The Importance of Truth: Nonfictive Bases for the Novels and Short Stories of Robert McAlmon

Edward N. S. Lorusso

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THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH: NONFICTION BASES
FOR THE NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES OF ROBERT McALMON

BY

EDWARD N.S. LORUSSO

B.A., University of Maine, 1985
M.A., University of Maine, 1987

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

July 1992
Dedicated to the Memory of Robert McAlmon
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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B.A. English, University of Maine, 1985
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Robert McAlmon's fiction was never published in the United States during his lifetime. Not until the 1960s, a decade after his death, did American versions of Being Geniuses Together and Distinguished Air appear. Most recently, the University of New Mexico Press has published three McAlmon books: Village, Post-Adolescence, and Miss Knight and Others. This new accessibility will allow a reevaluation of his work.

McAlmon most often wrote about his own life and the lives of those around him. While contemporaries dismissed him as a mere reporter, McAlmon can now be seen as writing nonfiction novels and short stories, decades before that genre was recognized. This new perspective enhances McAlmon's perceptions of himself and others. In effect, he preserved the times and places he wrote about in an honest, objective manner.

McAlmon also wrote inventive, complex fiction. Short stories like "Miss Knight" and "The Indefinite Huntress" prove that McAlmon could write as well as chronicle. "Miss Knight" follows an aging transvestite through the rubble of postwar Berlin; "The Indefinite
Huntress" recasts McAlmon's failed marriage to Bryher as the story of Lily Root and Red Neill. Both short stories are multi-layered and textually complex.

McAlmon can now be seen as a writer of formidable talent, one who often chose to write nonfictive fiction, but who could also create. This new critical perspective should help to reestablish McAlmon as a major writer of the 1920s and 30s.
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INTRODUCTION

Robert McAlmon is chiefly remembered for being one of the livelier members of the set of Americans of the Jazz Age known as the expatriates. Although his name has continued to appear in many memoirs, biographies, and other books about the Lost Generation, his fame has been limited to the activities of gadabout and avant-garde publisher.

McAlmon, however, was a writer. He considered himself primarily to be a writer; whatever else he was, it was a distant second to his chosen profession. While he was publishing Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and William Carlos Williams, among others, and although he was dancing and drinking away his Paris nights with James Joyce and others, McAlmon was always writing.

The question that arises then is: Why is he not then remembered as an American writer of the 1920s and 30s? The answer is as easy as the question is inevitable. McAlmon’s reputation as a writer has never been established in the United States for two principal reasons: first, few of his books published in Paris were allowed entry into this country because of obscenity laws and because the Paris imprint was often enough to bar books from entry; second, before 1990, almost nothing of his writing had been published in the United States. For one reason or the other, McAlmon’s novels, short stories, poems, essays, and memoirs went begging for an American publisher.

Although Ezra Pound and Kay Boyle championed McAlmon’s writing and actively sought an American publisher for his works, only one volume of poetry, Not Alone Lost (New Directions, 1937), was published in the
United States during his lifetime. Despite McAlmon's several trips back to the United States taken expressly to find a publisher, his works were summarily dismissed. There remain some spirited letters from F. Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and the American editor, Maxwell Perkins, concerning McAlmon the man and McAlmon the writer. These letters and many other documented pieces disclose the behind-the-scenes battles that McAlmon consistently lost.

During the 1920s and early 1930s, he published two novels—Post-Adolescence (1923) and Village (1924)—three collections of short stories—A Hasty Bunch (1922), Distinguished Air (1925), and The Indefinite Huntress and Other Stories (1932)—and several volumes of poetry. By the middle of the 1930s, however, the writing stopped. When his money ran out, he lost the buffer that allowed him to live free and write daily. The decade of the Great Depression engulfed Europe, and as war clouds gathered on the horizon, McAlmon's energies were spent in trying to get out of Europe.

His last major publication during his lifetime was Being Geniuses Together, his memoir of the 1920s in Paris. This book was published in England in 1938; it was not published in the United States until more than a decade after his death in 1956, and then only at the insistence of Kay Boyle, who edited the original volume and interspersed chapters of her own memoirs, many of which overlapped McAlmon's anecdotes. The 1968 publication of McAlmon and Boyle's Being Geniuses Together stands as perhaps the most incisive and honest look at the expatriate movement and the lives and times of the principal players.

The book seems a far cry from what James Joyce, in a peevish moment, called "the office boy's revenge" (Knoll 306). That comment
caused McAlmon to sever his friendship with Joyce, who lost more than McAlmon's comradeship: McAlmon had been paying Joyce a monthly allowance of $150. Although Joyce and McAlmon had been close friends, close enough for Joyce to ask McAlmon to type much of the manuscript of *Ulysses*, Joyce overreacted to McAlmon's memoir, believing McAlmon gave away too many secrets. The delegation to "office boy," however, demonstrated to McAlmon exactly what Joyce thought of him. It was a position McAlmon would find difficult to escape; most of the big names of the decade relegated him to a secondary role even while they accepted his offers of publication and money.

On the verge of World War II, McAlmon was trapped in France. Through the efforts of his family, legislators, and others, he was finally gotten out via Lisbon. His succinct comment on reaching Lisbon was "Thank God for German faggots" (*Hagius* 17). Back in the United States, McAlmon dutifully went to work for his brothers in their surgical supply store in El Paso—"selling trusses in the desert" (*Smoller* 284). From El Paso, McAlmon migrated to Phoenix, where he also worked in the family business. During the early 1940s, his recurring bouts with tuberculosis and ongoing alcoholism forced his absence from the stores on several occasions. By 1951, McAlmon was forced to retire from selling trusses in the desert or anywhere else; he moved for a final time to Desert Hot Springs, California, where he died of pneumonia and alcoholism on February 2, 1956. His nephew, George McAlmon, remembered his uncle's death: "I knew him pretty well. . . . He had a drinking problem. . . . All those guys [expatriate writers] they either went to AA of they died from it. He died from it (*Albuquerque Journal* October 13, 1990).
Since 1990, two collections of McAlmon's short fiction and his two surviving novels, *Village* and *Post-Adolescence*, have been reprinted by the University of New Mexico Press. McAlmon reportedly had completed a first draft of a long novel called *Family Panorama*, but copies have not survived. Now, after more than 60 years, the novels and many of the stories of Robert McAlmon are finally available in the United States. This new accessibility has allowed a critical reexamination of his work, an examination that led James R. Mellow to praise *Village* as "startlingly fresh for its time and, for that matter, any time" and "a masterfully controlled bit of writing" (*New York Times Book Review*, August 1990), and a precursor of contemporary "non-fiction" works by authors such as Norman Mailer, Gore Vidal, and Truman Capote.

McAlmon's purposeful choice of creating nonfictional novels and short stories places him at the forefront of that genre. Moreover, this dissertation will document that McAlmon could, when he chose to, write more traditional, fictive pieces, an ability that is especially evident in his later works like "The Indefinite Huntress."

McAlmon's new visibility allows a whole new generation to evaluate his work. This dissertation is such an evaluation. And although his work is still sometimes denigrated, most recently by Gore Vidal in a foreword to a McAlmon short-story collection, *Miss Knight and Others*, in which Vidal flatly states that McAlmon "invents nothing," there is much to be admired in McAlmon's nonfictional pieces as well as his more complex, fictive stories.

McAlmon often cast his eye back to his own youth in order to understand himself. In such stories as "The Jack Rabbit Drive," "Green Grow the Grasses," "A Boy's Discovery," and in the novel, *Village*,
McAlmon tells and retells the stories of his boyhood in the American Midwest. More often than not, he is himself the protagonist in the story; more often than not, the protagonist learns some kind of lesson. There are two ways of looking at these lesson-oriented stories: first, one can argue that McAlmon is merely pointing at the important lessons he learned as a boy; second, one can argue that McAlmon is reinventing his youth to fit the lessons that any boy learns. In either case, there is more here than the mere chronicling of days past, as Vidal implies.

And so, Vidal’s statement, admittedly applied towards McAlmon’s use of Vidal’s own family, unwittingly points to one of McAlmon’s chief strengths as a writer: the ability to recast his own life as a literary event. Vidal is not alone in his general dismissal of McAlmon. There were many before him. Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Ford Madox Ford, Katherine Anne Porter, and T.S. Eliot all had their turns at labeling McAlmon a hack. And as the decades passed, the voices of Pound, Boyle, and Williams, as supportive as they might be, were ultimately and uniformly ignored.

In order to gain an overall view of McAlmon as man and writer, one must start at his beginnings in the American Midwest and chart the course of his life through his Bohemian years in New York’s Greenwich Village and on to his continental years in Paris, Berlin, and other colorful locales. This brief tour of one man’s life will be mirrored in his fiction, and this examination will reveal how he often chose to use his and others’ lives as the basis for a neglected body of writing that rings with a clarity of truth not always found in the fiction of Hemingway or Fitzgerald. And it is the importance of truth in
McAlmon's writing that helps set him apart from more conventional or traditional writers.
CHAPTER I: VILLAGE, VIDAL, AND THE SHORT STORIES

Robert McAlmon was born in Clifton, Kansas, on March 9, 1896. His father, the Reverend John Alexander McAlmon, was a Princeton-educated Presbyterian minister (Smoller 9); his mother was Bessie Urquhart (whose maiden name McAlmon would sometimes use as a pseudonym). McAlmon was the youngest of eight children and his mother's favorite (Smoller 10). Because the Rev. McAlmon was a restless man, the family was constantly on the move. McAlmon's childhood was spent in poverty in Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Dakota. His nomadic existence can be seen in his fiction; he is the small boy, usually persecuted by parents or other children, the outsider always looking in. This scenario applies to "Potato Picking," "A Boy's Discovery," "The Jack Rabbit Drive," and "The Laughing Funeral."

Because McAlmon often shared a tendency, especially with Hemingway, to alter his own history for the public enjoyment of others, there are several vague areas in his life. But there is, not surprisingly, a sustained picture of mothers and fathers in McAlmon's fiction. He may have been abused by his father, although the Rev. McAlmon was "often away tending to his pastorates" (Smoller 10). McAlmon's fathers are usually despotic creatures who verbally or physically whip their children unjustly. In Village, John Campbell, a McAlmon double, actually commits suicide after a humiliating encounter during which the father strikes him with a pool cue. And if the fathers in McAlmon's fiction are brutes, the mothers are self-sacrificing beings whose only sin is not knowing when to cut the apron strings. McAlmon's boys often express impatience with their mothers.
Despite these parental stereotypes, however, McAlmon's stories about his childhood contain no "dramatic moments of revelation or initiation, no transmogrifying insights" (Knoll 11). Instead, they are the "plain, simple narratives of a young boy's perplexing experiences" (Knoll 11). McAlmon sought to create simple stories that befit the "wild and dreary plains state" (Knoll 11) where he spent most of his youth—South Dakota.

Whatever McAlmon's aims were in recreating his childhood in his fiction, they were not restricted to his childhood. He also wrote at length about his young manhood in New York and his continental years in Paris, Berlin, the Riviera, and other European locations. Up through the mid-1930s, McAlmon wrote down everything. Whether in short stories, novels, poems, or memoirs, he thoroughly chronicled his life and the lives around him.

Certainly, writing everything down or chronicling the lives of others does not, in and of itself, merit the title of "nonfiction novel." This category of fiction arguably is seen as having arisen with Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966) and Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night* (1968), although Meyer Levin's *Citizens* (1937) and *Compulsion* (1938) are often cited as nonfiction novels. A nonfiction novel has been defined as one "in which a[n] historical event is described in a way that exploits some of the devices of fiction, including a nonlinear time sequence and access to inner states of mind and feeling not commonly present in historical writing" (Holman and Harmon 334-335). In this dissertation, I will take the liberty of extending this definition, meant for novels, to short fiction as well.
Interestingly, Gore Vidal declines to be grouped with Mailer and Capote and dismisses the nonfiction novel altogether. About the genre, he says "[t]he non-fiction novel was a sham by Capote to get his journalism taken seriously as art. Also, telling a true story with lots of lies and guesses is fun but the result is still journalism" (GV to EL). Vidal goes on to defend his own historically based novels, which are often considered to be nonfiction novels, by stating that he "reflect[s] accurately on history as observed by invented characters" (GV to EL).

However, it can be argued, I think, that any first-person narration, even if autobiographical (as in Mailer's Armies of the Night), still deploys an invented character, the author's version of himself. This being so, Vidal's distinction is not very strong; what, after all, is the difference between a wholly invented character and a wholly invented self?

Leaving this particular debate to others and accepting, for the purposes of this dissertation, the above-mentioned definition of a nonfiction novel, it is interesting to note that Holman and Harmon seek to link Capote's In Cold Blood to a literary past by stating, "the form is indebted to much earlier writers as Isak Dinesen (Out of Africa) and Ernest Hemingway (Green Hills of Africa)" (335). By linking Capote's and Mailer's 1960s nonfiction novels to works by Hemingway and Dinesen, Holman and Harmon have certainly opened the door for Robert McAlmon. And Vidal, although sidestepping the question of McAlmon's place in the nonfiction genre, still says that McAlmon "appears to have no gift for invention or . . . dramatization. He describes what he thinks he sees" (GV to EL). Vidal misses the mark on
two points here: one, McAlmon was often working within the nonfiction novel genre; two, McAlmon sometimes ventured beyond the limitations inherent to the nonfiction-novel genre to write wholly invented fiction. Although this dissertation will attempt to correct Vidal’s misconceptions about McAlmon’s writing, Vidal’s description appears to place McAlmon squarely in the nonfiction camp.

Placing McAlmon as a writer of nonfiction novels and short stories is an important step in placing him in the literary canon. Too many critics and contemporaries have dismissed McAlmon’s writing for having exactly the same virtues that Capote’s orMailer’s writings possess. But then, Mailer and Capote were working within a recognizable genre. When Vidal says that McAlmon "invents nothing"; when F. Scott Fitzgerald says McAlmon "shows more creative imagination in his malice than in his work" (Letters 239); when Ford Madox Ford calls McAlmon "one of the worst writers" (Smoller 4); when Gertrude Stein complains that "McAlmon is pretty bad" (Smoller 102), these literary lions are not only seeing McAlmon’s novels and short fiction in the mirror of their own individual works, but, more importantly, they are failing to see that McAlmon was doing something new and different.

And yet, when McAlmon’s biographer, Sanford Smoller, states that to read McAlmon’s books "is virtually to plunge again into the total life of his times"; when William Carlos Williams calls Post-Adolescence "a journal intime [sic]" (Ford 43); when Williams writes to McAlmon, saying that "[o]ne never detects paraphrase in anything you do" (Smoller 179), they are detecting something different in McAlmon’s style, something that no one else was then doing. Even Ezra Pound recognized that McAlmon had originated something when he stated
that "America is now teeming with books written by imitators of McAlmon, inferior to the original" (Smoller 178), a comment aimed at Hemingway.

So, just what did McAlmon originate? In Village, he examines the life of a town over a fifteen-year period. Many have likened McAlmon's novel to Sherwood Anderson's better known novel, Winesburg, Ohio (1919), and, indeed, there are many similarities. In both novels the characters come and go, an unending parade of humanity marching through the gas-lit streets of a town that is seemingly the personification of all its inhabitants. Ima Honaker Herron linked Village with Winesburg, Ohio, Sinclair Lewis' Main Street, and Edgar Lee Master's Spoon River Anthology, stating that McAlmon showed "no sign of the happy average" (408) that was so often depicted in American small-town fiction. Also, in This Quarter, Ethel Moorhead noted that Village's "form is new and a good form. It is not the old novel form. . . . [There are] no beginnings or endings. . . . It is Life" (Smoller 141).

Whatever form Village does have, new or old, good or bad, is irrelevant because the novel is not about form. It is about life in general; more specifically, it is about McAlmon's childhood in Madison, South Dakota, transplanted to the fictional town of Wentworth, North Dakota. There is no doubt that most, if not all, the characters and events in the novel are based on real-life occurrences; Gore Vidal has substantiated this (more about this later), and in a newspaper article that ran just after the American debut of Village in 1990, McAlmon's nephew, George McAlmon, stated, "Village, that's the
family. That's autobiographical as far as I can tell" (Albuquerque Journal October 13, 1990).

In Village, McAlmon himself is reincarnated in at least two guises: he is Peter Reynolds; he is also John Campbell. In McAlmon and the Lost Generation, Robert Knoll says, "[t]he boy, whether called Bennie or Horace or Grant, is McAlmon himself" (11). Why McAlmon chose, in Village, to split his autobiographical past into two young men, one cannot say. Perhaps it was a way of disguising the degree of truth that Village contains. Perhaps the original design of Village did not call for it to be a novel, but short stories.

In any case, the book opens with Peter and chum, Gene Collins, squabbling over the veracity of the answers from a Ouija board. From the first, the reader is informed that Peter's "mind was dispersed, as some removed portion of it strained to dramatize this incident into romance" (4). McAlmon is also quick to identify himself as Peter by referring to his "baby clear blue eyes" (4).

The reader is also told that Peter is bored by "this damn town" and yearns for "[t]he city!" because he "always want[s] to get away to some city" and because he wants to "travel all over the world" (8). There is little doubt that McAlmon is starting Village with remembrances of himself, his boyhood friend, and their dreams. While McAlmon's alter ego vaguely dreams about a future of world travel, Gene Collins is more concerned about his chances of getting into the military academy at Annapolis or West Point. The Ouija board, however, doesn't give them the answers they want.

The idea that the city contains everything a boy could wish for is repeated in McAlmon's fiction. In "Potato Picking," where Grant, the
McAlmon character, is sleeping in a hay mound with the other working farm boys, thinking: "The city, what would the city mean?" he thinks. "What was the matter with Gould that he could stand to think of living all his life in this town?" (196). And in "A Vacation's Job," Dave thinks that he "must earn money . . . and get away from California, to New York, To Europe-elsewhere" (89).

The mooning boy that McAlmon depicts in the opening pages of Village is displaced later in the book by an older, less introspective version of McAlmon. In an extended picture of dysfunctional family life in Wentworth, one of the longest episodes in the novel, McAlmon details the family life of the Campbells.

Thomas Campbell having failed to make much of a success as an attorney in a small town in Kentucky, moved to Kansas City; after five years there he again moved, this time to Wentworth. . . . The family, made up of seven children, had at this time been in the village but eight months. (109)

There is a marked similarity between the Campbells and the McAlmons; the matchup is strengthened by Mr. Campbell's description as "a constant church-goer" and "rigid with his family in their observance of the gospel truths" (109). McAlmon's father, it will be recalled, was an unsuccessful, itinerant Presbyterian minister. And McAlmon was also from a large family. The relationship between father and son is most likely based on truth.

In a letter to Williams, McAlmon complained, "I've had a devil of a time-too precocious, too mature . . . too well read-too much family-too much poverty . . . and all the training impressed upon me that made me seek ethical codes, and ideals to stand aloof in, and shine like a lighthouse tower" (Smoller 11-12). Smoller states that
McAlmon "used his family experiences for his fiction" (12) and "the images . . . of a despotic father . . . are too prevalent to be dismissed as merely fictive invention" (11-12).

Not only McAlmon's tyrannical fathers, however, point to autobiography. The mothers in his "boyhood" fiction are clearly patterned on his own mother, Bessie Urquhart. In Village, Mrs. Campbell is also named Bessie. But there is more in common here than just a name. McAlmon had ambivalent feelings toward his mother. In the Campbell episode, John remarks "[h]ow cold he felt towards her. . . . Even now he could almost be brutal enough to brush her aside and walk coldly away." Later, John thinks, "[y]our caring about me doesn't do anything for me" (110). In a poem entitled "The Mother," collected in Not Alone Lost, McAlmon echoes John Campbell's feelings: "It is not fair that I must pity her. / I want my life" and "What she has not, what she has missed, / I cannot help. Her love's my prison, / and my pity is the lock" (Smoller 13-14). And John Campbell mentally debates, "how could he pretend an emotion, except a disgust of existence, and pity for his mother" (110).

There are other portraits of boys and mothers in McAlmon's short fiction, and, as Knoll suggests, the boy is always McAlmon. In "Potato Picking," first published in 1929 in transition and collected in Post-Adolescence (1991), McAlmon is Grant Donley; the mother is another woman named Bessie. The ambivalent relationship is again established: "Grant felt impatient with his mother (Post-Adolescence 192). Throughout the story, Grant is impatient with his mother and resentful of "her attitude that he must go to Sunday School" or that she "refused to realize that at twelve years old a boy knows more about
what having to make a living means than she wanted to admit" (193). There is no trace of a father in "Potato Picking."

In "A Vacation's Job," first collected in A Hasty Bunch (1922) and reprinted in Post-Adolescence, the same combative relationship exists between the mother and her son, Dave. The mother curls a "Scotch lip" (another Bessie) when the son informs her that he is dropping out of the University of Southern California, a college that McAlmon briefly attended. The incident produces a tirade against motherhood, Christianity, and all humanity:

"O the devil mother, lay off, leave me alone, leave me alone won't you? I can't be a lawyer, or a doctor. Why do you insist . . . on the common sense side of life? Who can you point out to me who has "settled down sensibly," as you call it, that doesn't lead such a damned, dull, animal routine of existence, that I'd want to shoot myself. . . ." (88)

and

"Don't try to help me. You can't. I'm not a Christian, don't give a damn about . . . the stupid respect of people whose standards you want me to acquiesce to. I'm not the kind of being you are. . . . I'll go to hell sure. . . ." (88)

It is interesting to note in "A Vacation's Job" the boy's threat to shoot himself and the played-out shooting event in Village, which may or may not have been accidental. McAlmon's boys think alike.

