# Awe and Wonder: The Curious Wunderkammer of Djuna Barnes's Nightwood

Christopher Bussmann

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## ABSTRACT

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Djuna Barnes's novel Nightwood contains characters engaged in the maintenance of "fantastic museum[s]" (5) that highlight their incongruous relationships to one another and to hegemonic power. These collections are similar in manner and design to the Renaissance Wunderkammer, or Wonder Cabinet. This thesis explores the circus and museum metaphors of Barnes' novel in relation to this Renaissance form of human and object display with emphasis on the personal collections of Nightwood's characters, the impact of these collections on character identity construction, and the subsequent relationship of each character to such hegemonic power structures as the church and aristocracy. An historic synopsis of the Wunderkammer and the ramifications of its human /object display will be given in order to clarify the position that Nightwood itself is a Wunderkammer in which its characters and their collections are perpetually on display.

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## Chapter I : Unlocking the Fantastic Museum

The characters in Djuna Barnes' novel Nightwood are all collectors and performers engaged in the maintenance of "fantastic museums."[1] Yet their collections lack the definitive, categorical hierarchies that would qualify them as museums in the post-Enlightenment era. Instead, in their privileging of legend over history, Nightwood's disorderly collections are more akin to the Renaissance Wunderkammer or Wonder Cabinet: a microcosmic reflection of each character's personality and relation to the greater macrocosm of the novel.

Attention has certainly been paid to specific qualities of Nightwood's collections. Both Meryl Altman and Mairead Hanrahan have investigated the "fantastic museum" of Guido and Hedvig Volkbein in the context of Barnes's questionable treatment of Jews within the novel, while Laura J. Veltman has examined Matthew O'Connor's medical cabinet in the hope of reconciling his contradictory status as both Catholic and homosexual in the novel. Robin Blyn has scrutinized the majority of Nightwood's collections for evidence of a freak show aesthetic, while Laura Winkiel has compared the items in Nora's collection to those kept by Barnes in Paris. Yet none of these scholars has fully explored these collections to see whether or not they fulfill the requirements necessary to be considered a museum. This thesis argues that these collections do not and that Barnes's circus and museum metaphors instead encapsulate the qualities of the

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[1] Barnes, Djuna. Nightwood. New York: New Directions, 1937 (5). All subsequent references to this novel will be given in parentheses within the text of this thesis.

Wunderkammer that is central to the novel.

Djuna Barnes uses the historical instance of the Wunderkammer to link her characters' personal bric-a-brac collections and personal interrelations. As Barnes was heavily informed by the work of Renaissance scholars and writers, including such noted Wunderkammer enthusiasts as Robert Burton and Sir Thomas Browne, during her composition of Nightwood (Herring 219), it is not surprising that the Wunderkammer, so central to Renaissance thought, would indirectly appear in the circus and museum metaphors of her novel and that, overall, the novel itself forms a sort of Wunderkammer in which Barnes's characters and their collections are permanently on display.

This thesis will explore the interrelated dynamics of performance and collection in the circus and museum metaphors of Nightwood as typified by the Wunderkammer and its differences from the post-Enlightenment museum concept due to the Wunderkammer's lack of hierarchical structure and its privileging of legend over history (a theme the novel significantly takes up). An historical synopsis of the Wunderkammer's human and object display indicates how such collections reflect the marginal status of Nightwood's characters in relation to hegemonic power as informed by a Foucauldian reading of the power dynamics at work within the novel.

The Wunderkammer was a product of the late Renaissance, a sixteenth and seventeenth-century vehicle for human and object display. It predates the modern museum by almost two centuries and most certainly formed the

foundations of that institution. What differentiates the Wunderkammer from its more modern counterpart are the principles according to which the objects were collected, sorted, and displayed. Whereas the modern museum strives to preserve, record, and catalog the genealogies of its artifacts for the edification of its patrons, the purpose of the Wunderkammer was "[t]o stun, more than to order or to systematize" (Purcell 17). The spectacle of the Wunderkammer lay in its ability to invoke wonder. This wonder refers both to the objects themselves (as wondrous) and the state of wonder those objects induced in their audiences (Weschler 77). According to Stephen Greenblatt, "[t]he expression of wonder stands for all that cannot be understood, that can scarcely be believed. It calls attention to the problem of credibility and at the same time insists on the undeniability, the exigency of experience" (14-16). It is this "exigency of experience" that the Renaissance collector capitalized on, hoping to invoke an awe similar to that invoked by the mysteries of God's creation.

Following the injunction of Francis Bacon, who insisted that personal collections ought to contain all that was created by both God and man (Weschler 76), Wunderkammers were intended to create a microcosm, a world within a room (as Barnes's novel strives to represent within itself the greater world outside its covers). The purpose of a microcosm was to "establish or emphasize the affinities that existed between things, to reveal the fundamental unity that lay beneath this welter of multiplicity" (Mauries 34). Similarly in Nightwood, Nora's diverse collection of circus-themed objects, for example, is meant to correspond

directly to her singular relationship with Robin.

For Renaissance collectors, the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm represented the very limits of human knowledge and understanding, a phenomenon beyond human control. And while the macrocosm was considered infinite, the microcosm was deemed a finite collection of all that was contained within that macrocosm, and Renaissance collectors thus strove to collect and contain as much of it as possible (Foucault, Order 31) in order to create a narrative of power in which collectors could demonstrate their mastery over the inherent mysteries of nature. Through the Wunderkammer, Renaissance collectors also attempted to establish a correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm and to contain as much knowledge of that correspondence as possible within a single space (Mauries 43). Problems, however, arose concerning the accuracy of this correspondence given the vast diversity of Wunderkammer objects, their incoherent, disassociated presentation, and the fabrications present in a variety of the Wunderkammer's more curious items.

As Renaissance collectors became increasingly aware of the impossibility of creating correspondences between a multiplicity of objects contained in a finite space, decisions were taken to cloak this impossibility in a veil of the mysterious, bizarre, and grotesque (Mauries 43). Renaissance collectors thus became lost in the ambition to create not only "the biggest [and] the most beautiful" but also "the weirdest and the most unusual" collections (Purcell 17). Typical

Wunderkammers were stocked with a startlingly vast and diverse array of material: mummified corpses and skeletons, fossils, saints' relics, live human freaks, plants and animals, ceramics, textiles, jewelry, metalworks, automata, scientific instruments, paintings and sculptures, ethnographic material, astrolabes, maps, books, bric-a-brac, and fabricated objects (Mauries 51, 105-110). In their encyclopedic desire to collect and contain any evidence of the inherent mystery of the microcosm, Renaissance collectors ruthlessly pursued objects that would lend their Wunderkammers an overwhelming aura of awe and wonder greater than those of their fellow collectors. In Nightwood, Jenny Petherbridge demonstrates a similar ruthlessness in her desire to outdo Nora in her pursuit of objects capable of swaying Robin to remain in the stasis of her company.

Adding to the aura of awe and wonder was a lack of coherence in the Wunderkammer's human and object display. Presentation was almost entirely random. Displays were unsystematized, something that, as part of the Enlightenment project, the modern museum concept strove to remedy by sorting the Wunderkammer into multiple, manageable, hierarchical categories: "the museum as an institution. . . organiz[ed] the wonder cabinet. . . by analyzing it, regrouping the random and the strange into recognizable categories that [were] systematic, discrete, and exemplary," including separating the Wunderkammer displays into exhibits of Art, Nature, and Science (Mullaney 60-62). Prior to this, Wunderkammer objects were strewn on the floor, hung from the ceiling, or presented on wall shelving with little thought as to their orientation, and such

also is the nature of the majority of Nightwood's collections, particularly Matthew O'Connor's. The only guiding principle was to create a tableaux of overwhelming juxtaposition and disassociation capable of inspiring awe and wonder (Foucault, Order 131). As Mauries explains, the "[c]ramming together [of] so many objects within such a confined space had the effect of creating a dizzying foreshortening of the perception. . . ; this also had the even more striking effect of throwing into sharp relief the unique qualities of each piece and the marvelous variety of each collection" (66). No category separated the marvelous from the odd, the beautiful from the mundane. This lack of hierarchical differentiation is also found throughout both the circus and museum metaphors of Nightwood. As Foucault writes, "the disconcerting effect of the proximity of extremes, or. . . the sudden vicinity of things that have no relation to each other. . . has a power of enchantment all its own"(Order xvi). This enchantment extends to the museum metaphors of Nightwood, reinforcing not only the (dis)organizational principles of the Wunderkammer apparent in each character's collections but also the greater culture of which Nightwood's characters and collections are a part. According to Barbara Benedict, Wunderkammers "reinterpret[ed] culture, sociability, and even human nature by relative, not absolute principles" with a preference for disorder since "no order of value can encompass all phenomena" (13). This also disorder spreads itself throughout each of Nightwood's collections and into the lives of their creators. To organize the Wunderkammer would be to disturb the enchantment of awe

and wonder attributed to the mystery of God's creation and to the prestige of the collector who had gathered and displayed it.

Given their diverse nature, Wunderkammers could also assume and absorb other structures unto themselves. One particularly famous collection, that of Peter the Great, was equal parts "library, museum, anatomical theater, scientific research center, and astronomical observatory. . . built to exhibit Peter's bizarre collection of anatomical preparations, natural history objects, artificial curiosities, ethnographic rarities, and freaks of nature" (Anemone 585). Human and animal displays, precursors of the circus freak show, were common in many Renaissance Wunderkammers (Mauries 111). Examples include Peter's exhibition of giants, dwarfs, cripples, hermaphrodites, conjoined twins, two-headed sheep, and six-legged roosters (Purcell 18-20). Such exhibitions generated not only awe and wonder but also fear and terror in an audience that both reveled in and recoiled from these seemingly unclassifiable human object displays. Similar characters, such as the legless Mademoiselle Basquette and Nikka the tattooed bear fighter, are on display in Nightwood's pages for the enjoyment of internal spectators and readers alike. They generate similar curiosity in Felix and Frau Mann when Matthew O'Connor tells their tales to them.

Peter's collection reflected its creator, revealing the Tsar's ambition to collect all knowledge and master all nature. As well, in its live human exhibits, Peter's collection served as a display of his ability to rule his subjects and was

thus as much a source of power as a demonstration of it (Anemone 585). As Mauries writes, the personality of any collection is highly dependent on the personality and temperament of its creator (51). Peter the Great's is only one of many examples. The Hapsburg Emperor Rudolf II established in Prague a collection that matched his temperament "in its immense richness and lack of purposeful direction" (Weschler 83). Rudolf's collection, the biggest in Europe at the beginning of the seventeenth-century, housed three palatial sized chambers full of scientific and natural objects (including a live Egyptian hippopotamus), over eight hundred paintings, and a library. Rudolph himself lorded over his collection, both in person and in the form of a giant wax portrait that hung over the door (Mauries 164 -175). The personalities of Nightwood's collectors are also stamped upon the face of their collections. Jenny's collection of second-hand objects, for example, reflects a squatter's temperament and confirms O'Connor's opinion of her as a "looter" (Nightwood 98) who steals what she displays.

