

***Shattered Objects: Djuna Barnes's Late Modernism.* Edited Elizabeth Pender and Cathryn Setz. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019. Pp. 248 (cloth).**

Reviewed by Tim Armstrong, Royal Holloway, University of London

This handsomely-produced and carefully-assembled collection bespeaks a certain maturity in “Barnes studies,” while also pulling off the trick of recognising that term’s problematic status, given the author’s mocking resistance to all that we associate with author studies: a consolidated academic community, a firm sense of literary periodicity, a relatively stable aesthetics stance, a coherent world-view. It provides a balanced selection of essays, covering Barnes’s entire career, and considers the status of her texts, her reception, her style, and the central issue of the human and bestial in her works. Certain familiar preoccupations emerge—anachronism, the politics and problematics of identity, generational inversion, early and late style—but the collection also takes in less familiar subjects like Barnes’s pilgrimage through queer film-making and her dialogue with the drawings of Thelma Wood. Though it has some of the hard-to-focus diversity of Barnes’s own output, it is a collection that both consolidates and refreshes its field.

The collection’s first section, “Modernism in Print,” focuses on textual materiality. It includes Alex Goody’s discussion of Barnes’s early journalism and Elizabeth Pender’s examination of early short stories in *A Night Among the Horses* (1929) and their extensive late revisions in *Spillway* (1962). Goody argues that Barnes’s pulp journalism for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and other papers cannot be separated from her modernist writings, both characterized by a refusal of distance and authorial privilege, of a clear distinction between fact and fiction, and of a firm moral (or “reform”) position. Goody also makes a strong argument for viewing Barnes’s early journalism “in situ,” surrounded by a clutter of advertisements and news items rather than cleansed of context as it appears in Barnes’s own scrapbooks and in the standard reprints. Pender examines Barnes’s early multi-generic work, comparing it usefully at one point to Toomer’s *Cane*, and sees a certain stylistic retrenchment in the later versions of her stories, produced by a post-war context in which modernism itself was being re-seen and regularized by the New Criticism.

The second section considers the “Human and Beast.” With an eye on the wider issue of human rights, Rachel Potter’s account of *Nightwood*’s outsiders explores the blurred middle ground between beast and human, and the inverted hierarchies often involved. Bruce Gardiner’s pleasingly digressive examination of *Creatures in an Alphabet* considers the mess and disorder of Barnes’s puzzling bestiary as a “chimerical” mixing of identities and creatures in a text which both evokes and undermines the tradition and order of both bestiaries and the Linnaean taxonomy. Joanne Winning’s essay on Barnes’s illustrations and the “lesbian modernist grotesque” has a certain tentativeness in the face of its multiple categories (all of which have garnered attention from Barnes scholars), but interestingly teases out relations between Barnes’s work and that of Thelma Woods in terms of a self-consciously “dissident worldmaking” in which hands, limbs, and faces all take on a queer disproportion.

In the section on “Style,” Drew Milne extends some earlier work on modernist “wit” in noting how the distinction between those with wit and those without structures *Nightwood*, and seeing in it a baroque critique of the solace of laughter. Barnes’s text is, in this account, among other things a critique of Eliot’s understanding of irony and his disavowal of the social witticism of his own early work. Cathryn Setz’s close reading of Barnes’s late verse in relation to the metaphysical poets and to the much more recent Alice Meynell is aimed at depicting a less antagonistic and “recalcitrant” intertextuality than is usually seen in Barnes’s relation to tradition; it also discusses the “jamming” of tenor and vehicle in her metaphors as indicative of a fallen language. Setz considers *The Antiphon* in terms of a metaphysical mixing of the religious and the secular, and Barnes’s final making and unmaking in her short poem “Rite of Spring.” Caselli’s essay acts as a kind of keynote, reflecting on her own decade of work on Barnes and on Barnes’s complex and allusive style in *Ryder* (1928) and other texts, relating her to the unholy pairing of Laurence Sterne and Dante. Tyrus Miller meditates knottily on Lukács, Hegel, and on Adorno’s account of late style in order to illuminate Barnes’s play with anachronism and the refusal of meaning and teleology, an index of her larger refusal of an easy place within modernism. The admission of “damage” and textual mutilation in Barnes’s work is, for Miller, what allows it to register epochal change, while her beginning, in *Ryder*, with a form of late style signals her disruption of classical notions of literary career in a literature of self-undoing.

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The final section of the book is “Modernist Afterlives.” Melissa Jane Hardie’s essay “Djuna Barnes: The Flower of Her Secret” is, as its title suggests, a bravura intertextual and intermedial mash-up, tracing *Nightwood* through the book’s appearance (as object or “prop”) in Almodovar’s film, Bertolucci’s *Sheltering Sky*, and other films. As she shows, a different notion of citation is needed both here and when Barnes herself is referenced in film, more focused on the uncertainties and productivity of translation across languages and media. But the essay also meditates on Barnes own cosmopolitan flow across borders, from and back to home in New York. Julie Taylor’s essay provides an excellent overview of responses over many decades to the knotty problem of Barnes’s relation to a lesbian, queer, or feminist historiography, given her resistance to any historical “placing” or identification. Taylor’s own view is centred on the notion of “contagious infection,” in which the subject is potentially overwhelmed by an intense contact which cannot easily be pigeonholed as “sympathy” or communication across time; a shudder, an odour; perhaps even the basis of a “community without identity.”

The strongest impression left by these essays is the challenge Barnes poses to our understanding and ordering of modernism—a challenge Peter Nicholls appropriately takes up in an “Afterword,” discussing once again Eliot’s response to *Nightwood*, in terms both of its chronology (like Wyndham Lewis, Barnes appears to be at the beginning and end of modernism) and of its impossible desire for a more stable aesthetic in the face of Barnes’s challenging opacity. The variety of ways into her work in current criticism—she is considered here from the perspective of identity, politics, historiography, philosophy, human rights, genetic criticism, the study of literary magazines, of metaphor and visual image—suggests the diversity of the field in which the authors we place within modernism now find themselves positioned. A collection like this underscores the difficulty of synthesis, and even of a coherent mapping of the field. But that is in a significant sense where modernist studies is: dealing with disciplinary boundaries which constantly overlap with other fields, working with the structure of authorial studies in an expanded canon, and, at the same time, recognizing the pull of wider contents and histories which unsettle the notion of authorship.

Finally, in all these essays the need for a firmer textual basis for formerly “marginal” writers is implicit as an issue, with Pender (in particular) usefully

helping the reader differentiate texts and editions in a way that points to further work on Barnes's corpus. The fruits of many scholarly visits to the Barnes archive at the University of Maryland are always apparent, but they also signal a slightly privileged and closed world in which the question of access to materials is an issue. In this light, the planned full edition of the *Letters* will be of particular help to students of Barnes, given that so much of her thought is vividly carried in her correspondence. The involvement of a number of these editors and contributors in that edition suggests it is in capable hands.