

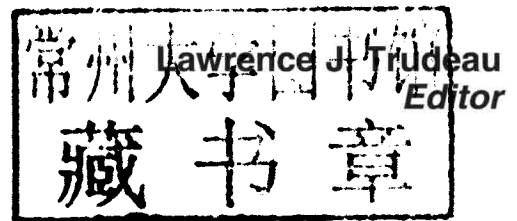
Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 294

Volume 294

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



**Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism,
Vol. 294**

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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. The great poets, novelists, short-story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey of an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Volumes 1 through 87 of TCLC featured authors who died between 1900 and 1959; beginning with Volume 88, the series expanded to include authors who died between 1900 and 1999. Beginning with Volume 26, every fourth volume of TCLC was devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers. With TCLC 285, the series returns to a standard author approach, with some entries devoted to a single important work of world literature and others devoted to literary topics.

TCLC is part of the survey of criticism and world literature that is contained in Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (LC), *Shakespearean Criticism* (SC), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (CMLC).

Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the author's name (if applicable).
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication information of each work is given. In the case of works not published in English, a translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is a published translated title or a

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- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Citations conform to recommendations set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (2009).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** describing each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

Citing *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as Modern Language Association (MLA) style or University of Chicago Press style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*. Ed. Reginald M. Nischik. Rochester: Camden House, 2007. 163-74. Rpt. in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 206. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 227-32. Print.

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Nightwood

Djuna Barnes

(Also wrote under the pseudonym Lydia Steptoe and Dobrujda) American novelist, short-story writer, playwright, journalist, and poet.

The following entry provides criticism of Barnes's novel *Nightwood* (1936). For additional information about Barnes, see *CLC*, Volumes 3, 4, 8, 11, 29, and 127, and *TCLC*, Volume 212.

INTRODUCTION

Nightwood is the best-known work of Djuna Barnes (1892–1982), though it has earned a reputation for obscurity due to its stylized language, at once archaic and avant-garde. Since its original publication, the novel has come to be recognized as an innovative experiment in the Modernist form. Though punctuated with melodramatic and sensational scenes, *Nightwood* relies less on plot than on giving voice to “impossible people,” characters consigned to living on the margins on account of their non-normative identifications and desires. Because of Barnes's frank treatment of same-sex desire, the novel is considered a pioneering work in queer literature, written in an era when homosexuality was typically regarded as deviant and even criminal.

The novel was completed in 1933 and rejected by publishers multiple times. In its third revision, *Nightwood* was accepted by T. S. Eliot at the London house of Faber and Faber and published in 1936 with Eliot as editor. Barnes herself provided the model for the character of Nora Flood, and she based Nora's lover, the promiscuous bisexual Robin Vote, on her own real-life lover, American sculptor Thelma Ellen Wood. Barnes refused, however, to identify *Nightwood* as a lesbian novel. In his 1983 biography of Barnes, Andrew Field (see Further Reading) quoted her response when asked about the autobiographical force behind the novel: “I am not a lesbian, I just loved Thelma.” Though unquestionably an important influence on lesbian fiction, the novel resists, according to many critics, the idea that sexuality can be put into such clearly defined categories. Circling around moments of degradation and abjection, and set in cities such as Paris and New York, *Nightwood* begins as a story of spirit in crisis and ends as one of love torn between estrangement and obsession.

PLOT AND MAJOR CHARACTERS

Nightwood's opening chapter begins with the genealogy of Felix Volkbein, the son of an Italian Jew who has rein-

vented himself as an Austrian baron. Felix suffers from a sense of disconnectedness, which gives him an urge to “bow down” before Europe's aristocracy. In the early 1920s, he attends a dinner party in Berlin in the company of circus artist Nora. They meet the Irish-American Matthew O'Connor, a doctor given to elaborate discourses on life's spiritual and social complexities. When their host throws everyone out, Felix and Nora exit with the doctor. After Felix bids them goodnight, O'Connor and Nora go to a bar, where he drinks at her expense. The second chapter follows O'Connor and Felix in Paris. At a café, O'Connor again plays the raconteur, dwelling on the subjects of nations and ethnicities. When a boy from a nearby hotel asks him to help a lady who has fainted, the two men make the call together. The young woman, Robin, is described as “heavy and disheveled” but alluring. Felix, in the days to come, pursues her. Longing for a son to pay homage to his family's past, he asks Robin to marry him, and she agrees. He takes her to Vienna, and then to Paris, only to realize that she does not meet his expectations. She wanders off on her own, sometimes for days on end. Though she bears him a son, she confesses, “I didn't want him,” and then abandons them both. When seen next, Robin is in Nora's company.