Theft was also a common occurrence among more unscrupulous Renaissance collectors. The examples of Peter and Rudolph are a reminder that forming a Wunderkammer was an exercise in imperial power. Sir Walter Cope, a sixteenth century British explorer and member of Queen Elizabeth's Society of Antiquaries (Mullaney 60), housed an enormous collection within his London apartments, including "such wonders as an African charm made of teeth, a felt cloak from Arabia, and shoes from many strange lands. An Indian stone axe. . . ;[t]he twisted horn of a bull seal. An embalmed child. . . [and] a unicorn's tail"

(60). There were even some holy relics taken from a Spanish ship that Cope himself had helped capture during the Spanish Armada (Weschler 76). Thus the majority of items in Cope's collection were appropriated through the exercise of British imperialism and could therefore be considered stolen (MacGregor 149). The opening of trade routes throughout the New World, Africa, and the Far East created tremendous opportunities for plundering among the more wealthy and ambitious collectors. Explorers and traders were often handsomely rewarded for filling their cargo holds with almost anything they could get their hands on, for even the most mundane of foreign objects would appear fascinating and exotic to European eyes (Weschler 77). And if these collectors could not steal whatever exotic items they considered necessary for their Wunderkammers, they simply invented them, fabricating an elaborate fiction to mask an item's lack of authenticity and genealogy much as Guido Volkbein does with his objects in Nightwood.

One particular item in Cope's collection, the unicorn's tail, demonstrates the lengths to which certain collectors would go to fabricate items that, like Matthew O'Connor's stories, privilege legend over history. Matthew O'Connor's elaborate fictions and grand stories purposefully prompt awe and wonder much as many Renaissance collectors stooped to lies and forgeries to expand their collection's capacity to inspire awe. Thus a unicorn's horn, for example, was usually the twisted tusk of a Narwhal (Weschler 81), and most Wunderkammers were stocked with such items. Catalogs of Wunderkammers reveal a collage of

objects outside the accepted spectrum of historical knowledge: mermaid skeletons, dragon's tails, unicorn parts, and other objects whose sources of inspiration frequently lay outside the European Christian hegemony. Fabricated objects such as mermaid's skeletons crossed the binary divide of human and animal (just as some of Nightwood's characters cross the binary divides of gender and race[2]) in a manner considered by Wunderkammer audiences to be abnormally grotesque (Mauries 43) and therefore intensely interesting (as Nightwood's grotesqueries may be to some of its readers).

Wunderkammer catalogs often listed objects that, in Foucauldian terms, were considered abnormal, including "mosses growing on the outside of shells, plants in the antlers of stags, a sort of grass on the faces of men" (Order 18). Two of the most popular abnormal human exhibitions included men with horns and a woman who laid eggs (Bondeson 123-126, 52-55). Thanks to a booming relic trade, abnormal specimens circulated though Europe and were in high demand among collectors since they helped maintain audience interest and collector prestige (Mullaney 63). That these objects were often fabricated did little to contradict or negate the overall purpose of the Wunderkammer. Thus an average man on stilts was as useful as an actual giant provided that such an elaborate hoax did the trick of invoking awe and wonder. In Nightwood no one is more aware of awe's duplicity than Matthew O'Connor, a self-confessed "charlatan"

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[2] Much has been written about gender in Nightwood and, as such, it is a topic that this thesis will deal with only as it directly relates to the collections of the novel's characters. Any other discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis.

doctor (Nightwood 96) who has others in the novel convinced of his legitimacy through the stupendous nature of his voluble discourse.

Unlike the later museum, which sought to authenticate items through their genealogies, the Wunderkammer's chief concern was audience transcendence (the end justifying the means), thereby allowing for the creation of fictitious genealogies that emphasized legend over history. In Nightwood also, Guido Volkbein attempts to hide his Jewish ancestry through a fictitious Christian Barony that he hopes his collection of imperial splendor will help authenticate.

Fraudulent items, such as a unicorn's tail, fed audience expectations for the marvelous and strange even though fabricating such items entailed a falsifying or masking of the object's "reality" in order to generate a fiction about it that transcended history in favor of legend (Kaufmann 177-178). In Nightwood, it is Dr. O'Connor who privileges legend over history:

> but think of the stories that don't amount to much! That is, that are forgotten in spite of all man remembers. . . merely because they befell him without distinction of office or title – 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. Legend is unexpurgated, but history, because of its actors, is deflowered. (15)

For O'Connor, the privileging of legend over history is the flattening of hierarchical distinctions, granting the "poor man" access to the spectacle of the

"high and mighty." This privileging of legend over history is what drove the curious masses of the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries to view the many Wunderkammers present in Europe at the time. For its audience, the Wunderkammer meant temporary access to the privileges of power, and thus, despite the spectacle of difference inherent in the juxtaposition of its disassociated items, the Wunderkammer served as an affirmation of normality and power. The Wunderkammer stabilized hegemonic power relations by ensuring that items and objects that deviated from the norm were safely contained in the world inside the room just as the characters and collections of Nightwood are safely contained between its covers.

The Wunderkammer thus reveals a desire for the power to control that which is often beyond control. As a space, the Wunderkammer, site and source of power for the collector, functions similarly to Julie L. Abraham's notions of history in Nightwood in that the Wunderkammer, as a space, "was fixed, exact, monumental, the source of power. [Yet] it was also chaotic, fragmentary, constantly under construction" (253). This may seem self-contradictory, but the fiction of a collection, whatever story or "history" the collector wished his collection to impart to its audience, reconciles this contradiction through the acceptance of its legend (as Felix accepts the legend of his parent's collection as "history" despite the unreliability of its piecemeal fragments). Renaissance collectors understood that "to define, discover, and possess the rare and unique [was] also, at the same time, to inscribe them within a special setting which

would instill in them layers of meaning" (Mauries 25). To collect and display an object is to control its circumstances and change its value so that whatever value an object holds on its own is altered by its display in an artificial or fabricated context. Such alterations are indicative of the way in which the idea of the Wunderkammer works for Guido Volkbein in Nightwood.

Guido Volkbein is the first and most important collector in Nightwood. Guido's primary concern during his brief appearance in the novel, and one that his collection directly addresses, is his desire to integrate into the Catholic church and aristocracy. Guido's framework for navigating the gap between "the impending and the inaccessible" that dominates his relationship to power is a "remorseless homage to nobility" (Nightwood 3) through which he intends to bridge the binary divide of his race and Christianity. Guido is a Jew, a race that "has the sanction of the Lord and the disapproval of the people" (1), and Guido's genealogical status is sufficient to exclude him from the aristocracy. Still, Guido attempts to fabricate his way into the aristocracy through marriage and a "fantastic museum" (3) that, by reproducing the signs of power through objects representing power, is a confession of his desire for assimilation at the cost of the obliteration of personal and genealogical history in favor of a legend of fabricated aristocratic inheritance.

The contents of Guido's collection reveal both his desire to assimilate and his failure to do so. The contents of this collection are described at length:

The long rococo halls, giddy with plush and whorled designs in gold were

> peopled with Roman fragments, white and disassociated; a runner's leg, the chilly half-turned head of a matron stricken at the bosom, the blind bold sockets of the eyes given a pupil by every shifting shadow so that what they looked upon was an act of the sun. The great salon was of walnut. Over the fireplace hung impressive copies of the Medici shield and, beside them, the Austrian bird. (Nightwood 5)

The items above, art objects and symbols of European history, culture, and power, detail Guido's obsession with aristocracy and his need to replicate for himself their images and patterns of power. In their collage of disassociation, fragmentation, and juxtaposition, these objects recall the Wunderkammer. In its spectacle of power (the Austrian bird, the symbol of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and wonder (the placement of the statue manipulates the sun's position in order to represent the Renaissance belief that the sun revolved around the ruler), Guido's entire collection highlights authority, emphasizing powers past and present, though in a manner that is bric-a-brac rather than holistic.

Connecting this outside power with an inner one, the association of a great collection of art with the collector's apparent intellectual mastery over the genre he collects, are Guido's copies of the Medici shield. Florentine art collectors and investors of the Italian Renaissance, the Medici bought their way into power by virtue of the prestige that their massive art collection carried and through aristocratic marriage managed to disperse themselves throughout European courts in order to expand their power and influence. Medici became Popes (Leo

X and Clement VII) and French Queens (Catherine and Marie) (Hale 8). Guido attempts to follow the Medici example.

That Guido would choose to hang copies of the Medici family emblem is an indication of both his desire to replicate their rise into the aristocracy and his failure to do so. Guido's copies may appear authentic in their provenance, but their authenticity is always in jeopardy when scrutinized by those in whom hegemony has invested the authority and knowledge to differentiate replica from original, uncensored legend from expurgated history. To avoid such scrutiny, Guido hangs his copies among a plethora of other, distracting objects, allowing them to take advantage of the disassociated, Wunderkammer-like qualities of his collection. Such placement allows his copies to perform the function of the originals in the purposefully wondrous setting of his house on the Prater. Guido's objects are meant to impress an imagined audience to the point that their awe and wonder overcomes their desire to scrutinize too closely, although there is no textual evidence that his collection is seen by anyone other than himself and his wife.

The problem with Guido's entire collection is that its strains under the weight of its own credibility, a strain alleviated by his objects' exigency, their mimicry of power (Greenblatt 14-16). Whatever items hegemonic power decrees must be contained in an aristocratic collection are indeed present in Guido's collection of cultural debris. Yet the majority of Guido's objects are recreated

rather than authentic, leaving Guido's replicas and copies to work in a manner similar to the Wunderkammer's false objects, generating a fiction of authenticity through the awe and wonder inspired in their (intended) audience. Though Guido's copies of the Medici shield are impressive, they are merely copies that give the impression of authenticity. Guido's genealogical history, that of the legendary wandering Jew[3], is only partially obscured by this desire for a new, fictive genealogy, that of a Christian aristocrat and Medici style arts patron. Guido here is attempting to enter the written, censored history of the powerful through the fabricated power of his collection.

Since any collection microcosmically reflects the temperament and personality of its creator, Guido invests in the symbols of power in order to be seen as powerful himself. Guido's collection becomes his assumed identity. Thus, to authenticate his pretence to a Barony, Guido purchases, collects, and reproduces artifacts that mimic secular and religious power: "[Guido] adopted the sign of the cross; he had said he was an Austrian of an old, almost extinct line, producing, to uphold his story, the most amazing and inaccurate proofs: a coat of arms that he had no right to and a list of progenitors (including their Christian names) who had never existed" (Nightwood 3). Guido, like such imperial collectors as Peter the Great and Sir Walter Cope, is clearly not beyond fabricating a relationship to the genealogies of objects over which he has no claim, thus further decontextualizing them beyond the scope of their original

[3] Guido is earlier described in reference to the legend of the Wandering Jew "cut off from [his] own people by accident or choice" (Nightwood 3).

meaning and setting. Guido's hope is that these objects will lend an air of credence to an inauthentic heritage whose inauthenticity he assumes his collection will hide. Two narratives are at work here: the narrative of Guido's relative stasis in relation to power (through denial and exclusion) and the narrative that his collection helps simulate (the sign of the cross as evidentiary artifact).