"The Jack Rabbit Drive" was also first published in 1929 in transition and collected in Post-Adolescence. Little Horace witnesses the jack rabbit drive, and his hovering mother frets over him. At dinner, she asks Horace if he feels all right. An older brother interjects, "Rats, sick. . . . Don't baby him" (208). But the mother shoots back with, "Nonsense . . . I can see that the boy is pale, and
his eyes have a feverish look" (208). Of course, Horace has gone to the slaughter strictly against his mother's wishes, and the same ambivalence exists between them: "He even felt impatient with his mother when she began talking to him" (208).

The ongoing battle of wills and the unfocused feelings seem to define the mother-son relationships in McAlmon's fiction. The mothers are never outright tyrants; that role is reserved for the fathers. The sons, on the other hand, are usually impatient, rebellious boys who strive to cut the binding apron strings. There is also an inner restlessness about McAlmon's fictive alter egos. Horace and Grant and Dave and John can't wait to get away from their mothers and show them they can handle the world outside their yards. Even Peter Reynolds escapes Wentworth. In the concluding pages of Village, we are told that "Peter Reynolds . . . was thought to be leading a dissolute life, somewhere in Europe, probably Paris, which was known to be a horribly immoral city" (168). The description certainly fits McAlmon like a glove.

McAlmon's boys, however, are not simple, one-dimensional creatures; there is, within them, a paradox. While they crave the life of the great cities of America and Europe, they also share a simple love for nature. Even as the boys avoid their mothers, hate their fathers, and despise small-town life, they appreciate and seek out animals and nature. In "Potato Picking," Grant's favorite thing in life is his pet pig, Porkie. In "The Jack Rabbit Drive," Horace can't forget the bloody horror of the animal slaughter and rebukes Sally, who is holding a dead rabbit, by saying, "[i]t isn't its fault it's nasty" (207). In "A Vacation's Job," Dave "struck out across the sand,
simply to feel the clarity and cleanliness of the desert and of its dry air, still cool with night" (90). Dave’s desert reverie is followed by a catalogue of animals he encounters: an owl, lizards, a rattlesnake. Dave finally notes: "the desert gave more sense of structure and of foundation than the most carefully planned metropolis" (90). And when John Campbell is away from his embattled family, he admires the serenity of nature and identifies with it:

Exhilaration however had come to him as he walked in the wind with his strong buoyant stride bucking each gust. . . . The moment’s physical vanity of being began to make him animally ecstatic; as a young bison on the prairies; or as a young wolf leading a pack. . . . He liked the feeling that the sunlight was pursuing him to shed its warmth upon him. . . . And the wind and cold was bringing higher color to his face. . . . Misery was suspended within him . . . beneath this animal rhapsodic response to the moment. (113-114)

In his ultimate moment on earth, John Campbell denies his large family, his parents, even his own humanity. He loses himself in a rhapsody of sun and wind and animalism. He is a creature of the prairie, like the young bison or wolf. There is something untamable in him, something his father and his tyrannies cannot reach. This streak in McAlmon is clearly manifested in his fictive boys. Indeed, the final comment on Peter Reynolds in Village is that he “had always been fast . . . a great drinker, and forever on the verge of being involved in some scandal or other” (168).

A third thing that ties together the boys in McAlmon’s fiction is their alienation, real or imagined, from normal society. I have already discussed John Campbell’s and Peter Reynolds’ restless
feelings in Village. But in the beginning of the novel, Peter confronts another type of alienation: he is lost in a blizzard.

the house was lost in the darkness of night before Peter was actively aware of the terrifying coldness. . . . He grit his teeth against the wind. . . . A gale blew about him. Sleet . . . swirled about and into him, cutting the tender flesh of his cheeks. Tears froze along his eyelashes and in the corners of his eyes. . . . Holding his hand out in front of him to see if he could see it . . . he was unable to, because of the darkness, the black coldness of the wind, and the swirl of snow. . . . He was lost. (10)

Horace experiences a similar sensation of alienation in "The Jack Rabbit Drive." After being sent to bed because his mother thinks he is sick, Horace "ducked his head under the covers . . . and he was in darkness . . . sleep overtook him, in spite of his fear in the dark, out of which anything might come. Suppose a great jack rabbit leaped right on him through the open window" (208). A frightened Horace continues to dream and fantasize: "He was standing way out in the dark fields, and everywhere rabbits were nibbling about him, so many that he could not walk without stepping on them" (208-209). The dreams become more and more gruesome, with the rabbits "trying to eat him up. . . . They would smother him. . . . He couldn't move" (209).

The crowding rabbits in Horace's dream echo the alienation dream John Campbell has, in Village, the night before his ill-fated walk in the woods. John "recalled his dream last night, in which he had been walking in a meadow filled with the live bodies of people he could scarcely avoid trampling on. They had all evaporated as he tried to touch them with his hand" (112). This aversion to crowds and paradoxical inability to connect with humanity seem to haunt McAlmon's
youth. The dreams also share a natural setting that is overcrowded with horrific beings.

Alienation is also a theme in "Potato Picking." Grant's life seems serene until a gypsy woman, a victim of societal alienation, comes to the door. Right away, a rift forms between mother and son. "Don't be silly . . . the woman is no gypsy. . . . She comes from the Scotch highlands" (193). But Grant "did not like the woman and her wild windblown look, black hair, dark eyes" (194). And it's not just her appearance that alienates Grant, there is also the matter of her accent. "It's a bonnie lad you have,' the woman said, and her accent made Grant think she meant he was skinny." Later, the mother reasons with him: "bony is the Scotch pronunciation of bonnie" (194). But Grant's hunch is right; the gypsies steal his pet pig and try to butcher it.

The theme of alienation is also found in "The Laughing Funeral," which was originally titled "Obsequies for the Dead" when it was first collected in A Hasty Bunch. When it was included in The Indefinite Huntress and Other Stories, McAlmon revised and retitled it. The revised version has been reprinted in Post Adolescence and is one example of McAlmon's inventing something. Horace can't help laughing out loud at Dad O'Brien's funeral, where "a feeling of hysterical laughter was in the air" (214). Later, Horace displays his growing alienation from society by defending his bad behavior and striking out at the town gossip and hypocritical society in general:

"Why were you at Mr. O'Brien's funeral anyway? You always gossiped about him and said he was disgraceful. As long as people like to attend funerals for something to talk about you ought to be glad I laughed to give you a chance to spread more scandal. . . . I suppose you could invent gossip enough
to go on. Anyway I told mother about it and don't have to listen to old dames like you scold me."

"The Laughing Funeral" ends with the mother "threshing" [sic] Horace, not for laughing at the O'Brien funeral, but for being to rude to Mrs. Harper "when the woman was a guest in their own home" (215). Once again, McAlmon presents a situation in which the son shows his ambivalence toward his mother. It is a relationship that McAlmon wanted to stress. In the revised story, "The Laughing Funeral," Horace is very direct in telling off the old gossip; the mother's wrath is also a very direct retribution. However, in the original version of the story, "Obsequies for the Dead," the concluding paragraph, although similar in content, has a very different ending as Bennie, the precursor of Horace, rants:

"As long as people like you will attend funerals and weddings for something to talk about you hadn't ought to object to my being disgraceful enough to laugh at them, because that furnishes you enough shock to keep you scandalized for several weeks of gossip," and then Bennie left the room. And lucky it was for Bennie that his father was out of town or he'd have gotten the threshing [sic] of his life. (A Hasty Bunch 46)

Besides the difference in language, in which the earlier version sounds stiff and formal compared to the second version, Horace's attack on the town gossip, who symbolizes, for McAlmon, the hypocrisy of small-town America, is much more direct.

In the first version, the boy admits to having been disgraceful. He also uses a less-direct assault on the old gossip when he uses the phrase, "enough shock to keep you scandalized for several weeks of gossip." In the revised story, the boy does not admit to being bad;
his attack on Mrs. Harper is more frontal: "to give you a chance to spread more scandal. You were running short, but I suppose you could invent gossip..." While Bennie uses a passive construction of "scandal," implying that Mrs. Harper has been personally scandalized by Bennie, Horace accuses the woman of spreading scandal, a much more active pastime and certainly a much more direct attack. Also, in the first version, Bennie would have been beaten by his father, had he been home; in the second version, the father is not even mentioned, and the mother does the disciplining.

In the ten years that elapsed between versions of this story, McAlmon had, in a rare instance of revision that can be documented, honed his attack on the hypocritical America he loathed and redirected his anger by targeting the mother as punisher and banishing the father from the revised story altogether.

Robert Knoll writes that McAlmon's "aim was to present a straightforward account of the way things were and the way things happened... he did so with an objectivity unblurred by nostalgic overtones" (11). Ezra Pound said "[h]e opened up a whole new vein of writing" (Being Geniuses Together 335). And checking contemporary reviews of Village as reported by Hugh Ford in Published in Paris (55) reveals the perceptions of critics who said things and used phrases such as: "new melody, a new rhythm, and new vibration" (Ludvig Nordstrom), "style of a true chronicler" (Carlino Linatie), "unliterary and direct as an invoice" (Walter Yost), "more detached and intelligent as a picture of American life than Anderson and Lewis: (H.G. Wells), "I like the general resumes which you do of what happened and what did not happen... It is present past and future"
(Gertrude Stein). And about a planned but never executed novel about his in-laws, McAlmon said, "Have done a hundred photographic pages of my in-laws" (Ford 56). Clearly, these critics and McAlmon himself were keenly aware that something new was at hand.

One may wonder whether, if much of Village is autobiographical and if many but not all of the characters in the novel can be identified as different versions of Robert McAlmon and his immediate family, most obviously the Campbell and Reynolds families, then who are all the other characters who appear in and disappear from the novel's fifteen-year course of action?

Although many of the real-life identities of the characters are probably lost to us now because McAlmon most likely changed their names and altered their personal stories just enough to avoid easy detection and because most of that generation is deceased, some of the characters in Village can be identified thanks to a chance encounter.

Gore Vidal happened to pick up a copy of the reissued novel in the summer of 1990 and was astonished to find his father, Eugene L. Vidal, portrayed in the novel as Gene Collins, one of McAlmon's boyhood friends. Vidal says, "it is a very odd thing to encounter one's father at the age of fifteen, using a Ouija board to find out if he'll be appointed to West Point or Annapolis" (foreword, Miss Knight and Others). Vidal's closer reading unearthed other family members in McAlmon's fictional town of Wentworth, North Dakota.

Vidal points out in his foreword to the upcoming collection of McAlmon's short stories, Miss Knight and Others (University of New
Mexico Press, 1992) how McAlmon came to rename Eugene Vidal as Gene Collins:

In real life, with another flyer from the 1917 war, Gene Vidal started the first continental airline. The partner was called Paul Collins. hence, Eugene Collins.

This fact is one that McAlmon was most likely aware of because of his interest in flying. During World War I, he enlisted in the Air Corps and was "sent for flight training to Rockwell Field in San Diego" (Smoller 19); after the war, McAlmon edited a "magazine about flying called The Ace" (20). Flying even inspired McAlmon's literary imagination. In what Smoller pronounces as "the real start of his literary career," McAlmon published six poems in Chicago in Harriet Monroe's Literary Digest. Two of the poems, "Aero-Metre" and "Aero-Laughter," were about flying (22). Passions about flying aside, it is clear that McAlmon did not forget Eugene Vidal and was certainly not unaware of his career in Washington. In the original Being Geniuses Together (Secker and Warburg, 1938), McAlmon states: "Possibly I forget my childhood. Some day I'll write to the new air director of the United States, Eugene Vidal [he was actually Director of Air Commerce in Washington], and ask him to check back in his memory" (155). This statement was omitted from the American publication of Being Geniuses Together, edited by Kay Boyle in 1968. In the early 1950s, McAlmon actually did write to Gore Vidal, most likely in an effort to reestablish personal ties, but Vidal remembers, "I barely knew the name. I didn't answer" (GV to EL).

The relationship, if that is not too strong a word, between McAlmon and Vidal, however, involved more than a shared love for
aviation. Gore Vidal also points out, more than once, that McAlmon was in love with his father, a love that apparently was not reciprocated. In his foreword to Miss Knight and Others, Vidal explains that in Village, the "sensitive adolescent protagonist . . . is one Peter Reynolds, and he is in love with a high school football hero called Eugene Collins, who is actually Eugene L. Vidal, my father." And in another personal correspondence, Vidal states that "someone told me that Robert McAlmon had been in love with my father when they were growing up in Madison, SD" (GV to EL).

Unfortunately, there is no statement from Robert McAlmon on his true feelings about Eugene Vidal. But in Village, there are a few clues. When Peter and Gene are consulting the Ouija board about what their futures hold, Peter says, "you and I know the kind of thing both of us want pretty well. That's why I like you so much" (4). Later, Peter admits "I always liked your looks . . . when you came into our class room . . . you were awfully funny looking . . . but when I got used to that I liked your looks" (8). This discussion leads the boys into a thinly veiled discussion of masturbation and wet dreams, an event McAlmon would write about again in Post-Adolescence. Gene wonders:

"you'll think I'm wanting to be funny, or that I'm being nasty or something, but I wonder—you know—well you know what happens to fellows our age—I wonder if it's happened to you yet." (8)

Peter replies:

"I guess so. . . . I told Chemo about the scare I had one night after I got to bed, and I thought something had burst in me . . . your dreams take care of you." (8-9)
McAlmon goes on to question Peter's baffling affection for Gene, not really understanding the nature of his attraction:

"He almost resented his affection for Gene. . . . Gene had an attraction for him however that Lloyd had never had. He wondered, was that simply now, and because both of them were adolescent? But . . . why did it exist more between him and Gene than between him and other boys in that period." (9)

McAlmon drops the issue, however, after the opening of Village. Later in the novel when Peter and Gene appear, they are involved in "ruffian" activities such as drinking beer and whiskey and luring girls out of the Normal School dormitory. The close relationship between the boys is set aside, and McAlmon treats the characters in a less personal way; the boys become town boys, and the reader is no longer privileged to know their thoughts.

In closing Book One of the novel, McAlmon sums up the action of the early years. We learn how accurate the Ouija board had been and what the relationship between Gene and Peter is now.

Gene Collins . . . was appointed to West Point, and his first year there made a great name for himself as a football player. By this time any friendship that had existed between him and Peter Reynolds had evaporated. (80-81)

Perhaps disgruntled over their falling out, McAlmon gets in his bitter digs, claiming that "they were completely antipathetic to each other" (81); McAlmon then catalogues the faults of Gene, but, not surprisingly, not his own, by describing Gene as being tightfisted about money, intent on making a good marriage, and willing to harness his intelligence to military discipline, all of which were ultimately true. McAlmon's final, sour comment on his one-time crush is that Gene
"never would be a man of strategic genius" (81), apparently alluding to Eugene Vidal's military aspirations.

Along with the acerbic tone of the above-mentioned passages, McAlmon chastises Gene Collins one more time toward the end of Village. In an unforgiving speech, Peter says to another friend, "you haven't gone away from me the way Gene Collins has; and when we were fifteen nobody existed much for either of us except the other; particularly him for me. Perhaps that's why his presence gets on my nerves now" (153). Perhaps. But the key phrase in this peevish speech is "you haven't gone away from me the way Gene Collins has." Casting back to his teen-age years, McAlmon still feels the antagonism and attraction that existed between Peter and Gene during the Ouija board reading. In going East to college, Gene Collins has not gone away from Wentworth or his own family to attend West Point, he has gone away from Peter. For Peter, the act is a purposeful slight, the ultimate act of unrequited love.

This self-centered attitude was a hallmark of McAlmon's personality. Throughout his lifetime, he would war with Joyce or Hemingway or Fitzgerald or whomever; the seeds of McAlmon's needful soul are seen in his fictive boys: there is never enough love. Smoller states that "McAlmon felt rejected and unloved" and reports that his sister, Victoria McAlmon, claimed "even as a little boy he . . . believed everyone was out 'to get him'" (13). The final, unemotional mention of Gene Collins in Village states that he became a Captain in the Army and had married the daughter of a U.S. Congressman.

Gore Vidal's father is not the only Vidal family member mentioned in Village. McAlmon chronicled several members and family events in
the course of the novel. And Vidal has stated, "I can testify at first
hand that, as far as my family goes, McAlmon invents nothing. He is a
literal recorder" (foreword, Miss Knight and Others).

In Village, there is a scene where Mrs. Collins, Gore Vidal’s
grandmother, corners Gene and Peter and launches into a history of the
family.

"I'm not one to brag... I just tell [the children] about
their forebears so they will know they can hold their heads
up... Of course the debt will never be paid, but if the
French government ever would pay back all it owes to our
family from away back since the Revolution, we'd be one of
the wealthiest families in the world."

And Mrs. Collins doesn't end there; she goes on and on.

"some ancestor of ours lent some king or other all kinds of
money years and years back. We aren't one of those families
which can't trace back more than a generation; though I'm
very democratic myself, and not one to boast." (5)

What the mother was talking about in real life must have interested
McAlmon because the story of family fortune nearly starts out the
story line of Village. And although the boys, Gene and Peter, "looked
sheepish" and didn't "give a damn about all that rot," the story
certainly lodged in McAlmon's mind.

In a personal correspondence, Gore Vidal sets the record straight,
saying that "the fortune due us from the Spanish government...
because of the regiment we had provided in the Napoleonic War (the
Republic paid us, just before Franco-about $50 a head."

In his foreword to Miss Knight and Others, Vidal elaborates on the
story:

the family's sense of fallen grandeur is captured,
particularly the endless discussions of how rich the Vidal's
would be once the Spanish government paid its debt to them
for having raised a Swiss regiment to fight for the Spanish king in the war against Napoleon. . . . In 1937, they discharged their debt to us: my father's share was about $100.

McAlmon also gets Vidal's grandmother right. In his rather uncharitable description of the woman—"She was retiring early, exhausted, as she might well be, carrying her great flabby person about all day"—McAlmon demonstrates that he presents people as they are, not as they should be. Vidal states "my grandmother was so fat that my father never allowed her to visit him at West Point or, later, come to Washington where he was Director of Air Commerce" (foreword, Miss Knight and Others). McAlmon also discloses that "her loose form did not reveal . . . she also expected another baby in two months' time" (5). Vidal says, "McAlmon notes that she is pregnant again at fifty, as indeed she was, to her horror" (Miss Knight and Others v).

Vidal goes on to say that "[m]y aunt Lorene is called Loraine, Aunt Emma becomes Renee" (Miss Knight and Others v). And in a personal correspondence, Vidal flatly states: "all the family anecdotes are correct" (GV to EL). One of the more interesting anecdotes reported by McAlmon in Village concerns Mrs. Collins' father, "the gay, rakish old Mr. Dubois," whom Vidal calls "my lecherous great grandfather." It seems the old roue feigned wealth and married an "Atlantic City widow" who also pretended to be rich. After marrying, both discovered the joke. Mrs. Collins doesn't seem at all upset about the roguish behavior of her father, and when she was "unable to find an interested audience," she went to bed. One member of her audience, it would appear, was paying much more attention than she thought.
Eugene Vidal, an undeniable presence in Village, may also be present in some of McAlmon's short stories. There is a marked resemblance between an episode in Village and the short story, "A Boy's Discovery."

In Village, Brick Simpson, "the best scrapper and swimmer of his age," dares Gene and Peter to drink whiskey and beer and play craps. He also taunts them: "'I'll bet you'd be afraid to put it into a girl even if she ast you.'" Brick concludes that "'if you can't take a little sip of whiskey, or beer at least, you don't need to try and make me think you did anything to them White girls . . . up in the hayloft.'" (41). Brick finally tempts the naive boys by saying he knows a "couple who'll really give a guy a little humping if you coax 'em and they're feeling hot" (42-43).

In "A Boy's Discovery" (reprinted in Post-Adolescence), two boys, Harry and Harold, are dared by the town bully, Tuffy Thomas, to experiment with two girls in a hayloft. Although all the boys in this story are younger than the ones in Village, Tuffy is the same type of strutting character as Brick Simpson in Village. When the town boys are curious about sex, Tuffy declares, "'I tell you I know how it's done; I've done it with Hazel.'" (222). When he gets his chance, Tuffy taunts, "'let's go inside the loft, and you girls show us what you have, and we'll show you'" (222). But just as Gene and Peter hold back in Village, Harry and Harold are at first shy about experimenting with the girls. While the two stories are only similar in the broadest details, there is a marked similarity in the McAlmon and Vidal characters in the two stories. In both episodes, they are led into the
evils of booze and/or sex by older boys, and in both episodes, they pay for their adventure.

