a less glorious tale which includes the unheroic aspects of slavery, theft and murder. Popular ideology, however,

excludes and excuses all that is unfavourable, because that would threaten cherished ideals and identities. (This is the official hypocrisy Bakhtin speaks of.) After all, Columbus "contributed to the development of America." It would not do to admit that the country is based in part on the very things it professes to abhor. The national mythology contains historical as well as physical repressions.

As for public declarations exposing these repressions, in a broad popular context the few outlets existing usually take the form of parody. An example from the 1960s comes to mind. The comedian Flip Wilson did a routine about Columbus discovering America, in which he adopts the tones of an irate "native" black woman. "She" scolds Columbus for trying to discover people who don't want to be discovered, and warns him to discover himself away from there. It was a brilliant way of showing the underlying assumptions which have governed the attitudes of Europeans (and later Americans) for centuries; and it was neutralized by being entertainment.

Implicit in this critique of (colonialist) history and ideology in Genoa we find a critique of patriarchy. Metcalf makes the connections very clear. Michael recalls his pride at the birth of his son, and compares it to the feeling a man might have in the act of discovery, gazing at the mouth of the Mississippi or Amazon (120). He never directly criticizes patriarchy, but it is implicit due to its

relation to other significant issues. Metcalf works through indirection to produce his effects, and this subtlety extends to his method of destabilizing historical texts.

In Genoa, when the authority of texts is challenged, the authority of history is also challenged. History here is like the body, discontinuous, unfinalized, unstable. It is multi-voiced and fragmented. The fragments are juxtaposed to each other, to pieces of fiction, to trivia, with none being privileged. There are several "histories," family, literary, official, and that mutant created by Michael, where all intersect. Meanings depend on perspective; as Michael shifts the position of his body and experiences different sensations, there are shifts in the quotations, contexts, geographical and temporal coordinates ("trying by changing the fundamental balance of my body, of my spine, to alter what I see..." 98). Traditional history with its closures is pitted against the carnivalesque which refuses to finalize or fix meaning and which never loses sight of the body. This is not to say that interpretive activity is absent. It seems to me that the text is carefully constructed to allow its carnival play. The repetitions, contrasts and limited continuities in the fragments (e.g. birth in Moby Dick, Michael's children) are not accidental. They appear so, in order to point to the overlooked accidental dimension of history. But now they form a text, and texts are openly

shown here to be products of manipulation and codes, as is the body.

Metcalf's concern with history is primarily centered on the United States, and he asks his questions in order to understand the American present. Even though we have Genoa and far-flung parts of the globe in this story, the focus is American. Allen Thiher has observed that "American writers are perhaps unique in their use of intertextual play as a way of affirming the space of writing as the locus for their cultural identity." He sees in Genoa a movement beyond intertextuality as play, to an emphasis on intertextuality and history, and the role of intertextuality in "the constitution of what we take to be the order of the real." The novel's underlying narrative structure testifies to the continuation of "a certain humanistic center to literature, for American writers appear far more reluctant to abandon humanistic ideology than their European counterparts" (185). Thiher may be right, but I think Genoa can also be read otherwise. Metcalf does not leave me with a comforting affirmation of man being the measure of all things. His book is too full of contradictory elements and disconcerting revelations. In his interview as well, he seems to be expressing this kind of view--"meaning, properly, is deeply encrusted, embedded, often hedged in with contradictions of itself, or at least paradoxes, ambiguities...maybe I'm a cranky Yankee, but today is a grim, drizzly December day,

and I somehow don't mind it, I feel no need to 'transcend' it, prefer it, in fact, to a land where the skies are not cloudy all day" (O'Brien, RCF 251-2). I realize that what he says elsewhere must be taken "outside" Genoa, but he seems quite consistent in mood with the novel. And I think he has moved beyond that humanistic ideology mentioned by Thiher.

III. Genealogy--An "Other" Voice

What Metcalf accomplishes by means of an artistic production is very much in tune with Foucault's theoretical essay which proposes Nietzschean genealogy as an alternative to traditional history. Genealogy records the "singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality" (139). Like carnival, it "refuses the certainty of absolutes" (153). It is opposed to the search for origins, because at the historical beginning of things is found not "inviolable identity" of origin but disparity (142). Rather, genealogy analyzes descent, which Foucault sees as "liberating a profusion of lost events" (146). Throughout Genoa there is a fascination with beginnings or sources on the part of Michael, Columbus, and Melville. "I push for a gateway, an entrance upon and beginning of things" (56). This tendency is ridiculed in the novel by the bizarre connections established among the characters. Metcalf's practice suggests, then, that we instead consider what Foucault calls descent. Using his unconventional, disjunctive method,

Metcalf reveals much about the relation between Columbus and Melville which probably was hitherto unknown. Genealogy does not restore unbroken continuities; it identifies dispersions and disjunctions. It exposes the errors which "gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us," and "fragments what was thought unified," showing the "heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself" (146-7).

