

DJUNA BARNES

b. June 12, 1892

d. June 18, 1982

AUTHOR

“The truth is how you say it, and to be ‘one’s self’ is the most shocking custom of all.”

Writers such as Truman Capote and Bertha Harris have cited Barnes as an inspiration for their works.

Djuna Barnes was a prominent modernist writer known for her experimental style and edgy themes.

Born in Cornwall-on-Hudson, New York, to a polygamist family, she was inspired to write by her grandmother, a feminist writer and journalist. As a child, Barnes was sexually abused by family members. In 1909, she was forced to marry her father’s brother-in-law. Two months later, she left him.

In 1912, Barnes moved to Greenwich Village and began writing for magazines and newspapers. She had affairs with men and women. She wrote novels, including “The Book of Repulsive Woman: 8 Rhythms and 5 Drawings” and “Paprika Johnson.”

She moved to Paris, where she lived with Thelma Wood, her lover and fellow artist. Barnes became involved in the Parisian lesbian community, which is depicted in her privately printed novel, “Ladies Almanack.”

In 1931, after her relationship with Wood ended, Barnes relocated to England. She stayed in a country manor with other writers and literary critics. She wrote “Nightwood,” her best-known novel, which received attention for its stylistic excellence.

So impressed by the book, T.S. Elliot wrote the introduction and became involved in its publication. “Nightwood” depicts desire between women and challenges the gender binary.

In 1939, Barnes returned to New York, where she lived in relative solitude for the remainder of her life. She continued writing plays and poetry that challenged heteronormativity and the lifestyles of the upper class. She often drew from her own life experiences, exploring themes of abuse and sexuality in a number of her works.

Barnes’s writing had a significant impact on modernist literature. Writers such as Truman Capote and Bertha Harris have cited Barnes as an inspiration for their works. She is recognized as a pioneer of lesbian literature.



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