Eccentricity and Deterritorialization in Natalie Barney's *The One Who is Legion*

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Abstract:
Rather than focusing on eccentricity as a character trait in human beings or literary characters, this essay engages with Natalie Barney's experimental novel The One Who is Legion (1930) in order to demonstrate how its techniques, in following a Deleuzian trajectory of deterritorialization, are "eccentric" in the sense that they are designed to elude altogether any binary dynamics of the centre and its peripheries. Drawing on Yuri Lotman's model of the semiosphere as a structure defined by a centre, a periphery and a boundary, the essay shows how Barney's novel resists the normalizing attempts of a criticism eager to recover a tradition of "lesbian" writing by insisting on its own eccentric conceptions of gender and sexuality. The "eccentric" is here a literary technique that seeks to deviate from an identified centre in unforeseeable, as it were "elliptical," ways.

1 The literary world seems to be swarming with eccentric authors. Within the community of the Paris Left Bank, Natalie Barney as "the most active and candid lesbian" (Benstock 8) of her times has entered the lesbian archive as an eccentric person due to her promiscuity and sexual liberty. However, while we are quick to award the label "eccentric" to describe a certain type of people, other uses of this notion have remained unexplored. How can we conceive of eccentricity as a possibly productive concept for cultural or literary analysis? Can this notion, which seems to be so very commonsense when it refers to actual persons, be expanded to work in different and more complex environments as we encounter them culturally or in a literary text?

2 What I am trying to do in this essay is approach the slippery and mostly unexplored concept of eccentricity from two different angles. The first part of this essay will attempt to come up with a working definition of the eccentric for literary analysis and as a writing practice. I will then connect the notion of eccentricity with Yuri Lotman's cultural model of the semiosphere that revolves around the dynamism of periphery and centre. I will show how Lotman's model operates by taking a closer look at the reception of Natalie Barney and her novel *The One Who is Legion* by lesbian feminist critics.

3 In contrast to this established process of reception, a process that I will read as an effort to crop and tame the eccentricity and conceptual daring of Barney's novel, I will endeavour during the second part of this essay to see eccentricity as a specific textual practice; in particular, I will propose that in the case of Barney's novel, an eccentric way of writing can best be understood as a radical effort in deterritorialisation and becoming in the

Deleuzian sense. The result is not only a new way of perception but a systematic de-gendering of the novel's main "character".

1. Eccentric comets

4 One of the definitions of eccentricity that captured my attention is despite its simplicity a useful one to start from. James Kendall, a priest charged with and censored for his alleged "eccentricity" in the 19th century, responded to these charges with a book entitled *Eccentricity, Or, a Check to Censoriousness*. This extensive attempt to justify (his own) eccentricity and feed it back into a religious context contains the following definition of the term: The word *eccentricity,* refers primarily to the motions of certain heavenly bodies, and must, therefore, be considered an *astronomical* term. *Comets,* for instance, by not describing an exact circle in their pathway through the general heavens, are said to take an *eccentric* course, that is, oval, or elliptical. *Deviation from a centre,* in fact, is the very thing which constitutes eccentricity. And I may suppose that the amount of eccentricity is in proportion to the degree of deviation. (Kendall 27)

5 What fascinated me most about this astronomical concept – which is still used in astronomy to refer to the degree to which the orbit of a star or planet deviates from a circular course – is that eccentricity does *not* refer to the fact of being *outside* a given centre – a notion that would certainly be the commonsense explanation of the term. This is not, however, the deviation that the term eccentricity primarily describes. Rather, I would propose that while being outside a given centre is a precondition for the eccentric, eccentricity lies in the degree to which one deviates from a circular orbit. Thus the deviation and its route are already prescribed by the centre (which due to its mass exercises an amount of gravity according to which objects circle it). Put differently, one could argue that each centre already restricts the way by which it can be transgressed or deviated from: we may assume, for instance, heterosexuality as the centre to which homosexuality is the prefigured transgression. Eccentricity, in contrast to that, occurs when an object *deviates* from this prescribed location, orbits differently, elliptically instead of circularly, spins off in directions that the centre could never have anticipated. Of course, the movement of the eccentric is still related to its centre but its potential lies in the aberration form a prescribed path. It is this potential to deviate with a difference, so to say, that I would like to claim as the core feature of the eccentric.

2. Eccentricity, canon formation and the semiosphere

6 To come back to Natalie Barney and the literature of the Paris Left Bank, then, I would like to trace the formation of a lesbian literary canon with the help of Yuri Lotman's model of the semiosphere. Contemporary canon debates resonate strongly with a rhetoric of centre versus margin, demanding the opening or expansion of the canon to include ”forgotten“ texts or texts peripheral to the canon. Debates about the disparity between canonized texts and those outside it

> tend to imagine cultural dynamics as a battleground between two polar forces – the oppressors and the oppressed – and to charge either of these diametric forces with absolute responsibility for either the perpetuation of the canon (equated with social injustice) or its rejection (equated with justified progressive revolutions). (Sela-Sheffy 150).