Descent also "attaches itself to the body," which is the "inscribed surface of events" (147-8). ("Maybe Melville, as history, had impressed himself into the fiber and cells of which Carl was made..." 156.) Genealogy shows how "the body is imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body" (148). Besides obeying the laws of physiology, the body is subject to "rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws" (153). Historical sense holds more in common with medicine than philosophy-- surely a "marginal" theory which Michael Mills would agree with.

Genoa shows us various versions of the body in history, such as 17th century theories about reproduction (39). We see the physical effects of the voyages on Columbus and his men (95-6), his gout the "result" of his explorations (87-8). The beginning of life in the womb is interwoven with references to colonization of the Indies by convicts, who multiply like cells of scar tissue. We also see the effects

of a coal mine disaster on Michael's father, and the effects of World War II on Carl and others in the prison camp. Here is the other dimension of history; rather than famous battles or treaties or leaders it contains bodies which speak of things we do not especially want to hear.

It is not at all surprising that in the introduction to Foucault's book, Donald Bouchard speaks of genealogy as breeding monsters. As Metcalf shows, and the ambivalence of carnival demonstrates, we risk encounters with "monsters" when we operate in the margins, at the limits of discourse. It is an intriguing and painful site where discoveries are made, including that of our own "otherness." By exploring this region, Metcalf makes it clear his interests have outdistanced humanist versions of history and the self.

The human subject is not "dead," as some critics of contemporary European theory would have it; it is being reconfigured in a process that seems infinite, and it is "other" rather than "same." The effort to understand what an "authentic" human being might be requires a dialogue wherein social constructions such as the body, history, language, and power are studied for their effects on each other, and also a recognition that none of these can be accepted merely as given, as "natural."

CHAPTER THREE

One Hundred Years of Solitude

It is no longer the sleep of reason which breeds monsters and which liberates that other of ourselves, but the attentiveness of scholarship, an insomniac knowledge, and the grey patience of genealogy. (Language, Counter-memory, Practice, p.18)

Since the publication of One Hundred Years of Solitude, a great deal of commentary has been devoted to the book's treatment of history. It might be tempting to say that enough is enough, but the novel is so complex and problematic that it invites continuing re-examination of this issue. In some respects, Garcia Marquez engages us in a game that we may play repeatedly because the outcome is not predictable.

There is, not surprisingly, considerable diversity and disagreement among critics about the meaning and significance of history in this text. Their work not only contributes to an appreciation of the novel but also reveals much about individual ideological agendas for which they seek confirmation in the text. I will discuss some of these opinions here in order to provide a context for my reading, which takes a somewhat different approach, although of

course I have my own agenda and do not pretend to be objective.

To say that Garcia Marquez poses radical questions about history is putting it mildly. In this tangled and disruptive story other troubling issues are embedded like mines, keeping complacency at bay. One of these is the status of the human subject; another is the status of the text in terms of the relationship between history and literature, complicated and too important to ignore, because it involves the problem of how we read texts. The underlying question which is often invisible but against which we stumble here is-- what kinds of critics do we want to be? Garcia Marquez poses it through the lines of readers/writers/critics in the Buendia family. This aspect of his work does not seem to have received much attention; before proceeding however, it is necessary to review some critical responses to this novel.

For Carlos Fuentes this work presents the totality of history, the oral, legendary past along with the (often inadequate) official version, everything that "men have dreamed, imagined, and desired" (380). In marked contrast, Alfred MacAdam perceives an absence of a historiographic core in Latin American fiction in general (6). His approach is to disregard the historical context of the work, concentrating on its status as a verbal artifact (8). MacAdam considers eschatology the main topic of One Hundred

years. In his view, history in its current state is a lie for Garcia Marquez, and his task in fiction is to end it. For emphasis MacAdam fills his text with references to the fiction of other writers who also see the "falsity" of Spanish American history (ch. 9). While we may appreciate the insight of these writers, this critic's response to the problem they raise seems woefully inept. He overlooks the intricacies and questions which mark Garcia Marquez's work, and indulges in simplistic pronouncements.