The scene shifts in the third chapter to New York, where Nora hosts an avant-garde salon. One night in 1923, while attending a circus, she meets Robin and takes her home. They soon begin living together in New York before heading to Paris, where they take a house and fill it with circus and theater remnants. Again, Robin begins to wander. During her absences Nora is left with a sense of “interminable night,” an agony heightened when she discovers Robin in the arms of another woman. The next chapter introduces Jenny Petherbridge, a woman who, unable to find her own great love, becomes a “squatter” in the great loves of others—in this case, Nora's love for Robin. One night in 1927, Jenny entertains a crowd that includes O'Connor and Robin. She is jealous to see Robin in close conversation first with a young English woman and then with a much younger girl, Jenny's so-called niece. Brought to tears, Jenny viciously attacks Robin. Shortly after this crisis, Nora and Robin separate and Jenny and Robin leave for the United States.

In the fifth chapter, Nora late one night intrudes on the doctor, who is lying in a miserable room dressed in women's night clothes and a wig, with rouged face and painted lashes. Nora, with a sense that “the night does something to a person's identity,” asks him what to do about her love for Robin. He holds forth on the nature of the night as a locus of terror for lovers, eventually offering her the image of

herself, Robin, and Jenny fatally locked together like animals whose antlers are entangled. The sixth chapter returns to Felix, whose son, Guido, is now a stunted ten-year-old. Felix considers a life in the church for Guido and writes to the pope, though with no hope of a reply. Preparing to journey to Vienna, Felix visits O'Connor and recalls a visit from Jenny, who came to him to learn more about Robin. Felix asks the doctor what will become of his son and Robin. Sometime later, back in Vienna, he bows to the cousin of the late Czar Nicholas one night in a café, feeling "that the great past might mend a little if he bowed low enough, if he succumbed and gave homage."

O'Connor visits Nora in the next chapter and learns that she writes to Robin obsessively. Nora wants to know what will become of herself and Robin. The doctor declares that he has become "the greatest liar this side of the moon" by helping people like Nora: "telling my stories to people like you, to take the mortal agony out of their guts." She recalls the night she confronted Jenny and parted from Robin. The doctor claims that she confides in him only because he is "the other woman that God forgot." He calls Robin a "wild thing caught in a woman's skin." Angered, he leaves Nora's house for a café, where he rages drunkenly. "What people!" he screams. "All queer in a terrible way." He is tired of constantly having to explain, advise, and console. The final chapter follows Robin and Jenny as they arrive in New York. Robin again begins to wander, frequenting railway terminals and boarding trains. Jenny, like Nora before her, becomes hysterical in response to Robin's wandering. Meanwhile, Robin travels to Nora's home, where for several nights she circles the house and sleeps outside. One evening, Nora hears her dog barking as it runs away from the house. When she follows it, she discovers Robin with the dog in a dilapidated chapel. The dog, hackles raised, is ready to attack. When it barks, Robin barks back; when it howls, she howls and laughs. The novel ends with the image of Robin and the dog collapsed together on the ground.

MAJOR THEMES

Nightwood has been criticized for beginning with a heavy emphasis on Felix and the burden he feels about his Jewishness but then abandoning this particular crisis once the novel's focus shifts to the devastation wrought by Robin upon Nora. Thematically, however, there is substantial continuity from the early to the later chapters, especially in terms of Felix's crisis regarding what it means to remember and what it means to forget. The barony he inherited from his father is a sham, as fabricated as the family portraits designed to bear witness to a European rather than a Jewish heritage. Meanwhile, what drives Felix is the desire for a son, an heir who will look back nostalgically on a family line that never really existed. Felix's father set in motion a longing after a past—and paid homage to a certain vision of the past—that exists only to the extent that the heart of the matter is ignored, or shrugged off and forgotten.

