“THE MUSEUM OF THEIR ENCOUNTER”:
HOMOBJECTIFICATION IN NIGHTWOOD AND THE PASSION

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As an object, my thesis has many narratives and timelines running through it. To encounter it is to encounter lots of people and lots of objects.

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INTRODUCTION:
TOWARD A METHODOLOGY OF HOMOBJECTIFICATION

objectify, v.

1. trans. To express (something abstract) in a concrete form; to render objective.

2. trans. To degrade or demote (a person, class of people, etc.) to the status of a mere object; to treat as an object; to reify. Also: to identify (a person) with a particular stereotype; to stereotype.

In his love poem “Having a Coke With You,” Frank O’Hara sets up a common opposition between humans and objects to celebrate his lover. The poem shares many of this paper’s concerns. O’Hara’s speaker says he would rather look at his lover than “all the portraits in the world,” except perhaps one but even in that special case, he wants to see it with his lover alongside him. The concept is simple: a living human body is more desirable than the representation of one. It is more desirable to be that kind of living, breathing body and it is more desirable to be sharing time with that kind of body than any other. Art may come close, but it is merely an imitation of life. I have excerpted four lines from the poem below:

it is hard to believe when I’m with you that there can be anything as still as solemn as unpleasantly definitive as statuary when right in front of it in the warm New York 4 o’clock light we are drifting back and forth between each other like a tree breathing through its spectacles (O’Hara 138)

Who would rather be the “solemn,” “unpleasantly definitive” statues that these two lovers observe over the bodies “drifting back and forth,” decidedly alive and natural like a tree? What is less human, and therefore less alive, than the object? To be “definitive,” immobile, dead—these
are the attributes of objects. Art objects are a more complicated case because they represent life, but representation should not be confused with reality, O’Hara’s speaker implies. Artists consistently associate art with the hope of their own immortality because of the very deathliness, the very solemn definitiveness of art objects. Regardless of how moving they might be, objects are the thing against which the lover’s mobility and vitality becomes clear and desirable in O’Hara’s poem.

And yet, objects do move us. This poem moved me to write this paper. These four lines were as “still… as statuary” in my mind for weeks, and their immobility only moved me more intensely as I read Djuna Barnes’s 1936 novel Nightwood. Nightwood is text populated with statues, an art object that is discursive statuary. Barnes’s novel sent me on a search for novels by Jeanette Winterson, who wrote the preface to Nightwood’s 2006 edition. When asked why I picked my novels, I honestly answered that sometimes the books pick you. Objects are always moving scholars; the phrase “objects of study” may be incidental but it seems important to remember that objects are the primary entities in which literary work traffics. More broadly but no less importantly, objects move us because it is against them that we define the human. For this reason, the object is a crucial site for examining those bodies that could benefit from more flexible definitions of normative capacity and redefinitions of the human’s contours.

Because I am invested in queer studies, temporal modes of bonding, and questions of alterity, this project asks: why is the object the metaphor of choice to describe a complex system of power, oppression, and otherness? The primary definition of objectification is to make what is abstract concrete, but when we use it in literary and cultural studies, we are usually referring to the methods by which a human subject is “degraded” to the level of an object. As an object, the
human becomes something to master, own, exchange, or otherwise use for purposes that compromise the human’s sense of agency. Both definitions suggest that objectification is about turning something dynamic into something definitive, like O’Hara’s statues and portraits.

To objectify is to confuse one thing for a decidedly different thing to make meaning, specifically that a human as like an object (simile) or a human is an object (metaphor). If this confusion was a conflation rather than the shuttling of one entity to another, then this confusion could generate an imaginative space to rethink the human and the object. Instead, objectification reinforces the boundary between what is human and what is object, and between the bodies that are assigned degrees of humanity. Through objectification, the human is dehumanized or made object and thus, still stands in direct opposition to the human. Objectification is a method for shuttling bodies who do not fit dominant scripts and social rhythms into the category of “object” as to excuse attempts to master those unruly bodies. Rather than argue for a more radical separation between objects and humans, I want to use the generative sameness inherent in metaphoric operations to think through the mutually dependent object and human relation. Because the metaphor is unafraid of bringing together what difference has set apart, the metaphor can be a tool for imagining other bodies, other times, and other world-making models that do not insist on centralized coherence but instead value models that looks more like what Jane Bennett calls “human-nonhuman assemblage” (Bennett xvii). Rather than fall into the same trap of difference as the worst kind of objectification, this project will emphasize sameness alongside difference to examine how this metaphor (humans are objects) should signal a rethinking of the methods we use to identify and interpret modes of oppression, the encounters
between humans and objects, and the malleability of the boundaries that separate objects from humans.

To begin examining metaphor’s power of sameness, it is crucial to recognize that objectification and personification are opposites that work together. When human characters are objectified in literature, the objects into which they transform are likewise personified. Consider the servants in *Beauty and the Beast*. The enchantress transforms the occupants of the castles into “what they really are”: the bad-tempered, unruly master becomes an animal and the servants become objects. In this enchanted world, it is easy to recognize that the humans have turned into objects, but hasn’t this transformation also made the objects more human? Hasn’t it redefined what a wardrobe, footstool, and clock are? Personification and objectification are two sides of the same coin because our ideas of what defines a human depend on our ideas of what defines an object and vice versa. Any turning-object accompanies a turning-human.¹

Barnes’s *Nightwood* and Winterson’s 1987 novel *The Passion* queer objectification by embracing its potential to work with sameness. Both texts make explicit the metaphor upon which objectification relies by literalizing it and by acknowledging that metaphor operates in both directions: when a human turns object, the object turns human. In addition to focusing on characters who are marginalized and socially objectified, Barnes and Winterson “objectify” their characters and “humanify” their objects on the discursive and narrative levels. In other words, Barnes and Winterson populate their novels with props but also use figurative language to put

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¹ While I disagree with the automatic association between the human body and the subject position in subject-object relations, for the purposes of literary analysis it is necessary in this paper to use the language of the novels and to acknowledge that as human readers, we engage with the novel as object. We also engage with the objects present in the narrative as subjects, through the lens of characters, who are themselves subjects. Therefore, in this paper I will use “human” and “subject” interchangeably in order to demonstrate the problems inherent, yet often unavoidable, with this usage.
humans and objects into close discursive proximity. This proximity does not guarantee that objectification will be more positive or empowering than objectification. However, I argue these two texts provide a methodology for reading these encounters that queerly objectifies, and thus queers the object and the human. In this paper, *homobjectification* refers to a methodology for reading objectification as the mutually constituting relation between humans and objects.

The “homo” in homobjectification signals my focus on sameness as well as difference, a focus that explains in part how this project is linked to queerness. My project examines texts that have been canonized as queer literature because they contain queer characters and were written by women who have had sex with other women. However, these credentials for queer membership interest me far less than the fact that these novels portray the queer body, the object, and time as out of joint. When we consider how time is written on the queer body, a body that signals backwardness, arrested development, the death of the future, and yet also trending as ahead of its time, a method for reading the encounters between humans and objects that is also attuned to temporal concerns become crucial. Objects, like queers, collect multiple timelines that seem contradictory under a trifurcated, linear temporality, the temporality upon which what Lee Edelman calls “reproductive futurism” depends. I will turn to the link between time and homobjectification later in this introduction, but here I want to stress that while this project does not examine sex or even sexuality explicitly, this project demonstrates its investment in queerness through its openness to sameness, temporal confusion, and the release of some mastery to gain versions of pleasurable bonding between bodies that are more than the sum of their normally recognized parts.
Of course, my choice to examine these questions at the site of the queer body performs a kind of objectification because, regardless of any disclaimers I might make to the contrary, my work cannot avoid turning the queer body into a monolithic, potentially knowable object of study to some extent. As I encounter my objects of study, the queer body, these queer texts, and their relationship to each other, I am asking these mobile and flexible objects to be still long enough for me to analyze them. Through my gaze, even as I provide reminders to readers that I am passionate about these sites of inquiry precisely because of their indeterminacy, I have objectified them, entombed them in my writing.

However, homobjectification provides an alternative to one-sided objectification. Objectification does not ask how it affects the objectifier. I must stay still for the sake of the encounter with these texts as well. These objects demonstrate their vitality as they shift my project, and my research and writing process, my attention, and the felt experience of my body’s capacity for fatigue, hunger, and sexual desires, and so on. Thus, these objects also possess me. The more animated my objects of study are, the more inanimate I become, a living statue at a desk, directed in different directions at different times by a computer, a cup of coffee, a pen, and books that demand more and more of me. Each object I encounter so intimately with my body objectifies me in turn.² If encounters between a subject and object necessitate a level of objectification, homobjectification recognizes that levels of vitality move between and through...

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² Sometimes objects don’t make the subject still, but actually incite intense animation. For example, I have witnessed and identified with a peer who, working with a computer that refuses to properly format thesis documents, begins slamming the mouse and yelling at the supposedly inanimate object, saying, “Why are you doing that?!” This example still demonstrates the shifting of vitality, the object becoming animate as it “acts out” in ways that redefine the object and call into question the agency of humans.
the components that mutually constitute the encounter, rather than pretending that all vitality lies with the subject, gazer, and/or human.

Of course, I’m taking the word “objectification” literally. When we talk about objectification, we are rarely talking about an inanimate object and a human. We usually mean an encounter between one human who is treating another human like an object. I want to explore what we mean when we say, “treat another human like an object,” and suggest that by turning a human object, we redefine the object against which we define the human. Thus, by objectifying the queer, I think I am solidifying myself as human, as natural, as belonging to a particular tempo. Instead, I ignore what my objectification of the other does to me. I require the other to (mis)recognize myself. If I am turning the other into an object, that object is still my mirror of myself, redefining the very conception of what is “human,” a conception to which the logic of objectification so desperately clings. Homobjectification is not the “good” kind of objectification. Instead, the “homo” prefix should serve as a reminder that the objectification works in the currency of sameness as well as difference.

Homobjectification encounters mark time, the object, and the human as “out of joint.” Much as Jacques Derrida notes that the ghost’s present absence should alert us to time as out-of-joint, we should learn to see these literalized metaphors and plot points of queer objectification as markers of time going awry. To supplement homobjectification methodology’s attempt to read

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3 Because I am interested in reading literally the “object” in objectification, I focus on objects. However, a similar project could be used to consider the animal, a body also utilized in objectification to signal the “demoted” status of the human. Another specter that haunts this thesis is the disabled body. In a project all about opening up definitions of the human and constructing a subjectivity that looks more like a human-nonhuman assemblage, it seems odd that I am not addressing this body, which is already in generative dialogue with queer studies. Although it makes few utopic promises, homobjectification should be extended and bent as a methodology to account for more kinds of bodies than the ones addressed in this paper.

the alterity and time of these encounters, I take a cue from queer studies scholar Elizabeth Freeman and her “erotohistoriography” method, which approaches the body “as a tool to effect, figure, or perform” (Freeman 85) the ongoing encounter between present and past. I extend this method to include the “bodies” of objects to articulate the temporal rubbing of human bodies and the inanimate. My inclusion of objects does not take the body out of historiography and undo Freeman’s work; instead, this inclusion will account for the fact that many bodily experiences are also experiences enabled, stalled, or disallowed by the inanimate.

The objects I examine in Nightwood and The Passion are rich sources for reimagining temporality because the majority of them are what Susan Stewart describes as “souvenirs.” Objects exist in a time structured by something other than heteronormative temporality, or what Edelman calls “reproductive futurism” (Edelman 10). Reproductive futurism is the process by which society endows the figure of the child with normative ideals meant to be continually reproduced to secure heterosexual models of community/kinship and render queerness a political impossibility. Reproductive futurism insists on progress and in its hurried push into futurity, linearity becomes paramount. The straightest line is the quickest way to get from one point (now) to another (normative utopia). At its best, queer temporality, in its many possible forms, offers other ways of thinking about time and other ways of moving in it that account for queer desire’s “excessive remainder” (Edelman 10). My turn to the inanimate assists this larger queer project because the constructed temporality in which objects exist cannot coincide with reproductive futurism, which uses life as its unit of measurement.

However, linear temporality’s absence does not automatically signal queer temporality nor does queer temporality automatically signal generative subversion. Furthermore,
reproductive futurism is not the only temporality that simultaneously and impossibly excludes the queer and demands usage of its body to delimit its narrative. Temporalities that are more flexible for queer bodies can also be similarly detrimental to other groups of bodies that may or may not intersect with queerness. Thus, I am not interested in demonstrating the problems of reproductive futurism or even linear time more generally. Instead, I want to suggest that by examining objects, which necessarily cannot participate in time the way reproducing bodies can and share some of the similar time-problems as the queer, we can attend to homobjectification’s other gatherings of time that unfold often in overwhelmingly numerous directions and at various speeds.