George McMurray provides a different approach to the historical context of this novel. He summarizes events in Colombian history to show that One Hundred Years is not merely an account of imaginary occurrences but rather is filled with references to actual events. Between 1884 and 1902 liberals and conservatives fought three civil wars. Disaster in another form came with the United Fruit Company early in the twentieth century. After some very prosperous years there followed a massacre of striking banana workers and a subsequent coverup by the government (70-3). From 1948 to the 1960's "la violencia," a brutal civil war, resulted in the deaths of several hundred thousand people (21). During this time political labels lost much of their meaning (24). To foreign readers with scant knowledge of Latin America such information provides a helpful orientation, and prevents an easy dismissal of history. It makes Col. Aureliano Buendia's career seem almost rational, and reminds

us that Garcia Marquez's "magic realism" is rooted in genuine suffering and horror as well as imagination and mischievous humour. However, McMurray does not take up Garcia Marquez's invitation to play. In his evaluation, the novel contains "the belief that human values are perennial," and he talks about the "essence of...universal man" (6), tired humanist clichés which Garcia Marquez repeatedly mocks in One Hundred Years.

McMurray seems to view history as something given and not very problematic, so Garcia Marquez's use of cyclical time is interpreted as an escape from the hard realities of history. The many instances of repetition in the story exist merely to support this mythical pattern (76-7). Numerous other references to cyclical or mythical time appear in the literature about One Hundred Years, but most are confined to this limited interpretation. Earl Shorris for example calls Garcia Marquez "an enemy of history" because he has turned linear (Western) history into the "mythical circle of older civilizations" and myth negates history (98-102). Rather than just dismissing history, Garcia Marquez seems to me to be posing some hard questions about it, and inviting us to re-examine certain cherished assumptions.

To gain further insights I find myself looking also to critics who have not commented on Garcia Marquez but who are nonetheless relevant. David Carroll states that we ignore history when we take it as a given, as "the simple,

unquestioned ground for everything else," as much as we ignore it when we oppose or suppress it. And so, "the rethinking and reformulation of history and historical discourse and methodology is one of the most pressing of contemporary theoretical problems" (5). Among those who have taken up this challenge, feminist critics play an important role; two of these make provocative assertions about One Hundred Years.

Patricia Tobin argues that linear time is patriarchal and a particularly Western phenomenon (12), and also that Garcia Marquez subverts the authority of the father in this novel. Quoting Duque, she states that for Latin Americans history simply is not linear and Garcia Marquez recognizes this (169). Her argument becomes contradictory. Tobin connects patriarchy with linearity and implies that cyclical/mythical time is not linked to patriarchy. However, Latin American society and the world of Macondo are still patriarchal, so it would seem that a cyclic temporal structure is in itself not a critique of or in opposition to patriarchy. She also claims that "the typical Marquez character does not expect the past to predict the future" but lives fully in the present (168), but fails to say just what constitutes a "typical" character. Ursula, who is a principal character, frequently expects the past to predict the future and dreads it.

Something more is at stake than the opposition between linear and cyclic time, and the critique of patriarchy which plays itself out in the novel offers an opening despite some inconsistencies in Tobin's argument. She shows how patriarchy is attacked through the Buendia family--the seventeen Aurelianos deprive paternity of any metaphorical significance; the absence of orderly descent is evident in the repetitions of names, physical traits and behaviour; the incestuous and other mixed-up relationships undermine stability (183).

The implications here extend beyond a consideration of history to our notion of the human subject, with which conceptions of history are entangled. David Carroll argues for a link between "family" and continuous history. If the home is seen as a closed space with a substantial center, the disorder of memory can be overcome. All crises, disruptions, absences and deaths become inconsequential because the history of the family is continuous. It requires "all voices of the past, all discourse, and thus all history have their roots in the subject as origin and first principle."

This notion of the family requires discourse to be unilinear; yet fiction often challenges this position. Discourse contains noise as well, which threatens the family history (150). Noise is abundantly present in Garcia Marquez's portrayal of the Buendias. They go on after a

fashion, yet lack a coherent centre and are plagued with disruption and discontinuity. A crucial distinction between Tobin and Carroll lies in the models of history they use, she the linear and cyclical, he the linear and the shapeless, ruptured non-form. The latter is often overlooked, perhaps because it questions the dominance of Western metaphysics. But Garcia Marquez mischievously offers all these models of history. Tobin is quite right when she refers to his embrace of "everything" in this novel (191). However many ingredients he throws into this book, they do not share equal status, and "discontinuous history" makes a significant difference, as later discussion will show.