If, as Vidal asserts, McAlmon "invents nothing" and is a "literal recorder," then it is probably safe to surmise that the relationship between McAlmon and Eugene Vidal was played out again and again in McAlmon's fiction. The names and ages and places may change, but McAlmon was seemingly unable to let go of his emotional attachment for Vidal. As Gore Vidal answered, when asked about the accuracy of McAlmon's depiction of his family, he said McAlmon's portrait fit "to a T" (GV to EL).

The broader implication of Vidal's verification of McAlmon's version of the Vidal family history in Village is that other memorable characters, including Miss Snow, Deacon Pothatch, Mr. Daly, Daisy the cow, Florine Watkins, and the bumptious Crawshaws were all real, too. Their true stories, however, are most likely lost.
CHAPTER II: POST-ADOLESCENCE

In 1919, at the age of twenty-three, Robert McAlmon wrote his first novel, *Post-Adolescence*; it was published in Paris through McAlmon's Contact Press in 1923. It was not until 1991, however, that this short *roman à clef* made its American debut in a collection of McAlmon's fiction, published by the University of New Mexico Press.*

In what William Carlos Williams called "a journal intime [sic]" (Ford 43), McAlmon wrote about his ideas concerning art in general and writing in particular. He also wrote, according to Williams, about "a young man hounded in his own body by the realities of love and sex" (Ford 43). As *roman à clef*, the novel stands on its own: the characters are interesting, even if only briefly seen. However, the novel is more important as a journal; McAlmon has recorded or referred to several anecdotes, and there are insightful portraits of some of the most influential writers in Greenwich Village in 1919.

Not surprisingly, the youthful attitudes and posturings of Peter, McAlmon's alter-ego in the novel, mirror those of Peter Reynolds and John Campbell in *Village* (1924) and the protagonists in several of his "boy's stories" that also appeared in the 1920s. *Post-Adolescence* acts then as a bridge to McAlmon's more sophisticated stories in which he examined an adult world and others' sexuality in such stories as "Miss Knight," "The Lodging House," and "Distinguished Air" in which he looked at homosexuals, lesbians, and transvestites; in these stories, he stopped recording his own introspective musings.

*Page references are to *Post-Adolescence: A Selection of Short Fiction*, University of New Mexico Press, 1991.*
Whereas *Village* opens with two boys discussing the mysteries of masturbation and wet dreams, the beginning of *Post-Adolescence* also delves into Peter’s sexual tensions:

He dozed. He was caressing somebody who did not exist, and he was apathetic . . . no will-drifting— he was yielding— was being buoyed to sensation— gradually an effusion of nervous reaction— gratification? — then this mind was black of imagination. . . . He awoke, uncomfortable. O the devil! He moved to the other side of the bed . . . dropped off again to sleep. . . . Sleep, so vacuous and complete a solution. (4)

This may be the first fairly explicit description of a wet dream in American fiction. It certainly sets the stage for Peter’s character in the novel. When he is not obsessively thinking about sex or his own body, he is meditating on the meaning and function of life. More often than not, however, he is daydreaming about sexual matters. McAlmon includes a narcissistic passage in which he frankly admires his own lithe, naked body while modeling for art students. The students’ minds are strictly on their canvasses; Peter’s is not:

He sat on the model stand. The looking glass faced him, reflecting his body. . . . Nice lines he had after all, there around the belly particularly. It was nice being slender. . . . He ran his lips along his arms, his hands up and down his legs. Legs are graceful things; slender, deer-like, and how fine the skin is on the side of the foot, frogbelly fine with ethereal tiny pores and pearly white. That’s the nicest skin on the body. He wondered if he could touch it with his mouth. . . . (5)

Sex aside, *Post-Adolescence* also continues the biographical trackings of those people who were important influences on McAlmon’s youthful years. As he had done in *Village*, McAlmon presents a gallery of portraits in *Post-Adolescence*. Chief among those influential artists portrayed in the novel are William Carlos Williams (Jim

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Boyle), Marsden Hartley (Brander Ogden), Mina Loy (Gusta Rolph), Marianne Moore (Martha Wullus), Lola Ridge (Dora), and Edna St. Vincent Millay (Vere St. Vitus). Notably absent from the list of McAlmon's associates are Bryher, H.D., and Djuna Barnes. One obvious reason for their absence is that the novel was written in 1919, and he did not meet Bryher and H.D. until the fall of 1920. And about Barnes, McAlmon says, "I had known Djuna only slightly in New York" (Being Geniuses Together 31), which prevented her from being portrayed despite a common literary interest with McAlmon in the ensuing years. The absence of these women also demonstrates McAlmon's notorious disinclination to revise his work; he did not expand the novel's scope to include Bryher, H.D., and Barnes before publishing it four years after it was written, even though his acquaintance with Bryher, H.D., and Barnes strongly impacted his life by the time of publication.

But the several portraits that do exist in Post-Adolescence are remarkably vibrant, honest, and insightful. Despite his youth, McAlmon was able to capture the true natures of the intellectuals who whirled around him at Greenwich Village parties and coffee houses. In Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet, Virginia M. Kouidis states that in Post-Adolescence, Loy (as Gusta Rolph) is "characteristically cynical about men" (17). In the novel, a typical exchange between Gusta (Loy) and Ogden (Hartley) demonstrates this cynicism:

"I'll have to use that in my book on men; just another idea for showing up what a sham he is... What tricks men play on us doting women."

"You know, Gusta, you like the darlings too well to do them the harsh justice they need..."

"Don't destroy my inspiration. I must do something, even if it's only trying to be clever..." (73-74)
Beyond capturing Loy’s world-weary cynicism, McAlmon also alludes to an historical incident: the recent loss of Loy’s husband.

Loy had married Arthur Cravan, a nephew of Oscar Wilde, in January 1918; in October of that year, he disappeared. Loy had preceded him to South America after honeymooning in Mexico, but Cravan never arrived and was never seen again. The U.S. State Department informed Loy that Cravan’s “body had been found beaten and robbed in the Mexican desert” (Kouidis 11-12), but there were also rumors that “he was last seen alive boarding a boat on the Mexican coast” (Kouidis 12). In Post- Adolescence, McAlmon makes good use of this story. Gusta Rolph ruminates:

My mind will keep wondering about that husband of mine—whether he’s really drowned or not. If it had only been my first husband so he couldn’t pester me about the children. . . . Gusta’s mind retreated, and she listened dimly, her thoughts fluttering weakly among the ideas and falling away from them. (15-16)

Later, she continues to brood:

her emotions and thought played around memory of her husband. She saw his white body, as it perhaps looked, drowned, a white hulk bloated with water. . . . She thought of the obscenity in relation to her dead lover, somehow reluctant to have her mind come to that, but it was not unclean, surely; it was only erotically desiring with frustration crushing her. . . . If she hadn’t been told he was dead perhaps she wouldn’t feel finished now. She gasped with a longing to have his body. . . . (18-19)

While McAlmon accurately describes Loy’s depression and cynicism, he also captures her method and flair for writing. He states that she:

took the pencil and paper and began to jot down notes at first, and then to write whole verses . . . trying to hear and see her sentences and phrases as music, rhythmed with rest and pitch. (25)
In explicating Loy's introspective poem, "The Widow's Jazz," Kouidis also uses musical terminology to describe Loy's approach to writing, referring to the poem as having "Negro jazz rhythms" (12).

And so Mina Loy passes through the pages of Post-Adolescence as a respected colleague. By carefully reading the character of Gusta Rolph and by researching the life of Mina Loy, one is able to discern that McAlmon has not written a caricature but has presented an accurate picture of Loy, a multi-dimensional portrait that reflects her temperament as well as her life.

A favorite target of McAlmon's sometimes skewed vision was the American painter and poet, Marsden Hartley. I use the word "skewed" here because McAlmon appears to use Hartley as the butt of his jokes, mainly because of Hartley's obesity and well-documented hypochondria. Not only is Hartley prominently displayed in Post-Adolescence, but McAlmon saw fit to portray him again in "Distinguished Air" (1925), which was one of McAlmon's Berlin stories. This second portrayal is not surprising because McAlmon "had at least a glimpse of . . . depraved Europe during his Berlin trip with Marsden Hartley" (Ford 64). Hartley also appears in "Miss Knight," another of McAlmon's Berlin stories.

Hartley (1877-1943) was nearly twenty years older than McAlmon, and partly because of this age difference and partly because of McAlmon's caustic personality, McAlmon never treated Hartley very kindly in print. Hartley's characterizations in "Distinguished Air" and Post-Adolescence read more like lampoons. And even in the somewhat
more serious and straightforward Being Geniuses Together, McAlmon continued to depict Hartley unflatteringly:

Marsden Hartley was beamingly merry these days . . . on account of the exchange, he could live as he liked to live. One night . . . he appeared in evening dress, with a huge orchid pinned to his coat lapel. . . . Marsden could this night cease to think about the beefsteak realities of existence, and he certainly did luxuriate in orchidean emotions. . . . He was weary of reality and intended enjoying the divine trivialities. He liked young people . . . particularly the young German boys. (96-97)

McAlmon’s characterization of the artist tended to dwell on Hartley’s rather effete manner, mood swings, sexual tastes, and hypochondria. Many of these attributes were corroborated by contemporaries. Sylvia Beach blandly noted that she "found him attractive, though perhaps a little melancholy" (Beach 113); Djuna Barnes noted only his "haughty manner, his piercing eyes and his beak-like nose" (Field 61). And although Barnes’ biographer states, rather ambiguously, that Hartley was "sexually ambivalent" (Field 15), others were slightly more aware of Hartley’s true sexual orientation.

Hartley "discovered" McAlmon at Cooper Union, where McAlmon was posing nude as an artist’s model. Hartley offered to show McAlmon the sights of the city from a street car, and "as if under a sudden overpowering impulse . . . seized McAlmon’s hand and covered it with kisses." McAlmon’s startled reaction was "so New York is like that" (Smoller 27-28). Hartley’s homosexuality was commonly known. William Carlos Williams also reported that Hartley had made a pass at him: "he [Williams] had lain back on Hartley’s sofa only to have Hartley make an advance, which he had to cut short" (Mariani 173). Williams also
stated "I, too, had to reject him. Everyone rejected him" (Smoller 28). Well, not everyone.

In Post-Adolescence, Hartley is portrayed as the imperial Brander Ogden. His first appearance quickly sets the tone for his character:

he encountered Brander Ogden who was as leisurely as he at the moment. "How glad I am to have a few words with you. . . . I haven't been out of my rooms . . . for almost a week. . . . I went into seclusion, but today I thought I'd venture out." (10)

Ogden ignores the information that Peter gives him and continues:

"Such a wardrobe as I've been looking over, if I ever get enough money that I feel I can put out. . . . My god, there are so many exquisite little sensations in life. The ties. The handkerchiefs. The perfumes. The last word." (10)

McAlmon describes Ogden as strolling "with deliberate eagle-like dignity, his great cold blue eyes staring about him." McAlmon continues to mirror the physical description of Hartley by Djuna Barnes:

Peter felt amused at what someone had called his dowager gestures, and noted his high beak-like nose, and his face with its fierce grandmother's profile. (10)

and

Peter turned to watch Brander proceeding down the street like a whole caravan to himself going in orderly procession, that surely had need of a crown and train. (11)

There are some slightly veiled references to Hartley's homosexuality (notably, his "dowager gestures" and his need of a "crown and train") and his suspicions about the sexual orientations of McAlmon and Williams, who is portrayed as Jim Boyle in the novel. As Peter and
Ogden continue chatting, Ogden slyly suggests the homosexual natures of Peter and Boyle:

"Don't you fear, I understand you [Peter] and your rantings. I've never had any doubt about you from the first. . . . Great lads, you and Jim. . . . He just never will know how to handle the many different qualities and personalities within himself. My, I ceased long back ever asking what he thinks about anything. . . ." (10-11)

In this brief speech, Ogden hits on a key point that also appears in other writing of the time. His reference to Jim Boyle's "many different qualities and personalities within himself" is similar to H.D.'s self-referral as "herself," implying that she possessed more than one self, what she called the "divided I" (Benstock 334) and Bryher's insistence that she not be referred to as "she" because she saw herself as more male than female. This concept of a divided self also recalls Pound's broader term, "paideuma," which Hugh Kenner explains in The Pound Era as "a people's whole congeries of patterned energies" (507). Jim's assortment of personalities suggests that there is a feminine and masculine side to everyone. Perhaps Natalie Barney, the American expatriate lesbian and writer, said it best in her author's note to her 1930 novel, The One Who Is Legion:

For years I have been haunted by the idea that I should orchestrate those inner voices which sometimes speak to us in unison, and so compose a novel, not so much with the people about us, as with those within ourselves, for have we not several selves and cannot a story arise from their conflicts and harmonies? (159)

In any case, McAlmon appears to be aware of the "several selves," the sexual crises of those around him, and the prevailing attitude that these "inner voices" are not always consistent with the general
idea of heterosexuality, which Gore Vidal, in his foreword to Miss Knight and Others, says is an "American invention on the order of cellophane." McAlmon touches on this apparent paradox in the wet-dream scene at the beginning of the novel. Peter’s sex dream is pointedly unfocused, yet the object of his desire remains decidedly unfeminine:

There should be somebody in bed with him. . . . He dozed. He was caressing a somebody who did not resist, and he was apathetic, with no attitude in his mind at all, no will-drifting—he was yielding—was being buoyed to sensation—gradually an effusion of nervous reaction—gratification—then his mind was black of imagination. . . . (3-4)

Brander Ogden may be more attuned to the "inner voices" within himself and around him than McAlmon or Williams would care to admit.

While there is no outright evidence of a homosexual liaison between McAlmon and Williams, one could be inferred from comments Williams made after McAlmon’s marriage to Bryher. Williams’ biographer, Paul Mariani, notes a few cryptic responses Williams made to others:

Just how hard Williams took McAlmon’s loss is difficult to gauge, but some indication can be gleaned from his telling [Kenneth] Burke . . . he was still lamenting McAlmon’s "sudden demise" . . . to Amy Lowell . . . he wished he "had the boy back with me." (179)

Williams also admitted to Amy Lowell that he was "heartbroken" (Mariani 179) by McAlmon’s marriage. While none of this is clearly homosexual in orientation, there appears to be a leaning in that direction and certainly a concern about homosexuality. Williams had described Hartley as being "tortured" and "an intensely lonely man" (Mariani 173) because of his homosexuality. It was Hartley who introduced McAlmon to Williams, whose remembrance of the meeting was
that he "caught McAlmon's hard, steely blue eyes. The man had a tough, wiry build... such a build as might have served for the original of Donatello's youthful Medici in armor" (Mariani 173-174). Williams' rather surprising initial reaction to McAlmon seemingly borders on the homoerotic.

When Brander Ogden reappears in the novel, McAlmon continues describing his "steel blue eagleglaring eyes—extended with a terror or a hatred or a suspicion of life" (32). Thereafter, the barely suppressed sexual tension that Hartley brings to each scene is plainly evident:

Brander sat on the bed... persistently coldly surveying everything in the room, with an insolent stare, as though they would vivisect any object, or rape any person they were gazing at. (32)

McAlmon continues down the monomaniacal path of Hartley's mind as Ogden coldly discourses on the state of his sexual life. Ogden states:

"I feel as though I've had enough—you know—of the sort of quality about. Not bad for its kind you know. But I've had enough of the New York quality... I go around, but nothing happens. Surely I remember that things were not that way in Paris... Nothing happens. The people don't know how to play... In Europe they know how to play." (32)

Ogden is certainly speaking to Peter as though the latter were an insider. His two veiled references to "play" and his winking assurance ("you know") imply a shared homosexual vision. But although there may be a shared vision, that seems to be all that was shared between Peter and Ogden. Peter notices that Ogden has his eyes on him, and his response is one of youthful cruelty that certainly reflects McAlmon's own acerbic wit.
[Peter] was conscious that Brander’s eyes were on him as he stood shirtless, shaving, and thought "Gets most of his erotic satisfaction through his eyes," as he recalled a phrase Brander had used . . . "in my adoration of flesh." He'd continually talk . . . while all his own repellent force resided in his savagely repressed rhapsody of eroticism. His was a repressing circumstance and temper, since he couldn't actually attract physically those he wanted. (33-34)

As if this isn't a damning enough portrait of Hartley, who would have been only 42 years old when he met McAlmon, Peter asks a rhetorical question with prim finality: "Who would want to touch skin and flesh that was so big pored and old looking" (34).

On the sidewalk, Peter and Ogden continue their conversation during which Hartley's alter-ego confesses his penchant for young men and his ongoing hypochondria.

"I haven't told you of a new acquaintance I've run into, a boy from upstate Maine. . . . Such gentle soft qualities. There's nothing in his head of course, but I like him so well just for lovely human qualities . . . and he seems so ready to be helpful. Last week when I was . . . laid up because of this damned gut of mine, he'd bring me things to eat. . . . How beautiful young people can be, just as things to have about one." (35)

As Ogden and Peter are about to climb three flights of stairs, Ogden explains just what his "damned gut" problem is: "I get so weak from climbing stairs. My intestines drop down on me . . . I have to be so careful of what I do" (35). Judging from this confession, it was too late for caution; Hartley was already suffering from a prolapsed rectum.

At the end of the novel, Brander Ogden is, perhaps, seen to his best advantage as McAlmon recounts a conversation, which is most likely an amalgam of all their conversations about art. After all,
Hartley's most positive functions in McAlmon's life were introducing the young man to the reigning artists and writers in Greenwich Village and in shaping his views on art. In *Being Geniuses Together*, McAlmon surprisingly credits Hartley with educating him in the latest "theories on abstraction and plastic values" (27). McAlmon rails against Wyndham Lewis' lecturing on theories of art and writing, stating, "I had heard most of what he was saying before, in New York, when Marsden Hartley... held forth in speech or newspaper articles" (27).

In *Post-Adolescence*, McAlmon devotes a passage to Peter's ruminating on Ogden's insistence that "the only possible thing is to be an artist, and enjoy the divine trivialities" (70). Ogden sums up the artist's experience: "Isn't it too wonderful to feel that the only thing one needs think about is a form, or a line, or a bit of colour in a design" (70).

Peter's mind wanders from the ongoing conversation, and he thinks:

White peacocks. White music. White winds; white with every colour in the world in it. He'd write something about that. White and purity. What is purity? It certainly couldn't have anything to do actually with acts. White winds blowing, cool and fresh through the white sky. Like the days far back in North Dakota when the blizzards hurled white sleet snow across the snowcovered plains. (69)

McAlmon's obsession here with color, representing the "visible reality" of art linked with the sterile North Dakota landscape, is realized in Village.

Weird snow music, snow and clamour, shrill shriek of cold whiteness shattered by a highmoaning vermillion [sic] calliope wail. Where are the gray wolf packs? The herd of bison that thundered in catapulting panic across the plains? (3)
McAlmon echoes Hartley's image of whiteness of snow as a barrier, a thing that separates man from nature. The snow also serves in this passage as a symbol for the endurance of nature. The wolves and bison may be gone, victims of men's greed, but the white snows remain and endure.

On several occasions, William Carlos Williams wrote about Hartley, who served as an everyman artist. To Williams and to McAlmon, Hartley was an important symbol of a man who could not be separated from his art, either poetry or painting, and yet Hartley was a man isolated from mainstream society by his art. In Williams Carlos Williams: Man and Poet, Joseph Brogunier states that to Williams, Hartley "is . . . a type of the artist isolated by an America inimical to its vital, creative talents" (571). And in his poem, "The Injury," Williams recalled an incident years before when he and Hartley watched a locomotive rush by; although Hartley likened his artistic being and powers to the train's, Williams heard instead something closer to McAlmon's perception of Hartley: he was as tangible as the color white.

—with the white-throat
    calling in the
poplars before dawn, his
faint flute-call,
triple tongued, piercing
the shingled curtain
of the new leaves;
    drowned out by
car wheels. . . . (120)

This is not the expected poetic imagery of a man who bears any resemblance to an onrushing locomotive. It does, however, recall
Peter's reaction to Brander Ogden's idle chatter about art: "White music. White winds; white with every colour in the world in it."

Ogden's final statement in *Post-Adolescence* reaffirms his denial of any reality but the power to create. He overhears Peter say, "I don't know what there is to express except some feeling about, or perception of ... reality" (175). Ogden responds:

"Don't for God's sake whatever you do, use those words seriously. It simply can't be done any longer, amongst a world so full of doting ecstacies, mystics, and other chattering." (75)

Although Brander Ogden has no grasp on the reality he firmly disbelieves in and is often the butt of Peter's youthful jokes—just as Hartley was of McAlmon's barbs—there is a grudging nobility about the man, one that McAlmon eventually respected.

Hartley may have lived on a higher plane than McAlmon could ever aspire to, but McAlmon repeats a story in *Being Geniuses Together* in which Hartley is snidely referred to by "one of those hard-boiled wisecracking girls" as an "eagle without a cliff" (97). McAlmon's final statement on Hartley and on this comment is "but aren't we all?" (97), a response that clearly demonstrates that by the mid-1930s, McAlmon had achieved a closer affinity to Hartley than the 1919 *Post-Adolescence* could have suggested.

