

**A Theory of the Viability of Incest: Djuna Barnes's *Ryder*, *The Antiphon*, and *Nightwood***

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## Abstract

In her three major works, *Ryder* (1928), *The Antiphon* (1958), and *Nightwood* (1936), Djuna Barnes explores incest as a mode of being and relating. She focuses on the relationships among the Ryders of *Ryder*, the Hobbses of *The Antiphon*, and between Nora Flood and Robin Vote of *Nightwood* as her three primary instantiations of the incestuous family apparatus. Taken together, Barnes's works present a scale of viability for the incestuous relationship. Through engagement with Barnes's work and her implicit theory of incest, this project seeks to investigate and challenge normative categories of viable relationships that currently do not (nor did they in Barnes's time) include incestuous relationships. Barnes's work suggests that it is the individual instantiations of the incestuous family apparatus that make incest a viable mode of being and relating, just as it is the individual instantiations of the non-incestuous family apparatus that allow the normative definition of the family to thrive. Barnes presents familial relationships as *not taboo*, and suggests that incest is not necessarily concomitant with trauma, fantasy, or abuse. Through analysis of Barnes's work, this thesis sheds new light on a central dimension of Barnes's work. In addition, through Barnes's conceptions and presentations of incest, the project seeks to open up new understandings of incestuous relationships and their implications, as well as, more generally, consider ways to expand the range of ways-of-life – what I call *livelihoods* – accepted as valid and valuable (*viable*) by North American and European culture.

## Résumé

Dans ses trois principaux ouvrages, *Ryder* (1928), *The Antiphon* (1958), and *Nightwood* (1936), Djuna Barnes étudie l'inceste, sous tous ses aspects, en tant que façon d'être et comme moyen relationnel. Elle se concentre sur ces relations à travers les Ryders dans *Ryder*, les Hobbses dans l'*Antiphon* ainsi qu'entre Nora Flood et Robin Vote dans *Nightwood*, comme ses trois principaux cas de l'appareil familial incestueux. L'oeuvre de Barnes mis bout à bout représente l'échelle de viabilité de la relation incestueuse.

À travers l'engagement de Barnes dans son travail et sa théorie implicite de l'inceste, ce projet vise à questionner et défier les catégories normatives de rapports viables excluant, de nos jours et du temps de Barnes, la présence de rapports incestueux.

L'oeuvre de Barnes propose que dans chaque cas, chaque individu de l'appareil familial incestueux fait de l'inceste une façon d'être viable et un moyen relationnel, de même que dans chaque cas, chaque individu d'un appareil familial non incestueux permet la définition normative de la famille épanouit.

Barnes aborde la relation familiale comme *sans tabou*, et suggère que l'inceste ne coïncide pas nécessairement à traumatisme, fantasme, ou abus. Par l'analyse de son oeuvre, cette thèse éclaire une nouvelle avenue à la dimension centrale de son travail.

De plus, dans les conceptions et les présentations de l'inceste de Barnes, ce projet tend à ouvrir de nouveaux horizons des relations incestueuses ainsi que leurs implications, autant que, de façon général, élargir la gamme de modes de vie, que j'appelle *moyens de subsistance*, acceptée comme valide et valable, dans le sens de *viable* dans la culture Nord-américaine et européenne.

## Table of Contents

Abstract 2

Résumé 3

Acknowledgements 5

Introduction 6

Chapter One: Testing the Viability of Incest in *Ryder*

- I. Members of the Family: Inescapably Collective Bodies 15
- II. Members of Society: The Citizen/Outlaw Metonym for Incest 24

Chapter Two: Expanding the Scale of Viability with *The Antiphon*

- I. Confusion and Abuse in the Hobbs Family 41
- II. Confusion and Abuse Without Trauma in the Potentially Viable Incestuous Family 60

Chapter Three: Constructing and Choosing Incest in *Nightwood*

- I. Viability in the Constructed Family: Nora and Robin 75
- II. Endorsing Viability in Incest: Scaling *Ryder*, *The Antiphon*, and *Nightwood* 93

Conclusion 99

Works Cited 102

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And to my beloved creature in an alphabet, Cale Johnson Passmore, I dedicate this thesis. Learning with me from Barnes, and learning with me every day in the continuous present, thank you, Cale, for your infinite love and being-with.