A comparable dichotomy marks the conflict between Robin and all her lovers, particularly Nora. What gives Robin license to move so freely is her capacity to forget everything and everyone, while what characterizes Nora is her obsessive remembering of everything about her relationship with Robin. *Nightwood* casts Nora as the embodiment of humanity, burdened painfully and maddeningly by memory, while Robin's refusal to remember suggests an arguably less tormented animalistic existence.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Nightwood appeared to mixed reviews—lauded for its eloquence, style, and insight into the human condition and criticized for its complexity, morbidity, and pretentiousness. As noted by Georgette Fleischer (1998), "*Nightwood*'s initial critical reception was divided, interestingly, in response to the novel's morality." While the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, quoted by Daniela Caselli (2009), called it "one of three great prose books ever written by a woman," American literary critic Philip Rahv, whose review for the *New Masses* magazine is discussed in Jane Marcus's 1991 essay "Mousemeat: Contemporary Reviews of *Nightwood*" (see Further Reading), accused Barnes of exploiting rather than honestly depicting her sexual subjects.

Many critics have explored *Nightwood*'s experimentations in form, particularly its deviations from novelistic conventions. Joseph Frank (1945; see Further Reading) helped inaugurate this strain of criticism with a reading that put Barnes's novel at the center of Modernists' attempts to replace sequence and history with forms of simultaneity and myth. According to Alan Singer (1984), *Nightwood* plays down obvious structural elements such as plot, setting, and character, striving instead for a fluid style marked primarily by a constant play of language. Mary Wilson (2011) argued more specifically that *Nightwood* disturbs, both formally and thematically, the images and ideas of house and home that have conventionally structured the novel as a form. Victoria L. Smith (1999) and Merrill Cole (2006) investigated the novel's preoccupation with elements that conventional narratives cannot represent. Smith, for instance, proposed that *Nightwood* relies on figural language, images beyond literal meaning, to approach forms of absence and loss that cannot be tackled directly. For Cole, *Nightwood* is a historical fiction attempting to access that which is conventionally omitted from historical accounts: the "uncanny"—Sigmund Freud's term for "the irruption of the unconscious into social reality."

Nightwood has long been characterized as a path-breaking work of lesbian literature. Frann Michel (1989; see Further Reading) explored the novel's lesbianism, arguing that *Nightwood* discusses gender through style in order to "inscribe and foreground the contradictions of gender definitions." Many feminist readings have applauded the

novel for its cogent critique of patriarchal ideology and for its emancipatory designs. Susan Gubar (1981) considered *Nightwood's* representation of cross-dressing as a radical challenge to conventional gender hierarchies. Reading *Nightwood* as a Modernist anticipation of Postmodern feminist theories, Ann Kennedy (1997) identified a liberating impulse at work in the text's deviation from linear and nostalgic modes of storytelling.

David Aitchison

PRINCIPAL WORKS

The Book of Repulsive Women: 8 Rhythms and 5 Drawings. New York: Bruno Chap, 1915. (Poetry)

A Book. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1923. Rev. ed. *A Night among the Horses.* New York: Liveright, 1929. (Plays, poetry, and short stories)

Ladies Almanack. Paris: Privately printed, 1928. (Prose)

Ryder. New York: Liveright, 1928. (Novel)

Nightwood. London: Faber and Faber, 1936. (Novel)

The Antiphon. London: Faber and Faber, 1958. (Play)

Selected Works of Djuna Barnes: Spillway/The Antiphon/Nightwood. New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1962. (Novel, play, and short stories)

Spillway. London: Faber and Faber, 1962. (Short stories)

Creatures in an Alphabet. New York: Dial, 1982. (Poetry)

Smoke and Other Early Stories. Ed. Douglas Messerli. College Park: Sun and Moon, 1982. (Short stories)

Interviews. Ed. Alyce Barry. College Park: Sun and Moon, 1985. (Interviews)

New York. Ed. Barry. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1989. (Journalism)

At the Roots of the Stars: The Short Plays. Ed. Messerli. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1995. (Plays)

Nightwood: The Original Version and Related Drafts. Ed. Cheryl J. Plumb. Normal: Dalkey Archive, 1995. (Novel)

Collected Stories. Ed. Phillip Herring. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1996. (Short stories)

The Book of Repulsive Women and Other Poems. Ed. Rebecca Loncraine. New York: Routledge, 2003. (Poetry)

Collected Poems: With Notes toward the Memoirs. Ed. Herring and Osias Stutman. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2005. (Poetry)

CRITICISM

Susan Gubar (essay date 1981)

SOURCE: Gubar, Susan. "Blessings in Disguise: Cross-Dressing as Re-Dressing for Female Modernists." *Massachusetts Review* 22.3 (1981): 477-508. Print.