If the dominant unit of measurement of time is life and if time is a bodily experience, then any encounter that rearranges understandings of life/death, mobility/immobility, the contours of the body, and the boundaries of the human will also be a temporally disjointed encounter. In *The Passion* and *Nightwood*, these encounters always articulate multiple crooked timelines. Although the homobjectification methodology I am proposing is by no means limited to queer studies, my emphasis on time is related to the queerness of my texts. The authors, characters, narrative structures, content, and history of these texts are related to queerness. Their relationship to each other is also temporally queer as is their place in various academic canons and systems of archiving. I explore the novels as physical books with histories and the methods by which they have been “collected” under certain categories by critics in the Conclusion. I also examine how the novel as a genre literalizes the temporal disjointedness of all objects. As a representative piece of art and a magical object, the novel is exemplary of the objects that populate *Nightwood* and *The Passion*’s narratives. The novel is an inanimate object that provides
an illusion of animating human characters through language. The novel is also the ultimate magic object: upon its legible interior, readers project their fantastical interiors. Furthermore, like the objects I will examine in *The Passion* and *Nightwood*, the novel represents an encounter between linear time and other organizations of time. Much like time writ large, the temporality of the novel may suggest one direction as given but this does not foreclose other approaches.

* * *

In Chapter 1, I put Martin Heidegger’s and Jacques Lacan’s theories of the Thing in dialogue with *The Passion* to examine how Winterson portrays the fantasy of the Thing, invites her readers to read metaphors straight, and uses magical objects to re-imagine the contours of both objects and human bodies. I also argue that Winterson frames the narrator as a version of an erotohistoriographer that includes the bodies of objects to demonstrate alternative queer kinship models that express themselves across time. The Thing names a subject-object relation that is productively elusive and out of joint for this project. The Thing is the relation that is formed in homobjectification.

Because the Thing does not name an entity in the world but a relation, it is almost synonymous with homobjectification’s model of alterity. Why not call the method I am proposing Thingification instead of homobjectification? The term “thingification” has its own history that relates to homobjectification, but from which I want to depart. In an essay called “Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity,” Frederic Jameson mentions “thingification” as he charts Western philosophy’s relationship to the image. He says the first stage of modern philosophy’s engagement with vision, and thus aesthetics, relies upon what he calls “the Look.” He describes the Hegelian master-slave dialectic as ultimately a relationship between Self and
Other, in which the Other’s gaze confirms the Self’s existence and vice versa. This Look is caught up in modes of oppression because the gaze displaces the gazed upon for the sake of the gazer. Jameson links the Look to the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and Franz Fanon. Jameson explains, “In Sartre, then, the great theme of the Look is bound up with the problematic of ‘thingification’, or reification in its literal sense, as the becoming object, the making over of the visible - and most dramatically of the visible subject - into the object of the gaze” (Jameson 104).

Thingification describes “that protopolitical phenomenon called domination, insofar as the fact of objectification is grasped as that to which the Other (or myself) must necessarily submit. To make other people over into things by way of the Look thus becomes the primal source of a domination and a subjection” (Jameson 105).

Homobjectification is not the redeemer of objectification or, here, thingification. I am not suggesting that homobjectification is the more generous, less oppressive version of objectification. Instead, homobjectification proposes that more objectification or thingification goes on than we think. Perhaps more significantly, those “bodies” normally disallowed the status of “human” – not only pots and pans and novels, but also queers, children, ghosts, disabled bodies, bodies raced or classed as socially, economically, politically, psychologically abject – express a different kind of animacy or vitality in response to these encounters. Homobjectification saves no one and offers no utopia. Homobjectification merely asks that we think of the possible pleasures and pains that accompany the sameness of thingification, the sameness that does not only turns humans object but turns objects human as well. The only utopic possibility that homobjectification might make available for those bodies assigned “not-
“quite-human” status is the vital capacity that it acknowledges nonhumans possess and the power that vital capacity has to affect the agency of the more normative human bodies.

In Chapter 2, I examine the fabricated family history of the Volkbeins and the time-sick queer souvenir that is Robin Vote in Nightwood. By reading Robin through Stewart’s souvenir, I demonstrate how Nightwood queers the souvenir by turning it human and how the queer body temporally disturbs that which tries to give it organizational structure. This temporal disruption does not necessitate a narrative of liberation from these strictures nor does it portray a triumphant story of love between queer bodies. The queer souvenir does not distinguish between which structures it should disrupt; it just disrupts. One method by which one might try to organize what is temporally out of joint is the collection or the museum. Both of these modes of organization manipulate narratives and thus manipulate time by accumulating and recontextualizing objects.

For literary studies, objectification matters because it is part of the process of writing. As literary scholars, we turn what is abstract, such as ideas and events and analysis, into a physical object using an abstract code system that is always shifting in vitality. Writing is often charged as imperialistic, especially writing that explores the past and populations most often objectified. In the Conclusion, I examine The Passion and Nightwood as physical objects, how they have been collected by literary canons, and the ways in which the novel as an object and genre lends itself to homobjectification. I also explore how reading and writing are encounters and how these activities open up various kinds of time-sharing when we are willing to bend normative notions of human will so that we might be moved by objects.

Objectification occurs unevenly to different bodies at different times and its long history (and future) as a mode of oppression is something to which we must continuously and vigilantly
respond. However, some of the experiences of homobjectification can support bonds between the very bodies most often objectified. Homobjectification calls for an openness to turning object and a reckoning with objects’ vitality, not to redeem objectification but to look in an unlikely place for models of queer bonding and to unsettle the temporal demands made on the human and object to move in the right directions at the right times.
CHAPTER 1

FEELING HISTORY AND MAGICAL OBJECTS IN THE PASSION

In Jeanette Winterson’s The Passion, objects operate as props more often than as parts of metaphors. Instead of a physical or linguistic closeness as demonstrated in Nightwood, the objects in The Passion “act” in relation to the bodies of characters. Domino’s icicle-talisman and Villanelle’s heart-in-a-jar exemplify homobjectification because these objects are part of the characters’ bodies even though they are materially separate from them. The connected separateness is the encounter that turns object human and turns human object. These encounters trouble clear distinctions between life and death. This chapter will focus on Villanelle’s heart-jar, Domino’s icicle-talisman, and Henri’s San Servelo diary. By putting The Passion and thing theory in conversation, I will demonstrate that the magical objects and representational objects (two categories that are not mutually exclusive) in the novel provide alternative models of objectification and objects’ relationships to queer timelines.

The props in The Passion have what Jane Bennett calls vitality, or “the capacity of things -- edibles, commodities, storms, metals -- not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (Bennett viii). Bennett and other new materialist scholars, such as Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, call us to recognize that while objects may not be “alive,” they are not “dead” either. In the introduction to an anthology entitled New Materialism: Ontology, Agency, and Politics, Coole and Frost note that while the anthology does not reflect a univocal view about what materialism should do or what it means, they can comfortably say that all the scholars
represented in the volume see materiality as “always something more than ‘mere’ matter: an excess, a force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable” (Coole & Frost 9). I am interested in how new materialist philosophy reconfigures the human by complicating the agency of objects. Queer bodies are so often made object and other. Increasingly and paradoxically, they are folded into the very modes of capitalism that support such objectification. Thus, the queer body is a rich site for exploring questions of homobjectification and homobjectification’s relationship to what we think we mean when we talk about objects.

Homobjectification requires a conversation between new materialism, psychoanalysis, and queer studies. New materialism offers queer studies alternative contours to the human and the object but it benefits from certain psychoanalytic and queer interventions. In The Passion, an object “expresses” its vitality through its intimate interaction with or relationship to queer bodies. Paired, psychoanalysis and materialist studies keep readings from sliding too far toward the human or the object and instead keep the two in dialogue with each other. The Freudian turns the object into a mirror of the human without attending to the human as a mirror of the object. The Marxist tends to ignore the interactions between human bodies and objects defined by affects other than alienation. The new materialist, disidentifying with Marx, still tends to look at the object in isolation without recognizing the various layers of fantasy and desire at play in the interactions between objects and humans.

The role of magic in The Passion requires theories of fantasy in addition to theories that take seriously the realism of object vitality. Furthermore, psychoanalytic thought is essential to a reading of the objects in The Passion because vitality of objects in this novel is so closely linked
to queer modes of kinship and to the bodily experience of life and death as well. Villanelle’s heart-jar, Domino’s icicle-talisman, and Henri’s San Servelo diary all provide representations of human bodies even though they are not themselves human. The first two objects in this list are unarguably magical. Later, I will make an argument for the magic of language and thus of Henri’s diary, but for now, I will put the notebook aside. The other two objects relate directly to the queer bodies in the novel and the status of those bodies as either dead or alive. To explore magic as vitality in *The Passion* and vitality’s movement between subjects and objects, it is important to examine the point at which psychoanalysis, phenomenology, queer studies, object studies, and questions of temporality converge. They encounter each other at the site of “the Thing.”

According to Bill Brown, the Thing is, in part, magical. He says things are the 1) “amorphousness out of which objects are materialized by the (ap)perceiving subject,” a materialization that represents a retroprojection “of the mutual constitution of the subject and object” and 2) “what is excessive to objects… the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems” (Brown 3). This definition borrows from Jacques Lacan’s extensive work on the Thing, which he borrows from Martin Heidegger’s “What Is The Thing?” I’m less interested in Heidegger’s explanation of the Thing than I am in how Lacan picks it up to describe alterity. Heidegger’s presence matters not because he uses the term “the Thing” first, but because this conversation across phenomenology and psychoanalysis demonstrates how the Thing bridges fantasy, experience, and perhaps most importantly the phenomenological experience of fantasy. I am also interested in how contemporary scholars like Peter Schwenger and Sara
Ahmed take up these two strains, psychoanalysis and phenomenology respectively, of the conversation.

Heidegger and Lacan describe the Thing as a presence defined by absence. Heidegger’s metaphor of choice is the jar; Lacan’s, the vase. The jar and the vase are only what they are because are hollow. They can contain *something* and by that function, whether the function is utilized or not, they are some *Thing*. However, Lacan reminds us that the Thing is never really the vase or the jar. The vase stands in for what we cannot explain or signify, which is why we have to use the word “thing” to talk about it. We use the word “thing” to signify what we cannot or choose not to specify. It is a placeholder but it is “not nothing,” as Lacan notes, “the Thing is not nothing, but literally is not. It is characterized by its absence, its strangeness” (Lacan 62). Although the jar and vase are used to talk about the Thing, it is crucial to understand that the Thing is not an object. Because the Thing must necessarily be represented by something else, we tend to turn to the object: “an object, insofar as it is a created object, may fill the function that enables it not to avoid the Thing as a signifier, but to represent it” (Lacan 119). Significantly, the Thing is best described not as an object but as subject-object relation. However, our encounter with the object becomes a Thing because the encounter creates the relation, which is why going to the object to explore the Thing is a repeated move.

Vital materialism tells us that objects are much more “human,” that is possessing and expressing mobility and agency, than we think. Bennett notes that things have a kind of power with which we must contend: “Thing-power gestures toward the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience” (Bennett xvi). Here, Bennett is specifically
talking about the environmental concerns with which her book *Vital Matters* is invested. She explores electric grids, landfills, and other supposedly inanimate material that prove unruly with regards to the demands or, more often, the general neglect of humans who assume they will act like objects, which translates to not acting at all. Bennett is right to point out that objects move in and out of thinghood and that their thing-power is participate in a larger network of which humans are a part. I would add that we depend upon this larger network so we can project ourselves onto objects to cohere ourselves and move in the world using words like “I.” The Thing is both that which does not signify and what we depend upon to constitute ourselves.

This subject-object relation relies upon fantasy and the fantastical process of signification. Fantasy’s crucial role in the identity-making event I am calling the Thing is why my project requires the help of psychoanalysis. Lacanian psychoanalysis is especially relevant to this project because Lacan puts so much emphasis on language as a component of fantasy and desire. In *The Tears of Things*, Peter Schwenger says of the Thing: “The case is such an object functioning as a word, filling itself… with a certain resonance” (32). The Thing operates like a word in a signifying chain because it is hollow and yet in its relation to the subject, it becomes filled “with a certain resonance.” The kind of resonance depends upon the incomplete communication between subject and object, reader/writer and word. Language, then, names the ultimate Thing. I will return to this when I explore Henri’s notebook at the end of this chapter and to the novel in general in the conclusion as a magical and representational object.

Before examining how the Thing relates to queerness and temporality, it is important to clarify the following terms: object, thing, and Thing. The object and the thing are material realities that exist in the world. You cannot hold a Thing, but you can hold an object or a thing.
Distinguishing objects from things is not a matter of categorization. Instead, an earring is an object or a thing based on how we encounter it and how it encounters us. For example, Ahmed, picking up Heidegger’s hammer, argues that the thingness of an object is “invisible” until the object’s utility comes into question (Ahmed 48). Brown makes a similar point when he says, “A thing, in contrast, can hardly function as a window. We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us” (Brown 4). What is left over from the window when it stops functioning as an object that opens and closes, keeps out what we want out and keeps in what we want in? In its state of leftoverness, the object announces itself as thing, its capacity to participate in the mutual constituting project of the Thing.

My emphasis on representational and magical objects has to do in part with the fact that I want to move away from strict utility. Because I want to look at objects as things, the thingy-ness of objects, I focus on tapestries, diaries, statues, and magical jars and icicles rather than on screwdrivers and benches. I also want to focus on representational objects because they claim to say something about the human body. All objects fantastically reflect the human body back at it by allowing the human gazing to say, “I am not that.” Representational objects, however, literally reflect versions of the human body.