## Introduction

Together in *Ryder* (1928), *Nightwood* (1936), and *The Antiphon* (1958), Djuna Barnes explores incest as a mode of individuals being and individuals relating. Incest in Barnes's three major works is not a site of trauma, fantasy, or taboo; it is a site of viability and livelihood. Through the presentation of incest in these three works, Barnes expands the category of what I call *livelihood*, simultaneously opening up the notion of the family apparatus, herein taken to be an apparatus of being and relating. Carolyn Allen, a Barnes scholar in whom my project finds support, argues, "*Nightwood* may be read as a theoretical fiction, or as a fiction of theory – a narrative that produces theory as well as a story" ("Erotics of Nora's Narrative" 181). Although Allen here only references the novel *Nightwood*, my project explains the implicit theory of the viability of incest that emerges not only out of Barnes's *Nightwood*, but also in conjunction with Barnes's novel *Ryder*, and her late play *The Antiphon*. Exploring each work in an individual chapter, and creating a dialogue among these works, I argue for what I view as Barnes's development of a theory of incest as viable. While Barnes's implied theory is in the form of "a fiction of theory," my project explores these fictions in order to articulate this theory of the viability of incest as a critical resource to the reader of Barnes's "stories," as it arises together from *Ryder* (chapter one), *The Antiphon* (chapter two), and *Nightwood* (chapter three).

For Barnes, incest is more easily (or readily) defined than family. In Barnes's works, incest is presented as a relationship with sexual and/or romantic intentions or actions between two or more members of the same family. These individuals may be of the same biological/"biological" or constructed family of origin or the same biological/"biological" or constructed family of extension (i.e. aunt, uncle, etc., rather than brother, sister, mother, father, grandmother, grandchild, etc.). Biological is meant to signify blood relationships, as in the traditional definition of the family and familial relatedness; "biological" (e.g. surrogacy, adoption, foster care) is meant to signify those familial relationships that are understood to compose the same bond (are *pro tanto* similar to) as biological relationships. Biological/"biological" types of relatedness all differ

from the constructed familial relationships as per Nora and Robin in *Nightwood*, who are not familially related until adulthood, beyond the point at which typical biological/“biological” relatedness is secured and enacted. This does not rule out estranged relatives, for example, from being considered part of biological/“biological” families, but rather places them in those very categories as *less common* examples of such types of familial relatedness. A major defining feature of the constructed family of origin (or extension) in Barnes’s work is the lack of biological/“biological” relation combined with the marked lack of interaction among (constructed family) members before adulthood. Finally, the constructed family apparatus (of origin or extension) comes *after* each member of the constructed family apparatus has left his/her respective biological/“biological” family of origin.

Incest is the more conceptually straightforward term in Barnes’s work, while the family involved is the variably defined term. An incestuous relationship may occur *within* the biological/“biological” family of origin or extension, or *without* such. *Without* the biological/“biological” family is the constructed family. For Barnes, relationships *outside of* the family of origin or extension are not considered incestuous. The family has no definitive form that arises out of her works, but together, all of her families present a conception of the family that has no penchant for exclusion (i.e. she does not limit her definition of the family). Barnes hereby plays with what constitutes the family, rather than what (normatively) constitutes incest (this definition is mostly unproblematized). Family, as we see in Barnes, has no fixed definition; rather, family operates as the aegis under which a series of relationships take place (thereby constituting incest).<sup>1</sup>

The principal ideas of the progressive and developmental theory of the viability of incest (in short form: theory of incest) suggested by Barnes’s work are those that I term *viability* and *livelihood*. These ideas, while explored throughout

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<sup>1</sup> Barnes is willing to present, and insists on presenting, “alternatives” to the normative – the normative family apparatus, the normative sexual and/or romantic relationship. In “A Story beside(s) Itself: The Language of Loss in Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood*,” Victoria L. Smith notes that “the dominant ideology naturalizes some forms of love as normal and others as special or aberrant” (198), while Barnes adamantly resists this tendency.

each Barnes text and each thesis chapter, or perhaps especially because of this, repay explanation here. *Viability* indicates that some mode of being and/or relating is possible (i.e. incestuous being and relating); moreover, it suggests that a mode of being and/or relating is socio-culturally recognized as valuable, valid, and encouraged, in a specific context, to thrive. This means that if a mode of being and relating is considered to be viable by the individuals involved as well as by socio-cultural standards in a certain context, then a type of livelihood exists. *Livelihood* is *pro tanto* similar to “being and relating,” and involves the subject considering his/her being and relationships viable. For one to consider one’s livelihood viable, one desires this livelihood to be acknowledged as valuable – to be endorsed. This socio-cultural valuation of a particular mode of being and relating (-cum-livelihood) is of great importance in achieving viability.

While livelihood may seem, then, to include any and all possible modes of being and relating, in my reading of what Barnes’s work suggests, it does not. Types of being and/or relating that are merely livable (when “livable” is defined as literally endurable without consideration for the desirability of the mode or resultant physical and mental “health” of the individual(s) involved in the mode) are not viable, and thus, do not give rise to a type of livelihood. A mode of being and relating that is considered *viable* constitutes *livelihood*, and a mode of being and relating that *is not* considered *viable* constitutes simply *livability*. Whether or not the socio-cultural standards of a particular time deem a mode of being and relating viable, the individuals involved in such a mode, whether permanently or temporarily, are still living this mode. Simply because some mode of being and relating is “able to be lived” (endured) does not mean it is desired by (or “healthy for,” if such is taken to mean “encourages the individuals and their relationships to thrive”) the individuals living this mode, nor by the socio-cultural standards of these individuals’ particular time. *Livelihood* is determined by socio-cultural standards of acceptance or endorsement of a mode of being and relating, whereas *livability* is determined by the mere force of will, ability, or circumstance of



particular individuals.<sup>2</sup> Attaining viability for the incestuous family apparatus is the ideal toward which Barnes's implied theory of incest is directed, and thus is what the current project aims to bear out and explore in Barnes's three major works.

