

Elizabeth
Freeman

Sacra/mentality in
Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*

Entirely woven through with elements that are imaginary, erotic, effective, corporal, sensual, and so on, [the church] is superb!—Michel Foucault, “On Religion” (1978)

As Michel Foucault has taught us, modern Western culture’s way of bundling desires, fantasies, acts, and object choices into a kind of person, the homosexual, has its roots in a religious ritual—the confession (see Foucault 1990, especially 58–63). But if for Foucault sexuality runs along a track from confession booth to closet, the American context suggests other routes. The work of Americanist scholars such as Peter Coviello, John Mac Kilgore, and Molly McGarry has clarified the ways that ecstatically embodied belief practices in the United States—nondominant religions from Native American spirituality to Mormonism to the “science” of Spiritualism—refuse to accede to the techniques whereby acts become identities through the medium of speech.¹ Yet this work inspires me to ask: what of Catholicism itself, a minority religion in the United States? To what extent is Catholic liturgical practice (not always equivalent to Roman Catholic theology) actually much more “catholic” about bodies, desires, fantasies, and affinities than the dominant Protestant worldview of the New England colonies and eventually the United States, and in ways that contest the regime of modern sexuality? What was the confession originally a part *of*, and did the power relations in which it was once embedded all give way to modern sexuality, or might there be remainders that indicate otherwise?

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Perhaps because of his own Catholic background, Foucault (1990, 116) treats the Protestant confession as continuation of the Catholic one, arguing for “a certain parallelism in the Catholic and Protestant methods of examination of conscience and pastoral direction,” and claiming that “procedures for analyzing concupiscence and transforming it into discourse were established in both instances.” But he may have been too fast to conflate the two. In fact, the medieval reorganization of confession, and eventually the *Protestantization* of this religious ritual during the Counter-Reformation, made modern sexuality possible and foreclosed other possibilities. These included what Foucault elsewhere calls the uses of pleasure—or at least, in this case, the use of the body as a sanctioned instrument with which to achieve transformations both individual and social, to do what queer theory has called *world making*.

Early Christian penance was, of course, deeply corporeal; the rite emphasized the public display of repentance in embodied suffering. Foucault himself has described changes in the rite of penance that precede the Protestant revolution, arguing that the monastic tradition of *exagoreusis*, or the verbal expression of sin, eventually overtook *exomologesis*, the somatic expression of penitence in early Christianity. And Steven Haliczer (1996, 8) identifies the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 as a turning point in the relation between acts and words. When the Council put priestly absolution at the center of the rite of penance, they also began to extend the interrogatory phase: as Haliczer’s history of the confession in Spain reveals, after this Council there appeared numerous manuals instructing priests and penitents in the elaborately structured process of examining the sinner’s conscience and replying appropriately to this examination.²

In some ways, Early Modern Protestants simply made this already-revised Catholic rite of penance into an explicitly secular matter; Martin Luther’s *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) demoted the confession from the sacraments. But more generally, Protestantism refocused Christian attention onto the Word as manifest in Scripture, and Puritanism especially focused on Scripture oral and aural, interpreted aloud by believers or received by witnesses, in ways that had deep ramifications for the rite of penance.³ The Counter-Reformation Catholic Church, in turn, responded to Protestantism in a particularly Protestant way: the bishops at the Council of Trent (1545–63) made the confession the centerpiece of a renewed emphasis on the sacraments,

demanding more frequent and much more detailed verbal interrogations and responses, and the rite became more extravagantly linguistic (Foucault 1993, 212–15).⁴ By stripping the confession of its sacramental status, and by forcing the Catholic Church to reconfirm that very status as a specifically oral and aural exchange between priest and penitent, Protestants paved the way for the transformation of acts into the utterances that would eventually signal particular identities—a process begun in the thirteenth century and culminating in the Counter-Reformation. But more importantly for my purposes here, by desacramentalizing confession, Protestants reined in the sacraments' power to contest several aspects of the transformation of bodies into objects of knowledge. The entry of sex into discourse isolated and specified individuals as if their erotic life had nothing to do with their extended social relations (though the newly specified were, of course, able to forge new social relations on the very basis of their named identities). The regime of sexuality also diminished the power of explicitly nongenealogical models for descent, such as apprenticeship and apostlehood—even as it extended the reach of confession toward “pedagogy, relationships between adults and children, family relations, medicine, and psychiatry” (Foucault 1990, 68). And by implanting desire into (and as) a timeless psyche, “sexuality” separated erotic life from the historical process. My contention is that a close examination of the sacraments themselves, particularly those among which the confessional was originally embedded before its secularization, reveals loops of flight beyond the regime of sexuality that are as powerful and promising as those of the Protestant evangelical and spiritualist traditions discussed by other Americanists. These loops can lead us to expansive ways of conceiving engroupment and belonging on the one hand, and the relations between past and present that we call “history,” on the other.

***Nightwood's* Sacramentalities**

No novel knows this history and understands its stakes better than Djuna Barnes's modernist classic *Nightwood* (1936), which has not generally been read as a meditation on Christianity.⁵ But *Nightwood* is all about kneeling to confess: it turns over and over again to the motif of genuflection. Its original title was *Bow Down*, which became the title of the first chapter; several of its characters spend their time “going down before the impending and inaccessible,” and the main female character,

Nora Flood, goes down on her knees in horror when she first sees her lover Robin Vote with another woman (Barnes 2006, 5). These episodes echo *Nightwood's* central scene, which is explicitly figured as a confession: in a chapter titled "Watchman, What of the Night?" the pathetic and jilted Nora comes to the apartment of her friend Matthew Dante O'Connor, a cross-dressing, defrocked priest and abortionist. As Watchman, Matthew emblemizes what Foucault calls the Christian pastoral, the beneficent, all-seeing shepherd who will sacrifice himself, if necessary, for his sheep. His tiny one-room apartment, strewn with women's garments and rusty gynecological tools, also visually condenses Foucault's notion of the confessional as at once closet and precursor for the "science" of sexuality (see Veltman 2003). Ultimately, though, *Nightwood* uses religion to reject the regime of sexuality: it does so unsurprisingly by renouncing the confession, but also counter-intuitively by turning to other sacraments. Barnes illuminates a sacramental point of view—a sacramentality—that puts pressure on her own moment in which the homosexual was firmly consolidated as a species. It also contests present-day theoretical configurations of queerness as radical negativity that are, I want to argue, profoundly linked to the secular.