To return to Tobin's argument, two key points on her agenda are to show that the dismantling of patriarchy (her "genealogical imperative") leads to the dissolution of binary oppositions, and that there is a feminist solution to patriarchal decline. Although these are provocative ideas, they are undermined because Tobin herself falls into the trap of binary thinking.

She seems to suggest that pre-patriarchal and post-modern cultures have in common an absence of the father. Ancient maternal cultures are presented idealistically as loving, nurturing, cooperative and group-oriented; in short, they appear to have been perfect. She also implies that since Garcia Marquez has rejected the world of the fathers, he offers (through Ursula) an

alternative world of the mothers (186-7). Her excellent point that "patrilineal projects assume a transcendent, self-contained individual who activates history by overcoming everything alien to himself" (188) attacks the authority of the patriarchal subject and centred self but she replaces this with the authority or privileging of the female in the form of an idealized maternal culture, and we find ourselves once again using binary (patriarchal) models. Maternal cultures are supposedly not dominating and power-oriented, so they may "fit" with Garcia Marquez's invitation to contemplate the possibility of having no one in charge, but I doubt that he is overthrowing the father in order to substitute the mother. I don't see even the suggestion of an idealized matriarchal culture as an alternative in this text. That is not to say the author is unsympathetic to women. Many readers must appreciate that moment when the aged Ursula permits herself an instant of rebellion after all the hardships of her years and bellows "Shit!" (235-6).

I think that Garcia Marquez is not just subverting patriarchal authority-- he is subverting authority in its many guises. Everything that Tobin says about Ursula is accurate-- she nurtures, she opens her house and heart to many. But another prominent mother, Fernanda, is mean and rigid, closing every door Ursula has opened. She does not fit neatly into Tobin's matriarchal solution, but she helps

to show that nothing is sacred in this novel. Motherhood, the family, birth, death, religion, education, knowledge, the State, the military, science, industry, history-- all are treated with irreverence, their authority undermined. Why this is done remains an open question. I see it as a way of allowing many voices (languages) to enter into the discussion rather than just the sanctioned few. Rather than being destructive and amoral, this device encourages a potentially endless series of explorations into the complexities of life, not to mention an appreciation of difference which can be liberating.

More interesting than Tobin's utopian speculations are her insights into the relationship women in the novel have to history. She notes that the word as written is the word of the Father. But another form of communication both ancient and modern is the oral story, product of numerous and anonymous storytellers. The new Latin American novel, and this one in particular, tends to celebrate and appropriate this form, partly in revolt against the "genealogical imperatives inherent in traditional" forms (189). She does not mention, perhaps because it is so obvious, that none of the Buendia women are ever seen to (seriously) read, write, or interpret texts, while a number of the men do so. The manuscripts of Melquiades are, among other things, the major "historical" documents in the novel, and several Buendia men at different times devote themselves

to studying these papers. This suggests that a certain kind of (official) historical discourse is closed to women. However, other forms of historical knowledge exist.

Susanne Kappeler argues that Ursula is the first historian in the book. (Kappeler claims that patriarchy knows no history because it conceives itself as timeless-- a debatable assertion.) In her old age, after the onset of blindness, Ursula re-examines the events in her life and that of the family, and changes her opinions about a number of people. She has the courage of interpretation, analyzing that long stream of people and events (148-63). I do not agree that this is the only "legitimate" history in the text, but it is a type, that of the storyteller. In the oral tradition the storyteller's gender is unimportant. (This is commonly considered as history in a mythic sense, and certainly many readers have commented on this quality in the novel.) Interestingly enough, Kappeler ignores another "historian", Fernanda, who actually plays that role before Ursula does. Fernanda also operates in an oral tradition; her kingdom of the past is patriarchal and not likely to please Kappeler. Frequently associated with death, Fernanda's discourse is not treated kindly by Garcia Marquez. In showing two types of approaches-- Ursula's which is critical and Fernanda's which supports the status quo--he reminds us that no form is neutral.