This debate results from an increasingly ideological notion of the literary canon which makes the problematic claim that representation within the canon mirrors representation in other spheres such as the social and political (Guillory 6-7; Kolbas 47-48).

7 One of the archives to have undergone a radical revision is the literary period of modernism. After the feminist interventions of the 1970s, the inquiries of lesbian critics posed a second challenge that uncovered a bulk of “lesbian” literature written during the modernist period but excluded from the canon. This attempt is an example of the kind of notion of eccentricity that I would label commonsense, namely the assumption that anything outside the centre or deviating from it is eccentric. It is quite obvious that this notion informs much of (lesbian) feminist criticism that poses male (heterosexual) modernist writing against supposedly suppressed lesbian writing, thus following the prefigured part of how to deviate from the centre:

> Modernism as we were taught it at midcentury was perhaps halfway to the truth. It was unconsciously gendered masculine. [...] Typically, both the authors of original manifestos and the literary historians of modernism took as their norm a small set of its male participants, who were quoted, anthologized, taught, and consecrated as geniuses. (Scott 2)

By reclaiming what has been erased from cultural memory, an archive of the past is being re-constructed with the intention of providing a sense of the historical continuity of lesbian communities and a self-confident lesbian literary tradition. The lesbian community situated on the Paris Left Bank formed the centre of critical attention. The specific location as an expatriate Bohemian enclave on the left bank of the river Seine, detached from the rest of Paris and its rather repressive gender stereotyping, marks a distinctly eccentric space: “Indeed, certain neighborhoods in Paris may have seemed [...] like the eroticized coteries

based on their defiance of conventional codes of behavior and their pursuit of an artistry linked to their love affairs." (Gilbert/Gubar 218/219)

8 Natalie Barney as the most liberated lesbian, “the mythic world of Parisian Lesbos over which Natalie Barney had presided” (Benstock 306), the activities in her backyard as well as her weekly salon feature strongly in accounts of the period by lesbian criticism and turn Barney into the central lesbian role model of her time. The lives of Barney and other lesbian writers such as Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, Bryher and Hilda Doolittle, as well as their effort in establishing a distinctly lesbian community by searching for and creating their own lesbian literary tradition, provide a rich repository of the past. Bonnie Zimmermann stresses the special appeal of this period and its writers for lesbian critics: “Contemporary lesbians – literary critics, historians and layreaders – have been drawn to their mythic and mythmaking presence, seeing in them a vision of lesbian society and culture that may have existed only once before – on the original island of Lesbos” (141/142).

9 Much as a male-biased literary criticism has shaped the canon of modernism as distinctly male and heterosexual, lesbian literary criticism has shaped the cultural memory of the Paris Left Bank by adapting “lesbian” texts according to its own premises. In order to illuminate the process of this adaptation further, I will briefly introduce Lotman's model of the semiosphere. Lotman views culture – in analogy to the earth's biosphere – as a “semiosphere” that contains all languages, texts and the codes to decipher them. The centre of the semiosphere is rather static and highly organised. It is also the location where rules, norms and a given culture's metalanguage are produced when the system starts to describe itself. In this way, the integrity and organisation of the sphere is ensured because, according to Lotman, a system can only tolerate a certain amount of diversity. If the elements are too heterogeneous, the system will start to homogenize its cultural space. The centre of the semiosphere is inextricably bound to its periphery; the periphery consists of unorganised zones that trigger cultural dynamisms because they come into conflict with the norms of the centre. The continuous interplay between periphery and centre is the only way, according to Lotman, to initiate and maintain cultural change.

10 This aspect is especially relevant to my notion of eccentricity since it becomes obvious here how intertwined the centre and its outside are: the texts produced by the periphery can only come into conflict with the centre if they run contrary to its norms. I would argue that this, to stretch Lotman's model a bit further, can only be the case if the centre recognises the conflict as a deviation and it can only do so if the deviation is already prefigured as the flipside of the norm. In other words, there seems to be no escaping the never-ending binary

interaction between centre and periphery. The process by which external texts are adapted into the semiosphere also shows the interdependence of periphery and centre. Adaptations of external texts into the semiosphere are regulated by its boundary that also guards the semiosphere's integrity. External texts can only enter by passing through the boundary whose basic function is their translation into the language of a given sphere, as well as selecting which contents are adapted. The criteria for the selection process as well as the language of translation correspond to the metalanguage of the semiosphere's centre. Thus, the centre at first identifies and even produces standardized transgressions from its norms and then adapts or assimilates the periphery's texts into the semiosphere in an attempt to homogenize its discourse once again.