A few words on the sacraments are in order here. A sacrament is a palpable manifestation of God's grace, experienced as an interaction between priest and recipient and sometimes extending itself between or among these recipients. In Catholic doctrine, there are seven: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Holy Orders, Marriage, and Extreme Unction. Since Thomas Aquinas, who followed Aristotle's theories of the material, each sacrament has been understood as bipartite, consisting of what the Catholic catechism calls "essential matter" and "form."⁶ The essential matter is material—water for the Baptism; oil for Confirmation and Extreme Unction; bread and wine for the Eucharist; the priest's spoken absolution for Penance; the laying on of hands for receiving the Holy Orders; and the couple's spoken consent for Marriage. The form is verbal. Indeed, for most sacraments that form is a linguistic performative: "I baptize thee" enacts a Baptism; "I confirm thee" a Confirmation; "I do" a marriage. "I absolve thee" transforms Penance into absolution; "Accipe spiritum sanctum" ("Receive the Holy Ghost") enacts an Ordination; and "I anoint thee" enacts Extreme Unction.⁷ In sum, the words, when accompanied by the material, *are* the action; the exception is the Eucharist's command, "Eat/drink this

and remember me," where the communion consists of that eating and drinking—about which more below.

But strikingly, only two sacraments have words as both their essential matter and their form: Marriage and Penance. Despite the 1545–1563 Council of Trent establishing the necessity of marrying before priest and witnesses, the essential matter of the marriage sacrament is still that of the twelfth century as formulated by Pope Alexander III and theologian Peter Lombard: consent, evidenced by the verbal "I do" of the bride and groom rather than by the priest's "I now pronounce you man and wife" or by consummation (Martos 2001, 374). Meanwhile, historians of marriage have described the way the Catholic Church seized marriage from the purview of families by demoting tangible, customary signs of agreement between couples' families and the couple itself, such as the dowry, the ring, the handclasp, the father's "handing over" of the bride, and the kiss, and by making the words of consent the validating act.⁸ Conversely, since the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, and as reaffirmed by the Council of Trent, the essential matter of Penance has been the priest's statement of absolution rather than the penitent's dramatization or statement of his or her sins.⁹ Catholic marriage and penance, then, are the least tactile of the sacraments: while these two are centered on speaking and hearing, the other five center on touch (of water in Baptism, oil in Confirmation and Extreme Unction, and hands in Ordination) or taste (of the bread and wine in the Eucharist).

I propose that the removal of the somatic and theatrical aspects of marriage and penance in favor of verbalization, their eventual desacralization by the Protestants, and the Counter-Reformation's reclaiming these two sacraments in the Protestant terms of *aurality* and *verbosity*, are precisely what made marriage and confession so transferrable to the civil realm, so useful for a *scientia sexualis* centered on the confession and eventually for a regime of normalization centered on marriage. Our Western *scientia sexualis*, grounded in law and psychiatry, has depended on the transformation of desire/fantasy/act into words and a concurrent flowering of language identifying the sorts of people for whom these desires/fantasies/acts are paradigmatic. Normalization, which exceeds both law and the health professions to encompass statistics and population management, has depended on diminishing the language required from those against whom aberrant species of people are demarcated. In other words, the more that sexual minorities have

been pressed to speak, and through speaking establish the truth of themselves, the less the “marriageable” have had to: culturally, both sexual “deviance” and marriage are organized around a dichotomy between speech and silence. This is made particularly stark by the comparative loquaciousness of the confession and terseness of the marital declaration. While the becoming-verbal of confession (and the becoming-tacit of marriage) certainly precede the Protestant Reformation by many centuries, this shift away from embodied acts can be seen as a precursor to Protestantism’s diminution of the incarnational, visceral, and visual aspects of Catholicism in favor of a focus on the Word of God as manifest in Scripture, and it is central to the Counter-Reformation’s reorienting of Catholicism itself toward an effulgent penitential scene and, to a lesser extent, a minimal marital one.

Nightwood knows this history. The novel’s only straight marriage is brief, laconic, and disastrous: Robin marries Baron Felix von Volkbein, bears a son, and abandons them both. She does not so much as speak an “I do”; in fact she accepts Baron Felix’s proposal of marriage “as if [her] life held no volition for refusal” (Barnes 2006, 46). But the novel both stylistically mirrors the prolix aspect of the confession (the first thirty pages are a nearly unreadable series of long paragraphs) and comments on it. As the controlling voice of the novel, Matthew O’Connor aligns Protestantism with the verbal and Catholicism with the sensory, figuring Protestantism in terms of talking. He asks: “‘What do you listen to in the Protestant church? To the words of a man who has been chosen for his eloquence’” (23), and finishes by stating that the Protestant outlook “‘is as hard, as hard as the gift of gab’” (24). By contrast, he figures Catholicism as somatic: it’s “‘already in your blood’” (24). He gives Catholicism the fleshy qualities missing from Protestantism, describing the Catholic sinning boldly (“‘*pecca fortiter*’”) with his goats, and finishing with a statement that in contrast with Protestantism’s “‘hard gab,’” Catholicism is “‘as soft as a goat’s hip’” (24). But then, just as these distinctions seem firm, they merge in the figure of the Catholic confessional—which I read as a post-Reformation one—where “‘in sonorous prose, lacking contrition (if you must) you can speak of the condition of the knotty, tangled soul and be answered in Gothic echoes, mutual and instantaneous’” (24).

In other words, *Nightwood* understands that if Catholicism originally seemed promisingly carnal, the Counter-Reformation confession reduced it to a hollow verbal exchange. We see this recapitulated in

“Watchman, What of the Night?,” where Matthew’s garrulous apologia overtakes Nora’s abject declarations of her love for Robin: she has come to confess to him, but he ends up the penitent. There is even a second confessional moment in the text: Matthew goes to an empty church to confess in the form of a masturbation session, pulling out his penis and making it “face the mystery so it [the mystery] could see him [the penis] as clear as it saw me” (Barnes 2006, 140). Here, Matthew lays bare not so much his sins as his state of morphological abjection, in an act reminiscent of exomologesis. Both penitent and priest, he offers his penis as simultaneously sign and solution: it identifies his sinful state, and serves as gender-normalizing punishment for the transgender subjectivity and cross-dressing, the “me” that God “sees” but apparently cannot see through to Matthew’s female soul. Yet within the modern regime of sexuality within which the novel takes place, this form of confession fails too: neither oral confession nor penitent acts in a post-Reformation world can save Matthew. He thus finishes his own chapter-long monologue, “Go Down, Matthew,” by renouncing verbalization, declaring that “I’ve not only lived my life for nothing, but I’ve told it for nothing” (175).