Throughout Barnes's texts, and thus throughout my current project, the mode of being and relating in question is that of the incestuous family. In *Ryder*, *The Antiphon*, and *Nightwood* the incestuous family apparatus in its fictive incarnations speaks to the realm of the real, and such relationships in this realm. This composes a theory of the viability of livelihoods seated in incest – both literary and real – while necessarily maintained primarily as a theory of the viability of the livelihoods of the characters in each of Barnes's texts. Considering the Ryders of *Ryder*, the Hobbsses of *The Antiphon*, and (primarily) Nora Flood and Robin Vote of *Nightwood*, I explore how Barnes expands the categories of being and relating to exemplify and validate or endorse the incestuous family apparatus and its concomitant individuals as a viable structure for livelihood – in literature, and in the realm of the real.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> My use of “livability,” “viability,” “livelihood” (and their other forms) comes from a close reading of Barnes in terms of what this project claims about Barnes's implicit theory of incest. These key terms come from this close reading of the ways in which Barnes conceives and presents incest in her three major works (which will each be treated in an individual chapter). After discerning these key terms from reading Barnes's works, I came upon, and spent much time considering, Judith Butler's account of incest in *Undoing Gender*, and have investigated her use of the terms “livable,” “viable,” “unviable,” and “viability” in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* Ultimately, her conceptions and uses of these terms are different than my own (as is her understanding of incest). Butler uses these terms (in *Bodies That Matter*) in order to facilitate her discussion of identity and the “cultural viability” of various identities, focusing primarily on sexual identities of individuals. Butler's idea of “cultural viability” is very much in keeping with my project's conceptions of livelihood and viability – although my project uses these ideas to understand the incestuous family apparatus as it appears in Barnes's works and as it forms Barnes's implied theory of incest. Moreover, given Butler's account of incest in *Undoing Gender*, the theoretical underpinnings of her uses of “livable,” “viable,” and “unviable” are not in line with this thesis's project of opening up “cultural viability” to include the incestuous family apparatus (and the individuals who make up such a structure). Given that Butler's account of incest is predominantly and significantly different than Barnes's, it would be disingenuous to apply Butler's ideas of what leads to “cultural viability” to this project in any large way. Finally, the uses of such terms as “livable,” “viable,” “livelihood,” etc. in this thesis are indeed my own coinages, coming out of the close reading of the implications of Barnes's implied theory of the viability of incest in her three major works, *Ryder*, *The Antiphon*, and *Nightwood*.

<sup>3</sup> Cristina L.H. Traina's article, “Maternal Experience and the Boundaries of Christian Sexual Ethics,” discusses incest primarily in terms of the relationship between the nursing mother and infant. Traina's statements regarding the experience of breastfeeding for the nursing mother, in terms of her sexuality and her relationship to received understandings of normative sexuality, are

Barnes does not simply open up what are considered or ought to be considered viable livelihoods, however, as she also interrogates the definition of the family itself, offering a non-normative theory of family. She explores incest through what will be referred to as the family of origin (as well as relationships outside of this family of origin). The incestuous family apparatus in Barnes does not have a set number of roles, or a predetermined idea of who ought to fill each role. Barnes's characters suggest that one cannot understand oneself if one does not understand one's family, and that one cannot understand one's family if one does not understand oneself; however, for Barnes this family apparatus of which one is a part is not limited to nor does it exclude any particular arrangement or combination of familial roles. In each of Barnes's texts, she understands and presents each incarnation of "the family" – here the incestuous family apparatus – as having a degree of viability. Examining each apparatus's degree(s) of viability allows one to understand the progressive development of Barnes's understanding of viability and incest across her three major works. This examination and understanding of how Barnes opens up *life* for each text's characters, and for the reader, audience member, and critic is the driving force of each thesis chapter.