11 If we transfer this to the making of the modernist canon, it becomes clear that the majority of texts by women writers could not enter the male-biased semiosphere because the filters of the boundary would not "choose" to adapt them in the first place. Thus, the function of the boundary during the making of a male-biased modernist canon was largely restricted to ensuring an organised whole based on a gendered difference between centre and periphery. Gilbert and Gubar argue that the whole modernist project is, in fact, an outcome of a "battle between the sexes" and that the rise of feminism and the New Woman led to an ever fiercer demarcation of male literary territory which constructed as its counterpart, so to say, a whole body of writing by women and/or lesbian writing that remained unacknowledged on the periphery. Shari Benstock, author of the much-acclaimed study *Women of the Left Bank,* also points out that literary studies of modernism have wilfully erased women writers and the intention of her study is to return them to their rightful place:

> The impetus for this study of expatriate women was the desire to replace them in the Paris context from which they had been removed by the standard literary histories of Modernism. With few exceptions, the women whose lives and works are recorded here have been considered marginal to the Modernist effort. [...] In rediscovering the lives and works of these women, however, I also confronted the ways in which our working definitions of Modernism [...] and the prevailing interpretations of the Modernist experience had excluded women from its concerns. (ix/x)

12 The deconstruction of the modernist canon was triggered by a shift in the metalanguage, as Lotman would put it, within literary criticism. Lesbian feminist scholars successfully challenged the monolithic canon with its limited number of towering male geniuses. The adaptation of "forgotten" texts into a lesbian canon, however, proceeded under almost reversed conditions: rather than wilfully excluding a certain group of texts, lesbian feminist criticism shows a tendency to eagerly claim as many texts as possible for a lesbian literary heritage. Although this move was immensely important, it is well worth taking a

closer look at the practice with which texts are adapted into this lesbian canon. Lotman argues that in order to create cultural memory through adapting texts, each system must have a subject and a code. The code which is embedded in the metalanguage of each culture must remain coherent and its job is the restructuring of incoming texts according to its rules. In our case, the code as well as the subject of the system is lesbian identity. Invoking this signifier is necessary for the creation of a literary heritage but it also involves, as we shall see, uniting very diverse versions of "lesbian" identity in the broadest sense into a unified whole.[1] As Lotman suggests, a move from the periphery into the centre of a given system always entails "an inevitable toning down" (141) of the elements. For this reason, the incoming texts are also stripped of their original characteristics to a certain extent so that "here, in the heart of the receiving culture they will find their true, 'natural' heartland" (146).

13 Lesbian feminism's attempt to recuperate the as yet "eccentric" texts robs some of them, as I would argue, of their very eccentricity. By uniting them under the banner of "lesbian" literature and by prefiguring the way in which these texts are thought to deviate from the assumed centre of male heterosexual modernist writing, the path of transgression is already set, as statements such as the following clearly show: "A lesbian version of modernism has always existed; constructions of masculinist modernism include it through their very act of exclusion." (McCabe 63). That the creation of a unified female/lesbian canon inevitably leads to a much too narrow focus is obvious: "In some ways, the creation of an alternative „female" canon (which sometimes seems to function as the binary opposite of traditional male practices) has led to a disconcertingly simplified framework." (Elliott/Wallace 13). As this process of assimilation operates on the basis of a notion of unified (lesbian) subjects, it can only theorize a certain kind of difference which remains inextricably bound to a centre. This strand of thinking, which revolves around the "episteme of Man" (Nigianni/Storr 4), can only result in a centre-periphery dynamic anticipating a distinct kind of difference from the outset:

> Within this framework, difference can only be conceived of as deviation from one, single model: a hierarchical differentiation starting and descending from the dominant signifier (the white (hu)man Face, the majoritarian, white, hetero, able bodied male) [...] that leads to a prolific production of minoritarian others always in response to the established norms. It thus fails to conceive of difference beyond the level of the signifier (Nigianni/Storr 4).

[1] To assign the label "lesbian" to any text of this period is highly problematic since it subsumes so many different concepts such as androgyny, hermaphroditism, inversion, or mannish women. As Judith Halberstam argues: "I have argued to keep the label 'lesbian' at bay throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Neither Fred (Anne) Lister, Woods and Pirie, John (Radclyffe) Hall, Colonel Barker, Robert (Mary) Allen, the women in Havelock Ellis' case histories nor their lovers would have identified as lesbians. When we describe them as such, we tend to stabilize contemporary definitions of lesbianism." (Halberstam 109).