Despite its own torrents of prose, then, *Nightwood* resists the triumph of verbalization, of sacramental “form,” revaluing sacramental “matter” and proffering it as a counterhistory of sexuality. We might think of *Nightwood* in terms of Barnes’s stubborn (and perhaps apocryphal?) statement that “I am not a lesbian. I just loved Thelma.”¹⁰ If being a legible lesbian at that historical moment meant a certain manishness à la Radclyffe Hall, or an investment in women’s community along the lines of Renée Vivien’s and Natalie Barney’s, or a couple-centered domestic arrangement like that of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, Barnes could only ever fail. Her sexual worldview—the capaciousness of “loving Thelma”—may have drawn less from the sexological model of the lesbian, the Sapphic Left Bank’s profeminist revaluation of women’s culture, or the ideal of the Boston marriage, than from her spiritualist grandmother’s influence, her own father’s bigamy, and her nonconsensual, quasi-incestuous first marriage to her father’s second wife’s brother. Certainly it encompassed her agonized relationship to Thelma’s committed nonmonogamy; her own bisexuality; and her exclusion from the upper-class leisure that many of the Left Bank lesbians enjoyed. To what of this complexity could “I am a lesbian” compare? And what intricacies of attachment are contained in

her seemingly defensive, self-diminishing, pre-lesbian feminist “just”? One of those intricacies, I contend, is spiritual. *Nightwood* is the story of her love for Thelma, and as I shall describe below, that story is written in a sacramental language. Then, too, Barnes’s commitment to the sacraments other than confession also has something to do with what T. Jackson Lears (1994), Heather Love (2009), and Kevin Floyd (2009) have in different ways made it possible to think of as an affinity for the premodern in protest of modernity’s reifications.¹¹

Perhaps, then, we might also call Barnes’s counterhistory of sexuality an *erotics of counterhistory*, insofar as the novel is also deeply invested in questions of the relation between past and present and yet fundamentally lacks the nostalgia of some modernist texts. The novel makes its move toward the historical less through the motif of return, say, to exomogenesis, than by renewing the promise of the two sacraments central to Catholicism, and the only two recognized as such by Protestantism: Baptism and the Eucharist. In doing so, *Nightwood* also crucially intervenes in a (perhaps by now rather predictable) debate in queer theory as to whether eschewing sociability, understood as so totally overwritten by marriage and reproduction as to be unredeemable, actually contests the regime of sexuality. As I’ll demonstrate below, the novel makes possible a reading of queer theory’s antisocial thesis as itself part and parcel of a regime of sexuality—as, indeed, completely wrapped up in the dynamic of confession that girds “sexuality”—and not as the latter’s antidote.

As I’ll argue in more depth below, *Nightwood* proffers instead what might be called a *hypersocial thesis* grounded in Baptism and the Eucharist as figures for a radically corporealized relationality, an inhabitation by and of the Other rather than a self-shattering. The basis of this thesis is twofold: the plethora of figuration (a different form of “form” than Catholicism’s words) opened up by these sacraments, and the vision of bodies and spirits as capable of inhabiting one another in traversals of corporeal boundaries. Moreover, this hypersocial thesis involves something the antisocial thesis cannot account for, the question of history: to inhabit or be inhabited by the Other includes a visceral reckoning with his or her past. Again, this is an aspect of the most lushly sensate sacraments: whereas marriage orients the betrothed toward a future until death do them part and penance orients the confessor toward the sins of his or her past, Baptism and the Eucharist have a promisingly complex relationship to time and to history.

Baptism; or, the Water of Enjoinment

In *Nightwood*, Baptism is initially a reminder of our oceanic origins, our commonality with other species in deep time. Foucault (1980, 30) writes, somewhat opaquely, that “it is not through sexuality that we communicate with the orderly and pleasingly profane world of animals.” I take this to mean that the animal world has its own extralinguistic system of ordering—one thinks, for instance, of the different roles of bees in a hive—independent of the naming function supposedly granted to Adam by God (and thus “profane”). One way to read sexuality, then, is as the demarcation between the inhuman and the human, the “human” denoting the kinds of entities that aestheticize, nominalize, and categorize not just bodies, but the pleasures of the body. A turn toward the animal would thus seem to figure a way out of the prison houses of both language and sexuality, which is to say, of the social. And *Nightwood* is often read this way.¹² Nora’s lover, Robin, is the novel’s avatar for an animality that begins with the phytological, moves through the zoological, and culminates in the antisocial. Robin first appears in a faint in her apartment, figured as a plant: her body smells like fungi, her flesh has the “texture of plant life,” and there is “an effulgence as of phosphorous glowing” around her head (Barnes 2006, 38). The narrator eventually analogizes Robin to a “beast turning human” (41), yet this process is incomplete, as “she yet carried the quality of the ‘way back’ as animals do” (44).

Robin’s prehistoric qualities are matched by her antifutural ones, and thus she embodies Lee Edelman’s (2004) most trenchant formulations of queerness: she rejects children, going so far as to threaten to smash the doll that Nora gives her as a symbol of the children they cannot have, and she even lets her pets die. In her refusal to be intelligibly human, which is to say, intelligible at all, Robin is fundamentally not just antisocial, but asocial; the novel refers to her “unpeopled thoughts” (Barnes 2006, 50), and Nora realizes that Robin “can’t ‘put herself in another’s place,’ she herself is the only ‘position’; . . . [Robin] knows she is innocent because she can’t do anything in relation to anyone but herself” (155). Indeed, Robin is the living emblem of Jacques Lacan’s (1999, 126) injunction that “there is no such thing as a sexual relation.” Finally, Robin escapes figuration. Matthew describes Nora’s fatal error regarding Robin as “dress[ing] the unknowable in the garments of the known” (Barnes 2006, 145). If a figure is something like matter

pressed into the service of an idea (and thus very different from the catechism's use of the term *form*), Robin simply refuses to let that process come to fruition. Baron Felix remarks, "I never did have a really clear idea of her at any time. I had an image of her, but that is not the same thing" (119). In sum, Robin links the antihuman, the asocial, and the antifulgural, and in doing so she clarifies the way that the anti-social thesis in queer theory has disdained the figure itself.

Robin's becoming-animal, that is, is less about degeneration or a departure from history or even humanity than it is about the fantasy of being unrepresentable, about an iconoclasm which is, I think, the basis of the antisocial thesis. We can see that iconoclasm in Leo Bersani's (1987) formulation of *jouissance* as a mode of ascesis, where anal sex serves as a rite of penance for the sin of selfhood, shattering the imago. We can see it in Edelman's (2004) *sinthomosexual*, which denotes a fundamental resistance to meaning and intelligibility. But as alluring and intellectually rigorous as these formulations are, I find them somewhat unsatisfying in that they are merely flip sides of the same coin: they are part of the complex of renunciation, asceticism, sadomasochism, and transgression of the limits of selfhood that Foucault sometimes suggests as modes of resistance to the regime of sexuality. But ultimately, this complex too depends on the rite of confession—which is to say on the linchpin of the regime of sexuality—for its meaning. It is not that one must confess before having, say, anal sex. Rather, confession has worked, historically, to produce the very form of personhood necessary for the queerly impersonal, self-unmaking, death-seeking drive to do its work. It is not possible to have the second without the first.