Making a cameo appearance at a party scene, Edna St. Vincent Millay is wickedly portrayed as Vere St. Vitus. Evidently, McAlmon did not like the woman; he gave her a surname that denotes a disease—St. Vitus' dance, the more common name for chorea, a nervous disease in which there are irregular, jerking movements caused by involuntary muscular contractions. This rude intention is borne out by the
unflattering description of her during a conversation between Brander Ogden and Peter:

"She [Dora] sent me a note saying she was having a number of people at her studio in honour of—think who—that lady poetess Vere St. Vitus—the jumpy cooey little thing. O she's just too much when she gets over in the corner with some coquetish male admirer and the two of them start gurgling." (33)

Oddly enough, even though Vere St. Vitus is the subject of Ogden and Peter's conversation and the supposed guest of honor at the party they attend, she is neither seen nor mentioned again in the novel. Perhaps McAlmon's intentional slight is ultimately more insulting than his merely unflattering description of her as "the jumpy cooey little thing."

Also making a brief appearance is Lola Ridge, the Irish-born poet who came to Greenwich Village from Australia to become the "editorial hub" (Smoller 29) of the literary magazine, Broom. In the novel, she is Dora, the ardent party-giver and poet. McAlmon is not kind to Ridge either; he responds to Ogden's invitation to her party as might be expected:

"But Lordy, if Dora gets up and starts to evangelize any of that verse of hers! Ouch! Isn't she less than could be desired, and more, when she begins swaying and spouting with a super trance look in her eyes about the perspiring moon or the hot belly of that illegitimate child of industrialism, the city? There are advantages in being a ditch digger so one doesn't feel called upon to appreciate or even comment on the beauty of the utterly urgeful affectation of sonorous agony."

(33)

McAlmon's snide phrase, "the hot belly of that illegitimate child of industrialism, the city" is most likely a reference to Ridge's volume, The Ghetto and Other Poems (1918), in which she depicted the horrors
of life in New York City. Ridge apparently was well known for her rhapsodic recitations and pseudo-spiritual bent. In 1929 she wrote *Firehead*, a tale about the biblical characters, John, Peter, Mary, and Mary Magdalene, which draws parallels between the crucifixion and the Sacco-Vanzetti case. Yet McAlmon saw Ridge as all gloss and no substance. Concerning her affinity for social causes, McAlmon "distrusted people like Lola Ridge for their liberal championing of the oppressed masses without themselves ever having experienced firsthand the lives of the poor" (Mariani 174).

Although during the early 1920s, the parties Ridge gave "had been of such importance to the New York literary scene" (Mariani 258), McAlmon harshly dismisses her. Even longtime McAlmon supporter Kay Boyle admitted that McAlmon "mercilessly satirized her [Lola Ridge] and the Broom parties" (*Being Geniuses Together* 23).

Everybody applauded the reading, enthusiastic at all costs. Peter suffered from not being able to get up and walk out . . . and blamed himself for having presumed to expect that any variation from the usual might occur at Dora's party. (36)

After Dora decides that the reading was sensitive, Peter bursts out in rage:

"God!" Peter ejaculated to a woman sitting near him, "Isn't this modern poetry movement awful? Lemon water, anguish, sand and sweat. Ain't the moon gangrenous though? How do we survive this atmosphere?" (36-37)

and

"I'd like to take art and drown it in the river. . . . Just too killing Dora is, and I used to think she had a sense of what not to do. . . ." (37)
Ridge is also dismissed for being old fashioned. Peter states she was a "poor old thing, pretending to be revolutionary and flaming with passion" (36). Ridge (1877-1941) would have been in her early forties when McAlmon was in Greenwich Village and did not take kindly to McAlmon's insults; she thought McAlmon should defer to her because she was older. She related to Kay Boyle that McAlmon was "wild and daring and as hard as nails" and dismissed him as "a poet who drank too much" (Being Geniuses Together 22). Perhaps McAlmon's caustic comments were not aimed at Ridge alone; they may have been more generally hurled at Broom as well. This little magazine was edited by Harold Loeb and Alfred Kreymborg, who is also seen in Post-Adolescence as the comically pretentious Reginald Crackye.

The evening was not actively painful, however, until Reginald Crackye read an extract from his play "The Mummy" and became dramatic about it, much worked up apparently over his inability to keep his long hair out of his eyes and out of his fervid recitation. (36)

During the next ten years, McAlmon continued taking swipes at "the Broom outfit [which] meant to be literary at all costs. . . . How the little group of pilgrim expatriates loved each other" (Being Geniuses Together 31). McAlmon also suggested that the Broom outfit's stay at a Paris hotel couldn't begin to be touched by Vicki Baum's novel, Grand Hotel, when it came to intrigue and drama.

Peter makes a sweeping statement after escaping the party that sideswipes Kreymborg and Ridge. He refutes the public display of "arty art" emotion: "Certain things exist; but why should they be talked about, unless they can serve to uplift us, and give us beauty" (37).
McAlmon insisted that there be a "preoccupation with life" (Knoll 108), not just a lot of talk about it.

The fourth woman poet portrayed in *Post-Adolescence* is Marianne Moore (1887-1972), who is portrayed as Martha Wullus. Peter and Gusta Rolf (Mina Loy) meet on the street and decide to drop in on Martha, who lives with her mother and who seems to be only a casual acquaintance:

"She thinks anything, disapproves of little, for other people, and is a churchgoing, cerebralizing moralist who observes sabbath day strictly, herself. I can't quite understand why with a mind like hers agnosticism hasn't eaten into her . . . or she conceals it . . . for her mother's sake." (68-69)

Peter continues to explain Martha.

"Possibly she isn't emotionally developed much. . . . She needs to be seen apart from the background of her mother. . . ." (69)

At Martha's door, Brander Ogden, who has joined Gusta and Peter, enters into the general criticism and declaims:

"Isn't Martha the quaint idea rather than a real human being. . . . She's sort of a Dresden doll thing with those great contemplative Chinese eyes of hers, and that wisplike body with its thatch of carrot-coloured hair. So picturesque too in her half-boyish clothes." (70)

The comments continue as Peter states that for Martha, "it's best for her to be only an idea . . . seeing that ideas is about all she'll have of life" (70). At this point, Martha opens the door and ushers in the guests. Martha immediately complains:

"I haven't been doing anything that I want to do. My work keeps me away from—my work, the real kind I'm wanting to do." (71)
Martha then launches into a tortuous story about the work she hopes to do and an altercation she had at the local lending library.

"It is true that I have never expressed so far any of the things that I particularly wish to say. . . . To put my remarks in verse . . . is like trying to dance the minuet in a bathing suit, though I do have some things to say about acacias and seaweeds and serpents in plane-trees. . . ." (71)

Ogden can't seem to hide his impatience with Martha and interjects, "What a person. What a person." Martha goes on:

"I was quite unable to control myself at the library today, and I fear I spoke curtly to the head librarian for some trite insistences. . . ." (71)

What those "trite insistences" were, we are never told. But we do know that Moore was "an assistant librarian at the Hudson Branch (Greenwich Village) of the New York Public Library" (Guest 133). Martha immediately launches into another list of incidentals she wants someday to write about: "But I find seahorses, lizards, and such things very fascinating. Also a fox's face . . . haunts me like a nightmare" (71).

Peter had previously noted that Martha needed to shed her mother. Peter also says that "she and her mother lived like anchorites" (75). Bryher also noted that she had paid a "duty call" on Moore and her mother, "a dinner preceded by a long grace, followed by a . . . religious discussion" and that the Moores "stressed that they never paid calls" (Guest 220). Bryher also recalled about Moore that "she was so very queer about her mother" (Guest 295).

In *Post-Adolescence*, the mother is a domineering, omnipresent woman who constantly interrupts their conversations about art with political tirades about the troubles in Ireland and starvation
strikes. Finally, Ogden suggests they go out to a little cafe and escape the old woman. At the cafe, Peter and Martha converse amidst the general chatter about art and life. Martha makes an insightful comment that recalls Lola Ridge's barb that McAlmon was "wild and daring and as hard as nails" (Being Geniuses Together 22). Peter is disturbed by much of "this sort of atmosphere" and Martha didactically replies:

"[I]t's restraining oneself in the midst of annoyances to which one is subjected that toughens the muscles. Wildness in itself is an attractive quality, but it fails to take into account the question of attrition, and attrition is inevitable." (74)

Peter, of course, wants everything now. Martha, however, is content to discount wildness and accept attrition; she says ambiguously, "I lack your swiftness, myself, or rather I have no swiftness" (74). Martha is the antithesis of Peter. And while Peter thinks that art is a reflection of the moment, Martha reproves him:

"I am telling you the truth when I say that if I had all the time in the world I should not write anything important to myself for some years. . . . I have, I think, an intuition as to how I am to succeed if I do succeed." (75)

But Peter is a callow youth, and he "could not comprehend, more than an idea, Martha's apparent ability to weigh and balance" (75). Peter quickly becomes impatient with Martha and drifts into conversation with Ogden, who, after Martha laughs with a "quickly passing chuckle," asks, "Doesn't Martha look piquant tonight? She's a rare one. Something so keen, and diamond hard" (75).

This long passage is remarkable, not only for its portrait of Marianne Moore, but for McAlmon's ability to analyze himself honestly
by seeing himself through others' eyes, suggesting that McAlmon could be more critical of himself than he has been given credit for. The remarks made by Martha really hit the bullseye in pegging McAlmon as being impatient, if not rash, in his writing. Martha, on the other hand, firmly believes that her writing will come together when the time is right. This is all very prophetic. At the age of thirty-four, Marianne Moore published her first collection of poems, entitled Poems, paid for by Bryher (Fitch 84), in 1921—two years after McAlmon wrote Post-Adolescence. For his part, McAlmon published some of Moore's poems in Contact magazine, which he coedited with William Carlos Williams.

McAlmon's depiction of Moore is as accurate as the other portraits in Post-Adolescence and gifies with others' descriptions. Djuna Barnes recalls Ogden's comment about those "great contemplative Chinese eyes of hers" (70), describing Moore as "a poet with the bright eyes of a wood creature" (Field 234). Sylvia Beach's first impression was that Moore looked like a "little old maid school marm but . . . she is unique and fascinating" (Fitch 366). Moore was described as a "red-headed lady given to large hats" (Knoll 378), and Williams recalled "her red hair plaied and wound twice about the fine skull" (Knoll 141).

Moore was not one of the expatriates; she remained in New York because "[s]he knew where her material lay. If it was to be aquariums and zoos . . . let it be American" (Guest 131). The Oxford Companion to American Literature points out that Moore's poetry "often alluded to exotic creatures based on her knowledge of biology and interest in zoos" (505). Moore's affinity for animals is well documented and is
mirrored by McAlmon's portrait of her. H.D. also commented on Moore's animals: "I do like Marianne Moore's poems, but they leave me a little stricken. . . . It is [a] very 'crab' world, collecting junk from under the sea" (Guest 233). Bryher nicknamed Moore "Dactyl" because her initial impression of Moore was that she resembled a pterodactyl because of her massive golden hair (Guest 133). Perhaps the most complete description of Moore is from Williams:

She's a Bryn Mawr girl. . . . Mother a terrific pain in the neck to whom Marianne is pathologically devoted. . . . Marianne a stick of a woman, fence rail with a magnificent head of red hair . . . fine eyes. Once bemoaned that God had given her no body at all to work with. Nothing feminine about her. . . . A great personality lost because of devotion to—what the hell. Straight as an arrow in every way—wanting to be able to flex." (Mariani 394)

Williams' rather dour picture of Moore is perceptive, honest, and it reinforces McAlmon's curt characterization of Moore, with whom he maintained a working relationship for many years.

The relationship between McAlmon and Williams endured from 1919 until 1951, when Williams wrote in his Autobiography what he thought to be the truth about McAlmon's marriage to Bryher. During the more than three decades of their friendship, Williams remained a close and loyal friend.

Indeed, McAlmon's relationship with Williams may have been the most important and stable one in his life. Williams was thirty-six when he met the twenty-four-year-old McAlmon, but despite the age difference, the two men became instant friends and soon thereafter founded Contact magazine. They remained close friends until the publication of Williams' 1951 autobiography. At the core of this
durable friendship, Hugh Hagius argues in a privately printed thesis, was homosexuality.

Williams is portrayed in Post-Adolescence as Jim Boyle, a "family doctor" (13) who lives in New Jersey with his wife Nellie (patterned after Flossie Williams) and their two sons. Jim's first mention in the novel brings up the question of his sexuality.

Wondered how Jim would be today, harried as usual, and tired out. . . . Funny mixture Jim was, Italian, Irish, Welsh, Yankee, and he thought there was a little Jewish blood in him too. No wonder he was up in the air most of the time, with a feminine will and intuition thrown in upon his impulses, if . . . well, yes, maybe. (9-10)

Beyond this suggestion of Jim's effeminate tendency, there is also a suggestion, in a conversation Peter has with Brander Ogden, about starting Contact magazine.

". . . we're up to a great scheme for rearranging the universe that we want to talk over alone together." (10)

And in conversation with Jim:

"I have some ideas in my head about getting writers and painters together. . . . we'll have to start something somehow." (12)

Ogden seemingly ignores these comments and begins a monologue about clothing and such. But he suddenly returns to the topic of Peter and Jim:

"I've never had any doubt about you from the first. You'll land on your feet all right, and what you say . . . you understand me too. Great lads, you and Jim." (10-11)

Peter departs Ogden and goes to the city clinic where Jim works. Jim complains about his recent lack of sleep, but assures Peter that he got some rest at the beginning of the week. Jim then declaims:
"That damned woman who's been sending me love letters and obscene photographs of herself has taken to coming out to the house in the country and leaving big packages of notes and photographs on my steps." (12)

Peter soothes Jim, telling him to treat the "old dame" as a joke. But Jim relates that after he wrote to the woman and called her an old hag, the woman threatened blackmail. Again, Peter soothes Jim and reminds him that the woman can't hurt him and that a "look at her should have told you she was a complete nut" (13).

This interesting passage in the novel is based on a series of incidents in Williams' life. The "old dame" is the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, a celebrated eccentric in Greenwich Village and friend of Djuna Barnes. The Baroness may have "followed Djuna Barnes to Paris, where she gassed herself" (Field 15). Williams' biographer, Paul Mariani, on the other hand, states that while the Baroness slept, her young male lover turned on the gas and left her to die (163). In any case, Williams, who initially admired the Baroness for her determination, once made the unfortunate mistake of complimenting the woman who

dressed in purple and yellow clothes with a coal scuttle on her head or tam-o'-shanter complete with feathers and ice cream spoons, or black vest and kilts, with brass teaballs suspended from her nipples. Once she'd even shaved her head and painted her face two colors divided down the center so that seen from either profile she offered two distinct faces. (Mariani 161)

and that

she wore postage stamps on her cheeks (the two-cent American stamp for ordinary letters in those years was pink. . . .) That her hat collections included . . . a peach basket . . . and once, a cake, replete with lit candles. That she wore stuffed birds. That her lipstick was black, her face powder
bright yellow. . . . She had . . . a Mexican blanket and
would regularly walk the streets of the Village from five to
six with nothing else on. (Field 80)

Yes, one look at her should have told Williams she was a complete nut.
One night in Rutherford, New Jersey, while Williams was dining with
McAlmon, the Baroness lured the good doctor from his house and
ambushed him in an alley, crying "Villiam Carlos Villiams, I vant you"
(Mariani 162). When he resisted, she punched him on the head. Williams
then practiced boxing and was ready for the next assault, which took
place on Park Avenue, when he "flattened her with a stiff punch to the
mouth" (Mariani 162) and had her arrested.

But Jim and Peter pursue other, more mundane matters. Peter fears
that Jim will not escape his dull life. Jim frets about money and his
being trapped with a wife and children and cries, "I want to feel
definitely free" (13). A cat and dog race before them and start to
fight. Peter yells: "That's the answer. . . . Run like hell" (14). But
Jim has stopped listening to Peter and announces that he promised
Nellie he would be home early. The miscommunication in this passage
suggests that Jim and Peter will not "run like hell" and possibly sets
the stage for McAlmon's marriage to Bryher.

Later, Peter serves as mediator by attempting to patch up a
squabble between Jim and Brander Ogden, which most likely reflects the
strained relationship that existed after Williams rebuked Hartley's
homosexual advances. Finally, Peter advises, "[w]hy don't you tell
each other to go kiss ass, and have it over with" (38). And Peter
lambastes Jim for running "at people so impulsively offering them

55
friendship, and then break[ing] away with some disapproving terror of having them ask too much" (38).

Hagius points out that this tendency to vacillate between public repression and private longing was one of Williams' biggest personal problems. Hagius also argues that Williams confessed several of his longings in his autobiographical novel, *A Voyage to Pagany*, in which he—as Dev Evans—battles with his unfulfilled feelings of love for Jack Murry, a portrayal of McAlmon, and repressed homosexuality in general. Williams writes:

> How do men ever get on without some business together? Brothers never do. In the same ship, the same regiment—maybe. . . . Evans loved his friend. . . . God bless Jack, he had said to himself a thousand times. I love him. I stand for him. (33)

and

> He wanted Jack and he did not want a makeshift. He wanted to be let in, he wanted to let Jack in. . . . He grew angry. . . . You might as well pick up a sailor. . . . Love. Everybody talks about love. . . . If you love a man, you want to have. . . . (36-37)

The word "makeshift" has a sexual connotation, meaning a short-lived affair.

Peter then visits Jim at the clinic. Jim is still fretting about his harried life. After Peter chastises Jim for moralizing, Jim responds:

> "Am I a coward and afraid to face things? Somedays I think it'd be the best solution if one could go mad and have it all over with, or just jump into a puddle, head down, and wave a big toe farewell to the world. . . . (44)"
Mariani remarks that Williams' attitude toward death was stark: "death was merely a biological matter. . . . If he died, he died" (157).

Jim and Peter part; Jim must get home to Rutherford, New Jersey. Peter dismisses Jim, asking, "why couldn't his home wait" (46). And as Jim "walked away, his legs a trifle bowed," Peter says, "[t]o the devil with Jimmy anyway" (46-47). Jim does not make another appearance in the novel.

All in all, the portraits of William Carlos Williams, Mina Loy, Marsden Hartley, Marianne Moore, Alfred Kreymborg, Lola Ridge, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and McAlmon's own self-portrait must stand as true, insightful glimpses of the Bohemian sect in Greenwich Village in 1919. Not only are physical descriptions and personal quirks accurate, but the immediate and extended stories are also true. Post-Adolescence can be read as a roman à clef, a portrait of an artist as a young man, or as an autobiographical remnant that served as a precursor for a more in-depth memoir, Being Geniuses Together. In any case, McAlmon was able to incorporate all the disparate voices around him to record his impressions of Greenwich Village in an accurate and unbiased manner.

But recalling Williams' remark that Post-Adolescence was "a journal intime" is to see Post-Adolescence also as a nonfiction novel. And as Gore Vidal proclaimed, "McAlmon's value was as a critic and witness" (CV to EL). He observed those around him and reported their doings; he got them right.
CHAPTER III: MISS KNIGHT AND DR. O'CONNOR

This chapter compares characters created by Robert McAlmon and Djuna Barnes that were both inspired by a real-life person: Dan Mahoney. This is a rare chance to hold up McAlmon's work to the work of some other writer. Although McAlmon's Village is often compared to Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, it is a case of comparing apples and oranges, or as Gore Vidal asks, "is it ever necessary?" (Miss Knight and Others v). This is not the case here because there is a direct and indisputable connection between McAlmon's Miss Knight and Barnes' Dr. O'Connor.

Although McAlmon knew Barnes "only slightly in New York" (Being Geniuses Together 31), they eventually became friends during their Paris years in the 1920s. McAlmon published Barnes' 1928 underground exposé, Ladies Almanack, a notorious who's who of lesbians in Paris that included caricatures of such notables as Natalie Barney, Radclyffe Hall, Janet Flanner, and Mina Loy, the token heterosexual among the group. The book was so outrageous that Barnes was not even listed as author; instead, the book was credited to "a lady of fashion."

Barnes continued delving into the nether world of sexual deviants in other novels, but other than some miscellaneous articles in Contact magazine, McAlmon never published anything else by Barnes. And although McAlmon wrote his own stories about the Berlin night scene that tracked the tales of homosexuals, lesbians, and transvestites, aside from Ladies Almanack, McAlmon and Barnes shared only one other major literary association: they both patterned their most bizarre yet
memorable characters on the same real-life individual, Dan Mahoney, a San Francisco transvestite and would-be entertainer.