14 This tendency to acknowledge only a prescribed form of difference is prominent within most lesbian feminist criticism dealing with lesbian writing in the 1920s and 30s. Not only is the label lesbian the prescribed way of transgressing; lesbian feminist criticism has also strongly determined *how* such a lesbian transgression might be brought about as there is a strong bias in favour of texts that are "progressive" in that they display early versions of feminism: "Their [Barney's and Vivien's] almost uncanny anticipation of the preoccupations of feminist writers whose work began almost sixty years after Vivien's death gives them a place as foremothers of feminist literature." (Jay xv) The link between feminism and lesbianism is prevalent and desired in the majority of (lesbian) critical work on this period. Again, Natalie Barney, or rather her body, serves as a stand-in for this particular version of feminine and feminist lesbianism:

> For Barney, lesbian eroticism was defined by a sharing of sensual experiences, each of the partners taking pleasure in the other's body. [...] lesbian sexuality allowed her to direct her own desire and discover through her body her own sensual purposes. The women of Natalie Barney's Sapphic circle believed that lesbian love preserved and honored the female body, beautified it, sanctified it, and kept it safe against the ravages to which heterosexuality subjected it. [...] Thus for Barney and others of her group, lesbianism signified not only a sexual orientation but a feminist position, a radical denial of heterosexual dominance. (Benstock 289/290)

15 This, then, is a privileging of a "lesbianism" epitomized by "feminine" lesbians and a liberated and guilt-free celebration of femininity and lesbianism on the one hand and an uneasiness with authors and works that seem to display too strong an investment in masculinity on the other. It is assumed that this investment is due to the fact that the authors rely too heavily on sexologist theories, suffer from internalised homophobia and are prone to resort to drugs. The overall logic in this seems to be that they are just not liberated enough to step out of the closet and feel comfortable in a woman's body. The discomfort of lesbian feminist critics with Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* bears witness to this. Shari Benstock, for example, comes to the following verdict regarding the novels of Radclyffe Hall, Bryher, and Djuna Barnes

> With few exceptions, however, these novels tended to reflect scientific thinking about homosexual behaviour that cast lesbian women as sexual deviants – men trapped in women's bodies. These works portrayed women who wanted to be men, lesbian marriages that took their models from heterosexual unions, and visions of lesbian existence as fraught with pain and suffering, disguised by makeup and clothes, eased through drugs and alcohol, carried on in the dark, in secret, and in fear. [...] the Barney-model of lesbian behaviour constituted a minority opinion among homosexual women of the Left Bank community, most of whom demonstrated that they had internalized homophobia and misogyny. (59)

Natalie Barney's person as well as her writings stand out as a feminist beacon because her "writings proclaim the delicacy and tenderness of lesbian love and demonstrate a subtle eroticism excluded by phallic notions of sexual desire redefining female sensuality." (Benstock 283/284)

3. *The One Who is Legion*

16 The reception of Natalie Barney's novel *The One Who Is Legion* (privately printed in 1930) bears witness to the urge to read femininity back into a text that defies stable gender categories as well as identity categories. The novel tells the story of the resurrected shadow spirit of A.D. which merges with an angelic light and enters a genderless body, forming a multiple and ungendered "character" referred to as "the One and its legions." This character follows the footsteps of its dead master/mistress through Paris, seeking to solve and revenge A.D.'s suicide. A.D., like the One, remains ungendered throughout the narrative. Critical reception of the novel suffers from a heavy autobiographical focus, reading it as Barney's attempt to come to terms with the suicide of her lover Renée Vivien (figuring as the dead A.D.). Shari Benstock, who certainly deserves credit for discussing this to then rather unknown novel, resorts mostly to an autobiographic reading and then claims that the novel "constitute[s] an effort to recover through language the feminine in Western culture" (298). Benstock reaches this quick and rather unsubstantiated conclusion because she anticipates exactly what the mode of resistance for a lesbian writer in a patriarchal society must "naturally" be. Lesbian critic Anna Livia provides a good account of the ungendered and plural narrative perspective but also reads the androgynous figure of the One as lesbian: "[Barney] presents this androgynous, dual being to demonstrate the expanded consciousness of the homosexual who must know both her own gender functions and how the lover of this sex should behave." (64) Karla Jay also acknowledges the hermaphroditic and androgynous nature of the One and claims that the One is genderless and asexual, but still reads a femininity back into the character. She proposes that in contrast to the Platonic concept of the androgyne as a softened man, "the androgynes of Barney and Vivien are unique in that they begin with the Platonic model but always place the female principle in the primary position." (99) Employing a rather monstrous neologism, Jay regards *The One Who Is Legion* as Barney's bid to proclaim a transcendental femaleness: "The aim of the creation of the gynandromorph is the emergence of a higher, more perfect being which would re-establish the principle of Femaleness in the universe." (100) Although both Jay and Livia seem to work with notions of androgyny regarding the "nature" of the One, it is striking to see how fast this

notion is neatly fed back into an identity category once more – be it the homosexual or the "gynadromorph".