This is especially clear in Foucault's (1998, 137) essay "Friendship as a Way of Life":

[Asceticism is] the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear which, happily, one never attains. Can that be our problem today? We've rid ourselves of asceticism. Yet it's up to us to advance into a homosexual asceticism that would make us work on ourselves and invent—I do not say discover—a manner of being that is still improbable.

The language of "oneself," "the self," and "being" still suggests a monadic horizon for queer activities: the product of all this effort is a new and different self, seen as the precursor to and product of new social relations. Bersani, it is fair to say, does return penance to the exomological in his suggestion that anal sex does precisely this work, and

he thereby recorporealizes the rite in ways that reanimate its sacramental qualities. But the model of self-shattering that the antisocial thesis privileges, as I'm not the first feminist critic to note, is actually very much bound up in the self it seeks to jettison. Finally, Bersani's and Edelman's emphasis on destroying the figure (the ego, the self, the Child, the political horizon) makes the antisocial thesis a somewhat reactionary queer theoretical drive toward a high modernist politics of the nonrepresentational. I say "reactionary" because the ideal of nonrepresentation is not, in the end, very far from the politics of self-abstraction that animate liberal democracy; those with the heaviest burden of embodiment are least able to reach even a queer apotheosis of self-negation.¹³

If the regime of sexuality originates in the confessional and finds its pseudo-oppositional corollary in asceticism, sadomasochism, defiguration, and other elements of the antisocial thesis, we can of course follow Derrida's (2000) work on hospitality and wonder if another version of friendship, that hypersocial mode that Foucault posited as homosexuality's real, material work on the world and against the regime of sexuality, resonates in the other sacraments. For Foucault (1998, 135) writes, in the same essay: "Perhaps it would be better to ask oneself, 'What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?'" The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one's sex, but, rather, to use one's sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships.¹⁴ Here, Foucault must mean something like "homoerotic life" rather than "homosexuality," as the idea of using one's specification as a kind of person in order to arrive at relationships that dismantle selfhood seems oxymoronic; indeed, "homosexuality" has led us to forms of identity politics that multiply one kind of relationship only to shut down many others. In comparison to his words on asceticism, though, here the horizon is promisingly plural, for he focuses on social relations rather than on individual models of selfhood. What Foucault does not consider here is that relations can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated through uses of the body that do not necessarily conform to what dominant culture recognizes as sex, yet are not personal and intimate in the way that friendship feels either.¹⁵

Indeed, friendship itself is never merely personal: while Foucault would insist that radical forms of friendship must operate "outside of institutional relations" (1998, 136) by which he means marriage and identity politics as well as school, the military, and the church, no

friendship completely escapes the framings of social relations such as race, class, and gender anyway: as cliques make clear, friendship is always mediated by public forms of intelligibility. And there were also times when Foucault suggested that promising social modes could occur within institutional relations. In 1978, for instance, he got into an argument with a hitchhiker about the Catholic Church. The hitchhiker was against it. Foucault (1999, 107) responded with the words I have used as my epigraph: “Entirely woven through with elements that are imaginary, erotic, effective, corporal, sensual, and so on, [the church] is superb!” Here he seemed to recognize that the church, like many institutions, contains the contradictions Marx attributed to the capitalist workplace and Foucault understood in terms of reverse discourse: the church generates both recognized forms of being and new forms of relationality that are irreducible to what it sanctions (marriage) or condemns (homosexuality). Canon law and the church’s interrelations with the state may produce legible and legal subjects, but what Catholics call “the mysteries” go beyond these earthly boundaries, beyond the boundaries between mind and body, and beyond the boundaries between individuals. Yet they are not, for that, intimate in the secular sense of the word. Nor do they constitute friendships in themselves.

What I hope to do here, then, is to offer up the two most sensate sacraments—Baptism and the Eucharist, with a detour through the sacramental imposition of hands—as a way out of the regime of sexuality. I’ll do so not through *Nightwood*’s universally admired, unrepresentable androgyne Robin Vote, but through the much more difficult, weepy, overwrought femme Nora Flood. A minor character remarks, in the novel’s opening chapter, “*Wir setzen an dieser Stelle über den Fluss*” (We set out in this place, here, over the river) (17; translation mine). While the allusion is to the river Styx, the flood of passion on which the novel rides is Nora’s. Her full name “Nora Flood” echoes the Old Testament’s story of Noah. In Christian theology, the flood that besets him prefigures the Baptism; one might also say of course that the Baptism rewrites aspects of the Hebrew text. Nora, then, is the novel’s figure for a sacrament more radical than penitence.

Early on in the novel Nora seems aligned with the verbal and textual: the narrator tells us that as “an early Christian . . . [Nora] believed in the word” (Barnes 2006, 56). But this association of Nora with words morphs into an association with water; Matthew declares that Nora is “‘of a clean race, of a too eagerly washing people’” (91). It’s notable that

Matthew describes Protestants as “a race,” as if washing confers enough bodily likeness upon the washers such that they may be thought of as a people, with water replacing blood. But he later declares: “We wash away our sense of sin, and what does that bath secure us? Sin, shining bright and hard. In what does a Latin bathe? True dust. We have made the literal error. We have used water, we are thus too sharply reminded . . . The Anglo-Saxon has made the literal error; using water, he has washed away his page” (96). Although this passage nicely skewers the Anglican rage for spiritual and physical hygiene, oddly, here, baptism washes away the “page,” the word: in short, the “literal error” of using water and not the word is a promising one. To wash away the page and immerse oneself in the element is, in a sense, to return to the material, the dust in which “the Latin” bathes.

Matthew eventually redeems this dusty (dirty?) version of Baptism for something the novel insistently tropes as queer—the night: “I’m an angel on all fours, with a child’s feet behind me, seeking my people that have never been made, going down face foremost, drinking the waters of night at the water hole of the damned, and I go into the waters, up to my heart, the terrible waters!” (Barnes 2006, 102). Here the sacrament of Baptism is an act of “seeking my people that have never been made,” of those outside of both polity and discourse. Gathering at the font with other outcasts, Matthew enters these unclean waters not to be forgiven but to be conjoined with something, someone, somewhere, beyond the secular imagination not only of “peoplehood” but also of humanity. This is, remarkably, what a sacrament does: it uses a material substance to invite recipients into both an experience of otherness and a community. Just as the sacrament’s proffered otherness is not limited to the earthly but includes the divine, its community is not limited to existing people but encompasses beings who were “never made” as solely human, let alone as a nation—the Apostles, the saints, the angels. Or, in Matthew’s case, the damned.