Bennett cites W. J. T. Mitchell to make some distinctions between objects, things, and the Thing. Mitchell writes:

objects are the way things appear to a subject -- that is, with a name, an identity, a gestalt or stereotypical template... Things, on the other hand... [signal] the moment when the object becomes the Other, when the sardine can looks back, when the mute idol speaks…

(Bennett 2)
For the purposes of this project, an object is the sardine can. The thing is the role the sardine can plays when, in its encounter with a non-object, it looks back, or, put another way, uncannily turns-human. The Thing is the mutually constituted duplicitous unit of the subject-object relation in the event of homobjectification. The Thing is not one but always at least two that encounter each other. In that encounter, the object becomes subject enough to become an Other by which the subject (mis)recognizes him/herself. In this uncanny moment, that which should be inanimate or dead “looks back” at the subject. This strangeness is the magical component of the Thing that Brown mentions.

What does the magic of the object, its thingness, tell us? What does it help us understand? The Thing allows psychoanalysis and other theories of identity to articulate how identity formation can occur between a human subject and non-human subjects or objects. The Thing also provides language for analyzing how this mutual constituting affects the objects and subjects involved. Furthermore, vital materialist philosophy would remind us to reconsider our ethics that privilege the human. Vital materialism is in close dialogue with post-human studies and through this dialogue, notes how politically and ethically important it is to recognize that we are less “human,” that is logical, coherent, and singular in body and mind than we think. Decentering the human in literary studies does not only ask us to pay more attention to the nonhuman aspects of narratives but also opens up what “human” can mean, who and what it can include. For The Passion, decentering the human as a rational, coherent, knowable body allows me to contend with the novel’s various representational and magical objects and the ways in which the narrative puts these objects into relations with queer bodies. Winterson’s novel traffics
in things and to ignore the role of things would be to miss much of what the narrative says about identity-formation and kinship in and across time.

In *The Passion*, Winterson repeats the phrase the “valuable, fabulous thing.” The word “thing” refers to the heart, which metonymically stands in for life and the vulnerability risked in love. Henri mentions this thing when he complains about Napoleon’s ambition but lack of personal risk. He says Napoleon “kept his valuable, fabulous thing behind the secret panel until the last moment, but we, who had so little except our lives, were gambling with all we had from the start” (Winterson 104). The valuable, fabulous thing is often encased, as in this example, to protect it and to stress the fact that it is possessed by an owner. Villanelle tells Henri three stories of “valuable, fabulous things.” The first story involves a bet between two gamblers in the casino. The gamblers bet their lives. Whoever won could kill the other in any way the winner wished. Villanelle tells Henri that the gambler who won decided to encase the hands of the man who lost in a glass box and hang it on the wall in the casino. At the end of the narrative, she says she often goes to the casino “to look at the case on the wall with two white hands. The valuable, fabulous thing” (Winterson 150). The life of the man who died is the “valuable, fabulous thing,” here signified by his dead hands. The hands and the heart, taken out of their context—the human body—become objects that represent what was once human life. The hearts, however, are magical. They go on living outside their context and their context can go on without them. I will return to this point.

The second story is about a woman and a man named Salvadore. The woman seems to be Villanelle, but Villanelle never makes this clear. The two talk a while before discussing “the valuable, fabulous thing that everyone has and keeps secret” (Winterson 98). When they broach
this topic, Salvadore takes out “a box enameled on the outside and softly lined on the inside and on the inside was his heart” (Winterson 98). He offers it to the woman in exchange for hers, but she “was not travelling with her heart, it was beating in another place” (Winterson 98). The third story is of Villanelle and the Queen of Spades. The valuable, fabulous thing in this story is retrieved by Henri after he finds it also encased and hidden.

The heart-thing is often encased to signify its value and because it is a living object that by all accounts should be dead, its capacity to exist outside of its context like a treasure demonstrates why it is called fabulous. However, the thing is valuable and fabulous for another reason. In *The Passion*, the thing is associated with interiors because it is found inside the wrong object, a case. It should be found inside a human body. The thing is also associated with interiors because of the logic by which the fantasy of the thing operates. The viewer of the thing often projects a false interiority into the object. Schwenger describes this fantasy and Winterson’s novel exemplifies it, especially with the story of Villanelle’s heart-jar. Schwenger and other object studies scholars often use Virginia Woolf’s *To The Lighthouse* to demonstrate the fantasy of the thing. Schwenger’s project is about the melancholy and other affective relationships to loss but *The Passion* offers other affective relationships to objects that are not just using them as projection screens for the subjects’ desire for death and the explosive blankness of *jouissance*. To further explore what Winterson’s homobjectification and fantasies of the Thing are doing, I will contrast *The Passion* with this oft-cited passage from *To The Lighthouse*.

**The Fantasy of the Valuable, Fabulous Thing**
In the fantasy of the thing, the viewer fantasizes that the object has a interior where the object’s excessive meanings become legible and preferably, that those legible meanings not only tell some authentic truth about the object, but about the viewer’s own fantastical interiority. As a physical object perceived as outside the self, this fantasy of the thing would allow the viewer to possess her/his interiority and therefore become whole. In addition to the belief that things have interiorities, the viewer’s wholeness achieved by encountering the thing should be suspect.

However, in *The Passion*, this wholeness is literalized through a magic object’s encounter with Villanelle’s queer body. Villanelle loses her physical heart to an ex-lover, again, Winterson literalizing a metaphor. Villanelle asks Henri to retrieve the heart from the ex-lover, who Villanelle gives the pseudonym “the Queen of Spades.”5 The Queen of Spades keeps Villanelle’s heart somewhere in her enormous house that is arranged like a museum: sparsely furnished with each room exhibiting of a different collection. As Henri turns to leave the eighth room, he hears a heartbeat and finds “a silk shift wrapped around an indigo jar” (Winterson 120). Upon viewing and holding the jar, Henri perceives that this object is a thing. He tells us he did not “dare to check this valuable, fabulous thing.” The fantasy continues when the jar is not a container of a void but instead holds a core interior that is the “valuable, fabulous thing” (Winterson 120): Villanelle’s heart. The fantasy is fulfilled when Villanelle then possesses her heart, swallows it, returning it to her own interior and thus, makes herself whole. Henri writes, “I heard her uncork the jar and a sound like gas escaping. Then she began to make terrible swallowing and choking noises and only my fear kept me from sitting at the other end of the boat, perhaps hearing her die” (120-1). While this magical moment shows the power of the fantasy of the thing and why it

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5 This pseudonym is also a representation of a human body in an object.
might be desirable, it also can help us understand why it’s important to see the Thing as a psychic subject-object relation rather than an entity unto itself.

This scene from *The Passion* differs from the usual *To The Lighthouse* example because Villanelle is able to complete a fantasy that is otherwise unattainable. *The Passion*, as a postmodern fantasy or magical realism text, can portray an object (the jar) as containing an interior (the heart) that is legible and capable of making Villanelle’s body whole (she can be alive without her heart; the heart can still work outside her body; she can swallow her heart and that consumption is enough to restore her without a more complicated medical procedure). In a text like *To The Lighthouse*, the encounter between the subject and object is still fantastical but the fantasy is incomplete. *The Passion* shows us what the fantasy of the thing fulfilled would look like and the danger of seeing our missing ingredient in the object or the objectified body of the other: our insatiable desire to possess and consume it.

The *To The Lighthouse* example is much more like homobjectification because the lighthouse is not something Mrs. Ramsay masters or thinks she understands. Instead, the object is a thing that invites her, upon encountering it, to consider herself less full and complete. She says “only in losing personality” do you find “the wedge-shaped core of darkness” (Woolf 53). Mrs. Ramsay thinks of herself as “one” with the object, and yet she does not master it. If anything, it masters her. By acknowledging the lighthouse’s vitality, she gives up her position as hegemonic subject and affords the object a sense of mystery. She loses her personality as she knows it and suddenly: “beneath it all is dark, it is all spreading… there were all the places she had not seen… she felt herself pushing aside the thick leather curtain of a church in Rome”
(Woolf 73). Unlike Villanelle’s heart-jar, the shifting vitality in this example is more like a psychic conversation than a physical encounter that involves a literal consumption.

Because the Thing names this relation between subject-object, it need not involve physical touching. Like Mrs. Ramsay and the lighthouse, it names something that exceeds the usual boundaries of the bodies in question, an excess that acts as a connector. In To The Lighthouse, this connection ultimately expresses Mrs. Ramsay’s alienation, which is why it is such an illustrative example for Schwenger who is interest in melancholy. The Passion, in its examples of complete and incomplete fantasies of the thing, portrays affective experiences that are not only defined by melancholia and loss. In addition, these examples help us imagine vitality as more than the agency of physical things – the way electric grids fail against the will of humans or the molecular activity of what looks so still. It includes, importantly, how fantasy constitutes the subject-object relation and troubles the boundaries what can be known and mastered, how we can see ourselves as productively more than the sum of our organic parts but less whole than we may have imagined.

However, the role of death in homobjectification Woolf portrays in this example is not completely absent from Winterson’s novel. The boat Villanelle steals so she and Henri can row to the Queen of Spades’s mansion-museum connotes the dead. Henri writes, “I was about to ask her where she got the boat, but the words died in my mouth when I saw the markings on the prow. It was a funeral boat” (Winterson 118). The queer is often framed as a figure of death.6 Villanelle’s body is already marked as the most explicitly queer body in The Passion. She identifies as female but she has webbed-feet like a boatman. A version of an intersexed body

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who identifies as female, she cross-dresses in the casino and sleeps with men and women. Her body is queered further by its deathly vitality. Before Villanelle swallowed her heart, was she alive? If a heart stops beating or is removed from a body, the body dies. Henri makes this point by saying what should be an obvious truth after he touches her chest and feels no heartbeat: “Villanelle, you’d be dead if you had no heart” (116). Was Villanelle’s body a corpse before she swallowed her heart? She was mobile. She could talk, think, eat, and desire. Was she a zombie? Was she a ghost with a body?

Through Henri, Winterson links the deathly vitality of Villanelle’s body to Villanelle’s treatment of the literal and the figurative as synonymous. In response to Villanelle’s request that Henri retrieve her heart, he wonders, “Was she mad? We had been talking figuratively” (Winterson 115). Later, Villanelle explains that many people live without hearts: “Those soldiers you lived with, do you think they had hearts? Do you think my fat husband has a heart somewhere in his lard?” to which Henri shrugs and says, “It’s a way of putting it, you know that” (Winterson 116). Villanelle responds, “I know that but I’ve told you already. This is an unusual city, we do things differently here” (Winterson116). Henri wants to read what seems fantastical to him as figurative because he cannot incorporate this kind of vitality into the rational, literal world as he understands it. Villanelle reminds him that while she knows that the heart is often invoked as metonymic device, the world in which she lives is a vast city of interiors (Winterson 150), where people “do things differently” (Winterson 116, my emphasis). In this scene, Winterson uses Villanelle, as she uses Henri in other moments, as a mouthpiece for a larger theme in the novel: the figurative language we use literally matters. The metaphors we invoke
can have world-making effects. The figurative is the literal in the story worlds of *The Passion* and *Nightwood*, though differently.

Wherever the Thing is, there is Villanelle’s Venice: a fantastical world of interiors where the thing that shows up as a metaphoric “object” in homobjectification matters and materializes. Rather than read a metaphor and then translate its metaphoric meaning, see the heart and then translate it to “love” or “life,” these novels ask us to double back to the untranslated image or remain behind with it rather than push to rationalize it like Henri hopes to do. We are asked to read in a different direction that both performs and undoes figurative language with which both novels are excessively full. For these novels, taking the figurative “straight” means reading it queerly.

If we read the figurative straight, then Winterson forces us to redefine the human and the object, which always ask us to redefine the line between what is alive and what is dead. Before Villanelle consumes her heart, she and her heart are magically alive. Her heart should also be as dead as the white hands in the case at the casino. The heart’s vitality outside Villanelle’s body encounters the jar in which the Queen of Spades hid it. When Henri finds the jar, it is throbbing. The jar, the inanimate thing, moves, is alive and if we read the metaphor straight, contains life. In fact, the jar moves the way Villanelle’s body should. The jar-heart is, then, not an object nor a human, but some kind of human-object, something that enables life but can’t, I think, be considered a human. The various parts of this encounter redefine the human, the object, and the means by which they interact.

These interactions create impressions in a time that cannot be described as unfolding in one direction. Henri encounters the jar that holds Villanelle’s heart, the thing he has wanted since
he met her. Attached to her heart is all the history of her experiences with the Queen of Spades, experiences inaccessible to him, but with which he comes into contact regardless. When Villanelle swallows her heart and it becomes part of her and she, presumably, becomes whole, she is in a reoccurring encounter with that history as well and the future possibility of giving her heart again.

Further complicating temporal trajectories, this story is a timewarp because it wormholes us into the future because the story’s future is in the past. As Linda Charnes explains, a wormhole is a “textual circumstance or event… in which we can detect an idea whose time arrives in advance of its historical ‘context.’ Lacan, and Zizek after him, have argued that for the individual subject, the truth of the past always arrives from the future, that history is always constructed retroactively” (Charnes 2007). Henri’s story is recounted on paper and with a pen in Henri’s cell in San Servelo. When we read Henri’s story, we are in the present with Villanelle as she swallows her heart. So when Henri writes, “I tell you her heart was beating,” he wormholes us into his present which is our future when we encounter the story.