17 Barney's novel, however, does not allow any such identification of fixed identities, nor does it have an agenda to reinstate "femaleness," transcendental or otherwise. Rather, I would suggest, the novel does something completely different, and *doing* is here an operative term: the focus I propose for a productive reading of the text is deliberately set on what the novel and its "characters" *do* rather than struggling to determine what they *are.* This kind of reading – as opposed to a hermeneutic reading practice – is one Deleuze and Guattari favour and employ, as Claire Colebrook points out:

> It is always possible to read literature as an art of recognition, as about 'ourselves' and 'the' human search for meaning. This art of interpretation or hermeneutics requires that we 'overcode' literature, seeing each text as an expression or representation of some underlying meaning. [...] Alternatively, literature can be read for what it produces, for its transformations. (137)

18 To come back to my hypothesis that the eccentric can be thought of as an unexpected deviation from the centre, I propose that the novel's trajectory describes exactly that: a movement away from what the novel sets as its centre – the dead A.D. – that spins off in many unforeseen directions thus employing eccentricity as a mode of writing. Therefore, *The One Who is Legion* should be aligned with the concept of a Deleuzian minor literature that "does not write to express what it *is* (as though it had an identity to repeat or re-produce)" (Colebrook 118) but creates new styles of perception through a series of becomings and deterritorialisations that contrast sharply with any stable concepts of gender, sexual orientation and, in fact, identity. In contrast to this trajectory, lesbian feminist criticism has employed a strategy to interrupt this eccentric movement by pinning the main "character" down and making it *signify and represent.* Claire Colebrook notes that this line of thinking is often at work when

> we start to think of women's writing as the expression of an underlying femininity that was lying in wait for literary inscription. The group becomes subjugated to an image of its own identity; its becoming is no longer open but is seen as the becoming *of* some specific essence. Writing becomes prescriptive and *majoritarian.* (117)

19 These two different concepts of thinking or, indeed, these different forces, are captured by Deleuze and Guattari with various terms; they are played out on the plane of organisation (which I would align with the reading of Barney's novel by lesbian feminist criticism) on the one hand, and on the plane of consistency on the other (this is the one on which the eccentric trajectory of the novel unfolds):

> The plane of organization or development effectively covers what we have called stratification: Forms and subjects, organs and functions, are "strata" or relations between strata. The plane of consistency or immanence, on the one hand, implies a destratification of all of Nature, by even the most artificial means. The plane of consistency is the body without organs. Pure relations of speed and slowness between particles imply movements of deterritorialization, just as pure affects imply an enterprise of desubjectification. Moreover, the plane of consistency does not preexist the movements of deterritorialization that unravel it, the lines of flight that draw it and cause it to rise to the surface, the becomings that compose it. The plane of organization is constantly working away at the plane of consistency, always trying to plug the lines of flight, stop or interrupt the movements of deterritorialization, weigh them down, restratify them, reconstitute forms and subjects in a dimension of depth. Conversely, the plane of consistency is constantly extricating itself from the plane of organization, causing particles to spin off the strata, scrambling forms by dint of speed or slowness, breaking down functions by means of assemblages or microassemblages. (*ATP* 297/298)

20 As can be observed from this statement, the notions of becoming, deterritorialisation, lines of flight and assemblage are all interrelated. Hopefully, they become clearer as we proceed with the novel. For now, let it suffice to draw attention to the movement of the plane of consistency, especially to the "particles" "spin[ning] off the strata" and to the fact that the movement of deterritorialisation is not anticipated by the plane of consistency – thus, it is a movement that describes exactly the kind of eccentricity I have proposed.[2] The novel effects this movement of deterritorialisation – "the movement by which 'one' leaves the territory" (Deleuze/Guattari *ATP,* 559) – by employing a "character" engaging in becomings and assemblages as opposed to a character with a fixed identity. *The One Who is Legion* effectively disengages from its territory and, indeed, its centre.

21 I would first like to take a closer look at the very beginning of the novel which describes the creation of the main "character" and sets up the relation of the One and its legions to their alleged centre – the dead A.D. The creation of the One makes it clear from the outset that we are not dealing with a subject or being but rather with a becoming in the Deleuzian sense. Becoming is directly related to deterritorialisation as it opposes notions of minority (e.g. lesbian subjects): "Jews, Gypsies, etc., may constitute minorities under certain conditions, but that in itself does not make them becomings. One reterritorializes [...] on a minority as a state; but in a becoming, one is deterritorialized." (Deleuze/Guattari, *ATP,* 321) A minority, then, is constructed by the centre – the state – and so is its prescribed deviation with little leeway for escaping this condition.

[2] "Deterritorialisation frees a possibility or event from its actual origins. [...] Deterritorialisation occurs when an event of becoming escapes or detaches from its original territory" (Colebrook 58/59).