We see this dual, communitarian and other-extensive aspect of the sacrament, especially baptism, enacted in *Nightwood*’s consistent linkage of humans and their others through water. Robin appears to us first figuratively immersed and transfigured into an animal, “as if sleep were a decay fishing her beneath the visible surface” (Barnes 2006, 38), the verb “fishing” curiously oscillating between “hunting her like a fish” and “turning her into a fish.” In another example of water connecting the human and the inhuman, when Nora first meets Robin in

the circus, a lioness comes to the edge of its cage, turns her head toward Robin, goes down on all fours, and, “as if a river were falling behind impassable heat, [the lioness’s] eyes flowed in tears that never reached the surface” (60). This scene, in turn, prefigures the novel’s famous ending in the ruined chapel on Nora’s property, where Robin goes down on all fours before Nora’s dog, and then begins to fight with it as if she herself were a dog. The dog begins to cry, and Robin for the first time cries too, cries with him, “crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head, until [Robin] gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees” (180).

Why does this final liquidation of the boundary between human and animal take place not only in a chapel but also in front of “a contrived altar, before a Madonna,” with flowers and toys heaped at her feet and two candles burning? (Barnes 2006, 178). It is because this scene, like the one in Matthew’s apartment, figures a sacrament, one as powerful as the confessional but extremely different in its performance and meaning. Baptism is practiced by various Christian sects in at least four different ways—aspersion or sprinkling, affusion or pouring, immersion of part of the body, or total submersion—but its fundamental sign is water flowing to the head. *Nightwood*’s final scene is not one of washing body and soul clean, though, as Matthew has earlier described Baptism. Instead, the novel’s final scene separates ablution from absolution, and merges with Matthew’s figure of the “waters of night.”

Crucially, this final baptism through tears joins Robin’s body with something, finally. Whereas confession is a technique that, Foucault tells us, specified individuals and isolated, intensified, and consolidated acts into monadic identities, Baptism is fundamentally a rite of engroupment, of admission to a social field irreducible to the human. Its fundamental work is not on the self, whether to shore it up or to dismantle it; Baptism not only asperses but disperses the self. Then, too, the identity it confers, that of “Christian,” has little to do with the specification of individuals; there is no postbaptismal apparatus that characterizes the baptized person as a kind of Christian (except, redundantly, a baptized one). Robin, then, is baptized at the end of *Nightwood* in boys’ clothes, by and with a dog, not into the divine, and not merely into Matthew’s community of human inverts, but into an unnameable interspecies form of belonging.

Furthermore, the sacraments do not only figure the “matter” of binding humans laterally, across spatial imaginaries. As theologian Mark Jordan (2006, 331) reminds us, “A spiritual child through baptism exchanges biological family for the genealogy traced in ritual supersession.” Genealogy is perhaps the wrong word here, as baptism enfolds the participant into a collective movement through time, one whose simultaneous forward propulsion and backward extension have to do with predestination and fulfillment, prophesy and recapitulation, rather than with biological reproduction or even simple descent. Jordan writes that “Baptism inaugurates a series of inhabitations or vicarious performances that reach backwards, sideways, and forwards through an ingathered history” (328). This question of how history can be “ingathered,” which is to say crystallized into formations that can illuminate the past, catalyze the future otherwise, and create diagonal lies across the temporal field, is important. It counters not only the (admittedly promising) nonrelationality of the antisocial thesis but also the (much less promising) ahistoricity of that way of construing queer. A queer hypersocial thesis, then, necessarily entails the question of the social as it binds us with what and whom have come before us, and will survive after us: *Nightwood* clarifies, again, the role of the sacraments in making this possibility felt.

Imposition; or, the Hands of Historicity

We have precious few ways of *ingathering* the past, a term I take to mean apprehending the past as more than a sequence of events in which one supersedes the next—rather, it means something akin to Walter Benjamin’s concept of the convolute, literally a sheaf (Eiland and McLaughlin 1999, xiv). But the convolute invokes the leaf in the bud, the event in longitudinal history rolled back over and over on itself in lateral relations such that events of different times can be thought or felt in conjunction. What does this look like as analytic or cultural practice? The most recent major innovation on the way that literary and cultural critics practice the analysis of history has been New Historicism, which privileges a kind of sideways ingathering of fragments from a single moment in time, and we are still reckoning with this method. But despite New Historicism’s concept of a poetics of culture, as an analytic practice it has been somewhat hostile to both pleasure and figuration; it has been grounded in the notion that works of literature

aestheticize and displace a violence that only a proper analytic investigation can bring back to the fore. New Historicism has been about recovering the history that hurts, as Fredric Jameson (1982, 102) puts it, and in that sense it is—to use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (1997) potent terms—a paranoid criticism rather than a reparative one, for it is always suspicious of the figure, the arrangement, that which imposes some kind of seemingly meaningful pattern on existence.

We can see this anti-aesthetic clearly in the New Historicist relation to the sacraments. As David Aers (2003) has discussed in great depth, New Historicism was elaborated by Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt (2001) in direct opposition to the sacraments and to sacramental ways of thinking. They equate the sacraments with sterile and ahistorical “doctrinal formalism,” as opposed to living and vital history; analogizing the art object to the Eucharist, they write that

when the literary text ceases to be [like the Sacrament] a sacred, self-enclosed, and self-justifying miracle, when in the skeptical mood we foster it begins to lose at least some of the special power ascribed to it, its boundaries begin to seem less secure and it loses exclusive rights to the experience of wonder [The new historicist project] is concerned with finding the creative power that shapes literary works *outside* the narrow boundaries in which it had hitherto been located, as well as *within* those boundaries. (12)

I am sympathetic to the New Historicist project, and remain deeply invested in questions of how texts contain the historicizing seeds of their own undoing.¹⁶ But given Gallagher and Greenblatt’s rhetorical divide between a dead formalism and a creative, shaping historicism—a divide that, we might note, always risks inflection by the homo/hetero divide—I think it may not be a coincidence that an antisacramental New Historicism and the New Americanist writing that followed it have not been particularly hospitable to queer theory, that it has taken a generation of queer theorists trained under this method some time to formulate other ways of doing and thinking history.¹⁷ At the same time, what queer culture and by extension queer theory may have in common with New Historicism is, paradoxically, something **sacramental: a relation to the fragmentary object as the invocation of and invitation to a world.** Just as the anecdote is the New Historicist key to what Greenblatt calls speaking with the dead, a camp performance is the reanimation of a historically specific, culturally “dead,” ideologically oversaturated object (a Cole Porter song, a Dolly Parton wig, a Wildean gesture,

Joan Crawford as Mommie Dearest).¹⁸ But queer culture parts ways with New Historicism by treating that fragment as a doorway not just into the past, but into a series of complex temporal relations: acknowledgments of contemporary paradoxes and struggles, invocations of a future to come, surrogate relations to the dead, nonlinear models of descent (and dissent).