To illuminate the most sensitive and most usable account of Barnes's implied theory of incest that emerges together from *Ryder*, *The Antiphon*, and *Nightwood*, my project necessarily engages the existing body of Barnes criticism, as well as the existing theory and history of incest. While there is certain overlap between these two areas of existing scholarship, this area of intersection arises primarily between biographical Barnes criticism and theoretical commentary on

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particularly apt in their application to Barnes's understanding and presentation of incest and its relationship to the reader/audience member and his/her reception and opinion of the incestuous family apparatus (incestuous relationships, individuals) as viable:

These feelings [of pleasure while breastfeeding] may well be experienced as problematic. A nursing mother may see her pleasure as sexual by association and add it to her definition of her sexuality (defining it by similarity of sensation), or she may see its lack of coherence with her previous understanding of sexuality as threatening and so reject it from her own definition of (appropriate) sexuality (defining it by similarity of action or formal definition). Moral approbation affects description: one must decide whether an inclination or sensation is good before making it part of one's vision of oneself (presumably a vision one can live with). And one may not even "feel" it if one is previously convinced that it is bad or (less judgmental) does not fit one's picture of oneself or one's relationship – for instance, the same sort of hug can feel "sexual" in one context and "platonic" in another. Ought can determine is. (382)

the abusive or traumatic incestuous relationship. My project will not take a biographical approach to Barnes's work, despite the vast amount written on Barnes's family life, which is likely to have involved one or several incestuous relationships. Instead, I focus on Barnes's texts – these *texts* make up her *theory* of incest – where we are certain *not* to find her presentation of incestuous family apparatuses as “symptomatic” of the “disease” of incest, or as the “writing cure” for her traumatic incestuous experiences. Nevertheless, I engage biographical studies of Barnes and her texts when necessary to my project. Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* remains a standard source for biographical criticism, focusing primarily on Barnes's place in modernist studies as inflected by feminist criticism and/or gender studies. Phillip Herring's *Djuna: The Life and Work of Djuna Barnes* is also beneficial in its comprehensive scope of Barnes's life and work, and is typically taken to be the most accurate source for biographical Barnes information. I also draw from *Hayford Hall: Hangovers, Erotics, and Modernist Aesthetics*, as the contributors to this volume, edited by Elizabeth Podnieks and Sandra Chait, offer an updated account of Barnes's work in her life, while prior studies are growing outmoded in their understandings of gender, sexuality, and for my purposes especially, the family.

While formal and textual readings of Barnes notably lack discussion of incest, they are nevertheless imperative to a project that seeks to infer a theory of incest from a body of fiction (recalling Allen's expression above). Louis F. Kannenstine's *The Art of Djuna Barnes: Duality and Damnation*, still prevalent in Barnes criticism, will be important because of its varied approach to Barnes's texts; his study is conservative where one expects it to evoke the avant-garde, and praises Barnes's vanguard voice where one expects it to condemn her for the same. Cheryl J. Plumb's *Fancy's Craft: Art and Identity in the Early Works of Djuna Barnes*, and AnnKatrin Jonsson's *Relations: Ethics and the Modernist Subject in James Joyce's Ulysses, Virginia Woolf's The Waves and Djuna Barnes's Nightwood* take up the formalist, aesthetic, and textual project that Kannenstine begins, although Jonsson examines these three projects in terms of ethics. *Fancy's Craft* features Plumb's arguments about the symbolism in/of

Barnes's early work, while *Relations* opposes such a symbolist reading of Barnes, and instead locates Barnes's very ethics in this opposition. In *Relations*, Jonsson notes: "I adhere to the work of Drucilla Cornell and Andrew Gibson, both of whom see imagination as essential to ethics. This kind of literary and poetic imagination has 'a power to break up the given to admit and elaborate the possible'" (20). While critics such as Plumb would have Barnes's presentation of incest hold symbolic power, and serve as a disembodied discourse of themes, Jonsson insists that Barnes's "power" lies in her presentation of her characters as beings-in-the-world, capable of changing socio-cultural normativity in Barnes's time and the present time (in the realm of the real). In this vein, Jonsson continues: "Ethics is the sphere in which (poetic) imagination is understood as possessing the power to hold open morality, to restrain it from violence or domination" (20). Of Barnes's *Nightwood*, and, by extrapolation, *Ryder* and *The Antiphon*, Jonsson describes: "The [texts] all opt for a new way of relating the subject and the world, a relation that offers resistance to the common inscription of alienation and individualism ascribed to the narration of modernism" (38) – and, one might add, of incest.<sup>4</sup> My project is in agreement with Jonsson's work, while valuing Plumb's work (carried on in Plumb's invaluable edition of *Nightwood* by Dalkey Archive Press). Ultimately, I find the ethical foundation of Jonsson's work in *Relations*, which is also carried out in her volume edited with Anna Fahreus, *Textual Ethos Studies or Locating Ethics*, more in keeping with my own approach to Barnes.

