Mapping *Nightwood*: Spatially Precise or Experimental Mapping

By Ryan Bilbee and Rachel Cruz

There are many places named in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* though they largely focus on Paris around the *Église Saint-Sulpice* in the city's Latin quarter. Some are concrete locations that can be mapped from fiction into reality others name a broad location with no specificity. For named locations seeing them represented visually is helpful to someone unfamiliar with Paris and Vienna. Leah Lynch applies Elizabeth Freeman's queer temporalities to the novel and locations the strange time and the non-concrete place of the circus where Nora and Robin meet is one such example. Alex Christie uses a Z-Axis tool to map a text's locations on a map which adds points that rise out of the 2D map to show how often locations are mentioned. About modernist critics Christie says, ''All too frequently they think of modernist experimentation as simply heightened realism, following the sort of isomorphic approach to mapping novels enabled by technologies such as Google Earth, which uses precise pins and accurate base maps to locate fictional events in actual cities' (Christie). There is a place for the experimentation of different types of mapping over that of google maps or a different mapping software is important for the types of information they can provide. Christie argues for a Paris that is divided between fluid homosexual Latin Quarter and the rigid straight areas around the Champs-Élysées as he displays in the z-axis map.

However, someone unfamiliar with Paris, France, and Vienna will not be able to easily understand the spatial movement in the novel. Robin and Felix walk around Vienna, 'they walked before the Imperial Palace' (47). A google search for Imperial Palace Vienna gives the Hofburg, where the Hapsburg dynasty ruled. Shortly later they are in the Kammergarten and Gloriette a little under 4 miles away from the Imperial Palace. This does not make sense there

must be another Imperial Palace in Vienna and sure enough there is; it is the Schönbrunn Palace which is not 4 miles away like the Hofburg. This is one example of confusion that can occur if readers are not familiar with the real geography the fictional events occur. From a static two-dimensional map pinned with locations from *Nightwood* can lead to other visuals gleaned from the text. With Paris in the novel littered with so many place names that can be mapped to see the spatial relationship between the locations the ambiguous are even more interesting. Nora is immediately known as a 'Westerner' an American but the part of America is unclear if she is like Dr. Matthew O'Connor from California or if she is from New York where she meets Robin at the circus. These ambiguities allow for different types of interpretation. The scene where Robin and Nora meet at the Denkmann Circus in New York has no concrete location like those in Paris or Vienna. The ambiguous space not concretely grounded in reality allows Jane Marcus to say— about the circus—that it 'enacts freedom from culture and inverts the ordinary' (Marcus 186). The ambiguity of a physical location in reality allows for these interpretations that are seemingly outside of reality. Robins wandering the different churches in France once mapped shows the distance she traveled. Mapping the fictional on the real is a tool to help imagine the distances traveled by characters. Freeman in another text makes the claim that '*Nightwood* uses religion to reject the regime of sexuality' (Sacra/Mentality 740). Throughout the two paragraphs of Robin wandering to different religious sites there interwoven are comments about Robin being not quite a woman, 'a tall girl with the body of a boy' and 'her feet large and as earthly as the feet of a monk' (Barnes 50). Yet the distances between all churches shows the time that Robin spent on her 'Catholic vow' before turning to history and the secular (Barnes 49).

Mapping *Nightwood* either experimentally with a three-dimensional map or simply placing pins on a satellite-accurate map has its place in the interpretation of texts. I will go a step

further to say that for those unfamiliar with the locations and as a pedagogical tool the satellite accurate map is the most accessible tool compared to the z-axis map.