[In the following essay, Gubar considers *Nightwood* among other Modernist feminist artworks that engage with cross-dressing as a means of disturbing male-female hierarchies by inverting gendered norms in clothes and costume.]

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.

Deuteronomy 22:5

Poor mixed rags
Forsooth we're made of, like those other dolls
That lean with pretty faces into fairs.
It seems as if I had a man in me,
Despising such a woman.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, VII

It was while teaching in the Indiana's Women's Prison that I became aware of the truth embedded in so many of Isak Dinesen's stories, specifically her conviction that, while men can and should find in their trials a blessing in disguise, women must make disguise itself a blessing.¹ When I went to the prison for the first time, to teach an English course,² I faced an audience ostensibly composed of country and western singers, cover girls, streetwise pimps and lanky cowboys. In spite of their outlandish appearance, as if to confirm the prison as an eerie model of our society's anachronistic system of sex-role socialization, these women had passed through an "Admittance Room" that resembled nothing so much as a Victorian parlor, complete with thin-legged writing desk, mirrors, dainty chairs, and curtained walls. This parlor was consistent with the entire prison structure in which the women were "framed": once they "admitted" belonging in the parlor, the women were photographed, and locked up in prison blocks called "cottages," where they were referred to as "ladies" and written up for such unladylike activities as fighting, cursing or dancing. In this setting how and why had their clothes turned into costumes, and such indecorous costumes as that?

Their pallor and their inactivity, as well as their "rehabilitation," which consisted primarily of cosmetology and laundry, seemed all too reminiscent of the claustrophobic lives of women in the 19th century, just as the elaborate costumes they created with the aid of these feminine crafts recalled the strenuous self-presentation that has obsessed women throughout this century. Not really intending to "pass" for the characters they played, the women in the prison seemed to be involved in an elaborate response to confinement, for their costumes were a survival strategy,

even a form of escape: unable to alter their imprisonment, these women transformed themselves; the place stayed the same, but they changed, each of them becoming a succession of different people. The inmates of the Women's Prison in Indianapolis can help us understand how and why costuming has a special place in female consciousness and culture. What the arts of the women prisoners suggest is that clothing plays a crucial symbolic role in the response of women to their confinement within patriarchal structures.

Certainly, at the turn of the century, when the uniform of the lady was undergoing rapid alterations, many women artists were as extravagant in their masquerades as the women inmates: Isadora Duncan posing as a Greek Goddess in the Acropolis and Anaïs Nin dressed up as a caged bird in pasties seem as self-consciously fictionalized as stately plump Gertrude Stein or Radclyffe Hall tempting confusion with Dorian Gray.³ While male modernists like Hemingway, Yeats, and Eliot were doubtlessly also poseurs, women in the 20th century have had a much greater range of options than men with respect to clothes. In this respect, too, they resemble the elaborately garbed women in the Indianapolis Women's Prison who were taking advantage of the only privilege they have which is denied male prisoners—the right to wear what they please. Just as the women inmates escape confinement by appropriating costumes that define freedom for them, female modernists escaped the strictures of societally-defined femininity by appropriating the costumes they identified with freedom. By the turn of the century, moreover, many identified male clothing with just such a costume of freedom.⁴

Cross-dressing in the modernist period is therefore not only a personal or sexual statement on the part of women; it is also a social and political statement that exploits the rhetoric of costuming to redefine the female self. As in the prison, passing is not the point, although many women did dress to pass in the Paris of the 20's and 30's, as the brilliant photographs of Gyula Brassai illustrate. Among the women artists to be discussed here, however, cross-dressing becomes a way of ad-dressing and re-dressing the inequities of culturally-defined categories of masculinity and femininity. If "man is defined as a human being and woman as a female," as Simone de Beauvoir has argued, "whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male."⁵ But this means, conversely, that at least one way woman could define herself as human was by determining to imitate man. This is why clothing emerges as a pervasive political issue in the suffrage movement, as well as a persuasive literary image in women's art during the interwar years. Paradoxically the very group who wanted woman to remain feminine might have been responsible for suggesting this strategy to feminists like Alice Stone Blackwell who found themselves constantly reassuring anti-suffragists that "The same fearful prediction, that women would be turned into men, has been made before each successive step of the equal rights movement."⁶