In other words, camp has an irreverent sacramental sensibility. In *The Premodern Condition*, Bruce Holsinger (2005, 5–6) has described the sacramental sensibility as one “which finds in discrete past events and surviving relics the wondrous promise of an invisible totality it can only occasionally glimpse in the lived present.” In other words, the sacrament takes up something acknowledged to have happened, and uses that fragment as a prismatic lens for two things: the fleeting presence of utopia in the now, and a peek at the kingdom of heaven that awaits believers in the future. By resurrecting the term *sacramental*, Holsinger points toward ways of knowing that include desires, bodies, and fantasies, and which the stridently secularized historicisms of New Historicism (and even the astringently atheistic philosophisms of some Continental theory) tend to disavow or displace. Aers is right to point out that religious ritual and its treatment of objects are not by any means an avoidance of conflict, contemporaneity, or narrative, three elements integral to what Gallagher and Greenblatt call “history.” Nor do the sacraments avoid diachrony, local contingency, process, or accidental likeness, other aspects of practicing historicisms new and otherwise.

In fact, *Nightwood* is as suffused with the desire to speak with the dead as New Historicism ever was, but it understands sacramentality as a way of doing so rather than as a mode of avoidant self-enclosure. Importantly, the novel figures the “doing” of history as an imposition or laying-on of hands. This gesture—the essential matter of the rite of Holy Orders that admits properly trained men into the formal priesthood—also appears in Confirmation, Baptism, and Extreme Unction, and it forms a part of the blessing administered by priests to penitents, the married couple, and communion takers. The laying on of hands is another visible sign of the Holy Spirit, understood as a means of conveying that spirit to the newly ordained; it is also sometimes interpreted as a way of imparting ministerial gifts, or charism; and some theologians describe it as an ongoing conduit between recipient and divine source.¹⁹ Its role as a means of power transferred from one priest to the next also gives it a kind of supercessionary character going back

to the original Apostles: in this sense the laying on of hands conveys something both eternal (divinity) and historical (succession).

In *Nightwood*, hands are the relay for a less purely monumental or sequential movement between past and present. About Robin, Felix observes that “when she touched a thing, her hands seemed to take the place of the eye. He thought: ‘she has the touch of the blind who, because they see more with their fingers, forget more in their minds.’ Her fingers would go forward, hesitate, tremble, as if they had found a face in the dark. When her hand finally came to rest, the palm closed; it was as if she had stopped a crying mouth” (Barnes 2006, 45–46). Robin’s hand, her touch, overtakes the visible, supplanting both eye and “crying mouth” or speaking instrument. In a Nietzschean ([1874] 1997) mode of amnesia as a catalyst for experiencing the present, Robin’s touch also stays the movement of memory. Crucially, *Nightwood*’s regime of palpability contains within it a kind of forgetting of the cognitive, or remembering of the visceral, that founds the novel’s alternatives to genealogy, lineal descent, and history proper. Here is one example, one of the most beautiful passages in the novel, and a complex reimagining of the imposition of hands: “As an amputated hand cannot be disowned because it is experiencing a futurity, of which the victim is its forebear, so Robin was an amputation that Nora could not renounce. As the wrist longs, so her heart longed” (Barnes 2006, 64). In this elaborate synecdoche, hand and wrist are cleaved in both senses of the word. They cannot be severed, yet their separation is necessary to assert the difference between their futures: the hand is experiencing a futurity of which the wrist can only be an ancestor. But rather than touching in a forward movement, here the hand longs physically backward through the wrist, wishing itself extensive enough to meet the body not in the past but in a future that precludes it (else the hand would not be “amputated,” and Nora cannot renounce Robin precisely *because* Robin is an amputation). The hand, that touch that enables forgetting “with the mind” though not apparently with the body, opens up a past of suffering, and a future of rejoining. Both memory and futurity here are metacarpal.

In *Nightwood*, then, the laying on of hands gets transmuted from a means of signifying a relation to the divine or bestowing the gifts of ministry to a way of palpably reorganizing the relation between past and present. The gesture, appearing only fleetingly, nevertheless links the affiliative aspect of Baptism to the complexly filiative work of the Eucharist.

Blood, or Food

Matthew's distinction between Protestantism and Catholicism turns on the figure of blood ("in the blood"), explicitly counterposed to words ("the gift of gab"). But what does it mean to say that Catholicism—perhaps even Christianity—is "in the blood?" How can Christianity be sanguinary, when it has been so consistently theorized and theologized as a form of sodality beyond biological kinship? In fact, the new Covenant is supposed to be a counterimaginary to family, and even to what we now know as the eugenic concept of race, which is to say, the idea that something corporeal connects earthly families across the boundaries of both domicile and historical moment. In some ways, then, the bread and wine of Christian theology are simply another version of the Baptismal waters, insofar as they posit belonging as a relationship of fluids shared in ways that supersede the fictions of sperm and blood that organize the meanings of kinship, and a version of the imposition of hands, insofar as they represent descent as a matter of surrogation.

Here are the words the priest speaks at the Eucharist, quoting Christ at the last supper:

On the day before he was to suffer,
 he took bread in his holy and venerable hands,
 and with eyes raised to heaven
 to you, O God, his almighty Father,
 giving you thanks, he said the blessing,
 broke the bread
 and gave it to his disciples, saying:

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT OF IT,
 FOR THIS IS MY BODY,
 WHICH WILL BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU.

In a similar way, when supper was ended,
 he took this precious chalice
 in his holy and venerable hands,
 and once more giving you thanks, he said the blessing
 and gave the chalice to his disciples, saying:

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT,
 FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD,
 THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT,
 WHICH WILL BE Poured OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY

FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME. (Catholic Church 2011, 639)

It's easy, and tempting, to see this eaten body and poured-out blood as a radical reorganization of corporeal connectivity, and indeed this is what I've been suggesting. But *Nightwood* complicates this sacrament by reminding us of the role of the Jew in blood theology. The novel's figure for blood as lineage, kinship, and descent is Felix von Volkbein, the fake baron born on a bed stitched with the emblems of a made-up aristocracy. Far from being a nobleman, Felix's father Guido is "a Jew of Italian descent" (Barnes 2006, 4), whose lineage is entirely fictional: his borrowed name, Volkbein, contains the figure of a biologized people, a "volk"; he has stolen a coat of arms and invented a "list of progenitors . . . who had never existed" (5–6); and the portraits of his father and mother that eventually hang in his dining room are "reproductions of two intrepid and ancient actors" that he found in a dusty attic (9–10). Guido also carries a handkerchief whose color scheme indexes the 1466 running of the Jews at Corso, making him what the narrator calls, in racialized terms, "the sum total of what is the Jew . . . black with the pain of a participation that, four centuries later, made him a victim, as he felt . . . the degradation by which his people had survived" (4–5). Here we see the stereotype of the Jew as Sander Gilman (1990, 1991) has described it: figuratively black (1991, 167–93, 234–44), mired in history, incurably bound to racial ties (76) (or as the novel puts it, "heavy with impermissible blood" [Barnes 2006, 5]), greedy (Gilman 1991, 122–23), duplicitous (10–37), and eternally victimized (1990, 360).