Other current criticism takes up the contextual and textual/formal discussion of Barnes's work, as well: Alex Goody's *Modernist Articulations: A Cultural Study of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy, and Gertrude Stein* situates Barnes in the context of her avant-garde contemporaries. Diane Warren's *Djuna Barnes' Consuming Fictions* provides the most comprehensive current exploration of Barnes's oeuvre – considering her major works, including the rarely addressed

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<sup>4</sup> In keeping with this, Jonsson, speaking of Barnes's *Nightwood* (and applicable to *Ryder* and *The Antiphon*), argues that Barnes's work "[makes] an effort to point to the other-than-recognized – to represent, but differently" (*Relations* 41; emphasis added). Barnes (re)presents incest, the incestuous relationship, the incestuous individual (the "other-than-recognized" by normative socio-culture), and represents them not as taboo – she represents them, "but differently."

*Antiphon*, but also her journalism. Bonnie Kime Scott provides a broad scope of investigation in her *Refiguring Modernism, Volume One: The Women of 1928*, and *Refiguring Modernism, Volume Two: Postmodern Feminist Readings of Woolf, West, and Barnes* while still providing sensitive detail in her examination of Barnes's major works and their contexts – biographical, literary, and socio-cultural.

To foster the socio-cultural understanding of Barnes's work on which my project is focused, it is necessary to consult the most prominent instances in Barnes criticism of the discussion of the avant-garde or taboo. Requisite to my project has been an investment in other critical responses to or explorations of Barnes's presentation of the "unspeakable" in order to gain an understanding of the ways in which such subjects have been treated, and to orient my speaking about one of the twentieth century's last "unspeakables": incest. While Nancy Bombaci, in *Freaks in Late Modernist Culture: Nathanael West, Djuna Barnes, Tod Browning, and Carson McCullers*, focuses on the sexual "freaks" or "freakishness" in Barnes's work, highlighting *Nightwood*, she does not directly treat incest. Bombaci does, however, open up the field of Barnes studies by situating Barnes with other "freak" writers rather than the traditional modernist contemporaries. Jane Marcus and Dianne Chisholm provide two of the most prominent in-depth article-length studies of Barnes's "taboo" subjects in *Nightwood*. Marcus's "Laughing at Leviticus: 'Nightwood' as Woman's Circus Epic" and Chisholm's "Obscene Modernism: Eros Noir and the Profane Illumination of Djuna Barnes" will be discussed throughout the upcoming chapters, as will Bombaci's study.

While the above review of critical literature entails a marked lack of criticism of *Ryder* and *The Antiphon*, this is because there is just such a lack in available Barnes scholarship, which primarily focuses on *Nightwood*. I suspect that this will change, as more studies become devoted to Barnes's oeuvre – or part thereof – and less fixed on *Nightwood*. And while there is no existing critical resource devoted to an exploration or delineation of the theory of the viability of

incest suggested by Barnes's fictions, I offer such a study in the following chapters.

## Chapter One: Testing the Viability of Incest in *Ryder*

### I. Members of the Family: Inescapably Collective Bodies

In order to establish the necessary background for what I argue regarding livelihood and viability throughout *Ryder* and Barnes's work, I begin with Michel Foucault's debate with Noam Chomsky, "Human Nature: Justice vs. Power," and a remark by Chomsky:

Let's think again of a human child, who has in his[/her] mind some schematism that determines the kind of language he[/she] can learn. Okay. And then given experience, he[/she] very quickly knows the language, of which this experience is a part, or in which it is included. (23)

Just as the child in Chomsky's scenario perceives his/her experience to be a part of the schematism of experiences he/she believes to be possible, Barnes perceives the socio-cultural climate of her time, and I would add, ours in North America and Europe (at least), to *believe* itself limited to a certain schematism of possible modes of existence, modes of being and relating – limited to a certain lot of modes of existence that ought to be considered *valuable*. This, much like Chomsky and the child in the above scenario, Barnes desires to change for her readers, for her socio-cultural climate. To open up the existing schematism to include the incestuous family apparatus is perceived by society-at-large as dangerous for fear that this would somehow be a condoning or valuing of abuse; however, neither is abuse synonymous with incest, nor is incest synonymous with abuse. To deny incest into the schematism of possible lives-to-be-valued – livelihoods – is to deny the experience, real and literary alike, of individuals who desire viability.

Foucault carries on to acknowledge, here in line with Chomsky: "The essence of our life consists, after all, of the political functioning of the society in which we find ourselves" ("Human Nature: Justice vs. Power" 37). To change this "society *in which we find ourselves*" in order to change what may be recognized as the "essence of our life" or the "schematism of possible experience" is Barnes's task with *Ryder*. I believe that Barnes, like Foucault in "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self," knows that this changing need be done responsibly,

insofar as responsibility can be taken to mean without the intention of harm, indeed, abuse, to others or the self who are integral to such change taking place. Foucault continues: “With regard to sexuality” – obviously a cite of much contention in regard to incest – “it is obvious that it is by liberating our desire that we will learn to conduct ourselves ethically in pleasure relationships with others” (“Ethics of the Concern of the Self” 27), “for what is ethics if not the practice of freedom, the conscious [*réfléchie*] practice of freedom?” (28). This freedom, Foucault reminds us, “is already ethical in itself” (28), for freedom “is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection” (28). Barnes does not advocate the callous or unexamined opening up of livelihood to include those involved in incestuous relationships, but, in line with Foucault, the “reflective” consideration of these relationships, and thus, the “ethical” “freedom” of these individuals to be considered as enacting their lives in viability.