In modernist literature and painting by women, the female cross-dresser figures conspicuously as a heroine of mis-rule: most simply, this heroine is a woman warrior whose efforts at potency motivate her attempt to prove herself as good as a man; but such presumptuous aspirations can plunge the cross-dresser into a tragic sense of contradiction between her inescapably fallen female flesh and her elegantly and aristocratically masculine attire; sometimes, however, this glamorously Byronic cross-dresser modulates into a being who manages to transcend the dualism of sex-role polarities, calling into question the categories of culture, specifically the category of gender upon which female socialization depends. These three aspects of the cross-dresser—woman warrior, Byronic hero, and androgyne—are what I will trace here. "Inversion"—as the psychologists of the period call it—is most simply an attempt by women to invert the traditional privilege system that lends primacy to men. But inversion goes through a series of displacements, as it is translated into a synonym for perversion and a means of con-version and sub-version.

"What a relief it is to be freed from chignon, extra braids, frizzes, curls, rats, mice, combs, pins, etc., etc."⁷ Dr. Mary Walker exclaims in the middle of her chapter on dress in the first of two books she devoted to the political, medical and social situation of American women in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century. Dr. Walker is an important starting point for any consideration of female cross-dressing because, living from 1832 to 1919, she supplies some of the links between this century and the last, even as she points us toward the political origin of this literary subject and strategy for women. In the 1850's, Dr. Walker wore the Bloomer outfit which consisted of a loosely fitted tunic (or coat dress) reaching below the knees over pantaloons. Along with such fellow suffragists and personal acquaintances as Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Dr. Walker was convinced of the political significance of costuming for women, as her creation of *The Mutual Dress Reform and Equal Rights Association* illustrates.

Like Amelia Bloomer, Mary Walker fought not only for women's right to dress as they please, but also specifically for clothing that would allow freedom of movement, as well as equal distribution of warmth and arrangement so that as little vitality as possible would be expended in carrying it about. In *Hit* (1871) and *Unmasked; or the Science of Immorality* (1878), she argued on hygienic grounds against the dirt of long skirts, the elastics cutting off circulation on the legs, the compression of vital organs by tight-lacing, the fire hazards of large crinolines, the threat to the unborn, and the crippling of feet from small shoes, arguments which had become commonplace in both England and America by this time.⁸ But she also reasoned from decency, ridiculing men's notions of modest female dress as the cause of women's vulnerability to sexual attack and abuse. At least one pair of cartoons from *The New York Times* shows Dr. Walker being arrested for an outfit that is far more modest than the hoop-skirt then in vogue. Significantly she even claimed to have

invented rape-proof underwear that would also discourage (if it could not prevent) seduction.

Harassed by the law and by neighbors, ridiculed by some newspapers for what they euphemistically called her "garmenture of dual form," Dr. Walker was appalled by the weight of unnecessary cloth carried about by the respectable Victorian lady in England and America.⁹ She would have agreed with Susan B. Anthony: "I can see no business avocation, in which woman in her present dress *can possibly* earn *equal wages* with men"¹⁰ [emphasis hers]. Dr. Walker believed that fashionable clothing prevented women not only from doing work but from concentrating on it, for women's clothes kept them "unnaturally excited, or in a condition to be easily excited sexually." For this reason,

While bodies are caged in the petticoat badge of dependence and inferiority, minds and souls are subject to evil, psychologizing wills and cannot command themselves; whereas crowns of strength, joy and sufficiency, with choice of place in the exercise of power await the Unbound Woman.¹¹

The issue of work, specifically war work, is what first signals the significance of men's clothing for women. Dr. Walker's trousers were obviously suitable for her medical career during the Civil War, a time which her biographer calls "one of the happiest epochs of her kaleidoscopic career. Rebuffs from top brass did not obviate the fact that she was needed almost anywhere she chose to open her medical case."¹² In *Hit*, Dr. Walker's emphasis on the martial arts of women like Joan of Arc, Margaret of Anjou, Boadicea, and Isabella of Spain matches the taste for danger, exertion and patriotism that won her the only Medal of Honor given to a woman. Actually it is not until the approach of World War I, however, that Walker ostentatiously dressed up in male costumes not just for comfort and dignity, but to appropriate and display conventionally male attainments and status. From the 1890's until her death, Mary Walker dressed herself increasingly in masculine evening dress, in a man's coat and pants, stiff collar and tie, with a tall silk top hat and her Medal of Honor in a prominent position. As elegant as a diplomat's costume or a general's uniform, her outfit had itself clearly become a badge of honor, symbolic of the proud time when she had been traded, "man for man," for a Confederate soldier.