So what, then, is it that Christians are consuming when they figuratively drink the blood of a Jew? In one of the novel's most complex statements about the Eucharist, *Nightwood's* narrator remarks that "the Christian traffic in retribution has made the Jew's history a commodity; it is the medium through which he receives, at the necessary moment, the serum of his own past that he may offer it again as his blood" (Barnes 2006, 13). The tangle of pronouns here does not make things easy: the "it" of the second clause could be "the Christian traffic in retribution" or "the Jew's history"; "he" could be the Jew or the Christian; the second "it" could be "his [the Jew's] own past" or "the Christian traffic retribution" again. Notwithstanding, the phrase "the Christian traffic in retribution" suggests penance. Reading for the first set of possibilities in each pair I have named, penance turns out to be a means of recirculating the past when it is rethought as a means of injecting the penitent (here, the Jew) with the "serum," the fluid, of history. The past, marked as Jewish, becomes sacramental blood. In other words, here

penance is rethought in precisely Eucharistic terms, as a sacrificial offering of blood that reanimates a community, as sacraments do. But Barnes also rethinks the Eucharist as an offering of history, of pastness itself, in ways that the New Historicist description of the sacrament as merely formal belies. Barnes's problematic formulation that Jewish sacrifice is the bedrock of a "commodified" Christian redemption seems to damn Jews and Christians in the same breath, but it does suggest that the sacraments are deeply, complexly historicist.

Nightwood also recognizes this process as in keeping with capitalism. According to Matthew O'Connor, the function of Christianity is to "bring up from that depth charming and fantastic superstitions through which the slowly and tirelessly milling Jew once more becomes the 'collector' of his own past" (Barnes 2006, 13). Disturbingly, here Christians recycle histories of suffering and exclusion into objects of consumption resold to their original owners—retelling the Old Testament as the New, we can presume. And they do so in ways that exactly follow the movement of the commodity-fetish: A Jew's "undoing," Matthew declares, "is never profitable until some *goy* has put it back into such shape that it can again be offered as a 'sign'" (13). He continues: "A Jew's undoing is never his own, it is God's; his rehabilitation is never his own, it is a Christian's" (13). And of course, the commodity-fetish is precisely the thing that obscures histories of suffering—the relation between owner and laborer—in a fantasy that the subject can be renewed, eternally, by the product: it is the form of formalism itself. This is certainly one way to read the sacramental, and the novel understands that the sacrament can be, simply, an uncomplicated reincorporation and sanctification of the Jew. Indeed, as Gil Anidjar (2009, 48) persuasively argues, the drinking of sacramental blood is not actually separable from later, racializing figurations of blood purity: Eucharist and eugenics—etymologically "*eu-* (good) *charism* (grace)" and "*eu-* (good) *gens* (people)" respectively—are not that far apart. Early Christians imagined themselves as those who, by drinking the pure blood of Christ, became themselves a pure people. In this sense, Barnes's choice of the term *serum* is not incidental: a serum is actually plasma purged of clotting agents, used as an antitoxin, and we can imagine the Eucharist as, precisely and paradoxically, a Jewish offering made to purge a people of Jewishness.

Yet *Nightwood's* other images of the Eucharist emphasize the quality of the host as food rather than as purified serum, and thus turn it other

ways. It is notable that nobody in the novel seems to consume any food, though Matthew mentions eating a salad and everyone drinks like fish. Instead, people are troped as edible: for instance, the circus performer Frau Mann has “a skin that was the pattern of her costume, a bodice of lozenges, red and yellow . . . one somehow felt they ran through her as the design runs through hard holiday candies” (Barnes 2006, 16). A more directly sacramental image of receiving the past through the incorporative gestures of the Eucharist by eating people is reiterated in the first account of Robin: “Such a woman is the infected carrier of the past . . . we feel that we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers” (41). Here, the image of “eaten death returning” is a way to come into contact with the savagery of our ancestors, with the violence and impurity indexed by the blood on their lips that could indicate either their cannibalism or their own version of a brutal Eucharist. This passage proposes eating the other not only as a movement beyond discourse—as Foucault (1998, 136) describes friendship, two people meeting “without terms or convenient words, with nothing to assure them about the meaning of the movement that carries them toward each other”—but also as time travel, a means of quite literally tasting the blood of the past. In other words, in *Nightwood*’s economy of sacramental friendship, the encounter with the Other must include an encounter with his or her past, and without the Christian recycling of this into a commodity. Foucault’s (1998, 136) description of friendship as “the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force,” then, is perhaps not temporally thick enough, not as rich as the blood on the lips of Robin’s predecessors.

What we have here is the image of a sacrament as something more than a palpable means of infusing a people with an otherness such that they feel a visceral sense of belonging to one another and to God, important as that might be for countermanding marital and genealogical notions of togetherness. Instead, what I am describing as a Barneesian sacramentality includes the rupturing bodily encounters both excised from the rite of penance by the organized church and indicative of what it means to really host the Other, which includes opening oneself to the pain of his or her past. *Nightwood*’s counterpoint to the regime of sexuality, with its verbalization of everything, is something like cannibalism, a completely different use of the mouth—though I’d argue that it is a mutual and reciprocal eating in which neither party is

completely dead. Thus for *Nightwood*, cannibalism is less a shattering of the self than a remixing of it. This is what I would like to stress as crucial to queer hypersociability: it risks wounding encounters between bodies, and encounters between previously wounded bodies. Yet it is not afraid of risking images of wholeness in the figure, or of taking the figure too literally (or, indeed, of taking the figure into the body). It understands that history hurts, but the gustatory trope allows for other experiences of history, including that of satisfaction. And it does not disavow connections between humans, and between humans and others, that some might call merely religious.