For Barnes, the family apparatus may involve variable individuals and relationships, as will be shown in the proceeding chapters. There is, however, a fundamental tenet of the family apparatus as it appears across Barnes’s three major works, initially substantiated in *Ryder* by the Ryder family of biological/“biological” origin: the family apparatus is constructed by relationships among a group of individuals whose connections (relationships) to each other are understood by these individuals to be inescapable. The individuals who make up the family apparatus according to what Barnes propounds find their ontological basis in the family. As such, these individuals are both psychically and physically defined in terms of the family apparatus, whether or not they believe themselves to have created or to desire the family apparatus from which they believe themselves to be inextricable. Critic John T. Irwin, in *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner*, asserts that such a “sense of repetition” or inextricability “within whose grip individual free will is helpless” is “the fate or doom of a family” (59), implying that if one feels “fated” to one’s family, one is “doomed.” This “sense of repetition” is explicitly understood as a negative state of being by Irwin. However, Barnes’s presentation



of the family apparatus as an inescapable unit is neither wholly positively nor negatively charged. Barnes allows that one may desire – may deem positive – such an existential position; however, the position *itself* has no inherent value, and is simply a mode of being that Barnes presents as viable, as a possible livelihood to be taken up or enacted by an individual – desired, chosen, or not.

The inescapable family apparatus is the subject of much discussion in *Ryder* by members of the Ryder family itself. The Ryder family apparatus is the outgrowth of “that which can noway be altered” (*Ryder* 43) – the spousal relationship – which Ann, Amelia’s sister, outlines. This type of relationship (spousal) speaks to Sophia’s elegiac explanation of how “separate” bodies turn “collective bodies,” and give rise to the “eternality” of the family (79). Indeed, Sophia Ryder’s perceived “bondage” (79) to her previous husband, though not the father of her “second son, Wendell” (80), may be read as the inception of her idea that the family apparatus is to be the ontological basis for the individual.

Sophia situates herself and is situated by her other family members as the instigator and proprietor of the Ryder family apparatus through her position as mother to her son, his wives, and their children. Sophia, on her wedding day to her first husband, the “right reckless Jonathan Buxton Ryder” (*Ryder* 6), is spoken of by “innocent women, all downcast of eye and mothers of twenty, saying: ‘Tish, tish! Look at the bride, now a Ryder forever!’” (6). This “Ryder forever” echoes in Sophia’s treatment of her son Wendell, and subsequently, his wives. Sophia searches for daughters – for wives for Wendell – imploring that they “Call me mother” (33) before they are ever to call Wendell “husband.” Amelia is the next to be adopted into the Ryder family “forever,” shortly after meeting Sophia:

[...] and from that day forward, Amelia held her [Sophia] close to her bosom as the very flower of woman, and ’twas thus that Amelia [...] gave into Sophia Ryder’s hands [...], that little property, *and thenceforth became an inmate of that house* [...]. (33; emphasis added)

Sophia hereby adopts (“biological”) Amelia into Wendell’s family of origin, ensuring not only that Wendell and Amelia will now be in familial “bondage” as spouses, but also that Amelia will be unable to stray from Sophia, as both

Wendell and Amelia now perceive Sophia as their mother. Amelia's inextricability from the Ryder family apparatus is further explained by "how quick Sophia had been in making her daughter, and all that seemed to go with it" (33). Wendell's inextricability can be explained through Sophia's belief that "the way to the heart of man" (15) is by taking up the role of the mother, and by Sophia's ensuring that "in the end her only courtier" (13) would be Wendell. Kate-Careless, Wendell's second wife, who joins both Amelia and Wendell as spouse, is adopted by Sophia into the Ryder family in a similar manner as outlined above for Amelia:

In due course of time, we say, Sophia, as was her wont, [...] asked her [Kate] also to call her "Mother," and in calling her mother – which she did with excellent swiftness – what but a step was it to entering that little log cabin in the hills of Storm-king, known to the Ryders, Amelia, Wendell and the two children as home, *and there to stay*.<sup>5</sup> (86; emphasis added)

While it may seem to follow that Sophia is "bonding" the other Ryders *to herself*, she too is "condemned" (12)<sup>6</sup> *to the family* she has herself taken part in creating.