Barnes used Mahoney as the source for Dr. Matthew O’Connor, a character she used in two novels: Ryder (1928) and Nightwood (1936). McAlmon used Mahoney as the inspiration for "Miss Knight," which was originally collected in Distinguished Air (1925) and more recently in Miss Knight and Others (1992).*

Djuna Barnes (1892-1982) was born in upstate New York and migrated to Greenwich Village after the close of World War I. There, she worked as a reporter and began writing poems, plays, stories, and miscellany. She spent most of the 1920s in Paris, where she knew everyone and became one of the lesbian circle that orbited Gertrude Stein, Natalie Barney, and others. Despite having written some notable novels, however, Barnes did not enjoy any sustained literary success. For example, Andrew Field, Barnes' biographer, called Ryder a "bawdy mock-Elizabethan chronicle of the Barnes family history" (17). The book might have become a succès de scandale, but, although it enjoyed a brief success, it did not establish Barnes as a major literary name. Her novel, Nightwood, often read as the story of her tortured lesbian relationship with the American sculptress, Thelma Wood, was accused of having "the spirit of Nazism" (Field 15), a charge that worked against its reputation. Despite the support of T.S. Eliot, who argued that the novel was "a work of creative imagination, not a philosophical treatise" (Nightwood xvi), that work also failed to establish Barnes

*References are to Miss Knight and Others (University of New Mexico Press, 1992).
as a commercial success. Her continued failure puzzled her. In the 1960s, Barnes wrote to Natalie Barney: "There is not a person in the literary world who has not heard of, read and some stolen from Nightwood. . . . I can't account for it" (Benstock 234).

Pound accounted for it by saying that Barnes' writing was "in need of deflation" and in a letter to Eliot, Pound included a nasty limerick:

There once wuzza lady named Djuna,
Who wrote rather like a baboon. Her
Blubberly prose had no fingers or toes,
And we wish Whale had found this out sooner. (Benstock 232)

Pound was not only disparaging Barnes, but because of his introduction to Nightwood, he was, by implication, blasting Eliot. The "whale" in the limerick is Ford Madox Ford, who frequently published Barnes' material in Transatlantic Review. Another critic saw Nightwood as "a distillation of the despair and estrangement of expatriation" (Kannenstine 104). Although the "estrangement of expatriation" may have been close to Barnes' heart, it was obviously not a subject the reading public was much interested in.

Central to these criticisms of Ryder and Nightwood and, conversely, to Eliot's appreciation of Nightwood is the character, Dr. Matthew O'Connor. Eliot says O'Connor's "monologues, brilliant and witty . . . are not dictated by an indifference to other human beings, but . . . by a hypersensitive awareness of them" (Nightwood xiii). Eliot correctly senses that O'Connor's function in the novel is as a sounding board for the other characters and especially Nora Floor (Barnes) and Robin Vote (Wood). Eliot notes that O'Connor intuitively knows that the only way to help anything "is to talk torrentially," a
trait Miss Knight also shares. O’Connor is "talking to drown the . . . small wailing and whining of humanity, to make more supportable its shame and less ignoble its misery" (*Nightwood* xiv). Shari Benstock also notes this trait in O’Connor and describes the character as "[g]ossipy and garrulous" (266). Perhaps this function serves the other characters in *Nightwood*, but O’Connor eventually goes mad. As Benstock sagely suggests, "[t]he consistency of a public persona is achieved only at great cost" (265).

In *Ryder*, O’Connor serves as a counterpoint to Barnes’ real-life father. Field argues that because Barnes hated her father, O’Connor is "offered as an alternative to Wendell Ryder [her father in the novel] . . . because he has the qualities of a woman" (31). Of course, one could extrapolate this contention to argue that O’Connor serves as a counterpoint to any man. Barnes’ lesbian sympathies, despite public statements such as, "I am not a lesbian. I just love Thelma" (Benstock 245), and her well-documented hatred of her father caused her to create a male hero who has female qualities. Indeed, in Barnes’ literary world, only a man with female qualities could be a hero. She patterned this "male trying to be female" as a parody of masculine priorities (Benstock 264). The famous pose of O’Connor, propped up in bed, wearing a black negligee and heavy makeup, is a self-parody; Benstock states that "Barnes used to write propped on her bed, dressed in a black negligee, highly rouged, her hair done" (239). This eccentric pose might suggest the maleness in Barnes emerging in spite of the grossly exaggerated female props. These poses also remind one of McAlmon’s penchant for wearing a women’s black hair net while writing—"just a whim of his" (Smoller 193).
Seeing Matthew O'Connor as a purposely drawn amalgam of female qualities in a male body, a combination that produces more a sexless woman than an androgynous being, is to see O'Connor as a political statement. Indeed, Benstock argues that O'Connor is the symbol of a patriarchal vision that robs women of their sexuality. She states that "in a society in which women are estranged from themselves . . . their sexuality becomes depravity" (260). Thus, O'Connor is more than a mere caricature in Barnes' two novels; he is indeed "a distillation of the despair and estrangement of expatriation," but based on sexual, not geographic boundaries.

Prior to examining these texts of Nightwood and Ryder, it is necessary to investigate the source of Barnes' (and McAlmon's) inspiration for O'Connor. So just where does this character come from? Who was the man behind Dr. O'Connor? As previously stated, the man was Dan Mahoney. Andrew Field states that "Barnes spent many hours listening to him [Mahoney], and in the end she made out of him her single greatest literary character" (137). Field goes on to call Mahoney the "freest spirit of all the Paris expatriates" and a "self-preserving if tortured self-caricaturist" (137).

This "free spirit," however much Field wishes to elevate him to "a great character, of Shakespearean stature and certainly one of the most memorable literary characters of our century" (Field 140), was, among other things, an illegal abortionist who lived in a famous bordello district in Paris. Field casually informs us that "by the way, [Mahoney] . . . performed the abortion on Djuna" (140). This leaves a bad taste, one that does not exist for "Miss Knight" because McAlmon chose to omit this bleak aspect of Mahoney's life.
Mahoney was from a large Catholic San Francisco family, born around 1895. Even in the relatively sane atmosphere of San Francisco, Mahoney was rather exhibitionistic. Field reports that because Mahoney had an extremely heavy beard, even as a youth, he "used a woman's compact to powder away his five o'clock beard growth that spread across his young but already pronounced jowls" (141). The young Mahoney had a feminine voice and no interest in school sports. To combat these rather stereotypical idiosyncrasies, Mahoney spoke in an "earthly and ribald" manner, not at all the way a conventionally conceived "fairy" was supposed to speak.

The picture that Field goes on to paint is one in which Mahoney was not necessarily homosexual. Field argues that Mahoney "always got along with women" and that he "enjoyed participation in the bridge circles of elderly ladies" (142)—certainly a sterling argument for heterosexuality. To cap his argument, Field relates that Mahoney would often accompany an American couple named Woods, and that he would announce: "We are the Widows Woods" (142). At the outbreak of the second world war, Mahoney, very much against his wishes, ended up back in San Francisco where he frequented a sleazy bar and enacted "lewd scenes" for the likes of William Saroyan and John Steinbeck (Field 142).

Finally, Field pronounces that:

It seems clear that the figure of O'Connor is indeed Mahoney, but the words and tone and substance of what O'Connor says belong to Barnes: seeds of his discourse can be found in all the best early Barnes short stories and plays written long before she knew him. (145)
Field attempts to bully his readers into missing the point, which is that if the "words and tone and substance" were Barnes' and not Mahoney's, what did the latter really contribute? Field readily admits, by way of dismissing McAlmon's version of Mahoney, that McAlmon's character (Miss Knight) "uses several of the stock Mahoney coarse phrases" (138) and that McAlmon "transcribed the speech of the real Mahoney" (141)—claims he does not make for Barnes.

And McAlmon was fully aware of Barnes' use of Mahoney a decade after "Miss Knight" appeared:

In her Nightwood she has a well-known character floundering in the torments of soul-probing and fake philosophies, and he just shouldn't. The actual person doubtlessly suffered enough without having added to his character this unbelievable dipping into the deeper meanings. Drawn as a wildly ribald and often broadly funny comic, he would have emerged more impressively. (Being Geniuses Together 31)

Of course what McAlmon is really driving at here is that if Barnes had stuck to the truth, the character of O'Connor would have been more believable. McAlmon's intention is not only to criticize Barnes, but to chastise her for not sticking to the simple truth as he did in his depiction of Mahoney in "Miss Knight." McAlmon claimed that Barnes always felt she must inject "metaphysics, mysticism, and her own strange version of 'literary' quality" into her works (Being Geniuses Together 31). And Barnes' use of Dan Mahoney as the basis for Matthew O'Connor, especially when compared to McAlmon's version, perfectly corroborates McAlmon's criticism that Barnes did not speak the truth and that her use of Mahoney was, ultimately, superficial.

In Ryder, O'Connor is the pivot upon which Barnes' world turns, the fulcrum upon which everything is balanced. In a novel that
purports to "expose the power of sexual difference" and "reads the priority that Western civilization has assigned to the male over the female" (Benstock 246), there must be some melding of the male-female oppositions in order to avoid the chaos that the polarization of the sexes would bring. Barnes' solution was to invent a male character with female qualities, which, in a male-dominated world, is the best way to preserve both sides of the battle, and represents a perverse but successful sexual joining.

O'Connor's first appearance in Ryder comes about mid-way through the novel (balance) when he delivers two babies, a boy and girl (again, balance). This is also an inverted version of Mahoney, the illegal abortionist. But O'Connor soothes Amelía, who fears death, saying, "No, you shall not die" (Ryder 96) after calling for scissors and silken twine. The baby boy is black; the girl is white. Barnes again suggests, here with color, the polarity of the sexes and the role of O'Connor as cynosure.

Later in the novel, O'Connor is placed on a pedestal. Women sing his praises. O'Connor "was as nice and as good a man, and as pleasant, outside the confessional, as one would wish to meet" (123). Another character, Kate, agrees that "O'Connor was a man in a million" (123). There is a subtle, underlying tone of sarcasm here. The revealing aside, "outside the confessional," and the possible misreading of "a man in a million," reserve public judgment on O'Connor and probably mirror Barnes' private knowledge of the real-life Mahoney. This premonitory stunt is certainly not outside the parameters set for Ryder; the entire novel is a convoluted stunt in a way that Paul West,
in the afterword to Ryder, says is "kaleidoscopic" and "only desultorily narrative" (243).

As Amelia starts to lecture O’Connor on the virtues of parenthood and begins to advise him to father a child, O’Connor jettisons his own maleness by blurting out tearfully:

"It’s always been my wish," he said, struggling with his emotions, "to be called Hesper, first star of the evening."
And with that he arose and went away. (124)

Hesper (or Hesperus) is, of course, another name for Venus, goddess of love and beauty. This confession seems to corroborate earlier suspicions that O’Connor is not at all what he appears to be.

But O’Connor really comes into his own as a character in Barnes’ extended soliloquy, wherein the first overt semblance of similarity between O’Connor and Mahoney appears in the gruff language and blurred lines of gender:

and thirteen we were, crying like pissants into our soup and breaking wind for the poor bastard done in and out of his joys in life. . . . I . . . see me, Matthew O’Connor, holding my satin robe about my backsides, tripping up to God like a good woman, and me only seventeen and taking on something scandalous for the ways my sins were with me. (135-137)

The soliloquy goes along, and O’Connor enters the confessional and quickly assumes an outright female persona. He is, after all, "only tenuously masculine . . . in desire and by nature he is a woman" (Field 139).

"I’ve come to it [Catholicism] with a free heart, once a lady always an acrobat . . . it’s a devil’s bit of peace I’ll get, says I, banging my head against the scrofula and the tapeworm and the syphilis and the cancer and the pectoris and the mumps and the gleet and the pox of mankind. . . . Go, my daughter, he says, and love thy fellowmen." (137)
But O'Connor continues his immediate "confession," which is really an amalgam of his confessions over a long period of time and shows his descent into depravity. The sins become more egregious; O'Connor now admits his unabashed sexual perversion:

"Yes . . . I've done it again, and this time it was with Fat Liz, him as keeps bar in a gophered boudoir cap, and smelling all zig-zag of patchouli, and as drunk as a lord . . . Aye, he's a good man, as sweet a soul as ever dashed his hips across this world . . . as holy a Bitch as ever trod on the tail of my satins . . . and let no man cast aspersions on me . . . For him who has not that goal . . . is a bitch's miscarriage . . . . I'm a woman of a few thousand gestures and a hundred words. (138-139)

The overt references to "a bitch's miscarriage" and homosexual activities with Fat Liz, of course, refer to Mahoney's activities in Paris and Berlin about which Barnes had first-hand knowledge.

Yes, it seems that O'Connor is "one man in a million"; the phrase that he "was as nice and as good a man, and as pleasant, outside the confessional, as one would wish to meet" takes on an entirely new meaning after his soliloquy because inside the confessional, O'Connor is something else again.

But O'Connor is nothing if he is not a paradox. In another section of the novel, after his public avowal of his wish to be Hesper, first star of the evening, O'Connor gives advice to children. To a boy, he states, "I'm afraid you are a little unnatural . . . you should never hit a woman" (161). To a small girl, he states, "Heels over head . . . never makes a pretty downcoming. That's a part of history that, if I were you, I should not repeat" (162). A third child tells the story of his birth to which O'Connor responds glibly: "defy the Lord to better it" (163). These "innocent" conversations move O'Connor to proclaim
that "a wicked, grimy soul has this day been cleaned by a child." He is so moved that he races "straight into the confessional, where he vows: "May I rot like a duchess if it do not reline me with sweetness and light" (163).

O'Connor's final appearance in Ryder comes when he catches a boy who has apparently stolen something. Again, O'Connor is paradoxical in that he presumes to tell the thief the three great moments of history so as to "set him in the strait path once again" (227).

The first great moment, recounted by O'Connor, involves Cleopatra, a bored woman "of service overlong." While being massaged, a form of therapeutic laxative, the queen lazily reaches for a fig to further the effects of the rubdown. Beneath the figs is an asp; Cleopatra hugs the snake to her breast in a fit of maternal passion, "drew her breath backward through he teeth, said, 'oooooo Jesus,'" and dies in a sexual ecstasy.

The second great moment consists of the American war heroine, Barbara Frietchie, "putting her head out of the window" and gasping in orgasm as Stonewall Jackson rode by. The third moment has Robert E. Lee's surrendering to Grant by unsheathing his sword and saying, "[y]ou know what you can do with this, don't you" (231). The sexual innuendo and imagery in O'Connor's three great moments in history is clear: despite O'Connor's frenzied confessions and sacred vows, he remains, at heart, a pervert. The implication is that anything sexual is perverse and that everything is sexual.

O'Connor's function in Ryder is a bit more complex than his source, Dan Mahoney, seemingly was. As a rare, sympathetic male character in any work by Barnes, O'Connor is important in two ways: he
amply demonstrates the deviousness of his maleness through his sordid confessions in female persona; Barnes implies that this female persona is what makes O'Connor sympathetic in the first place, especially in counterpoint to the father figure, Wendell Ryder, whose "sexual organ houses his mind, spirit and heart" (Field 139). Clearly, Mahoney was not terribly important in these two functions; only Mahoney's perversion seems to have inspired Barnes, especially since there is no evidence that Mahoney was the philosophical soul O'Connor so obviously is in Ryder.

In Nightwood, which Hugh Ford calls "a novel of sexual aberration and tormented love" (131), Barnes once again uses Dan Mahoney as her inspiration for Dr. Matthew O'Connor. It is this version of O'Connor that Andrew Field proclaims to be "a great character, of Shakespearean stature and certainly one of the most memorable literary characters of our century" and asserts that O'Connor "surges up to tower over the drama" (140). But even Field, in his onward rush of praise for Barnes and outright castigation of McAlmon, waivers when it comes to "the question of the relationship between the literary O'Connor and the real Dan Mahoney" (140). Field grudgingly admits that Barnes was not able to capture the true nature of Mahoney in her writing. He says:

Djuna Barnes did the best she could, and it's brilliant, what she did, but there was more gab, more blarney to him [Mahoney] than even appears in Nightwood. (141)

If Barnes was unable, or possibly unwilling, to capture the "gab" and "blarney" of Mahoney, McAlmon wasn't; he revels in doing so. And although O'Connor is more exuberant and outrageous in Nightwood than he is in Ryder, and although the character is memorable, Barnes'
version still pales in comparison to McAlmon's version in "Miss Knight."

In *Nightwood*, O'Connor makes an early appearance at a party; Barnes quickly establishes the pedigree of the character:

The man was Dr. Matthew O'Connor, an Irishman from the Barbary Coast (Pacific Street, San Francisco), whose interest in gynaecology had driven him half way around the world. (14)

There is no immediate reason for Barnes to give this information on O'Connor, who, true to the nature of his former incarnation in *Ryder*, starts talking about fate and the common man. Barnes seems to be giving clues to his identity—both O'Connor and Mahoney hailed from San Francisco; oddly, Miss Knight is from Chicago. There is another hint that O'Connor is involved with abortions ("gynaecology had driven him half way around the world"). And Barnes even hints that O'Connor may not be a certified physician. One character bemoans the presence of O'Connor, "this volatile person who called himself a doctor" (17). It must be remembered that *Nightwood* is, after all, the story of Barnes' love affair with Thelma Wood; therefore, there is an historic basis for most of the characters therein.

O'Connor's possible homosexuality is broadly hinted at during this same scene when another guest innocently asks if O'Connor is acquainted with Vienna.

"Vienna," said the doctor, "the bed into which the common people climb. . . . I remember young Austrian boys going to school, flocks of quail they were, sitting out their recess in different spots in the sun, rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed, with damp rosy mouths. . . ." (17)

The guest reproves: "I was not thinking of its young boys" (17), but the connection has been made: Barnes has foreshadowed O'Connor's
perversions to come; she has also tenuously established the link between O'connor and Mahoney.

The link is strengthened during O'Connor's next appearance, when he bares his soul during a carriage ride. The statement McAlmon made concerning how Barnes altered Mahoney's true nature by what he called, "this unbelievable dipping into the deeper meanings" comes to mind. But more importantly, O'Connor's descent into depravity in Nightwood points up the different perceptions that Barnes and McAlmon had about Mahoney. Barnes obviously saw Mahoney as a cosmic, tortured figure; McAlmon saw him as a camping drag queen who, however, was more honest than the "normal" people around him.

O'Connor begins to spout his peculiar mix of philosophy and self-deprecation:

"You see before you . . . one who was created in anxiety. My father, Lord rest his soul, had no happiness in me from the beginning. . . . He seemed to realize my terrible predicament: to be shot for man's meat, but to go down like a girl, crying in the night for her mother." (74)

As in Ryder, O'Connor's character steadily declines as the novel progresses. In Nightwood, his intermittent appearances grow markedly bizarre.

After merely hinting about his perversion, O'Connor next appears in women's clothing. This character that Andrew Field calls a "self-preserving if tortured auto-caricaturist" (137) actually mirrors Djuna Barnes. Shari Benstock notes that "Barnes used to write propped on her bed, dressed in a black negligee, highly rouged, her hair done" (239). In Nightwood, O'Connor appears in much the same situation:

In the narrow bed, with its heavy and dirty linen sheets, lay the doctor in a woman's flannel nightgown.
The doctor's head, with its over-large black eyes, its full gun-metal cheeks and chin, was framed in the golden semi-circle of a wig with long pendant curls that touched his shoulders. . . . He was heavily rouged and his lashes painted. (79)

This entire scene is one in which the male and female aspects of life are turned and twisted so that neither Nora nor the reader can tell where one ends and the other starts. But this is no case of yin and yang. Instead of harmony, this merged identity causes chaos, perhaps reflecting the tortures Barnes experienced in her relationship with Wood:

From the half-open drawers of his chiffonier hung laces, ribands, stockings, ladies' underclothing and an abdominal brace. . . . There is a certain belligerence in a room in which a woman has never set foot; every object seems to be battling its own compression—and there is a metallic odour, as of beaten iron in a smithy. (78-79)

In cataloging the displaced feminine items in the masculine room, the duality of O'Connor's personality is quite clear; the as yet covert link between O'Connor and Mahoney is made still clearer by Nora's references to brothels and abortions:

On a maple dresser . . . lay a rusty pair of forceps, a broken scalpel, half a dozen odd instruments that she could not place. . . . A swill-pail stood at the head of the bed, brimming with abominations. There was something appallingly degraded about the room, like the rooms in brothels. . . . (79)

What is not so clear, however, is the fact that Nora, who represents Barnes in the novel, is witnessing this funhouse mirror image of herself as a man in drag. What this convoluted situation really means is difficult to say. Does O'Connor represent the male side of Nora? Does Mahoney then represent the male side of Barnes?
O'Connor continues to blur the line between male and female, good
and evil. In a fit of honesty, he inadvertently cries:

"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
... no matter what I may be doing, in my heart is the wish
for children and knitting. God, I never asked better than to
boil some good man’s potatoes and toss up a child for him
every nine months by the calendar. Is it my fault that my
only fireside is the outhouse?" (91)

Along with the self-deprecation, we get a hint of O’Connor’s abject
bitterness. His soul-searching reveals that he is often thinking about
fault and accountability. This again reminds us of McAlmon’s criticism
that Barnes created a morbid character, and that "[d]rawn as a wildly
ribald and often broadly funny comic, he would have emerged more
impressively." As he is written, O’Connor emerges as little more than
a directionless and tortured soul, more a symbol than a real man.

He states grandly:

"In the acceptance of depravity the sense of the past is most
fully captured. What is a ruin but Time easing itself of
endurance? Corruption is the Age of Time. It is the body and
the blood of ecstasy, religion and love." (118)

This nonsensical philosophizing represents the over-the-edge quality
that Barnes has instilled in O’Connor—something McAlmon does not do
with Miss Knight. There is no evidence that Mahoney ever spoke this
way or thought about such topics.