One fashion historian, Lawrence Langner, has argued that men originally devised divided garments to give themselves mobility and undivided skirts to hamper women in their movements, a gender distinction that simultaneously assured the continuity of the race by announcing and guaranteeing that women would be non-combatants.¹³ Certainly, like Deborah Sampson in the Revolutionary War, or Emilie Plater, Polish heroine of the 1831 insurrection, or Philis de la Charce, who protected Provence from invasion by the Duc de Savoie in 1692—all legendary women who dressed as or like men—Dr. Walker was a singular anomaly as a

female participant in the Civil War. During World War I, however, a much greater percentage of women worked in the war effort [illustration 2]. The Great War furnished a great opportunity to nurse the men at the front and to "man" the coal mines, ammunitions factories, and farm machines at home.¹⁴ It makes perfect sense that the suffragists in England hailed the war, re-dedicating their energies and renaming *The Suffragette* newspaper *Britannia* in 1915, for the war that destroyed so many men supplied women with work and work clothes, as well as the political freedom which both represented.

As if to explain the mystique of adventure and power that associates male clothing so closely with strength born of combat, Anaïs Nin has the heroine of *Ladders to Fire* (1946) explain that the first time a boy hurt her, she went home and dressed in her brother's suit. This "costume of strength" makes her feel arrogant, for "to be a boy meant one did not suffer." Lillian wishes she could find relief from anguish in action:

All through the last war as a child I felt: if only they would let me be Joan of Arc. Joan of Arc wore a suit of armor, she sat on a horse, she fought side by side with men. She must have gained their strength.

But all of Lillian's armor lies broken around her. "The mail had melted, and revealed the bruised feminine flesh."¹⁵ A more fantastic and, therefore, more optimistic version of the woman warrior fascinated the most important woman writing science fiction during the interwar period: C. L. Moore published a series of stories from 1934 to 1939 about Jirel of Joiry, a "warrior lady" who is literally "mailed"—both armored and masculinized. A version of *la fille soldat* of folk songs,¹⁶ Jirel of Joiry reminds us that, while such a bid for power is not often allowed women in our culture, it has generally been viewed with a considerable degree of tolerance, when not actually glamorized.

Indeed the attractive figures of the woman warrior reveals that, as Robert Stoller, Deborah Feinbloom, and Natalie Davis have pointed out,¹⁷ the asymmetrical status accorded men and women in our culture is provocatively illuminated by the different attitudes we inherit toward cross-dressing in the two sexes. The goddess Athena, wielding the shield and spear of the male warrior, gains esteem by deriving her identity from her father, as does Ovid's Caenis who chooses to become a man (so as to avoid another rape like that inflicted by Poseidon) and who simultaneously receives the gift of invulnerability that leads her/him to become active in martial pursuits.¹⁸ But when Hercules is dressed as a female and placed before the distaff, he is pathetically weakened, emasculated, because he loses the prerogative and power the male genitals and garb symbolize: authority, primacy, independency, and creativity.

The male cross-dresser is labeled a transvestite, ridiculed as a kind of clown (*Charley's Aunt*, *Some Like It Hot*), condemned for indulging in irrational anarchistic impulses

(*Heart of Midlothian*, Bloom in *Nighttown*), or judged as a psychopath (*Psycho*), unless he is using his disguise as a con for effecting escape (*Huckleberry Finn*) or for seducing women (Sidney's *Arcadia*). While the male is degraded by imitating a woman, characters like Shakespeare's Rosalind (*As You Like It*) have always delighted male authors and audiences alike, although male actors imitating females obviously had their own reasons for enjoying such roles. Especially after the first wave of feminism in Europe, however, such attractive female characters as Meredith's Bella Mount (*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*), Hardy's Eustacia Vye and Sue Bridehead (*Return of the Native*, *Jude the Obscure*), Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Hemingway's Lady Brett Ashley (*The Sun Also Rises*), and Truffeau's "Tomas" (*Jules et Jim*) testify to male fascination with the female cross-dresser, as do the many fans of Sarah Bernhardt, who played male roles on stage, and Marlene Dietrich, who wore masculine clothing in a number of popular films.¹⁹