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<sup>5</sup> The addition of Kate to the Ryder family apparatus is further clarified in a subsequent passage: "'And this is Kate, my new daughter,' said Sophia, and 'this is Kate indeed,' said Amelia, remembering her well, as she wielded the besom, and 'this is Kate,' said Julie and Timothy [children of Amelia and Wendell], not remembering at all. 'And where is your father?' inquired Sophia, and came in, Kate following, breathing, smiling" (*Ryder* 87). Julie and Timothy "not remembering at all" will soon change, as this being their first introduction to Kate they as yet have no memory of her; soon they will not have any concept of their family apparatus without her. "That you may know your destiny!" (87) Wendell shouts, as he greets his family, which now must include Kate – who is "now a Ryder forever!" (6). Of Wendell's position when he proclaims the Ryder family "destiny" it is said that he is "standing as he was born" (86). This suggests that his proclamation and inclusion of Kate in the Ryder family apparatus is truly to be considered one that ensures the Ryders become her "family of origin" as he proclaims her familiarity ("biological") from his position of "origin" and of his family's origin by extension.

In this vein, Marie Ponsot, in "A Reader's *Ryder*," elaborates upon Kate's feelings of "there to stay" (*Ryder* 86): "But Kate interrupts them, furious at knowing that both she and Amelia are pregnant again. She asserts her idea of motherhood: 'It makes me ill, and there's no pleasure at either end, but I'm an addict, and it's your fault, keeper of the shop, and madame of the keeper' (R, 224)" (Ponsot 102). Kate, being "an addict" to motherhood, to the Ryder family, addresses Wendell as the "keeper of the shop," and Sophia as "madame of the keeper" – further asserting Sophia's role as family orchestrator, but at the same time implicating herself as unable or not desiring to leave the "shop" – the family.

<sup>6</sup> This use of "condemn" differs from the sense of the word that will be used in discussion of the family apparatus in *Nightwood* in the last chapter, but enacts a similar role in that it serves to underline the seeming inability of a member of the family to leave the family apparatus. Here "condemn" incurs or maintains some of its negative – as in punishment, damnation, etc. – connotations; however, the sense of "condemnation" used by Barnes is not primarily that of

The “chief pursuer” (*Ryder* 69) of what critic Susan Edmunds calls “the maverick ideals of polygamy, idleness, and freethinking” (“Narratives of a Virgin’s Violation” 218) is Sophia herself. Sophia initiates not only the vision of the Ryder family, but also its attendant insularity: “Sophia was born gross, witty, gentle, enduring. Upon this fabric she had leaned for the courage to renounce herself, that she might herself be equal for that struggle, self-imposed – a passionate and precarious love of family” (*Ryder* 16). This “passionate and precarious love of family” encourages her son, Wendell, to take up a polygamous (only getting as far as bigamous in the course of the narrative) family apparatus, with wives Amelia and Kate; however, just as in Sophia’s “self-imposing” this ideal onto Wendell, and “renouncing herself” in the process, Wendell’s wives and oldest daughter, Julie, also appear forced to “renounce” themselves. Surely there is another option for Sophia, Amelia, Kate, and Julie than “renouncing” themselves to the servitude of an ideal, now with Wendell at the helm. However, Sophia still “self-imposedly” believes in this ideal. Amelia and Julie are critically distant from both Sophia and Wendell insofar as they believe themselves to be slaves to the ideal (and to Sophia and Wendell’s “mastery”) that they have not chosen; however, Amelia and Julie are not socio-economically able to take themselves outside of this family apparatus, nor do they *certainly want* to leave their familial relationships. Kate does not appear to be self-aware enough to want other-than the ideal imposed by Wendell, although she wants to contribute little of the responsibility or endurance, both physical and mental, that the ideal entails.

As Sophia exerts power over the other Ryders, thus binding them all together, so is Sophia bound to her family – subjected to the powers of the family; parallel to this, Sophia is defined as a subject (or made subject) by her family, as

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denouncing something or someone as “bad” or “immoral,” but rather as “condemnedness,” as a way of relating to another, and thus to oneself, as unable, whether desiring such or not, to be “not in relation to” this other. This sense of “condemnation”/“condemnedness” occurs in the incestuous family apparatus as the way in which its relationships are maintained when the desire itself of maintenance is not there to maintain these relationships. This “condemnation,” however, is not only extant when desire is absent, but also plays a role in the maintenance of desire, as well as the production of desire among members of the incestuous family apparatus, and, indeed, is often sought (desired) as a means of establishing a relationship with another.

is each member of the Ryder family made subject by the combined defining power of the other family members. Foucault, according to Vikki Bell in *Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault, and the Law*, “argues that power operates to turn individuals into subjects” (73). The Ryders exert power over each other, and believe themselves to be in “bondage” to one another; the Ryders thus function as subjects formulated via a hermitic family apparatus. Bell’s inclusion of the following quotation from Foucault’s “The Subject and Power” speaks to this familial situation, and Sophia’s being “condemned” to the family just as the other Ryders are:

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him[/her] by his[/her] own individuality, attaches him[/her] to his[/her] own identity.... It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his[/her] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. (74)

The scene most telling of Sophia’s simultaneous “control and dependence” of and upon the Ryder family – and her “self-knowledge” of such – appears in Chapter 5: “Sophia and the Five Fine Chamber-pots,” wherein the narrator discloses Sophia’s “passionate and precarious love of family,” but only of a “family in need” of her, and thus a family “dependent” upon her, one that she may “control” as “queen at home” (*Ryder* 16). “She” thus “[gives] herself to be devoured” to her family, that they not go “apart,” and “[d]evour her they did” – all except Julie, who “went apart” (16) from this method of control.