22 The beginning of the novel is set in a gothic Parisian graveyard. Over the grave of the dead A.D., her/his shadow, who is also the narrator, hovers: “I, the most faithful of dead shadows, have hovered about this spot since my master-mistress' burial” (Barney 11). The graveyard is described as reeking with the residue of buried corpses ready to jump on you: “Graveyards are places of infection; not all is taken away by the dead – the diseases of their brain, their last thoughts, their desires, their failures, lurk in the air like poisoned wine to intoxicate the new-comer with the besetting characteristics of the deceased” (Barney 12/13). The “birthplace” of the One can thus be considered as a typical Deleuzian setting of infection that opposes “traditional” ways of conceiving and reproduction:

> How can we conceive of a peopling, a propagation, a becoming that is without filiation or hereditary production? A multiplicity without the unity of an ancestor? It is quite simple; everybody knows it, but it is discussed only in secret. We oppose epidemic to filiation, contagion to heredity, peopling by contagion to sexual reproduction. (Deleuze/Guattari, *ATP,* 266)

The shadow-narrator explains that apart from him/her there are many “disembodied fragments” (Barney 13) who are keen to join a source of light that is also present. The light itself is not a unity either for it contains “so many personages only remotely connected with its centre” (Barney 13). It finally allows the shadow to merge with it and together they enter a genderless dead body they find lying on the ground murdered – “This fallen rider whom a nightmare had thrown seemed neither a man nor a woman” (Barney 15). The resurrection of A.D. is completed by the arrival of a woman who “breathed into the pinched nostrils that expanded to her breath” (Barney 18/19), thus bringing the One to life. The result of the conjunction of A.D's shadow, the light and a dead ungendered body is the multiple entity “the One and its legions” who describe themselves as such: “We've met with too many persons and allowed them all to cross and join in us. We shall never get ourselves clear now. This collective organism must at least be made harmonious” (Barney 24/25). From then on, the narrator also refers to this multiple character using plural forms (“we”, “our”) which can be read as another refusal to attribute gender or a unified identity.

23 Before we look at the One and their legions in more detail, let us briefly return to the alleged centre of the novel, the dead A.D. As has been proposed by various interpretations of the novel, A.D. signifies the dead Renée Vivien whose suicide Barney could not overcome. The resurrection of the One thus serves to investigate the suicide of A.D who killed herself, according to Shari Benstock, because she could not deal with the “effects of self-division in women” (Benstock 299) enforced on her by a patriarchal society. However, One’s efforts at revenging A.D.'s suicide – “We would revenge the suicide, make good the failure, go back in

A.D.'s stead, [...] take over this broken destiny, be stronger than life" (Barney 30) – are immensely complicated by the fact that the One and its legions are reborn without memories.

24 The plot of the novel unfolds in a quasi-detective style, the One trying to piece together fragments and clues about A.D.'s life. This endeavour is complicated and in the end doomed to failure due to several facts. The first is the rather uncertain subject status of A.D. Going back to the beginning of the novel, the reader is left unable to fathom who, or indeed how many, A.D. was/were. The gender question cannot be solved since the narrator refers to A.D. as her/his "master-mistress" (Barney 11), and A.D.'s sexual orientation cannot be pinned down as the One and its legions find love letters to A.D. by male and female admirers. Karla Jay's rather desperate effort to maintain A.D.'s lesbianism is not convincing at all: she argues that the fact that the book the One and its legions find in a chapel close to the graveyard is bound in leather made of breasts "suggest[s] that A.D.'s particular interest was in women" (102). The second complication is that it is left open whether A.D. was indeed one or many or maybe a couple. At the very beginning, the shadow-narrator refers to A.D.'s grave as follows: "I, [...] have hovered about this spot since my master-mistress' burial. This is *our* tombstone with an engraved urn – the double of the urn in which *their* ashes are mingled and sealed togethe." (Barney 11; emphasis added). This passage is highly confusing since it can be read in different ways: one could claim that the narrator is the surviving part of a couple ("our" ashes); or, that A.D. was a hermaphrodite, a "master-mistress": "Had I not already shadowed a master-mistress, a couple so united that I could never cut one from the other in separate silhouettes" (Barney 14). The last sentence in which the narrator detaches himself/herself from A.D. – referring to "their" ashes – brings the final confusion because we can now also view A.D. as consisting of at least two persons. A further confusion arises out of the novel's exceptional set-up "beyond time": since it is the One's task to piece together the fragments of A.D.'s past life and possibly remedy it, the trajectory of progress is to step back in time. This scrambles the whole endeavour and entirely confuses the One whose additional problem is memory loss: "By progressing we risk a fall into the past. What past?" (Barney 25), "As we cannot well remember, let us move on to forget. Movement backward or forward?" (Barney 43). Since the novel ends without providing the reader with a notion of *who* A.D. was and who the One and its legions *are,* I would argue that instead of following the futile attempt in recovering A.D.'s identity, the novel rather invites the reader to drop this detective plot-line altogether. As I have stated earlier, it is much more productive to look at what this novel does and so refuse a narrative of representation and identity.