Clearly such seductive cross-dressers can function as sex symbols for men, reflecting masculine attitudes that range from an attempt to eroticize (and thereby possess) the independent woman to only slightly submerged homosexual fantasies. But for women the inversion of cross-dressing is not always or even primarily erotic, as we have already seen. Virginia Woolf's inclusion of photographs of judges, guards, and bishops illustrates in *Three Guineas* (1938) how male uniforms could become first a symbol and then simply a strategy for climbing the hierarchical ladder of sexual stereotyping. From Rosa Bonheur who received authorization from the Paris Police to wear male clothing in 1857 to Dorothy Azner who chose such feminine presences as Lucille Ball and Merle Oberon for her films in the 1930's, all the while herself looking directorial and masculine, women have assumed trousers and ties to facilitate and authenticate their work.²⁰

But if cross-dressing implicitly accepts the inevitability of such stratification, it presents special problems because it simultaneously assumes that, as a female, woman is necessarily condemned to inferiority. When, for example, Willa Cather spent her youth dressed in masculine trousers, with her hair cut short, calling herself "Willie," and proudly displaying herself in a Civil War cap, she was presumably just a "tom boy," like the Harding girls in *My Antonia* (1918). For, like her contemporary Dorothy Richardson, Willa Cather's attraction to male clothes seems well articulated by the young women in *The Tunnel* (1919): they are exhilarated by the physical freedom conferred by knickers ("you could knock down a policeman"), especially by the creative strength knickers seem to confer (you feel "like a poet though you don't know it"). But Richardson's heroines are quite sure that they "wouldn't have a man's—consciousness, for anything."²¹ On the other hand, Willa Cather seems far more aware that male dress could alienate her from conventionally female roles and activities. Indeed, this complex realization that she dramatized through her

clothing in her youth was profound enough to inform not only the themes but even the structure of her mature fiction, for she repeatedly celebrates maternal characters through the voice of a masculine persona. In *My Antonia*, for example, Cather is both Antonia, the female Muse, and Jim Burden, the male author, both the natural world she celebrates and the cultural world that gives her the language with which to celebrate.

What I am suggesting, then, is that the male narrator is at least metaphorically a kind of mask worn by the female writer to attain the trappings of authority. It was, after all, the male pseudonym in the nineteenth-century that protected the woman artist behind a masculine public identity. George Eliot, who considered inauthentic women's writing "an absurd exaggeration of the masculine style like the swaggering gait of a bad actress in male attire,"²² was explicitly addressing this dilemma, as were the Bells (the Brontës), George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne), Michael Field (Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper), and Ralph Iron (Olive Schreiner) implicitly. The woman who associates authorship with authority and masculinity may feel that in becoming a writer she is involved in an attempt to disguise herself as a man, whether or not this is a "vain denial," as Elizabeth Barrett Browning claimed of George Sand's name.²³ Elaine Showalter has recently shown that male characters in 19th-century women's novels represent extensions of the female self that had to be disowned as improper or unfeminine.²⁴ With more personal freedom in their lives, female modernists tended to be fairly extreme both in actually playing the male role and in their reaction against such camouflaging.

When Muriel Rukeyser revised an earlier poem in which she had portrayed herself as a male god, she condemned her earlier evasion: "No more masks! No more mythologies!"²⁵ What her poem seems to imply is that even male mimicry that presents itself as an act of assertion can, paradoxically, partake of "feminine" self-denial, even self-hatred, for the male facade or persona may be an attempt born of shame to deny, hide, or disgrace the female self. This objection was strenuous enough to yield the title for a popular anthology of recent women's poetry. But just as influential a group of modernists accepted the necessity for male masks on female faces, although such disguises might irreparably filter the timbre and tone of women's voices.

When we turn to the women painters of the modernist period, we find two of the most important—Frida Kahlo and Romaine Brooks—portraying the pain the male costume produces on and in the female figure. In their different ways, both reveal how—as an erotic strategy—cross-dressing can free the woman from being a sex object for men, even as it expresses the mutilation inextricably related to inversion when it is experienced as perversion. For these two artists, the cross-dresser is no longer a woman warrior. Instead she is a self-divided, brooding, Byronic figure who dominates the center of their canvases,