Keeping this in mind, I think it is also necessary to explore a diverging path and instead of seeing a negation of history through the emphasis on myth, let us drop such dualisms from consideration. Instead, let us allow that perhaps history is another form of myth, and that Garcia Marquez's novel invites a rethinking of these categories. There is no doubt that the novel offers a critique of history, from the beginning where the Buendias flee from the past to the end where history seemingly stops. A crucial factor here is repetition--of events but also of names and characteristics. People seem to be copies of each other. One is led to think that the task at hand is a twofold critique of history as the Western myth and of identity. This problem has recently engaged several French philosophers whose work is discussed by Vincent Descombes (109). Taking such a position is not necessarily a denial of history, but an opportunity to rethink it (110).

Lévi-Strauss has observed the strong resemblances between mythological thought and political ideology. A myth tells of a founding event belonging both to a certain time (its origin) and to all time (it is regularly celebrated). In France this is the place held by the Revolution. (In One Hundred Years, the revolutions have a similar status.) Semiology offers a critique of ideology. Institutions maintain themselves to the extent to which they maintain their signifying (representational) systems. If it is true

however that the signifier is exterior to the subject, then political discourses are analogous to mythical narratives. The power of institutions over individuals is related to the ascendancy of language. Myths and ideologies function "to absorb the heterogeneous, to give meaning to the senseless, to rationalize the incongruous...to translate the other into the language of the same." But shared language and forms that aspire to universal meanings are falsehoods, hence the move to deconstruct the dominant language in the West-- the logic of identity (Descombes 106-9).

In the novel the Buendias' compulsion to turn the other into the same goes to bizarre lengths. It is ridiculed in the obsession with incest and in the existence of the seventeen Aurelianos, sons of the Colonel, who are methodically exterminated by the State. Jose Arcadio (Ursula's husband) finds consolation in the dream of the infinite rooms where each room he enters is the same. The Colonel feels that "the vicious circle of that eternal war" always finds him in the same place (161). If we view the Buendias with some detachment, we find their lives marked with much instability and discontinuity as well. Their response to it is the imposition of sameness; it is far from being recommended, as we might infer from the decline and destruction of the family.

Because of Garcia Marquez's sensitivity to issues of politics and ideology, and because of his background and

historical context as a Latin American, one might expect to find a strong Marxist orientation in this novel, and Marxist readings are certainly possible. But just as he allows neither patriarchy nor matriarchy to rule, he does not exalt one "ism" or orthodoxy above the others. There seems rather to be a leaning toward a Nietzschean view which in Klossowski's explanation takes the supposition of eternal recurrence to mean "that there has never been a first time (no origin) and that there will never be a last time (no end of history)." (If One Hundred Years is read as apocalyptic, my claims here become unacceptable, but I think the close is ambiguous; Macondo is being destroyed as Aureliano reads, but as long as he keeps reading, he "lives.") There are no origins, only copies. (Who was the first José Arcadio or Aureliano? They don't exist in the text except as oblique references to ancestors of principal characters.) The further implications of this refusal of absolute authority are that there are no facts, only interpretations, no authentic versions of texts, only translations, no truth, only "pastiche and parody" (Descombes 182). That is a fitting description of One Hundred Years, a novel which presents itself as a version, a translation of a text purported to be not only in Sanskrit but also in the form of a difficult code. The identity of this text refuses to remain fixed-- it is a historical narrative which is also a prophecy, and wears the masks of fiction, of myth, and of

history. Its parodic qualities are obvious and don't need belabouring.

The negation of an origin ultimately points to the liquidation of the identity principle, so that the appearances of identity must be taken as masks. "The same is always an other posing as the same, and it is never the same other that is concealed behind the same mask." Here lies a world of masquerades, parody, and Heraclitean flux (Descombes 183), which could include Macondo. Perhaps the favourite tool for parody is literature, "the best plaything that had ever been invented to make fun of people" (Garcia Marquez 357).

If we indeed see the suggestions here of a rejection of Western metaphysics, then we need to ask what more that implies for "history." According to Descombes, "eternal recurrence consists in leaving history, that is, in the active forgetting of the past" so that new "histories" may be created (184). Garcia Marquez offers a similar prospect in One Hundred Years. Instead of religious apocalypse, traditional moralizing, nihilism or hopeless self-reflexivity, he opens up new social/textual spaces to be mapped, that is, historicized. It is important to recognize that this new project which disclaims the primacy of origin and identity is not necessarily awash in a limitless relativity which precludes values, but these must be sought and examined. Some of Bakhtin's work on dialogue

is pertinent here. He believes that "there is neither a first word nor a last word." The contexts of dialogue are limitless, but it is in these contexts that meaning emerges, and continues to emerge (Clark 348-50).