Taken at face value, the artifact of the cross authenticates Guido's claim to Christianity by hiding his true heritage as a Jew. The artifact thus performs the same role that Guido performs. As part of Guido's collection, it is imbued with a new meaning beyond that which hegemony has inscribed upon it. According to Foucault, "description is to the object one looks at what proposition is to the representation it expresses" (Order 136). Guido's cross, as a descriptive object, proclaims Christianity, yet the representation it performs is that of a hidden Judaism. Guido would take advantage of this misconception were anyone to actually view his collection. Still, in his acquisition and display of the objects of a presumed Christian heritage, Guido has also bought into the bloody legacy that Christian hegemony has inscribed upon his people (the legend of the Wandering Jew and its relation to European, anti-Semitic discourse). This legacy is also inscribed upon his collection.

As the description of Guido's collection continues, it grows increasingly more violent and bloody, containing a "thick dragon's-blood pile of rugs from Madrid. The study harbored two rambling desks in rich and bloody wood. . . ;

[i]nto the middle of each desk silver-headed brads had been hammered to form a lion, a bear, a ram, a dove, and in their midst a flaming torch" (Nightwood 5-6). This emphasis on blood stands as both Guido's claim to, and disqualification from, the aristocracy. To assimilate fully, Guido must first absorb the bloody ramifications of imperial culture, including its anti-Semitism (Marcus 229). The tension of that anti-Semitism for an assimilating Jew such as Guido is articulated in the violent juxtapositions of his collection and serves as a further reminder of Guido's desire to use his collection for the purpose of obfuscating his genealogical status as a Jew in favor of a fictive Christian aristocratism. Blood is the binary line of divide between Guido and Christian hegemony.

Despite the subtext of violence, the emphasis in the passage above is on disassociation of a mythic kind that highlights the more fantastical and incongruous elements of Guido's fabricated existence. References to "dragon's blood" and a menagerie of beasts recall the Wunderkammer and its purported authentication of that which collectors fabricated by design. Guido claims the pattern of animals and flames as the "Volkbein field," though, as the novel notes, such heraldic touches had been "long since in decline beneath the papal frown" (Nightwood 6). This oversight on Guido's part demonstrates his own personal disqualification from the religious institution he wishes to belong to. The display of his heraldic field, meant to demonstrate his aristocratic heritage and devotion to Catholicism, is a confession both of desire and denial and of the stasis of Guido's and the entire Volkbein family's relationship to power.

What hinders the promise of these accumulated artifacts, their ability to replicate power, is the very piecemeal manner in which they are purchased, collected, and displayed. In its lack of a unifying cohesion, the collection is "fantastic" but not a "museum." Like the Wunderkammer of Peter the Great, Guido's collection lacks any form of demonstrable hierarchy other than that its mismatched pieces all have some semblance of a claim to power. Unlike the demonstrable power of Peter's collection, however, the power of Guido's collection is denied either by his objects' lack of unity within the greater scheme of an imperial collection (the heraldry is out of place given the Pope's disdain) or by their outright fabrication and deception (Guido's family portraits).

The portraits of Guido's parents are the best example of Guido's attempt to fabricate a lineage, though again he is only partially successful: ". . .up to the curved ceiling hung life-sized portraits of Guido's claim to father and mother. . .; [t]he likeness was incidental. Had anyone cared to look into the matter they would have discovered these canvases to be reproductions of two intrepid and ancient actors.[4] Guido. . . had purchased them when he was sure he would need an alibi for the blood" (Nightwood 7). Occasions for this alibi of portraiture come often, for, despite the trappings of an aristocratic existence, the one person he cannot seem to convince is his wife Hedvig, the embodiment, to Guido, of hegemonic power.

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[4] That Guido's "parents" are actors is ironic given that many of Nightwood's characters are performers of false identities whose sham titles are alibis used to cultivate power among themselves and each other.

As a member of the House of Hapsburg and a direct descendent of the Emperor collector Rudolph II, Hedvig is an aristocrat whose bloodline forms a divide between herself and Guido that troubles their relationship. Hedvig is suspicious of Guido's claims to a Barony yet assumes the title of Baroness nonetheless. Barnes writes that Hedvig had "become a Baroness without question" (Nightwood 5) due to her genealogical right to assume power and to wield it. For Hedvig, wielding power is easier than it is for Guido since she does not have to fabricate it. Guido himself is often rendered powerless by the presence of his wife. She is described in military terms, goose-stepping and flag-saluting in the company of a general. The aristocratic authority she so effortlessly exudes leaves Guido "confused as if he were about to receive a reprimand" (4). Their relationship, an inversion of traditional patriarchal authority,[5] demonstrates the distance between Guido and the hegemony his wife represents. Despite his proximity to hegemony through marriage, Guido cannot challenge or assume this authority because he is constrained by his "remorseless homage to nobility" which, in his Wunderkammer's lack of an audience, applies only to Hedvig.

Hedvig's "continual reproach... meant as a continual reminder of her love" (Nightwood 3-4) is in fact a continual reminder of the superiority of her genealogical bloodline over Guido's, her questioning of his title and inheritance,

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[5] Mairead Hanrahan makes an excellent case for this inversion, claiming that Guido and Hedvig's roles are reversed "in that the German-sounding 'Volkbein,' which is first given as Hedvig's surname" appears to be a gift to Guido from Hedvig, a switch in the traditional marital adoption of surnames (34).

and her exploitation of that uncertainty (an uncertainty that makes assimilation difficult, if not impossible, for Guido and his heirs). Hedvig desires a Barony, and her marriage to Guido provides one. Hedvig desires a well-fashioned house on the Prater, and Guido provides a Wunderkammer of imperial splendor - a "fantastic museum of their encounter" (5) - that, in reality, is a confession of over-compensation in marriage and an unconsummated desire for aristocratic acceptance. Despite its fraudulent titles and ambitions, Guido and Hedvig's marriage provides each with an approximation of what they desire. Hedvig gets her title, and Guido gets the closest thing to an integration into the aristocracy that he can possibly achieve.

Hedvig's suspicions over Guido and his bloodline, however, are the reason that Hedvig questions her decision to bear Guido's child, having "a well-founded suspicion as to the advisability of perpetuating that race which has the sanction of the Lord and the disapproval of the people" (Nightwood 1). As the novel makes clear, Hedvig is cannily aware of Guido's lie, yet chooses to ignore it. Their marriage is, in short, a game that both tacitly agree to play. When Hedvig discovers the yellow and black handkerchiefs among Guido's possessions, he tells her that their colors represent the Roman branch of his family (3). There is no textual evidence that such a branch exists; moreover, Hedvig is entirely aware that these handkerchiefs actually represent "the ordinance of 1468," a Christian edict against the Jewish people requiring that "with a rope about its neck, Guido's race should run in the Corso for the

amusement of the Christian populace" (2), further commenting on the Christian-articulated legend of the Wandering Jew. For Hedvig, such items among Guido's Christian possessions cast doubt upon, and raise questions about, his relationship to this legendary event.

Hedvig, aware of the significance of Guido's fictions, chooses not to act upon this knowledge. She chooses instead to avoid the issue altogether, accepting the fantastic legend of Guido's Barony over the hidden history of his race. In so doing, she temporarily eases the divide of race between them, although, as Guido dies, the divide of blood re-arises: "[h]er body at that moment became a barrier and Guido died against that wall, troubled and alone" (Nightwood 3). Despite his collecting prowess, Guido dies excised from hegemony. Hedvig herself dies soon after but not before ignoring her own advice by giving birth to their son Felix.

## Chapter II : On Display at the Circus

Felix Volkbein, the son of Guido and Hedvig, is presented throughout Nightwood as a character both constrained by, and indebted to, the past. Felix speaks of the past as inextricable from both the present and the future: "[t]o pay homage to our past is the only gesture that also includes the future" (Nightwood 39). This "homage" takes the forms of an "obsession for what he terms 'Old Europe': aristocracy, nobility, royalty" (9). He even takes his long-deceased father's fraudulent title of Baron.

Felix's notion of the past, however, is not an altogether complete one since official history, according to Dr. O'Connor, is a fiction based on a censored interpretation of legend. Felix's lack of historical coherence can also be pinned on the accumulated and fabricated inheritance of his parents. Their fabricated legacy is the one that is passed on to Felix through an old aunt who hands him two phony portraits, a fake title, and an inherited obsession with integration into the aristocracy (Nightwood 7). Mairead Hanrahan points out that "[t]he 'facts' about Guido and Hedvig. . . are in fact the creation of Felix's aunt. . . whose memory, as well as her knowledge, is bound to be unreliable thirty years on" (40). It is the great legend of Guido and Hedvig, a legend made persuasive by the fake portraits and hyperbolized contents of their "fantastic museum," that wins out over whatever their authentic history may, or may not, have been. Guido's legacy is thus tainted with his attempt at assimilation into the hegemonic power structures that required such elaborate legend-making. Felix's inheritance is a

furtherance of this apparently futile desire.

Thus Felix, like his father before him, wishes to assimilate into the hegemonic power structures of the church and aristocracy. The narrator makes clear that "Guido had prepared. . . for his coming child a heart, fashioned on his own preoccupation, the remorseless homage to nobility, the genuflexion" (Nightwood 2). Guido's framework for traversing the web of power has been passed on to his son, thereby removing from him the possibility, as Meryl Altman points out, of forging his own narrative (167). Felix is doomed to a continual reweaving, or re/collection, of his father's own fractured narrative.

Felix's notion of the past is also imbued with "the odd" (Nightwood 10), the blending of legend and history across the hegemonic divide, an abnormal mixture that Felix himself embodies as a person "[c]onversant with edicts and laws, folk story and heresy, taster of rare wines, thumber of rarer books and old wives tales - tales of men who became holy and of beasts that became damned" (10). That Felix would be conversant with the edicts and laws of hegemonic history, myths, folk tales, and heresy indicates his position as a character swinging between two similar yet opposing forces of power: history and legend, hegemony and its parodies, including the circus. Felix traverses these binary divides, with "quick and pendulous movements" (9), caught in the stasis of difference that the image of the pendulum provides since, for all its movement, the pendulum remains fixed in a single point. The pendulum, as a contradictory image of stasis and movement, is befitting of Felix and his position in relation to

power.

Although Felix is indebted to his past, a bit of fabricated legend (Guido has achieved a bit of "posthumous acclaim" (Nightwood 8), though we are given no details), for articulating a legacy that grants him an "impending" access to the hegemony he believes to be his heritage, he is also constrained by the past, that of history as inscribed by hegemonic power, a past that is itself a fiction that renders the impending inaccessible. Felix's physical trajectory is described as "circumambulation" and his manner of speaking as "circumlocution" (8-9). Circumlocution is a form of circumambulation, a roundabout manner of discourse unable to penetrate the heart of the person, object, or story it circles. Although there are hints that the "great past" (9) of hegemonic history might offer itself to Felix as a result of his homage, as Nightwood progresses it becomes clear that no amount of bowing can alter the fabric of Felix's relationship to power. His is a race without finish, a perpetual circumambulation in which he repeats his cycle of "bowing, searching, with quick pendulous movements, for the correct thing to pay tribute: the right street, the right café, the right building, the right vista" (9). Felix has inherited the disassociated runner's leg of his father's Wunderkammer, as well as the legend of the Wandering Jew.