Finally, in a drunken stupor, O’Connor makes his last, desperate
pleas for himself in particular and for humanity in general:

"For Christ’s sweet sake!" he said, and his voice was a
whisper. "Now that you have all heard what you wanted to
hear, can’t you let me loose now, let me go? I’ve not only
lived my life for nothing, but I’ve told it for nothing—
abominable among the filthy people—I know, it’s all over,
everything's over, and nobody knows it but me—drunk as a fiddler's bitch—lasted too long. . . . Mark my words—now nothing, but wrath and weeping!" (165-166)

O'Connor's final, gut-wrenching statement is like a curse on the world he was forced to live in. It is a grand, if depressing, statement. And having made this statement, having damned everything and everybody, O'Connor is able to find peace in madness. Only in his drunken descent toward total madness does O'Connor find truth, which for him is "nothing, but wrath and weeping."

But as grandiose as this may be, it only widens the already yawning rift between O'Connor the character and Mahoney the man. It is well documented and patently evident that Barnes patterned O'Connor after Mahoney, and there are scenes in Nightwood that recall Field's statement that "Barnes spent many hours listening to him" as Nora listens to O'Connor, but the rift between reality and creation is wide here. In the final analysis, the traits held in common between O'Connor and Mahoney are superficial and covert. And although Field proclaims O'Connor "metaphysically pathetic" (137), the fact remains that Barnes made major alterations in creating this character, and in the process, she lost the essential truth of Dan Mahoney, the very trait that makes "Miss Knight" work so well.

"Miss Knight," which "manages to be simultaneously funny, pathetic, and repulsive" (Ford 113), starts right off; McAlmon doesn't waste any time in setting up the character of Charlie Knight or in establishing the time and place: 1920s Berlin. Indeed, "he explored with precision and detachment the moral rubble of postwar Berlin" (Smoller 156). Contrary to Barnes' use of Dan Mahoney in Ryder and
Nightwood, in which the character takes on cosmic or metaphysical proportions, Miss Knight, a direct characterization of Dan Mahoney, states simply, "now when these bitches get elegant I lay 'em out stinkin'" (3). To emphasize this aversion to phoniness or lack of truth, the reader is also told that:

in a group of sister bitches she had few thoughts but to see that none of them rose above the proper clan manner in elegance. ... (3)

and

"Miss Knight's chief complex was against elegance. The one thing she could not stand was to have some stuck-up bitch she'd known in the chorus get to acting elegant. (6)

Miss Knight does not limit his rigid expectations about truth to his "sister bitches" or fellow transvestites; he extends his principles to homosexuals as well:

"I was talkin' to a guy—one of these highbrows, you get me, just scientifically interested and all that, you know—and he sez to me, 'did you get queer in the army?' and I sez to him, 'my god Mary, I've been queer since before you wore diddies [sic].'" (3)

The irony here is that Miss Knight demands truth in others and yet is a man who dresses as a woman. Beneath the façade, Miss Knight is as brutally comic as he is honest. Smoller states that "with this ironic twist, McAlmon transformed 'Miss Knight' from a case study of degeneracy into a droll comedy that both documents the sordid life of sexual deviants in a predatory society and satisfies the complex demands of art" (161). It is these traits that make Miss Knight a survivor and a success. And in the 1920s Berlin McAlmon writes about, honesty and success are indeed rare commodities. It is this brutal
honesty that Miss Knight possesses that makes the character and the story one of McAlmon's best. The story was highly regarded: "Joyce and Pound considered 'Miss Knight' . . . one of McAlmon's best" (Smoller 159). Joyce even arranged for its translation into French and publication in an avant-garde magazine (Being Geniuses Together 134). Clearly, this is not just, as Gore Vidal would have it, a story in which "[t]he characters . . . come to Berlin to have a good time with boys and drugs"; nor do the characters "just keep talking" (Miss Knight and Others xv). Apparently, Vidal has missed McAlmon's point entirely.

Although Miss Knight clearly is not a deep or complex or symbolic character, as O'Connor is meant to be, there is at work here something other than Vidal's limp reading would suggest. Miss Knight loves truth; his simple reason for hating deceit in others is that it is not truthful. Miss Knight's love of truth reflects Gertrude Stein's encomium that each person possesses a basic truth—what she called a "bottom"—and McAlmon's own feelings; McAlmon said about "Miss Knight":

> various French people thought the story "Miss Knight" a sharp and stark presentation of a type new to literature but not to life. At any rate the story did deal with variant types with a complete objectivity, not intent on their "souls" and not distressed by their "morals." (Smoller 164)

Miss Knight always tells the truth. He does not hide his transvestite tendencies, homosexual desires, drug addiction, or even his current emotional state. Moreover, he is physically uncomfortable when he cannot be himself. Seated in a cafe with strangers, Miss Knight:

> felt a trifle ill at ease in the party she was with as none of the strangers were recognizable types to her. In her
perplexity she was afraid that some of the members were upstage and elegant, and she could not judge whether they were queer or not, so that she could lay them out cold. (7)

Miss Knight’s discomfort is based on not knowing the strangers’ true identities or how to deal with their possible falseness. His predicament continues:

A cautious reserve was forced upon her, and that was uncomfortable to so relaxed a disposition as hers. . . . her reserve kept her from revealing too much of herself by talkativeness. She listened. The conversation was a manufactured one. . . . (7)

But Miss Knight cannot contain his true inner self for long. As the strangers begin to babble falsely and pompously about American versus European culture, Miss Knight erupts:

"Now listen here, Mary—excuse me, just my way of talkin' you know—but are you guys trying to get elegant? Don’t do it, I’m askin' you. I’m common as dirt myself. Lay off this elegant stuff." (8)

For all his aggressive action at the hint of elegance or deceit in others, however, Miss Knight is most brutally honest with himself: "I’m a common piece of tird [sic], but I ain't never pretended I wasn't" (17).

This last statement is central to Miss Knight’s appeal and stature as a greater character than Barnes’ literary versions of Dan Mahoney. While O’Connor is patently false and pathetic, Miss Knight is honest and sympathetic. Whereas O’Connor is whining and self-reproachful, Miss Knight is valiant. Lastly, as O’Connor descends into madness in Nightwood, "Miss Knight" ends on an optimistic note:

Well, old dear, how are you? I am back in the U.S.A. How are all the others? Will be back in Paris February 1st, 1922. I am sending you twenty-five dollars for the marks you laid out
for me, and hope you will always be my friend, as I love you and hope that you are well—I am, yours,

Charlie Knight (20)

Because the above letter is read six weeks after Miss Knight’s sudden disappearance from Berlin society, Foster Morris—yet another McAlmon character based on Marsden Hartley—marvels: "He had not one sou on him when he went out the back door" (20). As perverted as Miss Knight may be, he is still more successful than Dr. O’Connor. McAlmon’s biographer concurs, saying:

McAlmon does some inverting himself, turning the tables on the naturalistic convention that would have had Charlie Knight, like Stephen Crane’s Maggie, commit suicide in despair. Instead, Knight, despite his effeminacy, proves to be a tough guy who bounces back with the resilience of one of Hemingway’s undefeated. (Smoller 161)

Despite McAlmon’s occasional table turning, his overt concern with accurate depiction extends to Miss Knight’s appearance, which closely matches that of Dan Mahoney:

Miss Knight was so built that she could have passed as a real man; even her voice generally didn’t give her away. It was no bass, but it functioned in the lower registers. (5)

And in another scene, where Miss Knight wins first prize at a costume ball, McAlmon’s description of Miss Knight’s ridiculous costume reflects O’Connor’s bedtime gear:

Miss Knight arrived as Madame Récamier, supposedly, but the neck of her gown was much less in evidence than in the well-known Madame Récamier portrait, for Miss Knight’s bulky shoulders showed like the white flesh of a newly bathed coalheaver above all the glitter of her gown. (12)
At the ill-fated Thanksgiving dinner, Miss Knight is dressed in a manner that also recalls Barnes’ description of O’Connor in *Nightwood* more than a decade later:

she laid aside her men’s clothing for the evening, and arrayed herself in a glittering garment made by herself. Upon her head she wore a bright red wig, and about her head she fastened an imitation but entirely gorgeous aigrette. (10)

While Dr. O’Connor bears a general but superficial resemblance to Mahoney-O’Connor is also a good deal older than his real-life counterpart—Miss Knight is the mirror image of Mahoney. McAlmon makes no attempt to masculinize Miss Knight’s physical appearance, soften his speech, or curtail his flamboyant mannerisms. Miss Knight is direct and acerbic in nearly all his speeches; he is the very soul of veracity.

Miss Knight’s honesty and love of truth are not limited to the way he dresses and his attitudes toward others; Miss Knight is also astoundingly honest about his use of drugs—specifically cocaine. For a short story written in the mid-1920s, the prevalence of cocaine and use of it by the main character is astonishing. The many drug references were one reason Sylvia Beach would not handle *Distinguished Air* in 1925 (Riley 230); the book would likely have been impounded by American and British customs officials. McAlmon’s terminology is also surprisingly contemporary. References to cocaine include such words as deck, powder, skate, drift, glide, snowbound, and coked.

Miss Knight takes drugs all the time. During any social engagement, he is likely to go “skating to the lavatory” (8) for a fix at any moment. At a party, when Miss Knight’s “real man”—one that is not a transvestite—is attracted to another, he goes “out into the
hallway to take a sniff of coke behind the door" (12). Even casual anecdotes come around to cocaine. When Miss Knight is telling the story of a near bust in New York, he ends the story by saying, "'My god Mary, when I wuz out of that I breathed better than coke's ever made me'" (15).

Miss Knight has a recurring nightmare in which he is paralyzed "from my nose to the top of my head with coke" (18). The only remedy seems to be to "drink six bucketsfull of water" (19). After these dreams, Miss Knight is usually apprehensive, afraid he'll "be taken out of Berlin all done up like a mummy and stiff, if . . . [not] floating down the river" (19) or "going home in a crate the next day" (6).

What is odd about "Miss Knight," as well as its companion stories, "The Lodging House" and "Distinguished Air," is that there is no outrightly sexual scene. Ernest Walsh seemed to miss this point in a 1925 review of Distinguished Air that appeared in This Quarter. He praised the collection for its inherent honesty and, surprisingly, compared McAlmon to Walt Whitman. He said:

He doesn't exclude anything from his world and is like Walt Whitman in his completeness but differs from Whitman in that he doesn't argue with his readers. He doesn't explain either. He doesn't apologize. He is a great white father watching his brood and because some of the brood are a queer lot . . . McAlmon doesn't shut the door . . .

And in discussing Distinguished Air, Walsh goes on to say:

Distinguished Air is interesting as an example of what a really distinguished mind can do with difficult material. . . . McAlmon has seen the humanity that is in the lives of these twisted characters and given us the humanity and left the rest out.
Elsewhere in the review, Walsh really seems to go overboard when he claims:

McAlmon is one of the most astonishing writers since the fathers of English literature. If you care for Shakespeare, if you care for Dickens, if you care for Conrad, you will care more for McAlmon. He is colossal without being dull, an unusual merit.

Walsh’s review of *Distinguished Air* places it among the greatest books ever written, and his closing line is: "It is chaste, severe, serious, profound: *(This Quarter 331)*.

But there is certainly a paradox in Walsh’s review: on the one hand he says that McAlmon "doesn’t exclude anything from his world and is like Walt Whitman in his completeness"; on the other hand, Walsh extols McAlmon for having seen "the humanity that is in the lives of these twisted characters and given us the humanity and left the rest out."

This apparent reserve on McAlmon’s part is, however, typical of his life’s work. He never gave away the details of his or anyone else’s sexual lives. Although his drunken admission, "I’m bisexual myself, like Michelangelo, and I don’t give a damn who knows it," is often quoted, it was a rare instance of McAlmon’s giving up any really personal information. There is nothing in print to "prove" a homosexual relationship with anyone, although there are implied homosexual interests in everyone from Marsden Hartley and William Carlos Williams to Ernest Hemingway and Morley Callaghan. But it must be remembered that, despite his sexless marriage to Bryher, McAlmon was reported to have been involved with Kay Boyle and Nancy Cunard, the Paris-based publisher.
More than likely, the truth about any of these "relationships" can never be known; most of the participants are dead, and few of them ever wrote about such matters. But McAlmon's insightful incarnation of Dan Mahoney as Charlie Knight serves as a kind of revolving mirror—one of McAlmon's favorite images and the title of his long poem—one that catches the facets of several people's lives and emerges as one thing or being. McAlmon's revolving mirror, Natalie Barney's "disparate lives," Ezra Pound's "paideuma," and H.D.'s "divided I" all share the view that human complexity may be beyond any one person's understanding, and that to ignore or exclude any side of humanity from art is to produce art that is sterile. McAlmon's ability and desire to create Miss Knight is a testament to his integrity and his long unsung talent.

In refusing to exclude any side of humanity, McAlmon produced, in "Miss Knight," a work that captures the ambiance and mores of a time and place as sure-footedly as Fitzgerald's This Side of Paradise, Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises, or Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath did their worlds. In this manner, "Miss Knight" is a microcosm of Berlin between the wars, an inside look at the squalor and desperation that pervaded Berlin and gave rise to Nazism.
CHAPTER IV: "THE INDEFINITE HUNTRESS"

In 1932, Robert McAlmon published his most ambitious but not necessarily his most successful short story. "The Indefinite Huntress" was the lead story in a collection of the same name, compiled by Kay Boyle without McAlmon's participation, and published in Paris by Crosby Continental Editions. Although this story has been collected in Miss Knight and Others (University of New Mexico Press, 1992), references in this dissertation are to the 1932 Crosby edition. As the last major text of McAlmon's fiction, "The Indefinite Huntress" serves as a tantalizing hint of what might have been.

Although McAlmon is often dismissed as a mere reporter, "The Indefinite Huntress" is a prime example of McAlmon's ability to invent, for not only does he recast Greek myths about Artemis, Dionysus, and Actaeon, he also recasts his own failed marriage to Bryher and her relationship with H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) as the story of Lily Root, her marriage to Red Neill, and her lesbian love for her cousin, Helga. The story stands as positive proof that McAlmon could and did invent something. The story has been praised recently in the foreword to Miss Knight and Others by Gore Vidal as "an exemplary minimalist novel" and as "the lifetime of a marriage" (vii). But although Vidal recognizes that the "result is satisfying" and that "one can place [it] comfortably beside any of Sherwood Anderson's plain tales of that day" (vii), he utterly fails to comprehend the textual complexity or the story of what McAlmon endeavored to accomplish through interweaving his own "lifetime of a marriage" with the several Greek myths.
On the surface, "The Indefinite Huntress" appears to be another of McAlmon's biographical stories in which he plays the boy—in this case, Dionisio (Dion) Granger, the youth loved by others. But one major clue excludes this story from that category: Dion is not the main character of the story. In nearly every other biographical story, McAlmon is the main character. In "Potato Picking," "The Jack Rabbit Drive," "Mexican Interval," or Post-Adolescence, McAlmon is the protagonist; in "The Indefinite Huntress," the protagonist is Lily Root.

And yet the story does not seem similar to McAlmon's simple, straightforward depictions of others as in "The Fast Girl" or "The Little Ninny." Gore Vidal provided the key to unlocking this story's puzzle when he commented that "The Indefinite Huntress" demonstrated "the lifetime of a marriage." Because McAlmon's stories were never far from his perceived experiences, the marriage theme in the story had to mirror his own marriage to Bryher. On closer examination, it is evident that both the theme and personalities in "The Indefinite Huntress" perfectly match the principal players in McAlmon's marriage: Bryher, H.D., and himself. McAlmon is Red Neill, Bryher is Lily Root, and H.D. is Lily's cousin, Helga.

In 1920, McAlmon was working in New York City as an artist's model and living on a scow in New York harbor. He had already befriended Marsden Hartley and William Carlos Williams with whom he had started Contact magazine, the precursor of Contact Publishing Company. With Williams, McAlmon attended a party and met H.D. and Bryher in September 1920. Although Williams was more interested in H.D., a rising poet, McAlmon was taken by Bryher. In a letter to Williams, McAlmon recalled that H.D. was "all right . . . but the other one,
Bryher, as she was introduced to us—she's something" (Smoller 36). The women left for California the following day, but they soon returned to the east coast. A card from Bryher kept McAlmon from shipping out on a freighter to China. Bryher proposed marriage, and the two were married on Valentine's Day, 1921.

This marriage was one of the pivotal acts of McAlmon's life. Not only did the marriage act as a means of his getting to Europe, but it also provided him with the large amount of money he would ultimately use to establish himself as a major publisher during the 1920s. Beyond these two positive facets, the marriage also made him a target of others' barbs. He was nicknamed "McAlimony" because of the public perception of a mercenary union, and others, including Fitzgerald and Hemingway, were jealous of his moneyed freedom. Bryher was not just rich; she was the illegitimate daughter of Sir John Ellerman, England's single biggest taxpayer.

About the ill-fated marriage, Bryher wrote:

I had happened to meet a young American writer . . . who was full of enthusiasm for modern writing. He wanted to go to Paris to meet Joyce but lacked the passage money. I put my problem before him and suggested that if we married my family would leave me alone. I would give him part of my allowance, he would join me for occasional visits to my parents, otherwise we would lead strictly separate lives. . . . It never occurred to me at the time that there was anything irregular in my suggestion. (The Heart to Artemis 201)

McAlmon's biographer, Sanford Smoller, wonders if H.D. might not have put Bryher up to the marriage (36) because she had recently separated from her husband, Richard Aldington. Sir John did not approve of wealthy unmarried girls "flitting about alone" (Smoller 35). And because H.D. and Bryher were having a lesbian relationship,
Bryher's marriage was both a convenient and important charade. In any case, the "courtship" proceeded at a dizzying pace despite words of caution from Williams, who was "heartbroken" (Smoller 42) by the marriage. Williams seemed to sense the ominous nature of the union, and in a letter to Amy Lowell, he said "I wish I had the boy back with me and not lost there abroad, to no good purpose I feel sure" (Smoller 40).

McAlmon's role in the marriage remains, for the most part, a mystery. Most contemporaries refused to believe McAlmon's story of being duped into the marriage by the lesbians. According to his own testimony, McAlmon believed that H.D. "was surprised they had married" (Smoller 39), a contradiction to Smoller's assumption. Even though Smoller attempts to present him as an innocent dupe, he grudgingly admits that "McAlmon's motives were a mixture of dare-devil whim and calculated opportunism" (39). Moreover, McAlmon persisted in avowing that he believed the proposed marriage to be the real thing, even though Bryher asserted that she had made her intentions quite clear. It is a mystery that most probably will never be solved. Each player steadfastly held to his or her own story through the years. In her 1962 memoir, The Heart to Artemis Bryher stated that, in any case, McAlmon benefited from the marriage:

I think now that there were advantages on both sides. . . . He introduced me to . . . Sylvia Beach, to Joyce, Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Berenice Abbott, Man Ray. He brought me the books of E.E. Cummings and Wallace Stevens. He received, in his turn, the freedom of Paris in the twenties. (201)
It is interesting to note that although the benefits Bryher states she received through marriage are specific and quantifiable, McAlmon's benefits are not.

In judging this final note on the marriage of McAlmon and Bryher, Smoller writes that Bryher "clearly got the best of the deal" (39). Although McAlmon had "the freedom of Paris in the twenties," that freedom had "only one wholly salutary [sic] effect: it enabled him to publish his own books after he was ignored by commercial publishers" (Smoller 40). Clearly, Smoller declines to accept McAlmon's close associations with Pound, Joyce, Hemingway, and others as being, in the long run, beneficial. In Smoller's opinion, although McAlmon served as a beneficial avenue for Bryher's meeting influential writers, it was definitely a one-way street.

When one considers that the Bryher-McAlmon marriage was so important in terms of money and opportunity, especially for McAlmon, it is indeed unusual that McAlmon never overtly wrote about it. His marriage seemingly excluded, in his writings, McAlmon was so consumed with chronicling the everyday minutiae of his life that he was dismissed as a reporter—a dismissal that persists. There are mentions of the marriage in letters, but McAlmon never wrote a full account of his side of the story. Bryher covered the marriage in The Heart to Artemis, and even Williams openly discussed the marriage and his reactions to it in his 1951 Autobiography, which was perceived as an act of treason and caused McAlmon to sever relations with Williams after more than thirty years of friendship.

But McAlmon did in fact write about his marriage to Bryher and its unfortunate consequences. In the 1932 short story, "The Indefinite
Huntress," McAlmon cleverly disguised the story of his marriage as the story of Lily Root and Red Neill. And although Gore Vidal correctly recognizes the story as being "the lifetime of a marriage," he fails to identify exactly whose marriage it is.

In the opening of the story, Lily and Helga are seen together. Helga is making ready to leave after having visited the family farm where Lily still lives. McAlmon was smart enough to submerge the real personalities and location and set the story in a place common to his fiction: an American small town. But the real-life relationships are maintained; we are told that "Helga was the first person with whom Lily had any relationship approaching intimacy" (7), a relationship that clearly parallels that of H.D. and Bryher.