25 To come back to the question of how the One and its legions are related to their alleged centre – the dead A.D. – it should be obvious by now that the novel thwarts any attempt of the reader to establish a clear-cut connection between the two, the three, the many. This is due to the fact that the resurrection of the One is neither a rebirth nor a creation of a subject but a becoming that typically lacks an origin, is not an imitation of someone else and is therefore not a version of A.D. Deleuze and Guattari's thoughts on becoming and the relation it establishes, or rather evades, between its two reference objects best express the relation between the One and their centre A.D.:

> A line of becoming is not defined by points that it connects, or by points that compose it; on the contrary, it passes *between* points, it comes up through the middle, it runs perpendicular to the points first perceived, transversally to the localizable relation to distant or contiguous points. A point is always a point of origin. But a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination; [...] A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both. (*ATP,* 323)

26 The notion of becoming, as well as much of Deleuzian thought, resonates strongly with the notion of queer and has in recent times often been brought together in productive ways. Cohen and Ramlow, for instance, align the two in the following way:

> These permutations of queer theory share [...] an assertion of the non-teleological, non-unitary status of 'queer', and in doing so directly echo many of Deleuze and Guattari's elaborations on 'becoming'. [...] Becomings have neither origin nor destination; like the queer, they are neither filial nor teleological. They do not confer identity – molar, sedimented, unitary – but produce an entity cobbled from disparate, provisionally allied parts, a relation of affects and speeds. (3)

27 Let us now take a closer look at the One and its legions – not to establish what they are but in order to follow their line of becomings, and to show how their perception of the world opens up new perspectives. A mirror scene follows soon after the resurrection but does nothing to clarify the status of the One either in terms of gender or in terms of a self-recognition:

> The One stood up from the bed, confronting the mirror. A simultaneous succession of reflections, more rapid than vibration, gave back through endless corridors of crystal, *a body*, still partially clothed, the seraphic head charged with new life. The electrical eyes seemed fed from a near battery – that close mesh of blue veins coursing through the temples? (Barney 24; emphasis added)

As this passage shows, the narrator employs the mirror and the light imagery to defer the viewing of the body which is clearly marked as “a” body, indicating both its genderlessness and the One's detachment from it. The One and its legions thus remain unintelligible in terms of gender, and, as a consequence, cannot attain subject status. The dissolution of gender is,

according to Deleuze and Guattari, linked with the notion of the the assemblage – a connection that makes sense when we look at the creation of the One out of light, shadow and a dead ungendered body (a mixture that is certainly highly unlikely to confer gender):

> there are as many sexes as there are terms in symbiosis; as many differences as elements contributing to a process of contagion. We know that many beings pass between a man and a woman; they come from different worlds, are borne on the wind, form rhizomes around roots; they cannot be understood in terms of production, only in terms of becoming. [...] These multiplicities with heterogeneous terms, cofunctioning by contagion, enter certain *assemblages.* (Deleuze/Guattari *ATP,* 267)

28 Gender attribution is also avoided in the depiction of the sexual intercourse of the One and a character called the Glow-Woman (who is a former lover of A.D). The narrative voice takes a detour in its account of the scene: it describes the act by drawing the reader's attention to the shadows of the lovers on the wall:

> too excited to choose a gesture, we battled, finding no issue to each other. Surprise her into unwilling pre-nuptial ecstasy – break in through her hand barriers? Bedded on the wall, our shadow cut an audacious figure [...]. Were we they .... were they we? Where joined, where separate? Lie down, you shadow woman, and beget us darkness, semblances to feed our Shadows on. (Barney 81)

In addition to the refusal to depict gendered bodies in this scene, the narrative perspective further complicates issues: "we battled" could either refer to the One battling with the woman or to the One battling with the legions. The next sentence indicates that they ponder „taking" the woman using a certain amount of force – an endeavour that could be aligned with male sexual behaviour. Then the narrator blurs the boundaries completely, asking which is which. Finally, the imperative of the One that the shadow woman "beget us darkness" connotes a female gender rather than a male.