It is not surprising that Felix is described as "contemplating relics and parts" (Nightwood 107) as such bric-a-brac forms the very fabric of his inheritance, the legacy of his parents and the "fantastic museum of their encounter." Without access to power, Felix is blinded to the larger picture of

hegemonic history because his monocled vision lacks the necessary depth to see beyond surface impressions. His vision is also fragmented by the piecemeal quality of the personal history passed on by his parents through his aunt. This is why Felix believes that the "relics and parts" that constitute the microcosmic quality of his own fragmented and fabricated personal history are enough to represent the macrocosmic whole of hegemonic history or at least his own vision of what he believes that greater whole to be. Tyrus Miller explains that Felix Volkbein "wants to reconstruct, through an aesthetically guided montage of fragments, a valid historical tradition. . . ; [s]urrounding himself with portraits, texts of history, and theatricalized rehearsals of rituals, Felix attempts to create an aesthetic simulacrum" (152). The aesthetic simulacrum that Felix creates for himself is a simulacrum of an aristocratic power through which he intends to authenticate his own personal history while assimilating it into the greater context of hegemonic power.

For Felix, the past to which he pays homage is also the past that denies him his place within greater, hegemonic history. Felix's "obsession" is driven by an "embarrassment" (Nightwood 9) stemming from his own inability to assimilate into the hegemonic narrative due to a double disqualification from the power that his fabricated Christian heritage supposedly entitles him to and from the power that his own authentic partly Jewish heritage has denied him as well. This embarrassment, in turn, causes him to seek out alternative forms of power, such as the circus, that are outside the narrative of his own circumlocution.

Felix's integration into the circus, which "linked [Felix's] emotions to the higher and unattainable pageantry of kings and queens" (Nightwood 11), is an integration into an aesthetic simulacrum of the aristocracy. The aristocracy and the circus are linked through pageantry, but whereas one is unattainable without the proper qualifications of blood and title, the overt spectacle of the other is present for all to enjoy and participate in since, like the Wunderkammer, it "can accommodate the unusual, the marginal, and the grotesque" (Winkiel 20). The circus thus offers a temporarily parodic response by low culture to the higher culture of the aristocracy, a "ritual spectacle" opposed to the strictures of hegemony (Bakhtin 5), and a space in which the mixing of high and low culture in juxtaposition serves as a "temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions" (Bakhtin 15). In this sense, the circus functions in a manner similar to the Wunderkammer in its juxtaposition of opposing elements and suspension of the hierarchical distinction of objects: "circuses are forms of collecting. . . outside the public organization of value" (Benedict 202). According to Foucault, the spectacle of the circus corresponds to the spectacle of the Wunderkammer in that both address a desire to "render accessible to the multitude of men the inspection of a small number of objects" (Discipline, 216) in a safely contained setting that reinforces hegemonic values even as it displays their opposite.

Furthermore, in its display of the abnormal bodies of its performers, the circus also functions as an extension of the Wundkammer's human body display. Like their Renaissance predecessor, circus freak shows "offered real or fake

monsters and hybrids - whatever was unique or abnormal and hence unclassifiable in a scientific taxonomy: a five-legged sheep, a dog boy, an ape man, a giant or dwarf animal or human. These shows were concerned with variety and exceptions, not uniformity" (Winkiel 18). Appearing in Nightwood's pages are both the half-wood, half-flesh Mademoiselle Basquette and the ambiguously gendered Duchess of Broadback, who maintains a fabricated aristocratic title. Both of these characters perform a precise function in relation to audience perceptions of their display, in Nightwood's case, a parody of the aristocracy and hegemony as a whole. Historically circuses often performed this function, "turn[ing] aristocratic exercises into the traditional popular entertainment of viewing physical curiosities that bridge ontological categories. . .; national power [made] frivolous spectacle" (Benedict 209).

Circuses act as "counter-sites," places in which hegemony is temporarily and "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 24). As Paul Bouissac notes, this position of the circus within hegemony is carefully circumscribed within the margins of culture since it "manipulates [the] cultural system to such an extent that it leaves the audience contemplating a demonstration of humanity freed from the constraints of the culture within which the performance takes place" (8). This is a reciprocal system for the audience, in that, as with the audiences of the Wunderkammer's human exhibitions, circus audiences are simultaneously left reveling in, and recoiling from, the spectacle of the performance:

> Circuses execute certain prescribed functions within society. As the stages for comic entertainment, for feats of acrobatic or magical skill, or for man's ability to tame nature, circuses provide a cultural outlet for the controlled performance of dangerous acts and the temporary realization of the repressed desires of the audience. (MacGowen 30).

Thus the circus, like the Wunderkammer, helps to stabilize hegemonic power relations by ensuring that abnormal objects and people are safely contained and displayed for a curious public. It is also a space in which hegemony, particularly the aristocracy, can be parodied. In Nightwood, such parodies extend beyond the circus per se.

The parodic aspects of the circus vis-à-vis the aristocracy in Nightwood are explicit in the numerous fake titles circulating among the circus performers with whom Felix associates: "[t]he people of this world, with desires utterly divergent from his own, had also seized titles for a purpose. There was a Princess Nadja, a Baron von Tink, a Principessa Stasera y Stasero, a King Buffo and a Duchess of Broadback" (Nightwood 11). A performer such as the Principessa Stasera y Stasero, a hermaphrodite, is one example of how the circus can be directly linked to the Wunderkammer in that hermaphrodites were frequently displayed in both settings as curious freaks of nature (Foucault, Abnormal 63, 65-67). That the desires of these performers would be divergent from Felix's own is not surprising: circus performers, aware of their status on the margins of power, are apparently content to maintain their temporary aesthetic recreation of power.

Felix, on the other hand, sees such an aesthetic recreation as a means to a more permanent end (integration into the hierarchies of power) rather than as an end in itself. For Felix, the microcosm of the circus ought to remain at some remove from the macrocosm of hegemony (contained by the classificatory stasis of the gaze in which hierarchies and distinctions are indefinitely maintained). Whereas Felix takes his Father's title of Baron to assume its power, circus performers use their titles "merely to dazzle the boys about town, to make their public life (and that was all they had) mysterious and perplexing, knowing well that skill is never so amazing as when it seems inappropriate" (Nightwood 11). Altman sees this as a "nascent class critique" in which the seemingly authentic aristocracy of hegemony and the pseudo-aristocracy of the circus are paralleled and their distinctions leveled (170, n14). And, as Marcus notes, "the enthronement of the fool implies the dethronement of hierarchy" (247). The parodic aspect of the circus is thus an inappropriate appropriation of the touchstones of hegemony intended to mock the apparently authentic among performers and patrons alike.

Felix is one such patron. He "clings to his title to dazzle his own estrangement" (Nightwood 11), thus parodying the aristocracy while he himself is being parodied by the aristocratic parodiers of the circus. The problem for Felix is in terms of audience relation in that although he is allowed access to the intimacies of circus culture, he is still an outsider, an onlooking audience member:

The emotional spiral of the circus, taking its flight from the immense

> disqualification of the public, rebounding from its illimitable hope, produced in Felix longing and disquiet. The circus was a loved thing that he could never touch, therefore never know. The people of the theatre and the ring were for him as dramatic and as monstrous as a consignment on which he could never bid. (12)

Felix's "longing and disquiet" result from this contradiction between hope and disqualification, feelings that render him powerless. The circus is for Felix is dramatic and monstrous, a mixture of his desire and its denial.

However, the circus is also Felix's consolation as among its performers "he had neither to be capable or alien" (Nightwood 11). The consolation of the circus is the (temporary) removal of the tension Felix experiences at being caught in the web of the twin forces of capability and alienation, hegemony and marginality. Within circus culture, Felix "had the sense of peace that formerly he had only experienced in museums" (11). Unlike other characters in the novel, Felix is not a collector of anything tangible. He is forced to rely on the collections of others to forge his own identity. This process of identification begins with the Wunderkammer of his parents and continues into the circus as Felix, "the 'collector' of his own past" (10), becomes "accumulated" (9) into circus culture:

> Going among these people, the men smelling weaker and the women stronger than their beasts, Felix . . . moved with a humble hysteria among the decaying brocades and laces of the *Carnavalet;* he loved that old and documented splendour with something of the love of the lion for its

> tamer – that sweat-tarnished spangled enigma that, in bringing the beast to heel, had somehow turned toward him a face like his own[.]
>
> (Nightwood 11)

Here Felix treats the circus as if it were a museum as he moves through its exhibits of "brocades and laces" its "old and documented splendour" recalling the historical emphasis apparent in the "Roman fragments" exhibited in the Wunderkammer of his parents. Felix has partially rerouted his father's desire for assimilation into hegemonic culture into the circus culture as a means of overcoming his own sense of exclusion from the hegemony he desires access to but is denied. Felix's desire to align himself with power, however, is indicated in his attempt to impose hierarchies where none belong: the circus and later Robin. This self-contradiction is reflected in his pendulous movements between the circus and the museum throughout the remainder of the novel.

To overcome his powerlessness, Felix makes use of his denied status within the hegemonic mainstream by projecting his aristocratic obsessions onto others and thereby attempting to wield power over them. He does this first through the circus and then to Robin (upon whom he transfers the title Baroness in a move mirroring that of his parents). To trace the trajectory of Felix's attempt to exercise power is to follow the path of his gaze as it classifies.

Several scenes in the novel drive home the power inherent in Felix's gaze. Despite the blindness of one eye – his monocular vision limiting the depth of his

vision to surfaces[6] – Felix still manages to use his gaze to classify and categorize those around him into tableaux that suit his desire for power. As noted in Chapter I, tableaux were often used in Wunderkammer displays to invoke awe and wonder, and Felix's desire to create and arrange his own tableaux also repeats the collecting impulse of his father. The circus is for Felix what the Wunderkammer was for Guido, an aesthetic simulacrum of power.

Gazing upon, and thus classifying, the Princess Nadja proves easy for Felix as she would sit with her "back to [him], as certain of the justice of his eye as she would have been of the linear justice of a Rops, knowing that Felix tabulated precisely the tense capability of her spine with its lashing curve swinging into the hard compact cleft of her rump" (Nightwood 12). Here Felix's gaze wanders the surface of Nadja's body with a precision comparable to the power of a Robespierre. The "justice" of Felix's eye is an assumption of power he is not necessarily entitled to but takes anyway in comparing Nadja's body to that of her lion. In the performance of her human-animal relationship, Nadja's identity is subsumed by spectacle and is therefore itself classifiable as animal by the gaze of its audience, Felix, in a self/other dichotomy.

Felix also uses his gaze to classify the body of Frau Mann, the Duchess of Broadback. Felix's gaze categorizes the surface of Frau Mann's body as an abnormal mixture of binary opposites – earth and air, male and female, human and doll (Nightwood 12-13) – marking her a grotesque in the sense of Wolfgang

[6] Foucault restricts the classificatory gaze completely to surfaces in The Order of Things (133, 269).

Kayser's definition of the grotesque as "the fusion of realms which we know to be separated" (85). Frau Mann's costume is described as "no longer a covering, it was herself" (12), and the judgments that can be rendered over it allow Felix to assume a position of authority in their relationship. Frau Mann becomes part of Felix's collection of circus performers, an entourage over which he can assume authority through the classificatory power and pleasure of his gaze.