**That Queer Time Thing**

Both the queer body and the Thing are figured as moving in multiple nonlinear timelines. Jonathan Gil Harris argues that object studies in any field of inquiry seem to suffer from a temporal confusion. He says, “After all, both Marx and Freud regarded the fetish as a pathological stray from a foreign past, an anachronistic irruption within the European present of a ‘primitive’ African belief system” (Harris 6). Indeed, the Thing, the queer, and the racialized-
ethnic body carry the threat of the past that “atavistically persists in the person of abject subjects” (Rohy x). For example, historically, African Americans have been judged as backward or uncivilized while discourses of sexology has deemed the homosexual a victim of arrested development. As Elizabeth Freeman demonstrates, binding time into a linear progression that syncs up traditional heteronormative familial practices and makes such time feel natural to those it benefits requires a out-of-bounds, the repetitive making of a boundary that leaves many bodies feeling as though they are “in the wrong body and in a different time zone” (Freeman 172). The queer body’s encounter with nonqueer bodies threatens to stall or even turn around the march toward futurity and thus, heteronormativity’s headlong rush to its exclusive utopia. Valerie Rohy explains that the temporally disruptive force of the queer is simultaneously what normative regulatory rhetoric uses as its excuse for oppression and what makes the queer so generatively dangerous to naturalized notions of time. Rohy argues:

… it is not just that time stops for the others but that the other—the “primitive,” savage, or homosexual—wields the power to stop time for all the world... Assigning both homosexuality and blackness to the place of the past, such theories span individual and cultural time lines whose own straightness is never in doubt. (Rohy x)

The queer figures the past, a stall in the present, a drag on the future, and the death of heteronormative utopia.

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7 All subjects are racialized-ethnic subjects, but that I will use that term as Antonio Viego does in Dead Subjects (2007): as shorthand for “non-white.” This shorthand, though technically longer than “non-white,” has several advantages. It stresses race’s construction by using a passive verb “racialized.” Secondly, unlike “non-white,” this term does not draw such a strict line between white and non-white, allowing the possibility that some subjects who are read differently at different moments, that whiteness is something not so permanent or dominant that one either is completely white or not.
However impossibly, queerness also connotes a particular progressive future in which queer is always ahead of its time. This liberal celebration of the queer as that which is consistently futuristic, and ever avant-garde, supports what Jasbir Puar calls queer exceptionalism (Puar 9). Queer exceptionalism ignores the ways in which queer bodies can be complicit in various forms of normativity, including heteronormativity. Puar rightly warns us against assuming that locating queerness automatically locates generative subversion. Similarly, queer bodies and their relationship to things do not always signal other ways of being in time. Ironically, the mere presence of a temporality that is not identical to the West’s trifurcated temporal organization with its emphasis on telos can sometimes be mistaken as an end in itself. This mistake is, in part, what Puar is responding to when she describes the detriments of queer exceptionalism. However, when we pay attention to the methods by which we normalize tempos for the benefit of some, we see that the language we use to talk about time is closely linked to the language we use to talk about how certain queered, classed, raced, and disabled bodies are bound outside what feels natural.

Queerness moves in double-time of before yet after, expresses an interruption that stalls temporal succession, and is defined by what it is not and yet is excessive to itself. All of these descriptions also describe the thing/Thing. The impressions, the affective reactions of human turning object, object turning human, of the Thing arrive belatedly. The object seems to “show up first” before it participates as a thing “during” the Thing. Yet, because the Thing is excessive, it also exceeds the stasis of the object. As Brown explains, “Temporalized as the before and after of the object, thingness amounts to a latency (the not yet formed or not yet formable) and to an excess (what remains physically or metaphysically irreducible to objects)” (Brown 5). Thus, we
cannot say that the thing or the Thing in which is participates operates along a strictly linear
timeline.

It is not surprising that the Thing and the queer share temporal configurations because
both terms name that which cannot be defined. They remain in a frustrating but generative space
for scholarship because they name what remains out of reach even if what they signify can be
felt with the body, both painfully and pleasurably. In addition to describing lived experiences,
the queer and the Thing provide language for talking about alterity and the methods by which we
try to understand our identities and the identities of those we encounter, even as we repeatedly
misunderstand what it is we are identifying.

The time of the Thing, then, is the queer time of the encounter between the subject and
object whose relation the Thing describes. Each component of the encounter has its own
timeline, which may or may not move linearly. When these components “meet,” so do their
timelines. The time of the Thing is the embodied impressions of these timelines encountering
each other. The Thing should be about the present, what Brown calls the “all-at-onceness” of the
Thing (Brown 5), because it is defined by an encounter, an instance. However, because the Thing
always names something else and thus exceeds and precedes the moment of its own legibility,
the Thing is never regulated to the present alone. In fact, the Thing in The Passion and
Nightwood always signals a temporal disjointedness that obscures linearity and often, any
teleological meaning upon which reading tends to rely. In Nightwood, this disjointedness shows
up in Barnes’s excessive Baroque style that creates many quotable lines but as a novel, refuses to
cohere. In the Passion, the queer and the Thing signal temporal disarray through the magical
objects and how these magical objects throw the queer body’s status as alive or dead into question. In these novels, where there is an object and a queer, time is askew.

Time, queer embodiment, and how the object is taken up in understandings of objectification and alterity are deeply intertwined. When we do historiography, a discipline into which I subsume literary studies, it is most generative if we: 1) follow Freeman’s call to include the bodily, felt experiences of history and 2) suspend “the assurance that the only modes of knowing the past are either those that regard the past as wholly other or those that can assimilate it to a present assumed identical to itself” (Goldberg & Menon 1616). At the narrative level, The Passion is a work of erotohistoriography. The majority of the text we read when we read The Passion is Henri’s notebook. The rest of the text is in Villanelle’s voice but because Winterson does not change the style of writing very much between the two voices, many scholars argue that we should assume that Henri is also writing Villanelle’s voice. For my purposes, this distinction does not matter. Both readings suggest the novel is fragmented, unreliable, and produced by at least one person who is recording his/her felt history. Furthermore, the sections I will close-read are all from Henri’s notebook.

Henri understands that history is felt through the bodies of humans and objects and that these bodies are time-machines. The Passion is a notebook written by a supposed mad man, Henri, who does not see his work as an attempt to understand history but to remember how it feels. Freeman explains that the erotohistoriographer “sees the body as a method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations” (Freeman 95-6). The project of erotohistoriography, a project in line with what Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon outline above, does not try to restore the past to the present or treat the past as wholly
other to the present. The emphasis on feeling rather than a rational, factual goal for history is part of what defines the erotohistoriographer from the historiographer. Domino asks Henri: “What makes you think you can see anything clearly? What gives you the right to make a notebook and shake it at me in thirty years, if we’re still alive, and say you’ve got the truth?” (Winterson 28).

To this, Henri responds, “I don’t care about the facts, Domino, I care about how I feel. How I feel will change, I want to remember that” (Winterson 29). Although I appreciate Freeman’s emphasis on pleasure, specifically sexual pleasure, I will be using her idea of the body as “a tool to effect, figure, or perform” the encounter between timelines in ways that cannot be generalized as always pleasurable, painful, or alienating.

In addition to taking erotohistoriography somewhat away from its purpose, I will be extending Freeman’s understanding of bodies. Although she does include historical documents and literature as a kind of entity a human body could pleasurably encounter, she never explicitly states that the body “as a tool to effect, figure and perform” the ongoing encounter between the past and present could be an object. I will extend this method to include the “bodies” of objects to articulate the temporal rubbing of human bodies and the inanimate. My inclusion of objects does not take the body out of historiography and undo Freeman’s work; instead this inclusion accounts for the fact that many bodily experiences are also experiences enabled, stalled, or disallowed by the inanimate. Henri understands the role that objects play in these temporal encounters. He pays particular attention to them in his narration and displays no surprise when these objects act out. Domino’s icicle talisman is the most illustrative example of Henri as erotohistoriographer of the encounters between objects and queer bodies.
Domino’s Talisman and Henri as Mad Writer

In a novel about gambling, pleasure, risk, and history, it is unsurprising that Winterson includes a character named Domino. His object namesake expresses his understanding of time. The game of dominos is about the linear progression of cause and effect. However, as a single domino, Domino is only concerned with the singularity of time, specifically his present moment. Domino tells Henri about the crowds of people who would come to fortunetellers to have their futures revealed. Domino warns Henri: “But I tell you, Henri, that every moment you steal from the present is a moment you have lost for ever. There’s only now” (Winterson 29). Domino’s temporality is the instant. The instant, for Domino, is the only time when a person “can be free, rarely and unexpectedly” (Winterson 154) and therefore, it was to be treasured. A person should not time-travel away from the instant or think of the instant as containing more than itself. If you try to move outside the limits of the instant, you will lose it forever and thus lose the possibility to be free—a term Domino never defines.

After he says he will not desert Napoleon’s army with Henri because deserting suggests that there is a future, Domino snatches an icicle hanging from the tent and hands it to Henri as a gift. As our narrator, Henri says of the icicle, “It was beautiful. Formed from the cold and glittering in the centre. I looked at it. There was something inside it, running through the middle from top to bottom. It was a piece of thin gold that Domino usually wore round his neck. He called it his talisman” (Winterson 87). The gold chain is a manufactured object made first, now inside a natural object that formed second. This new talisman is a hybrid, in terms of both its materiality and its temporality. Domino has affected the icicle’s “naturalness” by breaking it off the canvas of the tent. In his encounter with the icicle, Domino has made it something else,
fragmented, like the sentence Winterson uses to describe it: “Formed from the cold and glittering in the centre.” Partial, decontextualized, and representative of a moment that Domino would say cannot be lived again, the icicle-necklace journeys with Henri toward the negated future Domino rejects in favor of his presentist philosophy.

The word “talisman” means “an object, typically an inscribed ring or stone, that is thought to have magic powers and to bring good luck.” It comes from the Arabic ʿtīlsam, which comes from an alteration of late Greek telesma ‘completion, religious rite,’ from telein ‘complete, perform a rite,’ from telos ‘result, end.’ In The Passion, Domino’s icicle-necklace talisman combines the elements present in this definition. The talisman is magical, though its unclear if it brings good luck. The icicle-necklace is magical because the ice does not melt when it is supposed to melt. It does not react to heat but instead to Domino’s death. When Domino dies or when he “ends,” as the etymology suggests, the ice turns to water. When we consider the image of the melted icicle upon Domino’s death, Domino’s decision to give the talisman to Henri complicates his decision to stay behind rather than risk negating his future. Domino ignores the homobjectification that occurs when humans and objects encounter each other and, consistent with that, he fails to read metaphors straight. He dismisses the excess of the Thing because he is only interested in the instant, not what always simultaneously unfolds in many directions, the thingness that preceeds and exceeds all that interacts in the instant.

Through our encounter with Winterson’s novel, which we are asked as a narrative audience to encounter as Henri’s notebook, both writers ask us to recognize “all matter not just to touch otherness—other bodies, other times—but also to contain within itself the trace of that otherness” (Harris 150). The talisman contains within it the trace of Domino’s otherness, what
makes him not Henri and what permits Henri to know himself as Henri. Henri expresses that matter contains the trace of another/an Other body and time when Villanelle reveals she still has the icicle and gives it to him. Henri thinks to himself: “She must have found it and so I hadn’t lost Domino after all” (Winterson 152). Of course, Domino’s body is in France, probably still with Napoleon’s troops. Henri doesn’t “have” Domino because he has the talisman. Except he does.

If Villanelle is still herself and yet “live” without a heart, if her heart is still her somewhere else, if our bodies are the incorporations of objects and objects are, as Ahmed argues, “the extensions of bodies,” then isn’t Domino not just figuratively but also literally with Henri? As Ahmed points out, “Things become queer precisely given how bodies are touched by objects, or by ‘something’ that happens, where what is ‘over there’ is also ‘in here,’ or even what I am ‘in’” (Ahmed 162-3). Ahmed’s description is primarily spatial, but what she is saying works temporally as well. Bodies are touched by objects (and thus, always objects are touched by bodies) and these touches leave impressions that last beyond the instant Domino so values. The trace of otherness carries from the past into the future, making the present temporally touch the past. The past fast-forwards then and the future becomes an event that has already happened. With The Passion, terminology like “past,” “present,” and “future” becomes less and less helpful as we read these collisions. These encounters refuse a single timeline and the timelines that meet cannot be “lines” in any way we can draw.

When the ice around Domino’s gold chain melts belatedly, Henri instantly believes that Domino is dead. A reader could interpret Henri’s reaction as consistent with his mental illness, but within the logic of the novel, there is evidence that Henri’s extraordinary behavior and
beliefs are ordinary. Villanelle has webbed feat and can walk on water. Men die with their feet stuck in the guts of horses. Patrick, a priest Henri befriends, can see things at what should be superhuman distances. Someone can weave someone’s heart into a tapestry while that heartless person walks from Russia to Venice. The world of the novel/Henri’s notebook does not allow us to classify him as strictly insane, even if he is uncomfortably close to the dead while he is in San Servelo, Venice’s madhouse. However, Henri’s closeness to the dead has less to do with insanity and more to do with his understanding of the talisman as part of homobjectification and his role as narrator-erotohistoriographer.