29 A third passage similarly shows the narrator's refusal to reveal the body of the One as a gendered body – a fact that is all the more obvious since the One and its legions get drenched to the bone, an event which could easily reveal their sex. Instead, the narrator again employs light imagery to describe, or rather to avoid the description of the One's body. Furthermore, the One and its legions appear translucent and reflect back their surroundings:

> Under the curdling white shirt the One appeared drenched in nakedness. The rhododendrons' reflection made a stained-glass of the transparent flushed cheeks and the translucid eyes. The thin enamel of the teeth let the under-light through. Broken prism were playing about everywhere. The base of a rainbow feeding with fresh colours the pigment of the flowers. (Barney 39)

30 Not only do they reflect their surroundings due to being transparent; since the One and its legions are a multiple entity, an assemblage, their body is open and prone to connect with all kinds of things. This ability once again scrambles the notion of a deviance that revolves

around terms easily anticipated. Instead, the One and its legions are a creature that seems to come straight out of Deleuze/Guattari: “a multiplicity [...] continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities, according to its thresholds and doors. [...] And at each threshold or door, a new pact?” (Deleuze/Guattari *ATP,* 275) Right after their resurrection, the One and its legions experience this state of openness and becoming one with their surroundings as follows: “The body baring itself for communion, receptive of efflux and influx, ready for exchange, taking from passing things their pleasure-hints, unions innocent of possession” (Barney 16). In this state before the One and its legions encounter others who will make claims of possession, they can be aligned with the Deleuzian notion of a desiring machine which “constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows” (Deleuze/Guattari *AO,* 6). Wherever the One and its legions go, they merge with their surroundings: “We became so easily what we chanced to see, to sense, divine, that we had some difficulty in summing back our legion” (Barney 85). The legions seem to be wandering off continually and form new alliances with all kinds of things. Likewise, the One's perception of the world is dominated by a loss of boundaries, by things merging into one another – “Hardly discernible the uniting of trees with their reflections, the exchange of river with road, each becoming the other” (Barney 79) – and by unforeseen new alliances and assemblages. For instance, the One and its legions perceive a stop at a gas station as a merging of human and machine: “we slowed down and stopped before the blue-oblong-breasted-red-machine woman who nourished the motor. [...] The machine-woman's umbilical tube had been taken from our motor to another” (Barney 58/59). The people at a railway station are all perceived as hybrid beings, ranging from a “falcon profile asleep under hood” to “a mastiff dog-faced mother, deserted by her batch” (Barney 84). The perception of other people is frequently linked to gender ambiguity: “Women in masks seated by men in beards; some sphinx-like heads bound up in leather helmet. Women or men?” (Barney 56). Although the One and its legions perceive some people as clearly gendered, the preferred mode of seeing is not to attribute gender characteristics: “Fairer to look at a strenuous adolescence, androgynous through exercise, male hardly distinguishable from female” (Barney 61).

31 Since the One and its legions *become* everything, they scramble the notion of ever having emerged from or related to a centre: “to be all. The ebb of life within charged with life from without” (Barney 31). This move can certainly be called eccentric according to my definition since it is ever changing, not to be anticipated and, in the end, leaves nothing to deviate *from*. Deleuze and Guattari refer to this way of perceiving as becoming imperceptible;

rejecting the common way in which we perceive the world, namely by sorting perceptions into objects,

> we become *imperceptible* [...] by becoming one with the flow of images that is life. [...] By approaching or imagining the inhuman point of view of animals, machines, and molecules we no longer take ourselves as unchanging perceivers set over and against life. We immerse ourselves in the flow of life's perceptions. (Colebrook 128)

At the end of their "quest," the One and its legions fuse back into A.D.'s tombstone and become literally imperceptible by dissolving further and further: "We looked at our hands, through our hands, our bloodless shadowless hands, relieved from form and motion, folded within each other, at rest in the still centre of movement, as immaterial as the crystal air, and hardly distinguishable from the crystal objects still about us" (Barney 157).

32 The One and its legions "are" not a subject but engage in a line of becoming that brings them further and further away from their alleged centre. It should also have become quite clear that whatever they "are" or become, we are certainly not dealing with a suppressed lesbian subject.

4. Conclusion

33 If a minor literature has the power to engage in a movement of deterritorialisation, Barney's main "character(s)" certainly proceed upon this path. The One and its legions move on a Deleuzian line of flight that is "a path of mutation precipitated through the actualisation of connections among bodies that were previously only implicit" (Parr 145). In doing so, they radically undermine the notion of a stable and clearly gendered subject that progresses and evolves in predictable ways. Through constantly engaging the reader in a radically different way of perceiving the world, the novel thwarts any attempt to be pinned down, categorised and made to represent a certain (lesbian) identity. This novel resists falling into a dynamic of centre and periphery because of its constant, unexpected turns, alliances, becomings. Lotman's model aptly captured the novel's treatment by lesbian critics because it showed that they indeed operate strongly on a binary centre-periphery dynamics. This runs counter to anything this novel attempts to do: it offers us a truly eccentric way of writing that spins off its centre in entirely unforeseen ways. These "particles [...] spin[ning] off the strata" will never be captured by the "plane of organisation" (*ATP* 297/298), or, in other words: no matter how hard you squeeze, you will never make an eccentric orbit circular.

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