It is through Frau Mann that Felix meets Count Onatorio Altamonte, the first authentic aristocrat with whom Felix comes into contact in the novel. The narrator indicates a previous, possibly amorous, relationship between the Duchess and the Count (Nightwood 12), and Felix is surprised by the idea that such a relationship could exist between two seemingly stratified modes of power since he considers the spectacle of the circus to be outside the traditional hierarchies of power. Yet the circus, with its obviously fake titles, simulates power just as Felix "labor[s] under the weight of his own remorseless recreation of the great" (44). This simulation of power is what, in reciprocity, draws power's gaze. In this attention, power itself becomes spectacle. Thus, the Count, according to Frau Mann, becomes "something that must be seen" (13) just as the circus is "something that must be seen" by its audience.

Those in attendance at Altamonte's party, with few exceptions, are (or give the appearance of being) brokers of power and members of the aristocracy. They are described as "looking as if they were deciding the fate of the nation. . . all in parliamentary attitudes" (Nightwood 14). These anonymous men

summarily ignore Baron Felix and Frau Mann. Exceptions to this attitude are the as-yet unnamed Nora and Dr. Matthew O'Connor. In the hierarchy of the room, Dr. O'Connor remains separate from the anonymous, powerful men, yet even he gazes upon the body of Frau Mann and classifies her as separate from himself.

Viewing Frau Mann for the first time, O'Connor "noticed her and her attire for the first time, which, bringing suddenly to his mind something forgotten but comparable, sent him into a burst of laughter" (Nightwood 15), following which he launches into a diatribe concerning his memory of the grotesque body of Nikka, another circus performer, and the various implications of that body:

> Now I am thinking of Nikka, the nigger who used to fight the bear in the *Cirque de Paris*. There he was, crouching all over the arena without a stitch on, except an ill-concealed loincloth all abulge as with a deep-sea catch, tattooed from head to heel with all the *ameublement* of depravity! Garlanded with rosebuds and hackwork of the devil - was he a sight to see! (15-16)

According to Foucault, "words have been allotted the task and the power of representing thought. . . on the external surface of the body (Order 78). Nikka's tattoos are thus bodily inscriptions of the legacy that power has left upon his body. Nikka's sexually charged black body is a canvas on which O'Connor reads the signs of power and spectacle, history and myth: "over his belly was an angel from Chartres: on each buttock, half public, half private, a quotation from the

book of magic, a confirmation of the Jansenist theory" (Nightwood 16) and an epigram from Prince Arthur Tudor, son of King Henry the Seventh. Thus inscribed on Nikka's body are the symbols and structures of historical power (Chartres, the Tudors) and legends concerning both (the book of magic, the epigram), binary opposites coexisting together on the textual Wunderkammer of Nikka's skin, a Wunderkammer to be read and enjoyed by its/his readers.

When asked about the "depravity" of his tattoos, Nikka responds that he "love[s] beauty and would have it around him" (Nightwood 17). Nikka's answer is compelling in that he finds his body and its script beautiful despite the depravity that others may ascribe to these marks. Slavery in the form of the hegemonic tattoos of the Tudors, Chartres, and House of Rothschild (16-17) has been permanently inscribed on Nikka's body as a form of ownership of his body, his spectacle, and his safely contained place within the margins of hegemonic history. Yet Nikka's marks are also a form of power for Nikka himself, however pitiful, in that he can resist the "depravity" of audience classification by finding his marks beautiful. Marcus writes that the grotesque nature of Nikka's markings is both empowering and attractive since it "break[s] the Levitical taboo of writing on the body and the taboo of mixing objects" (224). In inscribing itself upon Nikka's body, hegemony has made room for the existence of the grotesque at its margins.

It is important to remember that all information about Nikka comes second-hand through O'Connor and that Frau Mann's body is what reminds

O'Connor of Nikka; thus, O'Connor, having viewed Frau Mann, has judged her and classified her (body) as belonging to the same hierarchical stratum as Nikka - to be dissected for meaning and discussed as an object (as were the bodies in the Wunderkammers at the time of their display). Nikka and Frau Mann are thus linked not only by their physical abnormalities but also by their mode of employment as circus performers bound to the spectacle of their performance and display.

Felix later returns the favor of O'Connor's gazing upon Frau Mann when he observes the Doctor's actions in Robin's hotel room. Experiencing a "double confusion" (Foucault's double system of observation wherein the reciprocity of the gaze disallows judgment [Birth 50)]), Felix witnesses a partially hidden and yet completely visible Matthew O'Connor perform "the gestures of one who, in preparing the audience for a miracle, must pretend that there is nothing to hide" (Nightwood 35) and similar to the way that Guido, in displaying his copies, hides their inauthenticity. As far as O'Connor can tell, there is no audience watching him, and yet he performs his theft of money and make-up as if aware that Felix is observing him. As spectator, Felix both revels in O'Connor's audacity and recoils from his flagrant disregard for Robin's property, a reaction in line with audience reactions to both the circus and Wunderkammer's human body displays.

Upon first seeing Robin, Felix feels as if he is "looking upon a figurehead in a museum" (Nightwood 38), a phrase that sums up the entirety of

Felix and Robin's relationship as one that is consumed by his desire for power over her in the form of an enslaving gaze. Felix is not the only one who desires this power. As Susan J. Hubert writes, "Robin is the novel's central character [and yet] she is portrayed mainly through the perspective of others" (39) such as Felix who wish to classify and contain her. In their very first encounter, Felix is already attempting to inscribe a hegemony onto Robin that he himself has been denied. Thus the metaphor of the museum becomes all-important for him because it allows him to cast Robin into an hegemonic tableau in the hope that she will bear him a son worthy of his (faux) title.

The reason for Felix's shifting away from the circus to the museum concerns differences in gaze. Whereas his gaze at the circus, for Felix, is entirely subjective, based on his personal relationship to its performers and culture, the museum is a vehicle in which he believes his gaze to be objective, a place in which he can attempt to exercise power over Robin by objectifying her. That Robin reminds Felix of a "figurehead in a museum" is not surprising given that she is presented in a series of tableaux that, in the stasis of their display, leave her vulnerable to the objective gaze. Felix's first vision of Robin is an example of such an arrangement:

> On a bed, surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly over-sung by the notes of unseen birds, which seemed to have been forgotten. . . half flung off the support cushions from which, in a moment of threatened consciousness she had turned her head, lay the

> young woman, heavy and disheveled. Her legs, in white flannel trousers, were spread as in a dance, the thick-lacquered pumps looking too lively for the arrested step. Her hands, long and beautiful, lay on either side of her face. (Nightwood 34)

This initial impression of Robin has much in common with the idea of the Wunderkammer in that Robin is displayed as something more akin to a doll or living statue than to a conscious human being. There is also an abnormal binary mixture about Robin in her mismatched clothes and ambiguous gender status. Robin's arrangement, the fact that only fragments of her body (legs, hands, head) are in view, is also reminiscent of the Wunderkammer's disassociated and juxtaposed pieces and parts: Robin is surrounded by a vast, messy, and exotic array of plants and animals (specifically birds), cages and clothes, of which she is the totally objectified "figurehead" or centerpiece. Here, in the Wunderkammer of her hotel apartment, Robin becomes a representative of both forms of power, hegemony and its parody, in that she is encased in the spectacle of her surroundings and is thus as static as a painting or museum piece and yet etched in the position of a dancer about to be spectacularly devoured by her suddenly carnivorous plants. Though she has done nothing, not moved once in this entire descriptive sequence, in Felix's mind, Robin performs the function of an objectified work of art, the ramifications of which lead Felix to hide behind the curtains not only out of delicacy for her position but also to hide his own desire for her body. Felix, in courting and marrying Robin, attempts to classify her

along prescriptive, hierarchical lines, a process that Robin strongly resists.

Despite temporarily wielding some power over Robin in the opening stages of their relationship, Felix finds himself continually unsettled by her inability to fully integrate herself into his hegemonic aims and ambitions: "[h]e took her first to Vienna. To reassure himself he showed her all the historic buildings. He kept saying to himself that sooner or later, in this garden or that palace, she would suddenly be moved as he was moved. Yet it seemed to him that he too was a sightseer" (Nightwood 43). Here Robin further destabilizes Felix's already unstable relationship to power. Though outside the structures to which he acts a guide, Felix, with his fake Barony and hegemonic aims, still feels aligned to the power that compels him to force it upon Robin as well, although with Robin even that flimsy bit of security is torn from him as he comes to the conclusion that despite titles and knowledge, he too is merely a circumambulating "sightseer" on the other side of the museum glass (as his father was before him).

As noted above, Robin's Wunderkammer-like qualities do not make her as conducive to Felix's hegemonic aims as he desires. Just as the Wunderkammer, to become a museum, needed to be broken into separate categories, Robin herself must be broken into separate fragments (similar to her arrangement in the initial hotel tableau) to suit Felix's hegemonic intentions. In resisting these aims, Robin's tableau actually reverses Felix's expectations of them:

> The woman who presents herself to the spectator as a 'picture' forever arranged is, for the contemplative mind, the chiefest danger. Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human. Such person's every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience. . .; stepping in the trepidation of flesh that will become myth; as the unicorn[.] (Nightwood 37)

Robin's body is subversive because it appears static yet is imbued with motion in the opposite direction of the "beast turning human" (as the unicorn was considered to have both human and animal form, and evidence of such, whether real or fabricated, was sought by Wunderkammer collectors for its combinatory spectacle of legend and history). Hers is a legendary body, invoking awe and wonder in its combining of such binary divides as human and animal, and thus more at home in the Wunderkammer or circus than in the hegemonic museums of Felix's desire.

The static image of Robin in the hotel becomes fluid once removed from its original setting. Just as an object removed from a Wunderkammer loses the meaning it has within the greater mythic scheme of a Wunderkammer's design yet still retains the quality for which it was originally deemed worthy of inclusion in the first place, Robin bears residual traces of her original setting and appearance despite Felix's removing her from it. O'Connor makes the Wunderkammer connection to Robin explicit when he tells Felix that the history that Felix wishes to impress upon Robin is "untidy" and that Robin does not fear

the disorder that hegemony attempts to remove (Nightwood 118). Robin is content to remain a disordered, bodily Wunderkammer in the face of Felix's desire to make of her a hierarchical museum.

Just as Hedvig's body remained a barrier for Guido to the end so too does Robin's remain impenetrable to the gaze of Felix. This is the "chiefest danger" that Robin possesses in relation to Felix's "contemplative mind." The problem that Robin poses for Felix is two-fold: one is that she resists Felix's attempts to wield power over her, and two is that despite her resistance, she yields and, in the ultimate act of acquiescence (much like Hedvig's), bears him a son. Felix's desire for Robin and her body is also a desire for a son to whom he can pass the inherited fiction told him by his aunt about his father. To the Doctor, Felix admits that "he wished [for] a son who would feel as he felt about the 'great past'" (Nightwood 38), a past of relics and parts, more fiction than history (even though, as O'Connor is quick to remark, history itself is fiction written by the powerful).