Venetian officials, after striking a bargain with Villanelle that saves Henri from state execution, imprison Henri in San Servelo. At San Servelo, Henri continues to write, reads what he writes, and then writes more. As the narrative audience, we are asked to believe that his product is the novel we have in our hands as we read. While writing this story in San Servelo, Henri says, “Domino’s right, there’s only now. Forget it. Forget it. You can’t bring it back. You can’t bring them back… There is only the present and nothing to remember” (Winterson 42-3). The content of Henri’s writing in this passage contradicts the act of writing it down, an act motivated by Henri’s desire to remember how history feels. As an erotohistoriographer, Henri may be telling himself to forget but his decision to write down what Domino said undercuts this desire to forget, and consequently undercuts the approach to time Domino expresses in Henri’s memory. Through his writing, by remembering “how it feels,” Henri brings these characters and event back each time a reader encounters his magical, representational object: his notebook.

Of course, we can argue that simply reading about these characters doesn’t actually bring them back but at this point in the novel, we should know better. If we read the figurative straight,
we arrive at the literal experience. Henri does “bring them back.” Henri writes, “They say the dead don’t talk. Silent as the grave they say. It’s not true. The dead are talking all the time. On this rock, when the wind is up, I can hear them” (Winterson 133). Henri writes that he can hear Napoleon, who comes to Henri weeping and asks Henri if he loves him (Winterson 133). He also receives ghostly visits from his mother, Patrick, and other friends. Villanelle’s abusive husband who he murdered also haunts him.

When Henri tells Villanelle about these ghostly voices and visual hauntings, Villanelle worries that Henri has gone mad. At first, Villanelle’s reaction of disbelief seems so inconsistent with her character. She has always had much more capacity for believing the unbelievable than Henri did until this moment in the novel. She says:

I tried to make him understand that there are no voices, only ones of our making. I know the dead cry out sometimes, but I know too that the dead are greedy for attention and I urged him to shut them out and concentrate on himself. In a madhouse you must hold on to your mind. (Winterson 147)

Villanelle, the woman who understands that the metaphor “I lost my heart” is a material reality, defines madness not by what is real and what is not. Instead, she is worried for Henri because the dead voices are “greedy” and might overwhelm his mind when he needs it most to combat his unfortunate situation. She tries to appeal to his rationality by telling him he is making up the voices, but she doesn’t believe what she is saying. She tells readers that she knows the dead speak – it’s just that they speak too much and perhaps too loudly in the minds of those who will let them in. Villanelle is only concerned that he might let the voices of the dead overpower his own thoughts and thus lose an illusion of individualized subjecthood located in the body.
Henri does, in fact, de-individualize subjecthood, but his closeness to the dead is merely another expression of how he thinks about the impressions that linger from encounters and how those impressions reconfigure the limits of the body. Long before the madhouse, he recognizes the traces of Domino’s otherness in the talisman. Henri, like Ahmed and Harris, knows that bodies are incorporations of objects and objects are extensions of bodies. To have the talisman is to have an extension of Domino. To live without a heart but with webbed feet is merely a different set of object incorporations that make up a body. Henri may not use the term “queer” to describe the phenomena but he would agree that the meeting of two or more things means extension and incorporation, that “what is ‘over there’ is also ‘in here,’ or even what I am ‘in’” (Ahmed 163). Allowing bodies to be more than the sum of their parts means releasing the comforting sensation of control that tells us we are always where we think we are in time and we are always made up of what we can see and feel as ourselves. While relinquishing this sensation of control opens up other modes of kinship and tempos of belonging for Henri, it is understandable that even people like Villanelle who are open to the figurative as straight and various kinds of kinship-making would be worried about living so closely to the dead that one might risk “losing” oneself.

Thomas Paine worried about a similar effect of working too closely with, and thus feeling too close to, the past. In *Time Binds*, Freeman describes a Romantic-era debate, specifically between 1790-1, between Paine and Edmund Burke that “centered on how the male capacity for sensibility, figured in terms of bodily constitution, was crucial to historical understanding” (Freeman 99). Paine accused Burke’s approach to history of “bringing the living too close to the dead, and so ruining the living body’s constitution” (Freeman 102). Henri lives too close to the
dead and thus, may not be able to “hold on to [his] mind,” as Villanelle describes it. Freeman aligns “living too close to the dead” with the work of the erotohistoriographer, someone who, like the “man of feeling” Burke describes, feels “the feelings of the past and then [feels] their disruptive contact with the present” (Freeman 101). The temporal disruption that accompanies the erotohistoriographic work that brings the living too close to the dead is precisely what allows Henri to feel as though he belongs and he is safe, that he is not in the “wrong body and in a different time zone” (Freeman 172). By allowing the ruin of his and other bodies’ constitutions, Henri can share-time with the pleurally untimely presence of the dead and otherwise absent.

Henri’s writing graphs the vitality that shifts between and redefines the human and the object, a kind of becoming I have been calling homobjectification. Through his writing, Henri provides alternative models of alterity that include and even depend upon the ultimate other: the object. For Henri, it is logical that the icicle-chain hybrid refuses the natural rhythms of its “body” in favor of the rhythm of Domino’s lifespan because the talisman is Domino. Domino-as-talisman redefines both the talisman and Domino, just as the icicle-chain redefines both the icicle and the chain. Domino-as-talisman suggests that objectification is not merely a process that puts the abstract into concrete terms or demotes a human to the status of an object. Instead, homobjectification radically reconfigures both and while often taken up to excuse or promote violence and oppression, it can offer other models for time-sharing across what seem like inaccessible times and spaces. Homobjectification permits Henri to time-share with Domino: “I hadn’t lost Domino after all.” Homobjectification, though not separate from objectification and thus not free from the same pitfalls, can open up the limits of subjecthood beyond a singular body as well as temporal strictures and limits of agency normally assigned to the dead-like stasis
of objecthood. As the next chapter will explore, these deathly objects are far more alive and unruly than we imagine. Moreover, we are dependent upon them as we form our identities and histories.
Between 1927 and 1936, Djuna Barnes wrote and rewrote *Nightwood*, a novel that opens with a birth, a fabricated family history, and a promise about living statues. In one, long, detailed sentence, the narrator describes the birth scene of Felix Volkbein before launching into the fabricated Volkbein family history cultivated by Felix’s father, Guido. The constructed genealogy and corresponding family narrative convey two desires related to modes of belonging. Firstly, the Volkbeins’ family history reflects their nostalgia for an older, idealized version of European aristocracy. Guido creates a narrative that suggests access not just to a higher class than the one to which he belongs, but to a version of an upper class that no longer exists. The second desire relates to the first. The narrator, in an uncharacteristic moment, is attentive to the relationship between class and other forms of identitarian belonging. The narrator tells us “In the Vienna of Volkbein’s day there were few trades that welcomed Jews, yet somehow he had managed” to secure a house for his family (Barnes 7). The phrase “somehow he had managed” is somewhat sardonic. As readers, we know how Guido managed. Guido “adopted the sign of the cross; he had said that he was an Austrian of an old, almost extinct line, producing, to uphold his story, the most amazing and inaccurate proofs: a coat of arms that he had no right to and a list of progenitors (including their Christian names) who had never existed” (Barnes 5-6). Of course, simply taking on the identity of a Christian aristocrat does not guarantee that one “manages” but it’s a start. The rest of the answer is that Guido traded in the very market that he used to take on this identity: household goods, the “discreet buying of old masters and first editions” (Barnes 7).
To authenticate his membership within the untimely social order of the “Old Europe aristocracy,” Guido puts his Judaism under erasure through the accumulation and exchange of objects.

A reader should find it difficult to separate *Nightwood*’s preoccupation with Judaism from the rise of fascism in Europe at the time of Barnes’s writing and publication. As Winterson points out in her preface to *Nightwood*, readers in 1936 “would have been uncomfortably aware of Hitler’s rise and rise, and his notorious propaganda campaign at the Berlin Games” (Winterson xiv, “Preface”). Fascism haunts the parade of freaks in *Nightwood*, a novel about, if we can say it’s *about* anything, the interactions between bodies that fascism must discipline or expel to maintain its narrative. The relationship between these alienated bodies and the desire that drives the collection is not arbitrary. Jean Baudrillard argues that the motivating force behind the collector is alienation: “It is because he feels himself alienated or at least lost within a social discourse whose rules he cannot fathom that a collector is drawn to construct an alternative discourse that is for him entirely amenable” (Baudrillard 24). Although both of Guido’s linked desires, one related to class belonging and one related to an ethnic and religious identity belonging, influence him to construct a false history that relies on a kind of untimeliness with his historic moment, these desires do correspond to timely crises in his and *Nightwood*’s historic moments. The pairing of the untimely and the timely situates *Nightwood* as an object both in and out of step with its time and thus, exemplary of the various timelines that collide at the site of any given object.

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8 The role of fascism in *Nightwood* has been well documented. For perhaps the most sustained exploration of this topic, see Erin Carlston’s *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity* (2000).
Importantly, Guido becomes a collector of “the most amazing and inaccurate proofs” in the form of objects, like the coat of arms, to “uphold his story.” The coat of arms is not the only “proof” Guido collects. The narrator provides a lengthy list of the items that cluttered the Volkbeins’ home. For example, the Volkbeins displayed two portraits of Guido’s aristocratic ancestors but rather than inherited, Guido “had purchased them when he had been sure that he would need an alibi for the blood” (Barnes 9-10). Objects provide an excuse for bloodlines. They stand in for the embodied histories that the Volkbeins do not have. The objects Guido (and eventually Felix) collects graph these “amazing and inaccurate proofs” onto the Volkbeins’ bodies, altering how their bodies are read by those they encounter. Not bothered but rather motivated by anachronism, the Volkbeins construct a history out of objects.

This construction of a history out of objects may explain Felix’s attachment to museums and monuments we see later in the novel. His life is a museum, a collection of the inanimate objects that authenticates an impossible past through recontextualization, accumulation, and organization. The Volkbeins’ problem is partly a time problem, so it makes sense that they would turn to the collection. They want to sync their personal time (the time that both already passed and never happened that allows them to belong to a particular privileged community) with the social time of their historic moment. As Susan Stewart argues, the collection can accomplish this task: “To arrange objects according to time is to juxtapose personal time with social time, autobiography with history, and thus to create a fiction of the individual life, a time of the individual subject both transcendent to and parallel to historical time” (Stewart 156). The collection is as a mode of narrative-making and time manipulation.
So far in this chapter, I have been using the word “museum” and “collection” interchangeably, in part because Barnes also conflates these terms. However, it is useful to distinguish them and explore how they relate to each other. When the narrator describes Felix’s trips to museums with Robin, “museum” has its usual connotations. They are visiting a building that is open to the public and houses a series of collections that are formally organized to express a larger often political and pedagogical ideology of the institution in charge. In contrast, a collection is often private and tends to reflect values particular to the collector rather than to a larger institution. Collections can also be political, pedagogical, and formally organized but they do not have to be and when they are, these elements say more about the individual who has gathered and situated them than about broader groups or institutions. This is why it is possible to encounter someone else’s collection and only see eclectic clutter, while the collector sees structure, context, and meaning. When the narrator describes the house where Guido and his wife, Hedvig, lived and where Felix was born as “a fantastic museum of their encounter” (Barnes 7), the narrator is describing the Volkbeins’ collection. However, because the Volkbeins’ collection offers them a method for syncing their ideal, private, personal tempo to often hostile social rhythms, the contours that distinguish museum from collection, public from private spaces, macronarratives from micronarratives prove porous.

One could argue that the collection, similar to the fantasy of the Thing, is not about the objects but instead about the collector’s narcissistic hope to encounter him/herself through these objects. As Stewart explains, “when one wants to disparage the collected object, one says ‘it is not you’” (Stewart 159). Although the value of any given item in a collection might have something to do with its origin, how it was made, to whom it has belonged, the histories in which
it has played a role, and so on, the collection’s value is in its capacity to reorganize time to tell a story about the values and identity of the collector. To return to Baudrillard, the alternative discourse the collector creates through the collection is “entirely amenable” to him/her because the collector “is the only one who dictates [the collection’s] signifiers—the ultimate signified being, in the final analysis, none other than himself” (Baudrillard 24). The collector takes objects out of their context or purchases them out of their context in order to recontextualize them to construct a language out of objects that tell a story about his/herself. Through accumulation, recontextualization, and organization, the collector becomes the “ultimate signified being” within a world s/he has compiled and in which the way time compiles depends on the various encounters between objects and the collector.