If Garcia Marquez is asking us to re-view history, he is not alone. In a recent book David Carroll devotes considerable attention to this issue. He refers to the prevalent idea of history as a nineteenth-century concept. And just as the "new" French novel has broken with its nineteenth-century antecedents, there is a "New History" which rejects the old concepts. Two prominent exponents of this thinking are Fernand Braudel and Michel Foucault (119-20). They and others of the Annales school have made significant headway in producing alternatives to the dominant notion of history, and some of their ideas may illuminate a reading of Garcia Marquez. Foucault questions the priority of the (human) subject, which he links to temporal continuity. For him history consists of discontinuities (122). In One Hundred Years discontinuities abound despite characters' emphasis on repetition, from the insomnia plague to the wars to madness to sudden arrivals and departures.

Braudel's approach also takes issue with the priority of the subject. He suggests that history can be conceived of in terms of several temporal series, that is times rather than the time of history. There could be geographical time

(man in relation to his surroundings), social time (groups), and individual time (particular people and events). This decomposition of history implies the "decomposition" of man "into various and contradictory characters" (123). To some this may be a negative and threatening development, to others it may be liberating. It is possible to see different kinds of time operating in One Hundred Years, with its temporal twists, loops and gyrations, and perhaps not surprisingly in a work of "magic realism." The early days of Macondo with their "timeless" sense correspond to Braudel's geographic time. Also present is that structure of social time as Macondo develops into a community. Characters and events have a different temporal rhythm. In Melquiades' room, time does not pass in the same way as it does in the rest of the house. When Ursula is old she feels time passing differently. Whether Braudel's framework is perfectly congruent with the novel's uses of time is not crucial-- the novel's plurality of times is significant. Such devices serve, as Braudel proposes, to continually submit history to a process of self-questioning (124).

These devices also undermine the concept of history as homogeneity. The assumptions which unify traditional history are those of consciousness, subjectivity and continuity. Foucault regards these as ideological concepts which order history and put it in the service of the dominant institutions (125). It would be unfortunate if this position

were construed as hostile to the individual as simply a human being; rather, it attacks the sacredness of "the individual" as a lie which cynical centers of power have long used for their own ends. One Buendía understands it only too well. After fighting his wars the Colonel rejects all government representatives and secludes himself. He refuses to be made a hero, historicized, and destroys all relics of his early days. When the government announces plans to celebrate an anniversary of the Treaty of Neerlandia and to honour him, the Colonel becomes furious. He knows that the State is using this version of history and this "noble individual" for its own ends. In response he attempts to "forget" in the Nietzschean sense, to be like the peaceful beasts, because he knows the painful disadvantages of official history. García Márquez offers no answer to the inevitable question of what history may be if the traditional view is rejected, but fills his novel with voices that speak of possibilities.

As if that were not enough, García Márquez directs his questions not only at traditional configurations of history and the subject but also at the figure of the reader/critic who must be concerned with problems of transcendence. One could argue that the subject and the critic are the same issue, certainly Foucault's critique of transcendental consciousness (Carroll 121) is relevant to either, but is

seems that the reader/critic is being singled out in order to make some comments about literary criticism.

In the course of her discussion about the suspension of dualistic thought in current fiction, Tobin remarks that "hierarchy and subordination in service to transcendence seem to have reached a dead end in Western literature" (209). This may be so for artists but hardly for many critics. An interesting survey by Frank Lentricchia, for example, reveals certain patterns among Anglo-American and French theorists whose work is complex and diverse. Whatever their perspectives, most have a tendency to privilege literature so that it transcends history. For Brooks historical time is "an unproblematic eternal now" which ensures "the freedom and autonomy of literature" (110). Frye's critique of the New Criticism is equally idealist and relies on similar transcendence. Saussure seeks to prove that language is a "self-governing system free from ...historical determinants" (67). Poulet "seeks and claims an isolated, privileged, and transcendent space of human consciousness--as the goal of critical reading" (69). His view of the book stresses the priority of the subject and a refusal of history (75). The structuralists who posit cultures as heterogeneous produce a criticism which embraces universals, giving systematic models to explain diversity and emphasize the "unity" of Western culture (105). Even Barthes, who recognizes the historical nature of discourse,

seeks/finds transcendence in the form of "jouissance" through his "text of bliss" which suspends all signified values (144). The Yale group of "Derrideans" are presented as misinterpreters of Derrida's work which contains a historical consciousness they prefer to ignore. Emerging as the "hero" of Lentricchia's account is Foucault (not strictly speaking a literary critic), who makes positive use of Derrida's theories. Instead of the "isolate and elite privilege" of literary discourse (158), his work proposes a messier model. Whether one studies history, literary history, or a national literature, one must first undo "disciplinary isolations of discourse" and national boundaries, and then search for the places where "literary, philosophical, scientific and religious modes of writing find a point of contact" (205).