The birth of Felix and Robin's son Guido marks the moment when Felix's gaze and hegemonic aims pass from Robin to his son. Guido is described as a "quivering palsy of nerves" (Nightwood 48), "[m]entally deficient and emotionally excessive, an addict of death" (107). What attracts his attention, however, is the Catholic church. While Felix attempts to indoctrinate his son about the "great past" of the aristocracy, Guido takes great comfort in an even more hierarchical institution: "[h]olding his father's hand, [Guido] climbed

palace and church steps. . . staring at paintings and wax reproductions of saints, watching priests with the quickening of the breath of those in whom concentration must take the place of participation" (107), rendering Guido's "concentration" a "precocious ecstasy" (107) that overcomes Felix's wishes for his son. Whereas for Felix the "contemplation of relics and parts" is a piecemeal ritual of determined integration, for Guido the relics of the church possess a linear symbolic meaning in their representation of the hierarchical structure of church authority. The church, unlike the circus or the Wunderkammer, is both micro and macrocosm, a universal museum in which all power (emanating from God through the Pope) is not merely represented or displayed but contained.

Guido's desire for the priesthood is an affront to Felix's desires for his son. For Felix, the church is to be respected and admired for its power and history, but it is into the aristocracy that he believes Guido must assimilate if he is to fulfill his family legacy. Felix believes O'Connor's notion that "people love their church and know it, as a dog knows where he was made to conform, and there he returns by instinct. But to the graver permission, the king, the tsar, the emperor, who may relieve themselves on high heaven - to them they bow down - only" (Nightwood 39). The Doctor has stated the case of Felix's life entirely. To accept Guido's ambition is to "accept a demolition of his own life" (108), yet Felix ultimately capitulates, purchasing for his son a relic, a medallion of the Virgin as a symbol of his acceptance of Guido's desire for integration into Christianity (the desire of his grandfather whose name he bears). The medallion, however, weighs

on Guido's fragile neck, forcing him, like his father and grandfather before him, to bow down to the hierarchical, hegemonic authority he wishes to join (108).

Most of Felix's previous experiences of church power have been mediated either by the glass partitions of a museum or through the discourses of the Doctor. Once resolved to help Guido in his quest for the cloth, Felix undertakes a firsthand examination of the Church's hierarchical structures by reading litanies, questioning priests, visiting monasteries, and writing the Pope (Nightwood 108). Confessing to O'Connor his own anxieties about his son's desires, Felix is made aware that in helping his son he has accidentally achieved his own personal ambition. O'Connor tells Felix that Guido "is what you've always been looking for – Aristocracy. . . a man never knows when he has found what he has always been looking for" (121). Aristocracy, as represented in the son, comes to the father through the Catholic church's combination of religious and aristocratic power as represented by the hierarchy of Popes, Cardinals, Bishops, and Priests. Still, neither Felix nor Guido can actually claim to be a part of this power since the privileging of Guido occurs only in the eyes of O'Connor (himself on the outskirts of power). Regardless, Felix accepts O'Connor's notion, wiping clean his monocle in order to see clearly the final phase of his life.

Felix decides to move back to Vienna because he feels it will give Guido a better chance to be chosen for the priesthood and because he feels Vienna to be his spiritual and ancestral home. There, where his parents kept their

"fantastic museum," Felix's life and legacy come full circle. Spotting a Russian prince in a café, Felix bows and repeats the pattern of his father while his son and Frau Mann helplessly look on. The power that Felix has managed to accumulate through Guido and the merits of O'Connor's aristocratic argument both collapse back into the pendulous stasis of the impending and the inaccessible that is Felix's relationship to power, an inherited relationship that is passed from father to son, from Guido to Felix to Guido in a vast circumambulation.

## Chapter III : Nightwood as Wunderkammer

As is the case with the Volkbein family, the remaining collectors in Nightwood embrace their collections as external manifestations of their inward states. Nora Flood's collection is a representation of her personal relationship with the circus, as well as with Robin, whom she meets there. Jenny Petherbridge's collection of second-hand plunder also refers to a personal relationship with Robin, albeit a failed one. The collection of Doctor Matthew O'Connor, himself a collector of stories, contains the accoutrements necessary to both his public life as a sham doctor and his private one as a cross-dresser and possible abortionist, all of which exemplify his central position in the lives of the other characters. Taken together, these collections, all of which inhabit the realms of the Wunderkammer and the circus, are what make Nightwood itself a Wunderkammer in which characters, through their collections, express their own personal interactions with the dynamics of power present in the web of interpersonal relations at work in novel.

As noted in Chapter II, Nora first appears among the hegemonic figures present at the salon of Count Altamonte although her presence there is secondary to the conversation between Felix and O'Connor and the objectification of Frau Mann. Like the other characters in Nightwood, Nora is a collector, although she is initially a collector of people rather than of objects.

Nora is described as keeping "the strangest salon in America," a Wunderkammer of human display in its hodge-podge assortment of outsiders:

"poets, radicals, beggars, artists, and people in love. . .; Catholics, Protestants, Brahmins, dabblers in black magic and medicine" (Nightwood 50). Like the novel itself, Nora's Wunderkammer salon brings together a dazzling variety of human "objects" from differing backgrounds and ideologies into a single space governed by the desires of its creator and keeper, Nora. The intermingling of these different types in Nora's collection is a statement of difference on display, their co-mingling and juxtaposition revealing their relationships to power. Representatives of hegemony (Catholics and Protestants) mix with marginals (radicals and occultists) to create a microcosmic backdrop, a world within a room. Nora's salon also functions like the circus for which she works as a space in which power and its parody of aristocratic value can temporarily coexist through the commingling of high and low cultures (Bakhtin 15). Aristocratic salons, often run and maintained by women, mimicked court structures; Nora's salon, however, is populated by characters otherwise denied access to either the aristocracy or the court. Thus, like the circus and Wunderkammer before it, Nora's salon is an aesthetic simulacrum of power replicating that which it parodies in an equal accommodation of hegemonic and marginal figures (Winkiel 20).

Wunderkammer collectors were not opposed to the physical collection of people and although Nora attracts those whom she collects through the vibrancy of her salon, her desire to bring such incongruous people together is also an exercise of power. Nora, as collector, provides a space for them to coexist, but the

space is panoptical in nature since she controls it by keeping a watchful eye on all those present in it. The narrator describes Nora in her salon as "a body falling in observable space, deprived of the privacy of disappearance; as if privacy, moving relentlessly away, by the very sustaining power of its withdrawal kept the body eternally moving downward, but in one place, perpetually before the eye" (Nightwood 51). Thus, although she might deny it, Nora as ringmaster is at the center of the ring where all the eyes of her audience, the patrons of her salon, can be on her in a double system of observation based on the reciprocity of the gaze.

Nora's collections are shrines to the people she collects, signs of her desire to keep and contain both the people in her salon, who are willing to remain, and Robin, who is ultimately unwilling since she becomes the totemic object in a stratified and hierarchical museum that stands in opposition to her disorderly bodily Wunderkammer. Although Robin states that "she belong[s] to Nora" and that a mutually accumulated collection would be a beneficial to their relationship (Nightwood 55), she quickly breaks those bonds while remaining subject to Nora's ever-increasing desire to see her safely contained. Nora embodies the imperialistic characteristics of Renaissance collectors who wished to wield power over their subjects through the capture and display of those outside the confines of hegemonic, binary divides. Nora's desire to contain Robin is a demonstration of her desire to rule Robin's life completely, to control her very movements. Robin's resistance to this desire, her constant flights from their home, trouble

Nora and lead her to confess her despair over their relationship to Matthew O'Connor.

Nora is obsessed with confession. Not only does she herself confess to Doctor O'Connor but she also collects the confessions of others: "[t]o confess to [Nora] was an act even more secret than the communication provided by a priest. There was no ignominy in her; she recorded without reproach or accusation, being shorn of self-reproach and self-accusation. This drew people to her and frightened them" (Nightwood 53). Nora is described here in terms of a circus performer in that she is both compelling and repellent in her role as confessor and, like a circus performer, assumes for herself a measure of authority over the patrons of her salon since "they could neither insult nor hold anything against her" (53). For them, Nora's uprightness makes her easy to confess to because she approximates hegemony well enough to play the role of an authoritative, non-judgmental, objective confessor. Nora also embodies the Foucauldian assertion that confession is a ritual vital to the foundation and establishment of hegemonic history (History 58), something the novel itself rejects in its privileging of legend over history, leaving her "endlessly embroiled in a preoccupation without a problem" (Nightwood 53), attempting, like Felix before her, to establish hierarchies where there are none. Nora's collections demonstrate this preoccupation, changing themes (from salon to circus to prison) in response to her increasing desperation to sustain for all time the (her) truth of her love for Robin. As one who believes in the possibility of finding tidy,

enduring truths in the clear, clean light of day, Nora is different from the other disorderly, "unclean" characters who prefer the night and the messy truths it brings.

As stated earlier, Nora's salon is a parody of an aristocratic attempt to accumulate power to herself through the display of her ability to gather and sustain a diverse, unhierarchical salon wherein the center and margins blur in a juxtaposition of religious and occult figures. Yet because the relationship between Nora and her patrons is an unstable one, any authority she attempts to assume is undermined by the unhierarchical nature of her salon that places her among its patrons and not above them. This equality among patrons changes upon Nora's meeting Robin at circus. In fact, the circus quality of Nora's salon, its mirroring parody of the aristocracy, changes upon her dissolution of it. Nora attempts to transform her non-hierarchical salon into a hierarchical museum that, while no longer parodying the aristocracy, is intended to retain a measure of its authority.

Nora's relationship to the circus is indicative of the power dynamics at work in her life. She is in Europe doing advance publicity for the circus, fraternizing both with the marginalized performers who may be appearing at her circus and with the patrons of the aristocracy whom she is pressing to appear as audience members. Nora's job as a publicist allows for a certain freedom of movement between stratified spheres even though all freedom of movement is ultimately constrained (Foucault, History 92-96). Thus, Nora, at Altamonte's

party, can appear both as a figure of hegemony and as a confidante of Dr. O'Connor. Nora's job also leads to her first meeting with Robin.

Becoming intimate with Robin (who has fled her marriage to the Baron), Nora abandons her collection of people and begins collecting an assortment of objects she believes exemplify their relationship together. This collection, consisting of objects culled from the circus so significant to both their lives, marks a form of exclusivity wherein certain specific objects invested with a primary dynamic or meaning replace the multiple dynamics inherent in her previous salon (the doll's symbolic resonance for Nora is vital to its placement atop the hierarchy of objects). Nora's attempted hierarchy is meant to replace the fluid juxtapositions of her previous salon, thus making a museum of ownership and stasis possible. Like Felix before her, Nora seeks to make Robin static (Winkiel 27), confining her Wunderkammer-like body within the semblance of a shared, hierarchical museum. Unlike her previous salon, her circus collection revolves around a singular figure and totemic objects that Nora hopes will help incorporate and contain Robin within the stasis of their display. This desire to control and contain Robin steadily increases throughout Nightwood in direct proportion to Nora ever-diminishing ability to enforce it.

For Nora, the items in her collection represent her union with Robin "as Felix's hearsay house had been testimony of the age when his father had lived with his mother" (Nightwood 56), but they also represent the hierarchical trappings of power (both religious and aristocratic), trappings that had

previously failed to ensnare Robin during her relationship with Felix (Chapter II). The meaning and value of Nora's collection changes as her relationship to Robin does:

> [E]very object in the garden, every item in the house. . . attested to their mutual love, the combining of their humours. There were circus chairs, wooden horses bought from the ring of an old merry-go-round, venetian chandeliers from the Flea Fair, stage drops from Munich, cherubim from Vienna, ecclesiastical hangings from Rome, a spinet from England, and a miscellaneous collection of music boxes from many countries; such was the museum of their encounter. (55-56).