By positioning himself as the ultimate signified being, the collector “seems to be seeing through [his collected objects’] into their distant past” (Benjamin 61). In Guido’s case (and later Felix’s), the collector encounters the distant past of his objects but also a past into which he writes a false family history. The past of his objects has both happened and not happened. This double past is possible because” time is not something to be restored to an origin,” it is not restored to either of those pasts, but “rather, all time is made simultaneous or synchronous within the collection’s world” (Stewart 151). In the Volkbein collection world, both pasts are encountered in the present not as fully assimilated into the present nor as wholly other to the present. Even though the collection is about Guido and his family, the lives of the Volkbeins would be wildly different without the collection. The objects, even if they look back at the Volkbeins like mirrors, allow Guido to construct a temporal illusion with material consequences
for himself and his family that alter their privilege and the judgments the larger community makes about them.

_Nightwood_ is a collection of objects organized by Barnes to construct a temporally out of joint narrative with almost no plot trajectory to speak of. However, if there is an organizing structure, it is whatever semblance of form Robin Vote’s elusiveness and incoherence gives the novel. The motivation behind the movement of Barnes’s language, whether in the mouth of the narrator or in the mouths of characters, is the struggle to hold onto Robin, to solidify her, to collect her, but she constantly evades, in part because of the temporal confusion she evokes in others. One way Barnes’s runaway figurative language tries to catch Robin is by putting her in proximity to statues and other static, physical replications of human bodies. This approach effectively homobjectifies her and the objects that constitute these encounters. As mentioned earlier, _Nightwood_ opens with the Volkbeins’ fabricated family history and a promise about living statues. Throughout the novel, Robin serves as a kind of living statue who throws everything she encounters into temporal confusion because she seems both stuck and moving, dead and alive, of the past and of a time that has not yet happened. Where Robin is, there is almost always homobjectification. In the rest of this chapter, I explore Robin as living statue, why others are compelled to collect her, and how she temporally queers theories of “the souvenir.”

**Living Statues: Robin Vote as Queer Souvenir**

Felix and his friends from the circus (“The circus was a loved thing that [Felix] could never touch, therefore never know” (Barnes 15)) attend a dinner party at which the host has
promised his dinner guests that they will be entertained by living statues. An acrobat self-named Frau Mann tells Felix that “Tonight... we are going to be amused” because their host, the Count, “is fond of impossible people, so we are invited... He might even have the statues on” (Barnes 16). The Duchess explains after Felix asks, “Statues?” that she means “The living statues... [The Count] simply adores them” (Barnes 16). Perhaps the fondness for impossible people explains not only the Count’s fondness for the circus folk and “Baron” Felix, but also his adoration for living statues. However, the host dismisses everyone before dinner is served and before the living statues arrive. In this scene, three of the four main characters are in the same space for the first time. The only character missing is Robin Vote. It is telling that both the living statues and Robin have not yet arrived. I argue that Robin, as the novel’s queer souvenir, fulfills the host’s promise of living statues.

Barnes puts Robin in physical and figurative proximity to several kinds of art objects, but most often statues. Temporal confusion always accompanies this proximity between Robin and objects. For example, the narrator describes Robin as:

gracious and yet fading, like an old statue in a garden, that symbolizes the weather through which it has endured, and is not so much the work of man as the work of wind and rain and the herd of the season, and though formed in man’s image is a figure of doom. (Barnes 45)

The language in this passage turns Robin into an object. However, instead of the magic in *The Passion*, a simile casts the spell. To read this passage, we must read Robin through an encounter between her body and the statue. However, Barnes makes the encounter as illegible as Robin herself. The simile is multi-layered in this run-on sentence: (1) Robin is like a statue; (2) the
statue symbolizes weather; (3) the weather inscribes itself upon the statue and shapes the statue’s form; (4) the statue, “formed in man’s image,” which symbolizes weather and bares the physical markings of past weather experiences, also figures a prophecy of doom. The simile unfolds many times, each time gathering to the statue various temporalities and influences (the weather, the work of man, the image of man). The simile then doesn’t operate like a simple simile that compares two things. Similarly, the symbol is not a perfect symbol – it is not a material thing that stands in for an abstract idea or concept. It is a material thing (statue) that stands in for another material thing (the weather). Wind, rain, and the “herd of the season” are all physically experienced phenomena just as the statue is a physical prop in Barnes’ narrative.

Why mix these rhetorical devices? *Nightwood* is about, in part, the illegibility of encounters and thus, is itself somewhat illegible. The mix-up of rhetorical devices continues a theme in the novel: what is figurative is no less “real” than reality. Just as *The Passion* asks us to read the figurative straight, metaphors are facts in *Nightwood* (Caselli 163). In the discursive encounter between Robin and the statue, a chain of signifiers Robin object. This chain not only conflates Robin and the statue but also images of the abstract and the concrete in general. Reading homobjectification is a move that reads the figurative and the abstract straight. It takes seriously the power of the abstract to materialize, to literally matter.

If objects are “polychronic, multitemporal, and [reveal] a time that is gathered together, and with multiple pleats” (Serres 60), then homobjectification must always contend with often illegible, multitemporal collision at the site of the encounter. It is impossible to read this passage as consisting a singular tempo. Words like “fading,” “old,” “weather,” “endured,” “work,” and “doom” are all temporal and they do not add up to the same temporal configuration. According
to the passage, Robin looks like a human but is immobile. Yet, she is not immobile because her body changes due to *temps* and the various tempos that work through her. The physical experience of her past inscribes itself upon and shapes her body. Figured in this way, Robin embodies a past in the present that is both malleability and immobile. However, the passage suggests she is not only a figure of the past but also of the future. In fact, her body’s relationship to the past causes her body to signal a wormhole into the future to mark it as already doomed. She is a fading yet statuary image marked by the past to name the future as already over in the present.

To understand Robin as a living statue is to understand her as a version of Susan Stewart’s souvenir. For Stewart, an object is a souvenir when “the memory of the body is replaced by the memory of the object, a memory standing outside the self and thus presenting both a surplus and a lack of significance” (Stewart 133). After the body experiences an event, a concrete object externalizes and stands as proof of the abstract memory of that event. The mechanism by which the abstract becomes concrete mirrors the mechanism by which objectification takes place. The souvenir signifies a moment that has passed in the present, a dead moment that persists through a haunting in the present, but unlike the spectral whose body’s/bodies’ physicality is questionable, the souvenir is decidedly tangible and concrete. The souvenir literalizes objectification: it is an object that stands for an abstraction, whether a place, a time, a person, an affect, or combinations of these possibilities.

Before I pick up the souvenir, bend it as a version of the thing, and argue that Barnes’s elusive Robin Vote is a homobjectified, time-sick souvenir, I want to respect the specificity with which Stewart describes this concept. For Stewart, the souvenir is an object removed from its
“origin” (a concept the souvenir both relies upon and questions) and recontextualized for the personal uses of its owner. A souvenir signifies a memory felt through the body that cannot be easily repeated. We purchase souvenirs (or take them like a piece of sea glass from the beach) from the location of a memory in order to commemorate an event when it is no longer happening. When Stewart discusses the souvenir, she is talking about a specific kind of object with a specific function. However, I want to open up the souvenir because of its similarity to things and its temporality.

Importantly, the objectification literalized by the souvenir is about timing. The abstraction of the souvenir is memory. By externalizing memory as an object, making it stand “outside of the self,” as Stewart says, the souvenir participates in the Thing. Stewart does not use the word “Thing” but she does use the language of thing theory when she says the souvenir presents “both a surplus and a lack of significance” (Stewart 133). The time of the Thing is not so different from the time of the souvenir.

Although the souvenir “arrives” after the past (event, then souvenir), the souvenir reaches backwards. The souvenir’s thingness precedes and exceeds whatever moment at which it is encountered by a subject. Stewart explains, “The souvenir generates a narrative which reaches only ‘behind,’ spiraling in a continual inward movement rather than outward toward the future” (Stewart 134). The souvenir is an object with excess due to the memory it signifies but because it is only a sample of a bygone experience, it cannot fully recoup that which it objectifies. The souvenir can only evoke the experience in the present and future. One should not mistake this inability to recoup the past as a drawback; rather, like the vase’s lack, the souvenir’s failure to bring the past into the present is “the very source of its power” (Stewart 13). Much of the
scholarship to which my project is indebted, specifically the work of Freeman, Ahmed, and Menon and Goldberg, compellingly argues for a queering of history that does not try to recoup the past or assimilate it into the present or, conversely, treat the past as if it were the present’s other. Stewart’s theory of the souvenir is consistent with these critical desires without actively participating in the debates about queer studies and historiography.

The souvenir, by definition, gathers time even though it is belatedly out of step with the time it is supposed to represent. The souvenir is a thing obtained to purposefully evoke nostalgia in the owner and perhaps other viewers as well. The souvenir captures time like a photograph and metonymically gestures towards a larger, more complex happening that it does and does not bring back into the present in which it is encountered. The time of the souvenir is stillness as it arrests its viewer in the “displacement of reverie, the gap between origin/object/subject which fields desire” and nostalgic longing (Stewart 150). The souvenir also shuttles the subject out of his/her own time into the deferred time of the memory the souvenir externalizes. If the souvenir could recoup the past, rather than partially present and defer, it would fulfill the longing it evokes and thus no longer have power or vitality that defines it as a thing. The fantasy of the Thing would tell us that the excess or thingness of the souvenir would be legible to us, could recoup the past, and with that legible past, make our fragmented, unreliable subjectivities and histories whole. However, unlike Villanelle’s jar-heart, which does fulfill this fantasy, the souvenirs in Nightwood are “saturated with meanings that will never be fully revealed to us” (Stewart 133).

Barnes queers the souvenir through homobjectifying the souvenir and Robin Vote’s body. In his reading of Edward Carey’s Observatory Mansions, Schwenger provides another temporal relationship to the souvenir that corresponds more closely to the queer souvenir in
Nightwood. Schwenger explains, “… a souvenir evokes the nostalgic longing for a past experience specific to its owner, whereas Francis has had no such experience. Rather, the objects he acquires signify his longing to have *had* such an experience, to have had a loved object from which he has been sundered” (Schwenger 87). Like Francis’s objects, Robin is a queer souvenir who/that externalizes a past memory that has not yet happened. Stewart claims that the souvenir arises out of “the insatiable demands of nostalgia” (Stewart 135) and that these demands are insatiable because the logic of nostalgia necessitates that fulfillment of desire for the past be deferred. How much more acute and impossible might that nostalgia be if it is nostalgia not for a bygone time but a time that never occurred or, if it occurred, the person who longs for it never experienced it or has forgotten it? This kind of acute and impossible nostalgic longing is the kind Robin as souvenir invokes in whoever she encounters.

**Time-Sickness**

To encounter Robin is to encounter the souvenir and temporal incongruity. The homobjectification of Robin queers the souvenir by permitting the souvenir to show up as a woman from a past no one remembers. Robin, rather than an inanimate item, is always becoming-object. She externalizes a memory and survives incongruously in the present despite the trace of the past that travels with her and as her.

Robin can be a queer souvenir because she is time-sick. The narrator warns the reader about Robin by saying, “Such a woman is the infected carrier of the past” (Barnes 41). The past is a contagious disease that Robin carries. However, not all carriers are afflicted with the disease they carry. The rat that carries the plague does not always die of it. Felix diagnoses Robin as
having an “undefinable disorder,” (a fairly vague diagnosis), which he goes on to describe as “a sort of ‘odour of memory,’ like a person who has come from some place that we have forgotten and would give our life to recall” (Barnes 126). Robin invokes nostalgia for a past that never belonged to/was experienced by anyone else, as if she wormholed into the future but the past sticks to her, the smell of it radiating from her and thus infecting all that she encounters with a deferred but intense Proustian remembrance.

O’Connor emphasizes that Robin’s disease is a temporal one by repeating Felix’s word choice but reframing the problem. O’Connor says, “Destiny and history are untidy; we fear memory of that disorder. Robin did not” (Barnes 126). He says this in direct response to Felix’s diagnosis and his use of the word “disorder” serves as an echo. O’Connor makes explicit his understanding that Robin is unaffected by the disorder she carries. Perhaps he means she is comfortable in disorder and perhaps even as disorder. Her disease/disorder does not disorder her but puts all around her out of order. Those who “catch” the past have specific symptoms: “before her the structure of our head and jaws ache” (Barnes 41). However this ache felt in the body is an ache of desire and nostalgia, not pain: “we feel that we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers” (Barnes 41). Her disease of the past queers those she encounters, setting them in temporal confusion and longing.

As a souvenir of this past no one remembers but everyone craves, Robin is protected from the symptoms of time-sickness she invokes in others. However, she does suffer from a related temporal problem that characterizes her as a queer souvenir. As the souvenir which is “destined to be forgotten” (Stewart 151), she expresses to Nora “her wish for a home, as if she
were afraid she would be lost again, as if she were aware, without conscious knowledge that she belonged to Nora, and that if Nora did not make it permanent by her own strength, she would forget” (Barnes 60). While Robin fears being forgotten and thus wants to be collected, she also wants to be remembered by no one: “Two spirits were working in [Robin], love and anonymity. Yet they were so ‘haunted’ of each other that separation was impossible” (Barnes 60). These opposing but related spirits demand that Robin repeatedly and retroactively obtain her innocence. As Robin has countless anonymous affairs to prove to herself that she is anonymous, but her fear of being lost and her selfish love for Nora brings her back home. Robin’s needs make Nora’s position is an impossible one. O’Connor tells her: “because you forget Robin the best, it’s to you she turns. She comes trembling, and defiant, and belligerent, all right—that you may give her back to herself again as you have forgotten her” (Barnes 162). Nora must remember Robin, make her “permanent” and stable, through memory so Robin will not be “lost again” but only by forgetting Robin so well, all of her infidelities for example, can she accept Robin into the home and love that Robin desires. For Robin to oscillate between what O’Connor calls her “primitive innocence,” she requires the collection of memories and the erasure of memories.

