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**“A Soul in Physical Stress”: Transgender Epistemologies in *Nightwood***

**Abstract:** The present article questions the common label assigned to *Nightwood*'s character Dr. Matthew O'Connor, widely analysed as a homosexual transvestite in spite of the various narrative implications that would reconfigure the ambiguities inherent to their gender identity. As a character in a novel considered to be as discriminatory as it is emancipatory, O'Connor is a main character treated as secondary and punished for their exclusion from standards of normativity. I employ the arguments brought forth by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1910 in order to consolidate the understanding of O'Connor as a transgender woman, as well as the views of Esther Newton on drag and camp discourses, in order to retrace the reasons for O'Connor's critical interpretation as a mere male cross-dresser, a theatrical vision whose femaleness is assigned a performative rather than an identitarian value. Apart from the importance of demarcating transvestism from transsexuality, O'Connor's wretched treatment and the impossibility of their transitioning is equally relevant. Their transition is envisioned as a matter of embodiment, and their expressed wishes of patriarchal female ideals point to an essentialist transgender narrative that consolidates matters of 'passing' that follow mimetic gender ideologies. The path to recognition requires the displacement of hegemonic standards of normativity, in favour of the recreation of the masculine/feminine dichotomy and the fragmentation of expectations for a sexed transitioned product. O'Connor's pessimistic narrative arc could be seen within the context of an indirect and subverted call for political change coming from the author, whereby transphobia is both reinforced and negotiated.

**Keywords:** transgender, queer, modernism, transition, camp, drag, gender