Although the items from the circus are congruous with Nora and Robin's meeting at the circus, other items such as the venetian chandeliers and ecclesiastical hangings clearly recall the hegemonic desires of Guido and Hedvig, though their Flea Fair origins flatten the hierarchy Nora wishes to impose on her museum.

Much like the "fantastic museum" of Guido and Hedvig's encounter, Nora's collection is akin to the Wunderkammer in its pattern of disassociation from, and parodically inadequate approximation of, hegemony. Nora's objects merely approximate the grandeur such items as venetian chandeliers and ecclesiastical hangings are meant to generate. Nora's collecting impulse, distilled through the circus, veers, like that of Guido and Hedvig, toward an aesthetic simulacrum of power, with the important difference that, unlike their collection,

a living Robin rather than a pair of fabricated portraits is to be the "figurehead" of her museum (Nightwood 38).

The museum of Nora and Robin's encounter ultimately fails because its Wunderkammer-like qualities make it irreconcilable with more museum-like hierarchies. Nora's collection is illustrative of a static rather than dynamic relation to power because Nora's inchoate, bric-a-brac collection, like Guido and Hedvig's, is an inauthentic approximation of power. Her desire for power comes back to haunt Nora as the meaning she invests in her collection fluctuates with her ability to exercise power over Robin. The description of Nora's collection carries the weight of this changed meaning: "When the time came that Nora was alone most of the night and part of the day, she suffered from the personality of the house, the punishment of those who collect their lives together" (Nightwood 56). Nora's collection thus becomes a representation of the burden of failure, an inability to keep Robin perpetually confined in the hierarchies of their shared museum, the museum finally becoming a mausoleum.

As Nora's relationship to Robin deteriorates, a power struggle between them ensues, one that is spoken of in Nora's confessions to Dr. O'Connor and attested to by the changing values she places on her collection. To O'Connor she directly confesses her desire for power over Robin: "[a]nd I, who want power, chose a girl who resembles a boy" (Nightwood 136). This is a confession of despair over Robin's philandering, her constant escape from their museum and the death-like stasis that confinement imposes for her. Nora confesses to

O'Connor that, kept inside, Robin would become "corrupt" and wither like a corpse whereas outside and free of the confines of their museum she becomes more animated as if renewed in life, drinking and carousing with men and women alike and cursing Nora as "a devil" each time Nora attempts to reconfine her (143-145).

Nora's despair is thus driven by what she sees: "I had stopped going out with her because I could not bear the evidence of my eyes" (Nightwood 143). Unable to keep Robin confined, Nora confines herself, staying inside her house, her museum to Robin, to spare herself the shame of Robin's gaze. Nora thus discovers the house to be a torture all its own and ends up temporarily imprisoned in the stasis of the museum she had hoped would ensnare Robin.[7]

Since the personality of her collection is initially one of union, Nora suffers from its loss, and a shift also occurs in the value Nora places on her most prized possession, the doll. As the item most significantly invested with meaning in Nora's collection, the doll is also an item imbued with power enough for Robin to wield it as a weapon against Nora and the stifling atmosphere created by Nora's would-be museum. Nora confesses the scene to O'Connor:

> I [found] her standing in the middle of the room in boy's clothes, rocking from foot to foot, holding the doll she had given us - 'our child' - high above her head as if she would cast it down, a look of fury on her face...;

[7] Nora and Robin make their final appearance at the end of the novel in the chapel, where Robin finally capitulates to Nora's inevitable confinement of her like the dog that Matthew O'Connor says will always eventually conform (39).

> [s]he picked up the doll and hurled it to the floor and put her foot on it, crushing her heel into it; and then, as I came crying behind her, she kicked it, its china head all in dust, its skirt shivering and stiff, whirling over and over the floor. (Nightwood 147-148)

In a scene mirroring an earlier one in which she threatens to murder her and Felix's son Guido, Robin here "murders" her and Nora's symbolic love child, and O'Connor tells Nora that Robin's fury over the doll arose directly out of her fear of perpetual confinement: "She saw in you that fearful eye that would make her a target forever. . .; the doll – yes, target of things past and to come" (148). Robin, realizing the doll's symbolic weight in relation to her own past and to her current status within the museum-like hierarchy of Nora's gaze, shatters the object representative of Nora's authority over her as an object. Nora later realizes that the doll really had no place in her museum since "[i]t's both effigy and shroud. . . sacred and profane," a grotesque mixture of life and death, a "monstrosity" (142) out of place within a museum's hierarchy of objects and categories. Nora's doll is an important indication and indictment of the failure of Nora's museum to contain Robin.

In this act of childish, petty rage, Robin restates her difference and contrives her ultimate act of resistance to Nora's desire for power over her since the doll represents a formulation of their relationship together and is also an indirect representation of Robin in that its immobility represents the stasis in which Nora wishes Robin contained. Thus, her smashing of the doll, in a kind of

"suicide," represents Robin's attempt to smash the categories and hierarchies of Nora's museum, to free herself of their confining relationship and to return to her bodily Wunderkammer state.

The image and metaphor of the doll is also tarnished by its previous, brief appearance in the Wunderkammer of another collector, Jenny Petherbridge. Jenny "adopts" the doll for the symbolic weight it carries for both Robin and Nora, hoping, in its acquisition, to transfer that weight from Nora to herself with greater success. Jenny, however, is even less successful at containing Robin than Nora. By the time Nora discovers the doll in Jenny's apartment, Robin is already gone, having fled the confines of yet another collector.

Jenny is cast as a collector intent on possessing second-hand objects, not just the doll but Robin herself: "When she fell in love it was with a perfect fury of accumulated dishonesty; she became instantly a dealer in second-hand and therefore incalculable emotions. . .; so she had appropriated the most passionate love that she knew, Nora's for Robin" (Nightwood 68). According to Tyrus Miller, "Jenny embodies secondariness and compulsive repetition. Obsessed with possessing objects, she ends up possessed by them" (156). This obsession/ possession paradigm is evidenced in the artifacts of her collection:

> Her walls, her cupboards, her bureaux, were teeming with second-hand dealings of life. . .; [s]omeone else's wedding ring was on her finger; the

photograph taken of Robin for Nora sat upon her table. The books in her library were other people's selections. She lived among her own things like a visitor to a room kept 'exactly as it was when'[.]" (Nightwood 66)

Jenny's collection is reminiscent of the plundering imperialists who stacked their Wunderkammers with appropriated foreign fare, thereby acquiring a power of awe and wonder not authentically theirs. All of Nightwood's collectors engage in some kind of plunder. What separates Jenny from these other collectors, however, is that she makes her desire for plunder explicit, thus becoming a parodic figure for O'Connor, who "looked at Jenny's object with scorn in [his] eye" (104) since they so obviously attempt to duplicate the fictions and histories of others. Jenny is also malicious in her collecting, plundering for plunder's sake. Her attempted acquisition of the Volkbein family portraits quickly turns into an underhanded attack on Felix's failed marital relations with Robin just as her malicious acquisition of Nora's doll is meant to signify the failure of Nora's relationship to Robin (114, 141). Jenny's collection is a repetition of these previous relationships, her collection functioning like theirs in that she is collecting "a destiny" (98) that cannot be fulfilled.

It is Nora's photograph of Robin that sits on Jenny's table and Nora's doll that lies on her bed. The second-handedness of Jenny's collecting impulse is a confession of a lack of present-time identity: "[c]ollecting the past in objects or texts verifies the collector's or reader's identity as owner of that past" (Benedict 202). Unfortunately for Jenny, her hoped-for identity is stifled by her inability to

identify with these objects. That she feels "like a visitor to a room" kept in a state of Wunderkammer-style disarray emphasizes this disconnection and the ultimate futility of her endeavor. For although that "room" is another shrine to Robin, it is also a shrine filled with another's objects of devotion and power. Jenny's power, directly linked to her collection, is thus a second-generation copy, an inauthentic replica similar in use and intent to that of Guido's Medici shields. Jenny's objects approximate power yet are themselves devoid of any context apart from that intended by their original owners. Indeed, items in collections are always already decontextualized by the very nature of their having been removed from their original settings. Jenny's collection, in its secondariness, adds another layer to this regression, causing her objects to "recede into a distance of uncertainty so that it is impossible for the onlooker to see them at all" (Nightwood 66). Jenny's collection is a parody of collecting because her objects can hardly be seen for what they are (or were) or for what Jenny wishes them to be.

Since Jenny is cast as an imperial plunderer stocking her Wunderkammer with stolen objects "belonging" to others, the value these items have to their original owners is reinvested by her into a dual system of value, that of the original value of the object itself and the value that Jenny places on having plundered that object. Greenblatt's argument of credibility versus exigency again comes into play here in that Jenny's objects (such as the doll) give an appearance of devotion that mimics the devotional values inscribed upon them by their

previous owners and shields them from the scrutiny of discovery that would reveal them as second-hand (just as Jenny's wedding ring creates a fiction of marriage that is true only for its original owner yet applies to Jenny through possession and display).

Jenny's objects are meant to perform her fictions, yet by placing these objects into contexts both similar and unfamiliar to those in which they were originally situated (Robin's doll being the best example since Nora spots it on Jenny's bed), Jenny's objects once again "recede into a distance of uncertainty" (Nightwood 66), causing their authentic history to become wrapped in the spectacle of Jenny's more disingenuous intentions. Thus, in her desire to make a spectacle of her collection (and to have that collection speak of herself), Jenny has unwittingly stripped away the very power of ownership she wishes to convey. This is the difference between Jenny's Wunderkammer and that of the Volkbeins in that "unlike the possessions of Hedvig and Guido, Jenny's possessions do not reflect her life, real or imagined; rather, they are. . . selected and given value by the people who possessed them before her" (Altman 211). And while several of Guido and Hedvig's objects contained value that was invested by others, they reinterpreted the meaning of these objects within the context of their "fantastic museum" (rather than in the context of the original settings from which they were removed) to create a narrative Volkbein history as inauthentic as the display of items used to support it. Jenny cannot create such a narrative, however, since she cannot speak of her own goods without directly relating them

to their previous owners because her objects have little meaning to her divorced from their previous context.

Even though Jenny wishes her collection to be viewed in direct correlation with herself and her fictive values - her collection of books giving the impression that she is well-read when in reality she is not (Nightwood 67) - this desire is impossible to fulfill due to her collection's second-handedness. She is, as the Doctor describes her, caught "between two tortures - the past that she can't share, and the present that she can't copy" (124). Jenny remains in this stasis (wherein her objects' fiction remains at odds with their genealogical history) unable to reconcile the past she has plundered with the present she has bungled (her relationship to Robin deteriorates quickly). In this way Jenny mirrors and parodies Nora in her inability to maintain a collection adequate to contain Robin. As O'Connor puts it, Jenny "has a longing for other people's property, but the moment she possesses it the property loses some of its value, for the owner's estimate is its worth" (98). Jenny's collection merely approximates Nora's devotion to Robin and is thus significantly less able to contain her than Nora's was.