All of Robin’s sustained lovers—Felix, Nora, and Jenny—try to collect Robin and fail. I argue that Barnes’s language is similarly trying to collect Robin, to make her permanent by objectifying her, but that Barnes’s language also demonstrates that this attempt to make permanent and static always gives way to the shifting vitality of homobjectification. We return then to statues as they are the most common object with which Robin is homobjectified on the level of both story and discourse.
During their courtship, Felix tries to understand Robin by developing a coherent image of her but ultimately fails, as do all of the characters in the novel. In one of his attempts to cohere Robin’s identity and her relationship to time, he compares her to a figurehead removed from its ship and relocated in a museum. The narrator tells us that when Felix looked at Robin, Felix “felt that he was looking upon a figurehead in a museum, which though static, no longer roosting on its cutwater, seemed yet to be going against the wind” (Barnes 41). Much like the image of the statue in the garden, the figurehead illustrates a meeting of the mobile human figure and the stasis of art objects. The figurehead is in the shape of a human body though it is not alive. The figurehead, “though static,” and thus not of nature, is moved by nature.

In this passage, Barnes offers us the stasis of the figurehead in the museum and then immediately reminds us that the figurehead is related to the movement of travel. The figurehead moves ahead while meeting the force of the wind moving in the opposite direction. Again, Robin is objectified as a humanlike object and that object embodies contradictions that redefine the human. Furthermore, in the figurehead’s encounter with Robin, the figurehead becomes more “alive.” If Robin is a figurehead then figureheads seem “yet to be going against the wind” even though they are inanimate. In this encounter, the figurehead is “going,” it is reacting in spite of its supposed lack of vitality. As Robin is objectified, the figurehead is personified.

The example of the figurehead demonstrates Robin’s objecthood through its own recontextualization. The body of the figurehead to which Robin is compared is arguably not limited to the figurehead but includes the ship to which it was once attached. The figurehead appears complete but is not. Like the figurehead in a museum, Robin has been taken out of her context, detached in some ways from her body (the ship), and recontextualized in a place that
tries to give her order through meaning (a museum). In this moment in the novel, that place is Felix’s life. He needs to collect Robin because the narrative he wants to tell with his collection is one that continues the fabricated history of his family through reproductive futurism (“... he wished a son who would feel as he felt about the about the ‘great past’” (Barnes 42)). Yet Felix could not make her “permanent” through collection. She would not sync to his time: “He felt that her attention, somehow in spite of him, had already been taken by something not yet in history” (Barnes 48). As a queer souvenir, Robin proves stubbornly untimely and cannot (or will not) assimilate into Felix’s temporal organization of the “great past.”

This example of homobjectification with Felix does not fully demonstrate how encountering Robin as queer souvenir also homobjectifies not just Robin but also her relationships. In the chapter entitled “Night Watch,” which details Robin and Nora’s relationship, Robin wanders the city at night and searches “for the sculptured head that both she and Nora loved,” “a quiet joy radiated from her own eyes; for this head was the remembrance of Nora and her love” (Barnes 65). In this example, the love between Robin and Nora is objectified as this statue. More specifically, the statue is the “remembrance” of Nora and someone’s love (Robin’s love for Nora? Nora’s love for Robin? Nora’s love in general?). Here, this statue operates like a museum or a collection. It is a “remembrance,” a recollection, a memory. Just as a collection of objects can signify a single narrative for the collector, Barnes illustrates that one object can represent an entire collection of narratives. An encounter with one object does not necessitate an encounter with only one event, narrative, or even, and perhaps especially, one timeline.
The head is the collection and recollection of love between Nora and Robin. The object is the museum of their memories. The sculptured head is stands in vigil of their relationship, like a keepsake or the metonymic souvenir. Their love is taken out of context, a love not likely to be repeated and through an encounter with this object, the object participates in the Thing. The head becomes more animated while the love becomes solidified, but in time already nostalgic. This encounter is one of erotohistoriography: by encountering the head, Robin encounters a lost object as already in the present because, time-sick as she is, she moves in a temporality that is not singularly present.

Barnes’s strategy of the “encounter” also exhibits a complex relationship between what is human and what is object. Robin and Nora’s encounter becomes thing, it looks back. The sculptured head has “shocked protruding eyeballs, for which the tragic mouth seemed to pour forth tears” and seeing this statue that cries out of its mouth, “a quiet joy radiated from her own eyes” (Barnes 65). This thing is full of psychic investment, of vitality, that it seems to cry and creates an affect on Robin. Robin’s eyes radiate affect; the statue’s eyes pour tears out its mouth. Both the statue and Robin have excessive affect coming from their eyes, even though their affect is different. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed argues that “What touches is touched, and yet ‘the toucher’ and ‘the touched’ do not ever reach each other; they do not merge to become one” (Ahmed 106). In homobjectification, there is still difference. The “homo” in homobjectification stresses the sameness that is often ignored in objectification, but these encounters that touch, whether physically, psychically, and/or discursively, never merge to become one assimilated, homogeneous entity. Rather, the two (or more) that constitute the encounter alter because each
leaves its impressions on the contours of the other. The vitality shifts, categories destabilize, and timelines palimpsest and wormhole.

**Collecting Robin Vote**

Robin is not of her time. She carries a queer tempo with her and serves for many characters (and perhaps for us as well) as a souvenir from a time we have never experienced but which invokes intrigue, obsession, fear, and nostalgia. Her queer tempo and elusiveness motivates those around to possess her like an object, to collect her as a souvenir for themselves, and to discipline her temporal disorder through the organizing force of the collection. Barnes uses the same phrase we saw earlier in this chapter that describes Guido and Hedvig’s house as “museum of their encounter” (Barnes 7) to describe the apartment Nora and Robin share. Barnes writes, “In the passage of their lives together every object in the garden, every item in the house, every word they spoke, attested to their mutual love, the combining of their humours... such was the museum of their encounter” (Barnes 61). Nora’s apartment and its surrounding environment (the garden) is a museum that documents the encounter between Nora and Robin. What they collect doesn’t really matter. Like Benjamin’s collector, Nora and Robin are not interested in functionality but in narrative: “Naturally, [the collector’s] existence is tied to many other things as well: to a very mysterious relationship... to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value—that is, their usefulness—but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate” (Benjamin 60). Their “museum” consists of mostly decorative objects such as circus chairs, wooden horses from merry-go-rounds, chandeliers, a spinet, and “a miscellaneous collection of music boxes from many countries” (Barnes 61).
The objects testify an abstraction, “mutual love,” because of their proximity to and documentation of two human characters. Unlike the figurative objects Barnes uses to demonstrate the illegibility and temporal disorder of Robin, these objects are literally present in the content of the narrative. However, their function is not so different from the objects used in Barnes’s the excessive metaphoric language. They trouble the boundary between the material/concrete and the abstract. A physical chandelier hanging in an apartment doesn’t just symbolize Nora and Robin’s love: it speaks it.

Throughout Nightwood, Robin and Nora’s love is always becoming-object. Just as the Volkbeins collect their fabricated history (which, Barnes seems to suggest, might be a redundant phrase) by populating their house with artifacts that attest to a particular heritage, Robin and Nora collect items that operate like memorabilia, even if those objects are not from trips they have experienced. Each object speaks a memory or many memories. Their collection and each object in that collection gathers time and tells stories. In a museum, each object has its own story that speaks to a broader story of the exhibit. Here, the broader story is love and combining of Nora and Robin’s humors. Nora and Robin are archiving their romance through methods of the collection: accumulation, recontextualization, and organization, all of which help manipulate time and narrative. For bodies that do not follow the temporal script of dominant social rhythms, the potential to manipulate time and narrative, even if only in the private space of the collection, allows for other ways of remembering, of making time, and of time-sharing.

Homobjectification can assist projects that try to imagine other ways of being in the world by (1) recognizing the role of objects in our attempts to sync up rhythms to certain narratives of belonging across space and time, (2) redefining the normative constraints taxonomy
places on “the human” and “the object,” and (3) reshaping the body away the demands of a certain anthropocentrism that tends to feel “natural” to those the demands privilege while placing uneven demands on disabled, queer, racialized-ethnic, and classed bodies. However, homobjectification does not always signal new kinds of belonging and kinship-making. Turning object can be alienating regardless of how “human” it makes the object.

For example, Robin and Nora’s attempt to codify their relationship not through heteronormative timelines that rely on reproduction but instead on the accumulation of objects both comforts and constrains time-sick Robin. When she begins to go on her night journeys to have sex with other women, the museum-apartment haunts Nora because it continues to tell a story about the “combining of their humors” and their “mutual love.” Nora “suffered from the personality of the house, the punishment of those who collect their lives together” (Barnes 61). Here, the personification of the house is made explicit as is the relationship between its personification and the presence of the collection. The vitality of the collection affects the human bodies it constitutes. Nora begins moving slowly and carefully around the house without realizing why. She becomes increasingly static, worried that “if she disarranged anything Robin might become confused--might lose the scent of home” (Barnes 61). Nora can’t change the organization of the collection or she will alter time and thus, the collection’s narrative.

At the end of “Night Watch,” Nora goes on one of her many crazed night walks to collect Robin, who, meanwhile, is trying to become forgotten to re-establish her “primitive innocence” through the bodies of others. On her walk, Nora comes upon the same statue that is the “remembrance their mutual love” discussed earlier in this chapter. In this moment, Nora, Robin, Robin’s lover, and the statue constitute an encounter that simulates a death-like experience for
Nora. Robin and another woman are in the shadows of the statue, as if the statue was “multiplying” (Barnes 70). Upon seeing this, Nora turns statue:

Unable to turn her eyes away, incapable of speech, experiencing a sensation of evil, complete and dismembering, Nora fell to her knees, so that her eyes were not withdrawn by her volition, but dropped from their orbit by the falling of her body. (Barnes 70)

She cannot speak. Her body fails her. This multiplication is “evil” and dismembers her. Ahmed quotes Merleau-Ponty as saying that if uprightness, our verticality that is based on “being caught up in the world,” is seriously weakened then the body becomes “once more an object,” to which Ahmed says: “The weakening of this involvement is what causes the body to collapse, and to become an object alongside other objects” (159). If bodies are the incorporations of objects, then Nora’s dismembered bodies turns her into a series of objects. She dies in many ways in this scene signified by her collapse—a movement defined by inanimacy. Here, Nora turns object because of her encounter with Robin, specially her encounter with Robin as Robin-statue-lover.

* * *

The sheer inventory of objects in *Nightwood* paired with Barnes’s excessive use of metaphor construct the novel as a cluttered collection of objects that stand in for, alongside of, and as part of humanness. If we understand homobjectification as a temporal phenomena, it is clear why collection, museums, and objects would play such a crucial role in a novel obsessed with pleasurable and failed bonding between untimely bodies. *Nightwood* is an object (a book), a collection (a series of objects, accumulated and organized as to tell a narrative), and in its encounter with bodies (readers), it chronicles its anachronicity. *Nightwood*, a novel at once baroque and postmodern during early 20th century modernism, is untimely in content and form.
This chapter has focused on the narrative of *Nightwood* but as a project focused on objects, it would be an unforgivable oversight to ignore the novel as object and some of its encounters. In the concluding chapter, I examine text as object, specifically Henri’s notebook, Winterson’s preface, and the novels themselves.
CONCLUSION:

QUEER COLLECTIONS AND THE “VALUABLE, FABULOUS” NOVEL

The 20th century is a century of human taxonomies. Although piles of scholarly essays and books have been published to address the problems taxonomies present, we haven’t moved away from the compulsion to categorize. Of course, categories are useful. Language itself is a categorizing machine, even as it undoes categories. Language’s promise, though never completely fulfilled, is to distinguish one thing from another to generate meaning. However, methods of categorization are overwhelmingly linked to imperialism, fascism, scientific racism, and other forms of boundary-making that makes living increasingly unmanageable and threatening for those bodies who cannot conform to the demands of normative embodiment narratives.

In Chapter 2, I note too briefly that fascism is a specter hovering over Nightwood but both novels respond to the violent, disciplining forces of the state and the methods by which those forces designate certain bodies as expelled from privilege and manageable life-making. Henri’s notebook is a counterhistory to a chapter from conventional history’s imperialism narrative, the Napoleonic Wars. As Scott Wilson observes:

Henri… was one of the first nineteenth-century archivists, a materialist who believed in love. So while, in the age of Hegelian idealism, he was a little belated and behind the times, he nevertheless anticipates, in his account of his own life, the areas favoured by the alternative New Historians, areas representative, usually, of the heterogeneous forces that escape or are excluded from the Hegelian state of universal recognition: women, freaks,
midgets, transvestites, lesbians, prostitutes… for whom the Republic proved to be little different than the monarchy. (Wilson 66)

Those who do not fit the script of normative bodies are regulated to categories that depend upon comparisons to or total conflation with “the object” or “the animal,” against which definitions of the “human” depend. This project examines some of methods of categorization, such as the museum and the collection. Even though the academy is one of the places that generates critiques of categorization, it is also out of the academy that so many categories come. In scholarship, we are constantly making “museums”—pedagogical, political, aesthetic, and disciplining—that organize objects of study into categories, collections, anthologies, and canons. Here, I would like to turn to the “object” in “objects of study” and the collections to which they belong.

