



# Colorado Book Club Resource

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR NIGHTWOOD BY DJUNA BARNES

1. *Nightwood* is rich in characters who adopt falsely-constructed identities, whether as a rejection of societal norms or as a means of self-defense. What are the implications of such alterations in identity? Do these characters succeed in shedding their original selves, or do they end up trapped within layers of deceit?
2. Discuss the idea of motherhood as it is presented in the book. Is motherhood seen as a desirable or undesirable condition? How does this narrative differ from or reflect the societal norms of the time? Can we consider these attitudes to motherhood a critique or an acceptance of the feminine condition?
3. The book's title *Nightwood* and the repeated references to day and night have strong symbolic undertones throughout the narrative. Does this concept of night and day present a clear dichotomy of the good versus evil narrative, or does it aim to break free from such binary perspectives?
4. Barnes presents cosmopolitanism as both freedom and a potential trap for the characters. How does the movement and constant shifting of geographical locations affect the identity of characters like Felix and Robin? Does it liberate them or make them more confused in their personal identities?
5. In a book teeming with characters wrestling with issues related to identity and societal norms, Barnes presents a clear depiction of a multicultural, cosmopolitan society. How does she address racism and anti-Semitism within this narrative? Does she offer any solutions, or does she merely portray the reality of prejudice and bigotry of her time?
6. Robin Vote is a complex character, characterized by her rebellious and untamed spirit. Given her unusual approach, do you think her character symbolizes the idea of freedom from societal and gender norms, or is she merely a chaotic, self-destructive figure?
7. Through Doctor Matthew O'Connor, the book explores the struggles of sexual orientation and gender identity. Does O'Connor's struggle provide a commendable representation of LGBTQ+ individuals, or does it perpetuate negative stereotypes? Attempt to address this question within the literary conventions of the time the book was written, as well as in the context of today's society.
8. Felix Vollbein and his father, Guido Vollbein, both grapple with issues of identity and authenticity. How has this struggle shaped their character? Are they merely victims of societal persecution, or do they contribute to their own identity issues? Can we draw a parallel between this and Robin's struggle with norms, or are these two separate manifestations of a common theme?
9. Nora Flood is often dubbed as a character of purity and naivety. How does her character portray the struggle between maintaining one's innocence and navigating the harsh realities of the world? Is her devotion to Robin a sign of love or self-destruction?



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10. Jenny Pentherbridge is presented as a “squatter”, inhabiting and mimicking the lives of others. Could this behavior indicate a deeper, existential issue she is grappling with, or is she just a charming opportunist? Does her character add depth and complexity to the novel, or does it contribute unnecessary drama?
11. Often in *Nightwood*, characters hide or manipulate their identities using costumes. Can you find examples of this and discuss what you think the author is trying to convey about authenticity and identity?
12. The natural world, and particularly plants and decay, play a significant symbolic role in the novel. How do these motifs connect with the theme of queer and non-gender conforming communities in the 1930s?
13. Robin's behavior with dolls serves as a metaphor for her relationships and personal struggles. How did you interpret these scenes and do you think they reflect broader societal attitudes towards women's roles as mothers?
14. Lions and lionesses are used to symbolize feminine sexuality and anima in *Nightwood*. Can you think of any moments where this motif impacted you and how did it influence your understanding of the characters' identities and desires?
15. Churches appear several times throughout *Nightwood* offering different things to different characters. How did the use of this symbol enhance your understanding of the religious and spiritual tones in the novel?"

***Discussion questions created by AI from SuperSummary.com.***



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