I have treated this group of theorists in a terribly reductive manner in order to make a point. To question the autonomy of literature which many of them favour is not to insist that literature is historically determined in a vulgar Marxist sense. To be suspicious of transcendence is not to sweepingly dismiss it, but it does seem to hold a privileged place, and in the spirit of One Hundred Years one feels obliged to reevaluate icons. Dominant theories and attitudes affect the reading and interpretation of texts, and they usually come from the university, an institution involved in the production and perpetuation of ideologies.

Although there are no universities in Macondo, García Marquez offers us several "scholar" figures who do not escape parody and through whom certain critiques are directed.

The first of these is José Arcadio who isolates himself in order to conduct scientific experiments which reveal facts that are already known (to others). The remaining examples devote themselves to the study of books and share the common trait of isolation (solitude) taken to an extreme. Their activity in itself is not necessarily negative (study after all requires some isolation), and to show this we have the case of the Colonel who gave up reading his poetry and then began the practice of drawing a chalk circle around himself to prevent close human contact. Meaning depends on context, and in this novel contexts keep shifting. There is however a strong suggestion that transcendence and solitude are interconnected and often unhealthy. As a young man, Aureliano Segundo shuts himself up and attempts unsuccessfully to decipher the manuscripts. During this time he is "drawn into himself" (179). His isolation and studies end when his involvement with Petra Cotes begins. Much later in life, José Arcadio Segundo installs himself in Melquiades' room to study in complete solitude, indifferent to everything but the parchments. When Ursula comes upon him, he presents a dismal sight (and smell). At this point Ursula is blind, so the description of

his appearance comes from a narrative voice clearly expressing displeasure. "The only thing visible in the intricate tangle of hair was (sic) the teeth striped with green slime and his motionless eyes" (309). Hardly a flattering portrayal of the seeker after knowledge. He is caught up in contradictions-- study requires isolation, but carried too far it makes him a pathetic creature leading an empty life. This is not to imply that every intellectual experience must be translated into practical activity in the "real" world, but the value of José Arcadio's endeavors is being questioned. Perhaps the severest criticism of him is that he does not question them at all.

The last Aureliano (Babilonia) is the most scholarly. He spends his childhood studying in Melquiades' room, "absorbed in his reading," so that by the time he reaches adolescence he knows many things "by heart," possessing "the basic knowledge of a medieval man" but totally ignorant about his own time (328). He learns Sanskrit and spends years patiently translating the manuscripts, studying other languages, never leaving the house, deep in his solitude. When he finally emerges, it is to enter the wise Catalonian's bookstore where he encounters new friends and new viewpoints. Up until now there has been a split between mind and body, between pursuit of knowledge and of carnal pleasures, and the division is never presented favourably. Under the benign influence of the Catalonian, Aureliano

combines lively discussions on diverse topics with visits to brothels. He even begins to realize the playful and irreverent aspects of literature. Later he abandons the manuscripts when he and Amaranta Ursula begin their affair. When he finally returns to the parchments and is able to decode them, they tell him of his imminent destruction. This could be a comment on the futility of his life's work, on the power of a text, and on the magical properties of the reading act itself. Like the others, he seems to have a blind spot about the ideological implications of his activity, which is, after all, a study of history/literature. They fail to ask enough questions of themselves, and to allow the activity itself too privileged a space. Perhaps Garcia Marquez is indicating in his way, as Nietzsche did in The Use and Abuse of History, that history should not be deified but rather used to enhance life.

The wise Catalanian presents an alternative approach. He is not idealized, but seems to express well the subversive spirit of the novel. As a former professor of classical literature who has rejected affiliation with any institution or orthodoxy, he is a man who questions authority, even his own. After he returns to Europe his letters to the young men in Macondo urge them to leave the town, "forget everything he had taught them about the world and the human heart...shit on Horace...wherever they might be they always remember that the past was a lie, that memory has no

return..." (370). This man whose "fervor for the written word" is "an interweaving of solemn respect and gossipy irreverence" (368) encourages his "students" to live in the world rather than separate themselves and their ideas from it, and to entertain a healthy skepticism.