At the book level, *The Passion* and *Nightwood* are physical inanimate entities produced by networks of bodies and objects, and commodified in economic markets. They belong to several canons though their membership is tenuous. At the narrative level, my objects of study also illustrate that any given object consists of multiple narratives and timelines, and any given collection consisting of many objects may be organized as to cohere a single narrative and timeline. These objects I study also encounter each other, not only in this project, but in and across time by sharing cross-membership in similar canons and because Jeanette Winterson lent her name and thoughts to the 2006 edition of *Nightwood* by writing its preface. As an indeterminate coda, I will examine these novels as objects in various academic collections, how these authors and books touch across time, and argue that in both novels, language is the ultimate magical, representational object that can participate in homobjectification.
The most obvious connection between these two books is Winterson’s preface, but even in this connection, we can see a strange temporal relationship with the help of an object: the physical novel itself. Winterson wrote the preface seventy years after *Nightwood* was first published, yet readers read the preface before they read a word of *Nightwood*. In the preface, Winterson writes about how much *Nightwood* influenced her and expresses the deep affective value her copy of the novel has for her. She says: “For the rest of my life I will be climbing those stairs with Nora to the doctor’s filthy garret. Why? Something of *Nightwood* has lodged in me” (Winterson xv-xvi). For Winterson, the book is always happening (she is always going up the stairs) and it is always happening in her body. She repeats this sentiment when she says reading *Nightwood* is like “drinking wine with a pearl dissolving in the glass. You have taken in more than you know, and it will go on doing its work. From now on, a part of you is pearl-lined” (Winterson ix). Winterson offers a description of her deeply embodied experience of Barnes’s influence on her before the reader reads source material for that influence. Already in the preface, the queer temporality of an object – the novel – offers an example of the muddling of the human/object boundaries as well as a non-linear time zone for Winterson’s queer scholarly desire to express its embodied experience, however disorderly.

*The Passion* and *Nightwood* are connected by Winterson’s preface but also by their tenuous cross-membership in various canons. Scholars attempting to collect *The Passion* and *Nightwood* use similar descriptors to justify their organizational choices. For example, both Winterson and Barnes are characterized as writing “lesbian novels.” Winterson’s body of work is decidedly lesbian in that Winterson self-identifies as lesbian and her novels include lesbian or queer female-bodied characters and relationships. Barnes, on the other hand, famously rejected
the term, saying, “I’m not a lesbian, I just loved Thelma,” (Caselli 34) her lover on whom Robin Vote is based. Scholars like Tee Corinne and Merrill Cole have read Nightwood as a homophobic text because it reinforces lesbian stereotypes present in sexology with its mother-daughter dynamics, emphasis on narcissism and pain, and extended monologues by Doctor O’Connor about Robin as an “invert” (Broe 54, Cole 391). Nightwood sits in the lesbian canon much less comfortably than The Passion does.

This positioning can be excused by looking at time. The Passion shows us how far we’ve come as a culture. Can we expect Nightwood to be as progressive as Winterson’s 1987 novel? Linking just how lesbian the novels are to “progressive” politics of each novel, and thus the novels’ publication dates is a highly problematic organizing principle. Of course, the positioning of these two novels in the lesbian literary collection is not without its own temporal narrative. This temporal narrative corresponds to how the two novels are positioned in modernist and postmodernist literary museums. In The Passion, for example, the queerest relationship is between two bodies that read as male and female: Henri and Villanelle. Henri is a stereotypically effeminate man whose first love is Napoleon. Villanelle is a cross-dressing lesbian sex-worker whose body contradicts Venetian myth that only boatmen have webbed feet, and thus her body may be read by the reader as intersexed. Henri is in love with Villanelle, while Villanelle says she loves him in a “brotherly, incestuous way. He touches my heart, but he does not sent it shattering through my body” (Winterson 146). From this affair, Villanelle becomes pregnant and gives birth to a child. They do not marry and Henri ends up in a madhouse—not exactly a normative romantic narrative, but also strangely not entirely distinct from one. It may be perhaps even more tempting to point to Winterson’s commitment to queerness, which seems even more
timely than lesbianism, as evidence of her postmodernism. However, to suggest that queerness is somehow more modern than lesbianism or than straightness is to ignore that norms and their alternatives emerge through the event of the Thing: they mutually constitute each other. To say the queerness in *The Passion* makes it a postmodern novel makes an other of the past, a move too consistent with queer exceptionalism for my comfort.

Winterson’s novels have been collected under postmodernism for more than their treatment of sexuality and gender. Her novels possess certain claims to a postmodernism defined by aesthetics and history. The least helpful definition for postmodernism is temporal but common: all her books have been published after the 1980s. In terms of aesthetics, her novels tend to be highly intertextual, decentered, and draw attention to themselves as constructed narratives. However, in some ways her novels are more properly collected under modernism, a period for which she has expressed a strong affinity. In their introduction to “*I’m Telling You Stories*”: Jeanette Winterson and the Politics of Reading, Helena Grice and Tim Woods point out that while Winterson’s work reflects her “anti-essentialist views on gender, subjectivity, and language,” “Winterson’s postmodernist credentials remain a vexed issue” (Grice and Woods 6). In their anthology, Lyn Pykett’s essay “A New Way With Words? Jeanette Winterson’s Post-Modernism” argues that Winterson is at least equally engaged in a “collaborative dialogue with Modernism” (Pykett 53). Pykett cites Winterson’s *Art and Objects*, in which Winterson attempts to situate herself in the tradition of modernism and affirm her commitment to its aesthetic values. However, we do not have to turn to Winterson’s analysis of her own work to see that *The Passion* is a far more plotted and structurally coherent narrative than the experience of *Nightwood*’s almost illegible, runaway metaphor-heavy configuration.
Nightwood, historically situated as avant-garde modernism at best, is out of step with its historical moment in which it was written. Nightwood is an odd object in any academic museum in which it is housed because the museum is a time operation and Nightwood, like Robin, invokes temporal confusion in whatever it encounters. As one early reviewer noted, “her work will not fall into oblivion -- it was predestined for it from the outset” (qtd in Caselli 2). The time of Barnes’s novel is like the homobjectified “old statue in the garden” in Nightwood. According to this review, Nightwood as an art object in the world that signals a wormhole into the future to mark itself as already doomed. It is a fading yet static image marked by the past to name the future as already over in the present. Emily Coleman, Barnes’s primary editor,9 repeated the phrase “dropped into oblivion” to describe the public’s awareness of the novel in an essay published in January 1944. By 1945, the book was out of print in the States. Barnes had trouble finding a publisher to re-issue it but finally did in July of the same year. (Plumb xxiv) Nightwood’s critical reception and circulation has been consistent with its content’s portrayal of disjointed object-time.

Because of its strange temporal positioning and what Daniela Caselli calls Barnes’s “improper modernism,” the novel is “strangely canonized and not read” (Marcus 145) in the academy, and it is even less popular among the general public. Winterson confirms Nightwood’s strange canonization in her preface: “more people have heard about it than have read it... Others have a vague sense that it is a Modernist text, that T.S. Eliot adored it... that the work is an

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9 T.S. Eliot is usually credited as the primary editor of Nightwood. Eliot’s fame, advice, introduction, and publishing house contributed greatly to Nightwood receiving any attention at all. However, as Cheryl J. Plumb examines, he receives all editorial credit even though he arrived on scene quite late in the editing process. Furthermore, Coleman is the one who reached out to Eliot in the first place and whose passionate but critical appraisal of the novel won his attention.
important milestone on any map of gay literature” (Winterson ix). Like Robin, *Nightwood* is
difficult to fit into the temporal organization of any given collection. Another early reviewer of
the novel summarizes the problem inherent in collecting *Nightwood*: “The book does not belong
to any easily definable class; it is not a novel, except in form; and it shows no contemporary
influence except, occasionally, that of Mr. Joyce” (Edwin Muir, qtd in Caselli 152). *Nightwood*
is celebrated and forgotten, avant garde and postmodern, a novel and a poem, hailed as a
liberating representation of social misfits and charged with homophobia, racism, and anti-
Semitism.

*The Passion* and *Nightwood* are objects in and out of step with time on book and
narrative levels. Like Robin, these objects thwart collection and temporal organization because
they themselves carry the disease of so many timelines. In addition to their positions in literary
history, the novel as genre adds to the possibility of temporal disjointedness. Readers know to
move from beginning to end when they read a novel. Unlike some collections of short stories or
poems, readers are not supposed to skip around. Even if the narrative is not linear, readers should
begin on page 1 and continuously turn the next page until there are no more pages to turn.
However, just because readers are *supposed* to move through the novel this way does not mean
they have to. Readers can time-travel forwards and backwards, linger over certain passages, skim
or skip others, and so on. Much like time writ large, the temporality of the novel may suggest
one direction as given but this does not foreclose other approaches.

At the narrative level, the characters also struggle with these problems of collection and
temporality. The collection is about order, even if only the collector understands the logic that
governs the collection, while temporality in these novels, a decidedly queer one, eschews order.
To be a collector, archivist, museum curator, or literary scholar, one risks oneself like Henri, who risks himself by allowing the bodies and narratives from other times to get so close to him through his encounter with objects.

Both novels link time-sickness with madness. Even though all the characters are seeking answers to questions about time, most are unwilling to risk themselves and thus, are not as open to the kind of time-traveling, time-stickiness that Robin and Henri experience. For example, Felix tells O’Connor, “I wanted, as you… to find, if I could, the secret of time; good, perhaps, that that is an impossible ambition for the sane mind” (Barnes 129). Similarly, Wilson argues that Henri, as “one of the first nineteenth-century archivists,” is mad not from love or physical trauma or his experiences at San Servelo. For Wilson, Henri’s madness directly relates to his position as an archivist of time that is impossible to recover: “It is the impossibility of the archive that drives Henri mad. How can he take account of the past when each year, each flickering moment, is unique in its identity and difference… Henri cannot ‘recover from the wonder of it’, but neither… can he forget it (P 43)” (Wilson 67). While I agree with Wilson that Henri’s “madness” relates to his position as archivist, or as I prefer his position as erotohistoriographer, I do not think Henri cannot “recover from the wonder” of each individual moment’s uniqueness because as a body who cannot “forget it,” the moments are not unique in the present in the way Domino might believe. Henri’s attempt to remember how history feels, and his openness to becoming object and going mad, makes him a more conscious souvenir than Robin is. Moreover, the past sticks to Robin and Henri, but the past that sticks to Henri is a remembered past or, more precisely, it has been felt. Yet even for a felt history, Henri must be mad in order to live in the time-sickness that accompanies his attempts to archive.
Importantly, through our encounter with these untimely books and the content of their temporally out of joint narratives, we participate in the Thing and in homobjectification. The Thing, as Lacan tells us, will always be represented by a lack because it can only be represented by something else. Literature constructs a time when the Thing can be represented as “something else.” Language is an abstraction made concrete by writing, by a network of humans and objects, and as a physical book, it provides an illusion of animating human characters through language. The novel is also the ultimate magic object: upon its legible interior, readers project their fantastical interiors.

Novels, as physical objects and as imaginative spatio-temporalities that mutually constitute with the subject, look back like W. J. T. Mitchell’s sardine can. Our proximity to the novel as object homobjectifies both. As Schwenger explains, the word “not definitively annihilate the thing; it only transposes it to the scene of an interminable haunting of language” (Schwenger 33). The book “comes to life” as we become increasingly still and as our affective and physical impressions become more and more dependent upon an object’s agency or vitality.

Like queer souvenirs, books often invoke a longing for a place or time that never was or of which we were never a part. Like the jar-heart Henri finds, sometimes we hope to find that “valuable, fabulous thing” that will make us whole. To stay open to the most fantastical, perhaps sometimes overly utopic, possibilities for literature, we must contend with our reliance upon things, with how influential things are as we constitute our bodies and participate in kinship-making. With literature, we hope to relate, to feel belonging across time, and perhaps, feel belonging with others who feel as though are “in the wrong body and in a different time zone” (Freeman 172). We hope to time-share with bodies that are not present, like the encounter
between Henri, Domino, and the talisman. If novels are the ultimate magical, representational object, then in our homobjectifying encounter with them, we will risk ourselves, risk our bodily constitution, and risk the disorganization of our tempos. If the reader who encounters these novels is willing to be a little mad with time-sickness and recognize herself participating in the Thing, not as a hegemonic human subject but as a becoming-object, then such a reader could experience the “most intimate relationship with objects” that Benjamin describes as a relationship only collectors understand. Such a reader would understand that it is not only that these novels “came alive in him[sic]; it is he who lives in them” (Benjamin 67).
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