We can see a glimpse of this queer sociability that I am linking to a sacramental outlook in Matthew's statement that "Nora will leave [Robin] some day, but though those two are buried at opposite ends of the earth, one dog will find them both" (Barnes 2006, 113). What links Robin and Nora is not a rosy vision of a shared subjectivity achieved by eating the same substance, nor an exalted spiritual state of living together after death, but a shared susceptibility to being eaten by the same creature. Here again, animals lead us to the extralinguistic aspect of the sacramental, and its ability to provide connective tissue between the dead and the living, the past and the present. And it is Nora, again, who figures the passion of giving her body and blood to be eaten for this purpose: "Nora robbed herself for everyone; incapable of giving herself warning, she was continually turning about to find herself diminished. . . . She was by fate one of those people who are born unprovided for, except in the provision of herself" (57–58). This figure of eating impurity, of offering the body as necessarily impure because human food, throws a wrench into any fantasy of confession as communication, as language purified of power relations—if indeed one could have such a fantasy after Foucault. The narrator insists that Nora's "good is incommunicable" (57), that her passions "ma[k]e the seventh day immediate" (58) in a way that obviates questions of belief and makes faith a material matter. The narrator continues: "to 'confess' to her was an act even more secret than the communication provided by a priest . . . she recorded without reproach or accusation, being shorn of self-reproach or self-accusation" (58). In the figure of a confession that is "more secret" than the "communication provided by a priest," the pun on "communication" (which means both to converse and to administer the sacraments) suggests that Nora offers up and receives a Eucharist of a visceral, nonverbal kind.

In all, then, *Nightwood* moves from the confessional whereby acts, fantasies, and desires turn into discourse; through Baptism whereby immersion in, drinking of, and exchanging water enables a reconfiguration of the social; through the laying on of hands whereby the past is a visceral encounter; to the Eucharist, where consumption remixes both selfhood and the present. Tracking this, I have asked: if sexuality and its Other in the project of asceticism both emerge from the rite of confession, what would the other that Foucault calls friendship, and I am calling queer hypersociability, look like if imagined in terms of the rite of the Eucharist? It would, I have suggested, look more engaged with pastness, violence, and memory, and involve collisions of bodies with one another and with spirit and animal, rather than like sex as we know it. If the New Historicism also emerged from a rejection of the Eucharist, what would a Eucharistic imagining of the historical look like, and what is its purchase for queer theory? It would not counterpose the figural and the historical, but exploit the trace of the visceral in the sign for new forms of connectivity, insisting that the queer and the social are inseparable. I think *Nightwood* helps immensely in thinking about these questions. The sacramentality of Djuna Barnes lies in her commitment to the tangible, the perceptible: in her version of history, we leave our body and our blood to be eaten by the dogs.

University of California, Davis

Notes

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- 1 On Native American speech as “enthusiastic,” I have learned from Kilgore (2012); on the Mormons, see Coviello (2013, 104–28) and Freeman (2002); on Spiritualism, see McGarry (2012). I’ve also written about the Oneida Perfectionists in some of the same terms; see Freeman (2004).
- 2 Foucault (1990, 58) also cites the Twelfth Lateran Council as a turning point.
- 3 Kibbey (1986, 7) writes that for Puritans in the English colonies, salvation was “essentially a linguistic event,” in which listeners’ relation to

their own language was transformed in a “conversion from one system of meaning to another.” But of course any scholar of Early Modern literature and culture will recognize that my schematic division of Catholics into “the material” and Protestants into “the textual” is an oversimplification. As Kearney (2009, 22) has argued, Protestants struggled with the problem that the text itself is material, and also believed that responses to the Word would and should be somatic (34). But I think it is fair to say that nonverbal transactions are less important to Protestants than to even post-Reformation Catholics.

- 4 For detailed renditions of the same story, see both Haliczzer (1996) and Martos (2001).
- 5 The extant bibliography on *Nightwood's* exploration of Judaism, by contrast, is large. It includes Trubowitz (2012), Hanrahan (2001), and Altman (1993). In terms of Catholicism, *Nightwood* has also been read as a neo-Decadent text (see Blyn 2008), and Decadence is complexly entwined with Catholicism (see Hanson 1997). But nobody has taken *Nightwood* seriously as, in some ways, a Catholic theology, or perhaps a countertheology of Catholicism.
- 6 For a concise history of each sacrament, see Martos (2001); on Aquinas in particular, see 60–64.
- 7 For an enumeration of the matter and form of each sacrament see Catholic Catechism (2003).
- 8 In addition to Martos (2001, 351–80), see Coontz (2006, 106–7); Goody (1983) makes a compelling argument that the Catholic Church became involved in marriage regulation and rites because they wanted to wrestle large tracts of land away from aristocratic landholders, uninheritable lands defaulting automatically to the Church.
- 9 On penance and the two Councils, see Martos (2001, 295 and 308–12).
- 10 Thelma Wood, her lover (see Field 1983, 137).
- 11 On antimodern premodernism, see Lears (1994); on identifications with the sexual formations made obsolete by the hetero-/homo- divide, see Love (2009); on the reification of “sexuality” as part of a larger aspect of the system of production, see Floyd (2009).
- 12 Persuasive readings along these lines include Seitler (2008, 94–128) and Stockton (2009).
- 13 I take my understanding of disembodiment as a relay to citizenship from Warner (1990) and Berlant (2008).
- 14 Note that by “sexuality” here Foucault means not the regime of knowledge/power, but something more like “erotic acts.”
- 15 Interestingly, Bersani and Phillips (2008) offer up the analytic scene as just this promising kind of impersonal relational mode. But again, it's all talk—and thereby it conforms to a Protestant split between an apprehending and cognizing mind and a body that cannot take on this function. In this sense it repudiates Freud's compelling claims about the symptom

as a means of bodily knowledge and communication. More promising is their discussion of the original scene for the impersonal, the disinterested love of God theorized by Catholic mystics in the late seventeenth century as “le pur amor,” where the love of God does not depend on whether God is merciful or vengeful to humans: love is, here, indifferent to reward or punishment for that love. But though they analogize that kind of love to “bareback” (condom-free) sex between men, Bersani and Phillips do not elaborate on the role of bodily acts. It does seem significant that they cite St. Catherine of Genoa’s inability, as a follower of pure love, to confess her sins (51–53).

- 16 For example, a masterful, though not precisely New Historicist, account of how historical elements deconstruct the morality of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s tales and sketches is Colacurcio (1984).
- 17 While the New Americanists by no means excluded sexuality or queer theory from consideration, I think it is fair to say that their suspicion of the aesthetic made it difficult to claim certain queer strategies as directly political or, indeed, historicizing. I consider Nealon (2001) to be the inaugural source in the shift toward considering queer modes of historiography. McGarry (2012) provides a splendid example of queer theory, religious studies, and historiographical questions reinflecting one another.
- 18 I have argued elsewhere, following the lead of Dyer (1986) and Ross (1989), that camp is best understood as a queer archival practice, albeit without the reverence for preservation that accompanies archival work (see Freeman 2010).
- 19 On the history and theological disputes over the laying on of hands, see Tipei (2009).

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