The intimacy that we see in this scene is Helga's grooming of Lily's hair. This act of admiration and tenderness implies and foreshadows the relationship that will come. Helga says, "I would give a thousand to have hair like yours... That colour is worth a fortune" (8). Helga tells Lily to "let it down," a euphemism McAlmon uses several times during this scene, and as Helga begins brushing out Lily's hair, there is a joining of the women:

"I love the crackle of your hair," Helga mused, running it through her palms. Lily saw the whiteness of Helga's fine hands against her own hair, in the mirror. "It's as lively as you are, Lily"... "I'm always restless," Lily said, petting Helga's arm. (9)

Later, Helga blurts out her innermost feelings:

"I wish you could come with me"... "you're so strong. I feel like nothing beside you, but you make me feel vitality too. I don't cry defeat easily." (9-10)

To this last, rather nebulous comment, Lily replies:
"If you ever feel that way, let me know and I'll come and take care of you." (10)

Whatever "that way" means to her is certainly unclear, but it does elicit the desired response: "I'll come and take care of you." In their final moments together, Helga asks for a snippet of Lily's hair and places it in an envelope. This acts seems to seal some unuttered pact between the women:

Lily saw the look on Helga's face. She was trying not to weep. Lily felt cut with loneliness, for her, and sad because she was sad. Then Lily broke away and bolted to her room. . . . She stood at her window watching the car going towards town until it was out of sight. (10)

There is a shared empathy between the women. Not only have they physically merged—Helga's white hand in Lily's golden hair—in a mirror image, but they have spiritually merged, culminating in a symbiotic relationship as Lily begins to weep, seeing that Helga cannot.

During the opening of the story, the reader is introduced to Lily in the presence of her parents and then with her cousin, Helga. There is no empathy, no meeting of minds, between Lily and her parents. Yet there is a sense of commonality between Lily and Helga, who is the only other woman McAlmon developed in the story. Lily has no empathetic relationship with Red Neill, and her favorable leanings toward Dion are dismissed by her calling them 'arm hunger.' Clearly, McAlmon has taken great care in building the foundations of the relationship that Lily will ultimately succeed in: a lesbian alliance with Helga, who does not again appear in the story, although she is often in Lily's thoughts and daydreams. Less clear, however, are the beginnings of McAlmon's own possible homosexuality, which are merely
hinted at in the story by Red’s obvious sexual attraction for Dion. On the one hand, we know the result of Bryher’s lesbian leanings; on the other, we are left with ambiguous results of McAlmon’s first sexual stirrings: there is no closure.

The reader’s introduction to Red Neill, on the other hand, is colored by Lily’s sharp reactions to his flirting with her. Red is not what he seems to be, but then, neither is Lily. She is combing her hair and daydreaming about Helga when Red, shouldering a string of ducks, suddenly appears, asking for a drink:

"May I have a drink of water, or buttermilk if you have it?" a voice said. Somewhat resentfully Lily tossed her hair back and looked distantly out of chilled blue eyes. (11)

Lily is immediately resentful and challenges the man she does not know. She also "tossed her hair back," hiding it from the man. Just as Bryher would appraise McAlmon as a possible husband, so does Lily challenge Red:

Her pale eyes challenged his appraising glance with a glance more coldly appraising. . . . "That’s not a bad string of ducks," Lily relaxed some. "I brought in more the other morning though." (12)

After Red has gone, Lily mentally debates her reactions and emotions concerning his intrusion and the ensuing conversation. She was "resentful towards his patronizing attitude of male gallantry, which while appraising her didn’t recognize that she was sizing him up too" (13). Red is unaware of exactly what Lily is thinking, just as McAlmon was most likely unaware of Bryher’s schemes during their first meeting. Lily also resents Red’s "male coquettish attitude" (13), which parallels McAlmon’s work as an artist’s model.
After mulling over her feelings, Lily returns to doing up her hair and begins another daydream in which Helga and Red merge into a "romantic gallant who came upon a legendary herself while she was combing her tresses" (14). Lily's immediate confusion over her reactions to Red and her symbiotic bond with Helga conclude the daydream. Finally, her "pent-up rage" subsides, "[s]he felt emptiness about her, and realized that Helga too felt emptiness" (15). Just as Lily's actions keep returning to brushing her hair, a sensual act once shared with Helga, her thoughts also return to Helga, who acts as a refuge during Lily's emotional turmoil.

Midway through the story, Lily is discussed by Red and Dion Granger, the youth who ultimately brings together Lily and Red. The reader is told that Lily has left the family farm; "she visited a cousin of hers in New York this summer" (23). Lily has returned to live in the town of Lansing; she does not live on the family farm. Red clearly remembers Lily because she "gave herself airs because her father was a rich old penny-snatcher" (23).

The emphasis on Lily's father's money and her continued attachment to cousin Helga maintains the connection between Lily and Bryher. The trip east, however, has changed Lily. Besides living in town, she now dresses better. And when Red and Lily meet again on the streets of Lansing, Red notices Lily's new-found sheen of sophistication and thinks that "swell cousin of hers had probably taught her a few things" (27). Whatever Helga has taught Lily, it certainly seems that Lily's attitude toward Red has changed, a change that Red takes notice of:
A forbidding antagonism he had sensed in her once was not now present. It pleased Red... Lily was striking him as femininely alluring and poised. ... (27-28)

Lily has become a trap. While back east, Lily has been taught by Helga how to get this man, a situation that brings to mind Sanford Smoller's inference that during the trip west to California in 1920, Bryher "perhaps with H.D.'s assistance" plotted to catch McAlmon because of his "seeming amorality and disengagement" (36). Whereas Lily's initial reaction to Red, when they first met, was one of antagonism, her reaction is now more studied and deliberate, perhaps implying a plot on her part.

During their sidewalk conversation, Dion is struck in the eye by a wayward baseball. Watching Red tend Dion, Lily "decided not to act antagonistic towards him... Lily felt resentful" (29-30). Again, her feeling is one thing, but her decided action is something else. After tending Dion, Lily and Red are alone, and Lily begins earnestly courting Red:

"I never thought you would be able to appreciate that kind of look on a person's face." Red looked confused as well as surprised... "Let it go," Lily's voice chortled a tender mocking lilt. "Anyway I like you a little now... I see how you really are." (31)

Lily's antagonism is gone, and Red's reaction is confusion and surprise. Stumbling along, Red starts to suggest that Lily accompany him on a trip to Minneapolis, but he senses that Lily would not appreciate the implication. But even this rather overtly suggestive offer doesn't offend the new Lily. She playfully chides him:

"Don't be foolish. What right would I have to go with you if I didn't understand it the way you know you meant it..." She kept changing before him. There she stood, seeming a
healthy, knowing farm girl, very physical, and at moments he got the feeling he had to be more careful. . . . Just now there was a stark, raw quality of blunt and very young honesty in her attitude. . . . (32-33)

Even as Red is being reeled in by Lily, even as he intuitively understands that she is stalking prey, he allows himself to be caught in her trap. Perhaps Red's predicament is actually what McAlmon felt when Bryher set her sights on him in New York in 1920. Red conjectures:

In her remark upon his tenderness towards Dion there had been a teasingly sympathetic woman of the world's understanding. Then Red felt that she had out-thought him, and understood more than he did. He knew he was not of a subtle or delicate sort. (33)

Red is intellectually aware of what Lily is trying to do: corner him into marriage. Later, during a ride in the country, Red and Lily argue and grapple.

He caught her in his arms and held her close. She did not fight, but let him kiss her deeply, with long kisses. Then she forced him away. "I'm stronger than you," she said drily. "That kind of kiss means nothing. I was ready to offer you something but you wouldn't understand." (39)

The "something" that Lily says she is about to offer is purposely ambiguous. Could it be sex? Could it be marriage? Could it be money? Lily never says; Lily does, however, dangle the prospect of marriage before Red until he finally asks: "Do you want me to offer marriage because I kissed you?" (40). But Lily continues to play the game until she teasingly admits that it "would be better if I am married" and "I want to do something to keep from being bored and restless" (41). Red
mentally notes that there was "no doubt that now she'd decided the marriage was arranged" (41).

During the off-and-on discussion of marriage, Lily continues to manipulate Red's emotions and desires until he finally blurts out, "Hell, Lily, let's get married" (42). Lily still balks at the idea until Red mentions Dion:

"You ask Dion," Red became persuasive now that Lily held back. "I said today that I ought to marry a girl like you. . . ." [Lily replies] "Go to a minister's then. Maybe there's a little something between us . . . and if it doesn't go, I have my living to make, and we can each go on our own." (43-44)

Love is never mentioned between Lily and Red. Each sees the other through the eyes of Dion, who acts as a sort of go-between, a goal or aspiration that Red and Lily each adhere to. Dion represents a meeting of the minds of Red and Lily. He brings them together because he is the one thing they can have in common, especially as there is no love between them.

The same absence of love echoes through the pages of Smoller's biography. In a letter to Norman Holmes Pearson, McAlmon described his meeting with Bryher, saying they "talked about literature and education, and he [McAlmon] felt they were in rapport since they were both 'scornful and rebellious'" (38). Smoller also states: "If McAlmon was loved, it was not by Bryher" (37) and for his part, "McAlmon . . . never said anything about loving Bryher" (40). The details in the Red-Lily and McAlmon-Bryher proposals are all superficially different, but the basic situation and feelings are similar. McAlmon and Bryher also shared a "Dion," a thing that for them both equaled freedom.
Lily soon regrets any form of marriage to Red. However, although she realizes that she not only tricked him, "Lily felt she had tricked herself" (44). Her regret takes form as an anti-marriage idea because "she didn't want marriage or him . . . things were grotesque, and she felt in no way romantic about marriage or love or sex" (44).

On their second day of marriage, Lily asks Red if he wants to go on because they "are not what each other wants" (44). Red doesn't seem to get the true drift of Lily's plea. Lily counters with the fact that they "ought to love each other a little if [they] stay married" (45). Red and Lily strike a bargain, not unlike the one agreed to by McAlmon and Bryher, whereby they will remain married but go their separate ways. The pretense of marriage is for the sake of the town, just as Bryher's and McAlmon's sham marriage was for the sake of her parents in particular and for society in general.

Smoller states that one of the few things Bryher's money gave McAlmon was "the dubious advantage of providing McAlmon with a continuous supply of alcohol and the means to travel incessantly" (40), while Edward Dahlberg believed that the marriage "probably led him to aberrations and excesses that he would not have indulged in otherwise" (Smoller 42).

Red's fate is similar. He departs for Minneapolis, leaving his affairs for Lily to manage. The ability to manage is a strong link between Lily and Bryher. In a biography of H.D., Bryher is described as wanting to "inherit and direct her father's business" because she "knew she could run it was was probably correct in this assumption" (Guest 113). Bryher, like Lily, "found much pleasure in discussing business" (Guest 114). Red "sullenly admired Lily's energy and
business capacity" (47). Lily's excellent managerial abilities make them comparatively wealthy but lead directly to her husband's death. With no worries about money and with little to do, Red "grew lazier and less inclined even to hunt, his favorite pastime. Having drunk much whiskey, Red got a chill . . . pneumonia set in and within five days he was dead" (50). McAlmon outlived his marriage, but the toll its excesses took was never overcome; when he died in 1956, he was the victim of years of alcoholic abuse, tuberculosis, and, ironically, pneumonia.

The parallels between Lily and Bryher concerning family and marriage are numerous, and the two women also share similar fates: they both wind up in the arms of another woman after their marriages end. Bryher lived with H.D. for forty years; Lily runs for Helga.

After Red's death, Lily recalls Helga's "fragility she had worshipped" and thinks "there must be people . . . which meant similar ecstatic emotions" (52). The women exchange letters, just as H.D. and Bryher corresponded. Lily "opened the letter with hands trembling with expectancy . . . she had wanted to have Helga with her" (52). Helga writes that her husband

never meant anything to me . . . I must get away. . . . Do you remember the hair I clipped from your head years ago, it seems. I still have it, and it always reminds me that there is brightness, and you. (52-53).

Lily responds to Helga's letter, saying she is heading east and that "[w]e are saving each other" (53). Lily's final thoughts in the story center around Helga. Lily is still unsure of exactly what kind of journey she is embarking on.
Helga needed her. . . . Helga meant a release into a human relationship, and Helga meant some mystery that was going to be solved for her now. (53)

Her final comment, to a passerby, is:

"I'm breaking loose to learn what living is about. If there's anything in life that matters, I'm going to find it. I've been compromising too long." (53)

Lily's judgments about her relationship with Red are quite harsh. Her marriage to Red is dismissed as a "compromise," and she feels she is about to be released "into a human relationship," but Lily also tells the passerby that she is "breaking loose." This is an odd phrase for a recent widow to use because she is unencumbered. By linking the phrase, "breaking loose" with "what living is all about," McAlmon successfully conveys exactly what Lily means, even though Lily is unsure of what she means. Lily is breaking free from the heterosexual world.

After Red's premature death, Lily "tried to feel what she hungered for, to reconstruct some picture of Red in her mind to which she might remain loyal. . . . She was too emotionally upset and honest now to trick herself, however" (52). Clearly, Lily tries to hold on to her familiar, staid life, but she cannot conjure up a picture either of what that life is or of Red, who represents the heterosexual world. The correspondence with Helga commences after this revelation, an impending homosexual union is implied, and Lily ceases to be the "indefinite" huntress.

A final word on the Bryher-Lily connection must be said about the personality of the woman and the character. While Lily may be seen by some as a feminist heroine, through a modern reading at any rate,
there is a decidedly unpleasant edge to Lily, just as there was to
Bryher, whom Thornton Wilder once described as "looking like Napoleon
and acting like Napoleon" (Guest 115). The consensus is that Bryher,
despite her demure appearance, was a manipulative, possessive woman.
Even H.D., her long-time lover, referred to her as that "hateful hard
child" (Guest 106), while McAlmon's sister, Victoria, said that Bryher
left a "pernicious, lasting effect," especially on her brother
(Smoller 43). Others shared this negative viewpoint of Mrs. McAlmon:
Smoller states that Bryher was "selfish, deceitful, and scheming"
(42); Amy Lowell "never succeeded in liking Bryher" (Guest 109),
despite her deep affection for H.D.

Because he is not the protagonist in "The Indefinite Huntress,"
Red Neill is not as well developed a character as Lily Root is, but
still there are a few striking similarities between him and McAlmon.
Both had transient pasts: McAlmon drifted from college in Minnesota to
college in California, then joined the military, then wandered to
Chicago, and then on to New York.

When asked if he had been a hobo, Red describes his checkered
past:

"I started to drift when I was sixteen. I worked in a
newspaper office and was a reporter, but after I got back
from France I didn't feel like taking any work I could get. I
bummed around for a couple of years." (24)

In a moment of self-analysis, Red sounds suspiciously like McAlmon
when he thinks he had

mucked around so much he couldn't even express a nice emotion
any more, and what had he ever gotten out of his lousy
adventures that satisfied him, even momentarily? (23)
Of his marriage, McAlmon wrote, somewhat cryptically, in *Being Geniuses Together*:

Incidentally, it was my suggestion that I felt my marriage was not a go. It represented to me more things that I did NOT want in life than I could cope with. (224)

The only major character in "The Indefinite Huntress" who does not have an obvious, human corollary to McAlmon's real world is Dionisio Granger. Here, he serves a different function. As stated previously, this story is often wrongly regarded as being one of McAlmon's boy's stories, lumped in with "The Jack Rabbit Drive," "Potato Picking," "A Boy's Discovery," and others. Indeed, Robert Knoll, in *McAlmon and the Lost Generation*, does exactly that, stating it "may have grown out of personal experience. . . . In theme it is not different from much of his other fiction" (321-322). Elsewhere, Knoll asserts that the story "harks back to the Dakota villages and the Great Plains country of his earliest memories" (309). In randomly lumping "The Indefinite Huntress" in with McAlmon's boy's stories, Knoll misses the entire objective of this short story.

Granted, Dion appears to be, on cursory inspection, similar to the other boys in McAlmon's fiction, especially the unnamed narrator/protagonist in "Green Grow the Grasses," who tells that story from the vantage point of adulthood. There are several similarities found in the relationships between the stories' boys and men, but there are several important differences that separate "The Indefinite Huntress" from "Green Grow the Grasses." First, Dion is not the protagonist in "The Indefinite Huntress," as the unnamed narrator is in "Green Grow the Grasses." Second, the latter story is told in first-person
narration; the former is told in third-person narration, a difference in point of view that also distinguishes between the autobiographical approach utilized in "Green Grow the Grasses" and the biographical approach used in "The Indefinite Huntress." Third, the unnamed narrator serves solely as a youthful version of McAlmon, in what is obviously a memory piece that begins: "They used to sit on the lawn weaving flower chains" (Post-Adolescence 179). Dion, on the other hand, is not so important as a character in the short story as he is as a symbol of something much more general, something that is as elusive and ephemeral in "The Indefinite Huntress" as what the Greek god Dionysus stood for in that ancient society.

The ideas about Dionysus . . . seem at first sight contradictory. In one he is the joy-god. . . . In another he is the heartless god, savage, brutal . . . both ideas arose quite simply and reasonably from the fact of his being the god of wine. Wine is bad as well as good. It cheers and warms men's hearts; it also makes them drunk. (Hamilton 59)

More generally, Dionysus was the god of bounty, especially associated with the fall harvest, which was also a sign of the coming winter. The duality of the Dionysian nature, the idea of both good and evil dwelling in one god or source, helped the ancient Greeks understand the nature of man. The duality of Dionysus and other Greek myths also helped McAlmon to explain the reasons for his marriage to Bryher and its failure.

Dionysus dwelled with Demeter, the goddess of spring, in the ancient Greek city of Eleusis (Hamilton 48), a city McAlmon apparently visited. In "Green Grow the Grasses," the adult narrator states: "Years later in Eleusis the remnant torso of a boy sculpted by an
archaic Greek struck a pang into me, but what that evoked was elusive" (191). In "Green Grow the Grasses," the narrator (McAlmon) looks back at his childhood from the seat of worship of the Eleusinian mysteries.

These mysteries, which attempted to explain the revolving seasons, but more specifically elucidate the myth of Dionysus, play a central role in "The Indefinite Huntress" because the character, Dion, is the pivot on which the entire short story turns. Initially, Lily and Red are not drawn to one another, although there is a sexual tension; they are, however, each separately attracted by Dion's physical beauty. It is this shared attraction that brings together the two confused adults.

During a hunting trip, Red thinks, "Dion's face swam before [him] . . . with a beauty that made him dizzy" (21-22). Later, he realizes "that if the boy wanted anything, there was nothing he would not do to give it to him" (22). For her part, Lily was preoccupied, "remembering the emotion she had felt about Dion. . . . she had been hopelessly in love with the twelve year old boy" (48). It is clear that both Red and Lily are attracted to Dion, even though they are confused by the attraction. Only because they see their separate attractions to Dion as a thing they hold in common do Red and Lily marry.

The duality of the myth that Dion represents in "The Indefinite Huntress" is the core of the story. Just as Dionysus, as the god of wine, represented the good and evil aspects of alcohol, Dion serves as a symbol for the duality of sexuality. His androgynous beauty is a lure for both men and women, yet there is no sex. His beauty awakens the dormant sexual desires in others. It is the misfortune of Lily and Red to misdirect their sexual desires by marrying each other. Lily is
obviously more sexually drawn to Helga; Red’s tender scenes with Dion, which border on the homoerotic, are more tender than any of his scenes with Lily, with whom he is always arguing. Referring to their wedding night, Red asks, "What’s the trouble girl. . . . Am I too rough for you? I thought you knew more than do you" (45). Lily’s rather apathetic response is that she "only felt sorry" for Red and that she wouldn’t "go on feeling sorry all the time" (45), which of course means no sex.

At the moment when Lily and Red admit to and concur on their feelings for Dion, they agree that their marriage is a sham. Lily says:

"I’m no good for you. Maybe if you treated me or felt for me as you did . . . . for Dion things would be different, but you don’t." (45)

True to the nature of Dionysus, the ambiguous sexual urges awakened by Dion in Red and Lily have two major effects: Red discovers no satisfaction in his marriage and physically declines and finally dies; Lily, on the other hand, discovers her true lesbian nature and embarks on a journey that will take her to her intended lover—Helga.

The parallels to McAlmon and Bryher are clear. Their marriage allowed Bryher to pursue freely her lesbian relationship with H.D., and McAlmon descended into a dissolute life of alcoholic and sexual excesses that eventually led to his early death. In their lives, there was no Dion, but Bryher’s wealth served the dual Dionysian masters of being good and/or evil. What Bryher’s path might have been without McAlmon’s participation is, of course, a matter of conjecture, but the fact that she quickly married Kenneth Macpherson after her divorce
from McAlmon certainly suggests that any man would do in her marital schemes. But McAlmon's fate might have been vastly different if he had not been distracted by the corrupting power of easy money. Indeed, in a moment of low esteem, McAlmon confessed to Sylvia Beach, "I'm only a drinker" (Beach 103).