The attention given in the novel to the reading and study of texts underlines the importance of this activity. On the last page categories collapse as Aureliano reads a historical text which is also fiction-- the novel, and thus becomes a reader of Garcia Marquez's book like the rest of us, as well as a character in it. What one makes of this is not just an "academic" issue, but touches deeply held beliefs and assumptions. Critics who subscribe to absolute forms of knowledge as expressed in traditional notions of history or literature are being mocked here, and can be expected to produce readings which neutralize the issue.

As readers we are caught in ambiguities. Reading is a solitary activity and a dialogue with the voices (or languages) in the text at hand and other texts; it is physically passive and one of our most common expressions of the will to knowledge. This will to knowledge usually remains unexamined and admired, but Garcia Marquez warns of its dangers, as does Nietzsche. According to Foucault, the Nietzschean historical sense enables a transformation of history into a different form of time and it opposes "history as knowledge" (160). Historical consciousness

appears neutral, but it is an aspect of the will to knowledge which also has its violent, disturbing aspects. The will to knowledge does not achieve universal truth--it multiplies risks, dissolves the unity of the subject, and demands sacrifice. It is not limited by the finitude of human cognition, rather "it loses all sense of limitations and all claim to truth in its unavoidable sacrifice of the subject of knowledge" (162-4). Here transcendence can be dangerous, not only for the theorist in his study or an amusing Buendia character. The will to knowledge harbours dangers to what we may value highly, and yet is necessary for this book to have been produced and read. To identify limits that may not exist could be as destructive as denial of all limits. Garcia Marquez often tests the limits of "reality" in this novel; his purpose is subversion rather than transcendence. He is thumbing his nose at us, teasing those who feel compelled by their will to knowledge to explore the many directions which his book takes. The novel constantly requires us to question limits and authority--including our own. It is a playful reminder to readers and critics to be humble and laugh at their pretensions. In Macondo, no one is fully in charge, and no single theory will allow us to encompass that world.

Garcia Marquez once stated that his book is totally lacking in seriousness, that he only wanted to tell the story of a family which lived in terror of incest and tried

hard to avoid begetting a child with a pig's tail (McMurray 107). A "serious" reading should borrow the spirit of that remark, admitting that the sheer pleasure derived from this novel surpasses the dubious experience of producing (and reading) critical commentary. A reader who identifies, among the book's many messages, the dismantling of traditional history and the subject along with their ideological supports which may be oppressive but at least are familiar, may be caught feeling both dismay and delight. Garcia Marquez seems to suggest a lighthearted response. After all, the story does not end cleanly, the last Buendia does not finally disappear but suddenly is sitting in the reader's (any reader's) place, leaving us on the edge of something that requires further exploration-- an inexhaustible dialogue. It brings to mind the words of Rilke (himself no stranger to solitude), "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart...Try to love the questions themselves."

AFTERWORD

The novels of Barnes, Metcalf, and Garcia Marquez offer us inexhaustible resources, and the dialogue within and around their texts is by no means over. As Bakhtin said, and I like to believe, "every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival." I have explored only a few avenues here, and realize that a great deal more remains to be said.

One could, if remaining within the critical framework used here, consider the carnivalesque elements and grotesque body in Nightwood and One Hundred Years; the dialogic imagination of Barnes and Garcia Marquez; and the reader/critic in Genoa. I rather hope that my discussions have implied some of these possibilities. One could also extend the borders of this study to other literary texts and genres, including works within the canon and those which are marginalized. I think it is especially important not to overlook the latter. Some possibilities which come to mind are Kathy Acker's The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula, Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi, Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy, Heinrich Boll's The Clown, William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying, and Shakespeare's history plays. Film studies could also prove a fruitful and provocative field for exploration.

A dilemma which always faces us is the knowledge that the critical strategies we use are bound to privilege certain readings and exclude others. All I can do here is acknowledge it, and continue to work toward other readings. In that spirit, I have tried to remove these novels from their respective classificatory "ghettoes" (lesbian, avant-garde, Latin-American/foreign). Most of all, I hope that in the midst of the critical and theoretical discussions it remains clear that these are marvelous novels which amply reward the reader.

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