Lastly, the intense juxtapositions in Dr. Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor's collection symbolize the grotesque nature of the Doctor's character and his relationship to other characters in the novel. In his apartment, stuffed full of cultural "debris" (Nightwood 86), including the medical instruments necessary for performing illegal abortions (objects that maintain his

image as a quasi-legal doctor), Nora finds items irreconcilable with the Doctor's public image strewn about in a "disorder" (78) similar to the arbitrary arrangement of Wunderkammers:

> A pile of medical books, and volumes of a miscellaneous order, reached almost to the ceiling, water-stained and covered with dust. . .; [o]n a maple dresser, certainly not of European make, lay a rusty pair of forceps, a broken scalpel, half a dozen odd instruments that she could not place, a catheter, some twenty perfume bottles, almost empty, pomades, creams, rouges, powder boxes and puffs. From the half-open chiffonier hung laces, ribands, stockings, ladies' underclothing, and an abdominal brace. . .; [a] swill-pail stood at the head of the bed, brimming with abominations. (78-79)

In its grotesque juxtaposition of objects, O'Connor's room serves as one part cabinet of medical curiosities and one part inventory of the gender paradigm he, assessing himself and Robin, dubs "invert" (136). The more morbid aspects of Renaissance collecting, also present in the Doctor's "swill-pail" of "abominations," recall certain Wunderkammer displays featuring "jars of fluid containing various small animals, frogs, and snakes. . . a real baby's head. . . a crocodile embryo" (Mauries 105). Nora is uncomfortable with the contents of O'Connor's room, yet awed by them as well:

> There was something appallingly degraded about the room, like the rooms in brothels, which give even the most innocent a sensation of

> having been accomplice; yet this room was also muscular, a cross between a *chamber a coucher* and a boxer's training camp. . . ; every object seem[ed] to be battling its own compression. (Nightwood 79)

This description highlights the Wunderkammer-like qualities of O'Connor's room, blurring the hierarchical distinctions between gender and other categories and allowing Nora a glimpse into the internal state of O'Connor's extroverted, loquacious personality.

Disorder such as that found in O'Connor's room is the disorder that the characters of Nightwood accidentally cultivate within their own lives and then spread to the lives of others. O'Connor's collection reflects this disorder, allowing Nora a space in which to confess the story of her own collection and its failure to contain Robin. O'Connor's room thus stands as the novel's most direct example of the Wunderkammer aesthetic in that no amount of rationalization or categorization can give hierarchical context to this absurd mix of the medical, the abominable, and the gender dysfunctional. O'Connor's room literally contains his world. As Nora describes it, it is a room "giving back evidence of his occupancy" (Nightwood 80) and thus a microcosm of the greater roles he plays outside it: sham doctor, abortionist, crossdresser, and collector and maker of legends.

The Doctor confesses his many roles to Nora: "I am a doctor and a collector and a talker of Latin, and a sort of petropus of the twilight and a physiognomist" (Nightwood 92). This description encapsulates, as his

Wunderkammer does, the many roles O'Connor plays in the novel, each one adding to the fiction of his own legend, a legend that O'Connor accentuates through the collection and dissemination of others' tales and legends. As a "petropus of the twilight," O'Connor is given privileged access to the accounts of others: everyone from Felix to Nora to Jenny comes to O'Connor, or else he appears before them at the perfect moment for them to confess their deeds and stories to him with the understanding that he will return the favor with discourses of his own.

O'Connor is also always informed of the activities of others even when not present in their company. The Doctor, in these instances, borders on omniscient with the panoptic quality of his gaze (similar to that of Nora's in that his gaze is consistently aware of the others): "the reason the doctor knows everything is because he's been everywhere at the wrong time and has now become anonymous" (Nightwood 82) like the figure at the center of a panopticon. This anonymity aids in his ability to gather and collect the stories of others and to weave them into his own greater narrative of humanity.

O'Connor also makes explicit, however, that he is a "charlatan" (Nightwood 96) aware of the fabrications of his titles and professions and that this awareness passes beyond himself and applies to others as well. Just as Felix "clung to his title to dazzle his own estrangement" (11), so too does the Doctor maintain an elaborate fiction of his occupation, his notoriety as a "Doctor" maintaining his legendary status among the novel's other characters. O'Connor's

"fabrications seemed to be the framework of a forgotten but imposing plan" (30) to privilege legend over history and to thus articulate an entirely different framework for navigating the webs of power present in the novel.

Like the other circus characters in the novel, O'Connor uses his title "to make [his] public life. . . mysterious and perplexing, knowing well that skill is never so amazing as when it seems inappropriate" (Nightwood 11), which is what Felix considers O'Connor's secret abortion practice to be. When Frau Mann questions O'Connor's title of Doctor, it is a rhetorical question ultimately irrelevant coming from a falsely titled circus performer in the company of a fraudulent Baron. Frau Mann is cannily aware of this: "Am I what I say? Are you? Is the Doctor?" (25), further rhetorical questions driving home the problems of authenticity in the novel. For O'Connor, "[o]ne's life is peculiarly one's own when one has invented it" (118). The Doctor is a "Doctor" because he is perceived as one just as Felix is perceived a Baron by virtue of his title and just as Guido's copies of the Medici shield might mistakenly be deemed authentic by virtue of their display and thus lend credibility to his Barony as well. These perceptions, in turn, call into question the supposedly authentic titles of Count Altamonte and the Russian Prince even though theirs are titles legitimized by history, which O'Connor undermines with his view that "history, because of its actors, is deflowered" (15). Authenticity through history is as "impossible" as legend due to its fictive, censored nature, making all of Nightwood's characters "charlatans" in the great charade of hegemonic history.

For O'Connor, "[l]egend is unexpurgated" (Nightwood 15), and thus the only means of access to any form of authenticity. O'Connor, in his privileging of legend over history, also takes many shots at hegemonic institutions in his disquisition on stories (15). O'Connor's scorn for the distinctions of rank and merit, for the trappings and hallmarks of hegemony, explains his fascination with collecting the confessional tales of others. O'Connor views this activity in relation to the pursuit of truth, confirming Foucault's notion that those who engage in the collection of confessions delight in "the anguish of answering questions and the delights of having one's words interpreted; all the stories told to oneself and to others, so much curiosity, so many confidences offered in the face of scandal, sustained. . . by the obligation of truth" (History 71), their "helpless power among the helpless" (Eliot, "Introduction" xiii). T.S. Eliot's assertion that the discourses of O'Connor grant him a measure of "helpless power" in the novel is supported by O'Connor's own confessions to powerlessness and futility despite accumulating for himself a collection invested with his power to perform the fraudulent title of Doctor. O'Connor is himself aware of the power of his fiction, calling it "the power of the charlatan" to make fiction legend and take it out of hegemonic history (Nightwood 31). Still, O'Connor is aware of the deceit of such notions as transcendence and freedom of movement, believing human existence to be a "condition that *cannot vary*" (112). Eliot describes O'Connor as "a constituent of a whole pattern" ("Introduction" xiii), a pattern that confines its constituents within a greater web of power.

O'Connor confesses as much in his final scene in the café, damning those who have confessed to him, whose confessions he so willingly collected, since whatever power he may have accumulated from them was ultimately as inauthentic as the history he wished to transpose into legend: "I've not only lived my life for nothing, but I've told it for nothing – abominable among the filthy people" (Nightwood 165). O'Connor too is left in stasis, aware that the legends he so carefully crafted for himself and others have done little to alleviate his position at the margins of hegemony.

In the end, all of Nightwood's collectors fail in their attempts to either replicate or contain power mainly because power itself cannot be replicated or contained in an individual manner. Foucault describes power as a "dense web" (History 96), and, as Eliot explains, power in Nightwood functions in a manner similar to Foucault's description: "the book is not simply a collection of individual portraits; the characters are all knotted together. . . [and] it is the whole pattern they form rather than any individual constituent, that is the focus of interest. We come to know them through their effect on each other" ("Introduction" xv). The spectacle of each character's performance or collection is only one of many examples of their effects on one another in this web of power, but it is certainly an important one. The spectacle of the circus or Wunderkammer is more than just a collection of people, images, or objects; it is also a social relationship that such collections help mediate (Debord 12).

Debord's outline of spectacle as relational certainly applies to the

relationships between Robin, Felix, Nora, and Jenny. In each instance, a collection is necessary to mediate the power dynamics at work between each person. Felix uses his fake portraits to lure Robin into marriage. Jenny wishes to purchase these portraits to underline Felix's failures. Nora's items circulate between her collection and Jenny's much as Robin herself does. Each collector performs the role of power in the hope of ensnaring Robin and fails because power itself cannot be performed on an individual basis. The subject and object of each collection, the perpetrator and audience of each performance, are locked in an eternal stasis within the web of power.

According to Foucault, the reciprocity of the gaze between subject and object challenges the idea of a binary distinction between performer, object, and audience, locking them into an infinite regression (Order 5). In the spectacle of their display, the curiosities of the circus and Wunderkammer (both human and non-human) "escape both the taxonomies of spectator and the ontologies of the subject" (Benedict 3) and thus require their audiences' interpretation of both the spectator's and the subject's place within the structures of hegemony. Like Felix, "the spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere" (Debord 23). Beneath the surface of the gaze, the distinction between center and margin is blurred because power emanates not from a single monolithic source but from the inter-relation of everyone and everything (Foucault, History 93). These interconnections in the web of power manifest themselves in reciprocity, hegemony and its parodies locked in a contest extending to infinity.

Power is unstable because the gaze is unstable, and therefore any form of category or hierarchy is also unstable. Nightwood plays into these assumptions about power in its use of the circus and museum metaphors since (according to Marcus) the novel "is about merging, dissolution, and above all, hybridization - mixed metaphors, mixed genres, mixed levels of discourse from the lofty to the low" (223). This is evident in the discourses of O'Connor, who, like Felix before him, is conversant with all manner of high and low culture and mixes their discourses together at will: "Jehovah, Sabaoth, Elohim, Eloi, Helion, Jodhevah, Shaddai! May God give us to die in our own way. I haunt the *pissoirs* as naturally as Highland Mary her cows down by the Dee" (Nightwood 91). Here alone is a grotesque combination of religious incantation blended together with a pastoral folktale and all in the narrative relation of a homosexual encounter.

In short, the grotesque is on display within the text of Nightwood's pages for the gaze of an internal audience as well as external readers. The gaze of each character toward the other traverses the same web of power as the gaze of the reader: "Nightwood redirects any voyeuristic impulses back on the reader" (Hubert 45). Thus, in this instance, and according to Marcus's definition, Nightwood is a circus housed inside a Wunderkammer caught in webs of power that trap and contain both character and reader alike. Horner and Zlosnik consider Nightwood as "the setting for a dark and bizarre encounter with boundaries which, once transgressed, then have

their very existence called into question" (78). That Nightwood itself is the macrocosmic setting for the microcosm within it lends itself to the interpretation that Nightwood, as a novel, is a Wunderkammer, a space in which the performative spectacle of its characters and their collections is continually on display. Nightwood's metaphors of the museum and the circus, its menagerie of sideshow freaks and circus performers, wandering Jews and sham Doctor, make these connections explicit, encapsulating and containing both spectacles between its covers.

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