If Dionysus were the only Greek god present in "The Indefinite Huntress," the role of mythology in McAlmon's story might be dismissed, but in this story McAlmon also draws on Greek tales other than the myth of Dionysus. Also present in McAlmon's pantheon are Artemis, the goddess of hunting and wild animals, and Actaeon, the hunter.

The myth of Actaeon and Artemis is clearly played out in "The Indefinite Huntress" in the scene where Lily and Red first meet. Red intrudes on Lily's reverie:

Lily was in the yard beneath the umbrella tree. Her hair was loose as she stroked it musingly . . . and thinking how Helga praised its colour and gloss. Across the road from the farmyard thousands of yellow butterflies hovered. . . . As she regarded them she saw them as a flood of flame rippling over the fields. . . . Tranquility was deep within her. To look at the cattle . . . gave her full satisfaction. . . . "May I have a drink of water, or buttermilk if you have it?" a voice said. Somewhat resentfully Lily tossed her hair back and looked distantly out of chilled blue eyes. . . . (11)

There is a strong bond between Lily and nature; there is a sense of oneness or communion as Lily surveys the surrounding countryside. This rapport with the natural setting is central to the myth of Artemis. In Mythology, Edith Hamilton recounts the tale of Artemis and Actaeon:

[Actaeon] was out hunting and hot and thirsty entered a grotto where a little stream widened into a pool. He wanted only to cool himself in the crystal water. But all unknowing he had chanced upon the favorite bathing place of Artemis
[who] at the very moment... stood in her naked beauty... She flung into his face drops from her wet hand and... he was changed into a stag. (255-256)

Robert Graves, in The Greek Myths is more succinct in his telling of the tale:

Actaeon... stood against a rock... when he happened to see Artemis bathing in a stream not far off, and stayed to watch. Lest he should afterwards dare boast to his companions that she had displayed herself naked in his presence, she changed him into a stag. (85)

A few details are different in McAlmon's retelling of the myth. Lily is neither naked nor bathing; Red is not changed into a stag or anything else. But the spirit and locale of the meeting are basically the same: Red, who has been hunting, intrudes on Lily's grooming, which she resents.

Besides the hunting and grooming motifs here, McAlmon has established other connections between Lily and Red and the Greek myths. Actaeon was changed into a stag; indeed, he was the "sacred king of the pre-Hellenic stag cult" (Graves 85). The term "stag," according to Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, refers to "a full-grown male deer; said specifically of the European red deer [emphasis mine]" (1767). Also, under "red," the same source lists "a kind of stag" (1511). And although Red is never changed into a stag, he does metamorphose into a horse:

That night she [Lily] dreamed of Dion, but in the dream he changed to Red, to Helga, to a horse, which became Red again, and she and Red were running up the sky. (51)

The link is evident: whereas Actaeon is changed into a stag and killed by his own pack of hunting dogs, in Lily's dream, Red is changed into
a horse. Significantly, Lily's enthusiasm for horses is one of the specific subjects Red and Lily argue about.

He watched with strange emotions one day as she was regarding her . . . horses on the farm. There was more between her and the horses than there was between her and him. . . . Later . . . he cursed her horses. . . . She treated that horse more lovingly than most mothers treat their children. (47-48)

Red's misplaced jealousy of Lily's affection for her horses aggravates his insidious degeneration. His jealousy also signals his disharmony with nature: it is during an infrequent hunting trip that Red is caught in a downpour and catches a chill, which leads to his bout with pneumonia and eventual death. Earlier in the story, Lily is fully aware of Red's robust body. She admires his "athletic body" (14) and his "straight shoulders" and his "strong, elastic body" (38). The marriage, which causes Red's dissipation, apathy, and alienation from nature, also leads to his death.

On the other hand, Lily is always seen in harmony with nature. Her affection for her stock goes well beyond any professional concern. And in the scene where Lily and Red meet, typically, Lily is dreaming of "yellow butterflies" and "uncut alfalfa" (11). She gazes out as "cattle standing in the marshes, lying in the pasture chewing their cuds" (11). Lily's place in the natural setting is also signified by her rather obvious name. Aside from being a flower, the word "lily," also denotes whiteness or purity. Lily's surname suggests that she is rooted to the earth as naturally as any tree or other rooted thing. Beyond the botanical sense of "root," two other meanings apply to Lily's personality: as the story's protagonist, she is the "source or
originator of action," and she also does root out or "search" (Webster's 1574).

It is no surprise that Lily is so often associated with nature, especially because she is also McAlmon's version of Artemis, the goddess of nature. There are several links between Lily and Artemis in "The Indefinite Huntress." As previously noted, the meeting of Lily and Red is a mirror image of the meeting of Artemis and Actaeon. Lily is also aligned with hunting more than once. The opening sentence of the story says that "Lily strode firmly into the kitchen and threw down her string of ducks" (5). Later, when she initially meets Red, who has a string of ducks slung over his shoulder, Lily says, "That's not a bad string of ducks . . . I brought in more myself the other morning though" (12).

Lily is confirmed as the huntress of the title, but she is indefinite because she is unsure of what to hunt. This idea is touched on in the scene mentioned above where Lily continues, "'You're maybe a better hunter of other things than ducks'" to which Red responds, "'It's not all game that's worth the hunting'" (12). Red and Lily are making a game out of the ambiguity of what they might be hunting for, but their bantering also points out the indefinite nature of their feelings for one another.

Lily slips into the guise of Artemis as soon as Red departs the scene. She "imagined a romantic gallant who came upon a legendary herself while she was combing her tresses" (14). The key words here are "legendary" and "tresses." The former is a definite tie to Artemis; the latter, a rather archaic word, furthers the feeling of Lily's idea of myth. This scene also foreshadows the dream Lily has
after Red’s death. In that dream, Lily completes her impersonation of Artemis by interchanging Red with an animal:

That night she dreamed of Dion, but in the dream he changed to Red, to Helga, to a horse, which became again Red, and she and Red were running up the sky. With a snap she felt herself falling into eternity. (51)

Beyond the act of metamorphosis, there are two clues here in arguing for Lily’s mythic stature. First, the reference to her "falling into eternity" can be read as a reference to her godly immortality; second, "running up the sky" and the mention of a horse can be seen as a reference to Artemis' being the twin sister of Apollo, whose horse-drawn chariot often symbolizes the path of the sun as it arches across the sky.

Completing the circle of Artemis-Lily-Bryher, it should be noted that Bryher often identified herself with the goddess of nature. Indeed, she titled her 1962 autobiography The Heart to Artemis: A Writer's Memoirs. Most likely, Bryher, who had a penchant for seeing herself as something else (she named herself after one of the Isles of Scilly, where she had vacationed as a child), learned her Hellenic history from H.D., who, enamored of the ancient cults and religions, saw herself as a "spirit caught back into the old mysteries of Egypt and Greece" (Hermetic Definition 1).

It was during a misguided trip to Greece in 1920, when the unaccompanied women were denied access to the Oracle of Delphi by Greek authorities, that H.D. and Bryher decided that Bryher must marry. H.D. was then separated from Richard Aldington. McAlmon echoed this story when he explained to William Carlos Williams, "[t]he
marriage is legal only, unromantic, and strictly an agreement. Bryher could not travel. . . ." (Carpenter 76).

And so the circle was completed when McAlmon wrote "The Indefinite Huntress." It stands as McAlmon's most ambitious and complex story, a story in which he attempted to exorcise the demons of his marriage, Bryher, and H.D., and to see himself as a martyr. Because the story was written well after his divorce from Bryher in 1927, McAlmon had time enough to contemplate the full and lasting effects of his Dionysian experience and his own impending dissolution. The story may also, in the episodes between Red and Dion, hint at McAlmon's possible homosexual tendencies.

True to the nature of his marriage, McAlmon wrote the story from the female protagonist's viewpoint; the male in the story as in life was merely a dupe. Lily has the final words in the story in which she justifies her life and her hopes for the future:

Helga needed her [Red had not]. Helga, a person, felt she had strength. . . . Helga meant a release into a human relationship, and Helga meant some mystery that was going to be solved. . . . "I'm breaking loose to learn what living is about. If there's anything in life that matters, I'm going to find it." (53)

And Bryher had the last words in life, in which she justified her life and denied responsibility for McAlmon's premature demise:

I felt guilty in having exposed Bob to a postwar Europe of which, it must be remembered, I knew nothing. . . . [I] realized that he was a child of the Prohibition age and that the end would have been the same, whether he had remained in New York or gone to Paris. (The Heart to Artemis 201)

Bryher's innocence of "postwar Europe" and her placid assurance that McAlmon's fate "would have been the same, whether he remained in New
York [unmarried] or gone to Paris" strike one now as just another case of her not seeing the plain reality before her.
CONCLUSION

The recent publication by the University of New Mexico Press of Robert McAlmon's two novels and twenty or so short stories finally allows an objective reevaluation of his work, an evaluation that has been nearly six decades in coming. Because his works have been unavailable for so many years, his reputation as a writer has been negative because that reputation was based on contemporary views, which were personally biased, homophobic, or both.

The constant harping of Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ford Madox Ford, and others, concerning McAlmon's lax attitudes toward revision and proofreading—admittedly true—helped create McAlmon's public image as opportunist and drunkard, someone who was not a professional writer. As is often true, it was frequently a case of the kettle calling the pot black. But animosities aside, when one peruses the written comments of McAlmon's contemporaries, one finds that all of the above, with the exception of Fitzgerald, in addition to Ezra Pound, Kay Boyle, William Carlos Williams, and others, often had positive things to say about McAlmon's writing. There appears to be a paradox.

In a letter to Sylvia Beach, Hemingway admired Village, saying, "McAlmon's book Village came out and is damn good. If anyone asks for it tell them it's recommended by E.M. Hemingway" (Smoller 147). Ford recognized that McAlmon "was among the trend setters and that his books were helping to chart a new course for American literature" (Smoller 133-134). For his part, Joyce thought enough of McAlmon's
short story, "Miss Knight," to have it translated into French and published in an avant-garde magazine.

Present-day reviews of McAlmon's resurrected works have been, for the most part, positive and have borne out the view that, personal biases and homophobia aside, there is decided merit in his writing. James Mellow, reviewing for the New York Times Book Review, proclaimed Village to be

a tour de force: a long, remarkably sustained fugue on the theme of village life, an extended epic of the lives, queer alliances and frail family bonds of plain people

and that McAlmon has a real gift for describing country—the uncanny stillness of a summer night, or a young boy's fearful sense of the white winter isolation of a morning after a blizzard. (August 1990)

There has been more praise. In his foreword to Miss Knight and Others, Gore Vidal says that "The Indefinite Huntress" is "an exemplary minimalist novel long before that mini-vogue" and that the "result is satisfying and the concentration of effect and tone like nothing else of McAlmon's" (xv-xvi). In San Francisco Review of Books, Eric Lach says about the three recent editions of McAlmon's writing: "These new books . . . reveal clearly just how formidable was McAlmon's talent" and "many of the stories are wonderfully alive and should have no problem finding a contemporary audience" (43-44). Publishers Weekly named Village one of 1990's best books, noting that it "[d]eftly summoned . . . the inhabitants and way of life in a small North Dakota
village prior to WW I" (January 4, 1991), and USA Today hailed Village as "a rediscovered classic" (January 2, 1991).

Perhaps time has partially closed the gap that separated McAlmon from his contemporaries. Perhaps the gap was unfairly created. In any case, there seems to be a shift in attitude about Robert McAlmon, writer—a shift for the good.

I have, in this dissertation, stated and documented a case for McAlmon's writing. I have pursued a course that firmly places McAlmon as a precursor to the now well established genre of nonfiction novels. I have also documented McAlmon's ability to write inventive, complex, fictive pieces. True, McAlmon's work did suffer from his own inattention to detail, but beyond that cavalier attitude and behind the façade of a dilettante, there was a writer of considerable wit, perception, objectivity, and talent.

McAlmon was able to write truthfully about his life and the lives of those around him, and he was able to produce a remarkable body of work that records and illuminates long-lost periods. In Village, his major novel, McAlmon reexamines his own youth on the American prairie, a youth that was stultified by the small-town atmosphere of turn-of-the-century America. He records honestly his tumultuous emotions and his reactions to the hypocrisy that drove his alter ego, John Campbell, to suicide.

McAlmon also records his sexual interest in a boyhood friend, who happened to be the father of Gore Vidal. With Vidal's corroboration, one can track the paths of several of the novel's characters who happen to have real-life counterparts. This verisimilitude casts a new sheen of truth on McAlmon's novel. This new light highlights McAlmon's
ability to weave fact and fiction and verifies his standing as a precursor to more contemporary writers of nonfiction novels: Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, and Vidal.

In *Post-Adolescence*, McAlmon continued his literal recording of what went on in his life, and the result is a short novel that not only exposes his thoughts and feelings as a young man, but also paints an always honest and sometimes humorous portrait of some of the seminal minds in Greenwich Village after the first world war. William Carlos Williams, Marsden Hartley, Mina Loy, Marianne Moore, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Alfred Kreymborg, Lola Ridge, Kenneth Burke, and others populate this novel in which McAlmon documents his growing awareness of and interest in art and writing, his sexual awakening, and his desire to get to Paris and be somebody.

In his short fiction, McAlmon runs the gamut from obviously autobiographical pieces to wholly invented ones. Stories like "Potato Picking," "A Vacation's Job," "Green Grow the Grasses," and "A Boy's Discovery" chart McAlmon's boyhood on the prairie. About McAlmon's stories, Kay Boyle has said:

If Robert McAlmon had written only "A Boy's Discovery" and "A Vacation's Job," he would be more than worth remembering." (A Hasty Bunch 298)


Chief among his inventive stories are "Miss Knight" and "The Indefinite Huntress." The former follows the life of Charlie Knight,
an aging transvestite, through Berlin's postwar rubble. Miss Knight is honest, comic, and sympathetic as he endeavors to "have some real American cooking" by giving a Thanksgiving dinner for American expatriates, a dinner that ends in a shambles. Despite Miss Knight's many eccentricities, however, he is always more honest than the supposedly normal people around him. He is the sane center of a society gone mad.

It is also in "Miss Knight" that McAlmon uses his ability to chronicle in creating a character that doubles as a statement on the façade of polite society. The Americans who went to Berlin and Paris to experiment with drugs and sex are sleazier, with their holier-than-thou attitudes, which McAlmon saw as the norm, than the too honest Miss Knight. "Miss Knight" becomes then as much a statement about Berlin between the wars as Fitzgerald's This Side of Paradise or Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises are statements about their worlds; "Miss Knight" sums up an era and the people that populated it.

"Miss Knight" also affords a literary rarity: the chance to compare directly McAlmon's use of nonfictional material with another writer's. In this case, McAlmon's creation of Miss Knight can be held up to Djuna Barnes' Dr. O'Connor in two novels (Ryder and Nightwood), who was based on fellow expatriate, Dan Mahoney. The result is satisfying. While Barnes only superficially modeled O'Connor on Mahoney by using subtle hints about Mahoney's performance of abortions, his lack of medical certification, and his perversion, McAlmon directly patterns Miss Knight after Mahoney. In doing so, McAlmon overtly uses a well known contemporary to make a political statement about art and America.
McAlmon's most complex and ambitious story, "The Indefinite Huntress," has two main themes: it is the story of his failed marriage to Bryher, an English heiress and writer; it recasts his marriage as Greek myth, making it a cautionary tale about marriage for the wrong reasons.

In telling the story about the marriage of Lily Root and Red Neill, McAlmon reconstructs his own marriage, and in doing so he delves into the behind-the-scenes reasons for his accepting a proposal of marriage and for the ultimate failure of that union. In Lily Root, McAlmon creates one of his best female characters, one that is fully drawn and motivated to fulfill her destiny—a lesbian alliance. McAlmon's reluctance to discuss or defend his marriage, through which he received the money to establish himself as a major publisher in 1920s Paris, encouraged others—notably Williams Carlos Williams—to tell the story. But what Williams and everybody else failed to recognize was that McAlmon did write about his marriage to Bryher and her long-lived lesbian relationship with H.D. (Hilda Doolittle).

In a major achievement, McAlmon was able to submerge his own story beneath the story of Lily and Red so thoroughly that no one guessed what he was doing. It is also commendatory that McAlmon does not take the opportunity to cast Lily in a negative light. Lily remains basically likable and believable throughout the story; moreover, Red is neither pathetic nor greedy. Lily and Red are simply two people who marry for the wrong reasons and pay the consequences.

But there is more here than the submerging of the story of McAlmon's failed marriage; he also recasts the Greek myths of Artemis, Actaeon, and Dionysus. By modeling this story on these myths, McAlmon
makes the story larger than life. "The Indefinite Huntress" ceases then to be the story of his marriage, it becomes, in Gore Vidal's words, "the lifetime of a marriage" (Miss Knight and Others xvi).

There is more to write about; this dissertation does not deal with other of McAlmon's excellent short stories, "Mexican Interval," "Wisdom Garnered by Day," "The Lodging House," "Distinguished Air," or "New York Harbor"—all worthy of attention. Nor does this dissertation touch on McAlmon's long poems, chief among them, "The Revolving Mirror" and "North America: Continent of Conjecture." Nor does it consider McAlmon's many short poems, essays, reviews, or miscellaneous writing.

There is much to do. But the continuing problem is one of accessibility. Several of the above-mentioned works are unavailable in this country; several have never even been published in this country. McAlmon's considerable correspondence remains uncollected, scattered throughout several university and private collections. There are long-lost manuscripts. McAlmon allegedly sent a manuscript copy of his novel, Family Panorama, believed to have been lost in France at the outbreak of the second world war, to William Carlos Williams' wife, Flossie. McAlmon's nephew, George, has informed me that McAlmon's sister, Victoria, had boxes of manuscripts, letters, and photographs at the time of her death; these are now lost.

Perhaps this dissertation, recent publications, positive sales, and continued favorable reviews will act collectively as a catalyst in creating interest in the man who has been called the "Last of the Lost Generation." Perhaps academic interest will be spurred, and other dissertations, theses, and investigations with be forthcoming. Only if
and when all these things occur will Robert McAlmon be brought back from the literary oblivion he so surely does not deserve.
Dear Mr. Capusso,

Years ago, someone told me that Robert McAlmon had been in Rome with a bug for the winter, when they went growing up in Piedmont. So I briefly registered the gossip, and went to check on it; forgot.

I think McAlmon may have written me a letter having someone check my papers at UVW.
O loving this any because

One just need "sou", Niles
F. Mur "Eugene O'Neill"

Eugene Collier on the
first page — all the
family accredited one
connected. I grow more

more curious — I note

that my father is "To

Shaw" in All American,

Beauchard 1876 - 1919

(from R.E. Knoll) — "He said

we're coming this year come

on over here? I write one reference
directly, to Eugene O'Neill

(Knoll, P. 228) — My curiosity

is idle that I long biographies;

Walter Clemens less so —

love wishes Eugene O'Neill
Dear Dorusso,

Walter Clemens, who is writing the authorized biography of me, is making some use of the "interesting footnote"—I think Mr. Almon wrote me once but of that I barely knew the name. I didn't answer. The U.S. Wisc. Collection of my papers
Should have his letter.

There is absolutely no invention in Village.

He reports my grandmother's arias on the fortune due us from the Spanish Court, because the Regent we had provided in the Neapolitan War (the Republican paid us, just before France—about $50 a head) and all other details are not, to the extent I know the family, made up.

I'll look at the Berlin stories. In general, I find him more interesting as a figure than a writer—best wishes, [Name]
Dear Mr. Vidal,

I want to thank you again for your foreword for *Miss Knight and Others*; I also want to ask you a favor.

I am writing my dissertation on McAlmon. I am especially interested in the biographical aspects of his fiction. A large part of my thesis will concern McAlmon as a precursor to non-fiction novelists like Mailer, Capote, and yourself. Would you please comment on the following:

Is the non-fiction novel a real genre (as opposed to a sub-genre)? Fiction is made up so... The non-fiction novel was a scam by Capote to get his journalism taken seriously as Art. Also, telling a true story with lots of lies, it seems to be a genre.

Do you consider yourself a writer in this (sub-)genre?

No, I prefer accuracy in my story as fun but the result is still journalism. Observed by invented characters. Do you consider McAlmon to be working in this vein? He appears to have a gift for 'inventing or worse - but characterization. He describes what he thinks plausible - a genre. Does Village present an accurate portrait of your family? No.

If McAlmon were considered to be writing non-fiction fiction, does this make "Miss Knight" and other of his stories better stories?

Better than what? There is good writing and bad writing - mostly he's pretty bad in fact. I like it and what I like is McAlmon's "invented nothing." Would this phrase generally describe his fiction? I've not read any of it except Village. Can you comment on McAlmon's portrait of Dan Mahoney as Miss Knight vs. Djuna Barnes' portrait of him in *Ryder* and *Nightwood*? No.

Can you make any other comments appropriate to this dissertation?

Thanks so much for taking time to answer these questions. By the way, my agent truly disliked my McAlmon novel; among other objections, he said I maligned Hemingway! I.e., there is a greater truth in our literature. I've not come across him. It is typical of the minds of our academics to consider McAlmon a 'great' novelist but never wrote a good novel - McA's claim was as a critic & witness.

16 September 1991

Gore Vidal
La Rondinaiia
Salerno

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