The Ryders “devour” Sophia – “all but Julie, who loved her [Sophia] best” (*Ryder* 16), and who refrains from this act; Julie, upon Sophia’s “offering her heart for food,” “spewed it out on a time, and said, ‘I taste a lie!’” (16). This exchange between Sophia and Julie highlights Julie’s critique of Sophia’s method of maintaining the family apparatus. However, as much as she “went apart” here, she “loved her best.” Julie does not “go apart” from the family apparatus initiated by Sophia, but rather creates what Foucault calls a “critical ontology of ourselves”

(qtd. in Bell: 56). Barnes here takes on the task of “an historical interrogation of our construction, of what and how we ‘know’” (Foucault qtd. in Bell: 56) through Julie in order to facilitate the reader’s ability to consider the Ryder family apparatus as a mode of livelihood. A livelihood that is unexamined does not allow one to perform “an experiment in going beyond” the “limits that are imposed upon us” (Foucault qtd. in Bell: 56), which is counter to the success of Barnes’s project in *Ryder*: the critical expansion of what are considered viable lives. Sophia claims, “I could not kiss her [Julie], as I had kissed the others, because she was thinking something outside the family” (*Ryder* 169). Julie is, however, grave Sophia’s claim may sound for the continuation of the family apparatus, only “*thinking* something outside the family” – she is not *outside of* the family. Julie here gains critical distance insofar as she is able to move toward the boundaries of this family. She is thus able to refuse some of Sophia’s affectionate advances in such a way that the reader becomes sensitized to the intricacies of a livelihood that, at times, may appear to the uninitiated, or the one who has not chosen such a subjecthood, as the “restrictions of home” (74). The synopsis of Chapter 24: “Julie Becomes What She Had Read” provides a description of Julie in line with this claim: “In which Julie is many children, suffering the tortures of the damned, kneeling at the parent knee, in all ages, all times and all bindings, becoming what books make of a child” (106).<sup>7</sup>

While Barnes is markedly conscious of what B.W. Capo calls “the social framework of marriage as a necessary condition for female sexuality” (30), she is also aware that this axiological tenet, contemporary to the narrative of *Ryder*, need not be maintained. Through Julie, Barnes is able to move beyond this “framework,” and show that while marriage and sexuality *may* be linked, they

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<sup>7</sup> Anne B. Dalton, in “Escaping from Eden: Djuna Barnes’ Revision of Psychoanalytic Theory and Her Treatment of Father-Daughter Incest in *Ryder*,” provides a precisely detailed account of Julie’s dream, which makes up the entirety of the chapter save for the opening, quoted above, and the ending, which involves Sophia and Wendell arguing over the just-woken body of Julie. While my project here does not agree with Dalton’s claims about the incestuous relationships in *Ryder*, most notably her focus on the monstrosity of Wendell and the trauma of Julie’s experience insofar as Dalton unwaveringly polarizes the characters, I direct the reader’s attention to this article for its rare and in-depth treatment of the Arabella Lynn (Julie’s representative in her dream) dream in Chapter 24 of *Ryder*.

need not be, inside or outside of an incestuous family apparatus. Julie, unlike Amelia and Kate, is not *per se* (meaning, traditionally or normatively understood as) a wife or mother, though she may enact this role within her family apparatus. Julie is poised to be the next “wife” of Wendell, as is suggested by the scene where Wendell is looming above Julie as she wakes from a dream – a dream of rapacious sexuality, fecundity, and procreative “destiny” (Ryder 109) while “kneeling at the parent knee” (106). Sophia screams at Wendell, “Do not strike her, do not strike her! I had no daughter ever, and she is that daughter!” (109) in reply to Wendell’s sudden aggressive movement toward Julie’s prostrate form. He tells Sophia, “Keep her [...] she is none of mine. Did I not hear her deriding me greatly?” (109). This disowning of Julie as his daughter could signify Julie’s turning from daughter to preordained-wife. However, here Barnes places the emphasis on the mother-daughter relationship between Sophia and Julie, and therefore, on Julie’s place *outside* the position of wife and mother, making Sophia’s position as mother and Julie’s position as her daughter the dominant combination of familial roles enacted in the scene.

Julie’s position in the Ryder family apparatus places the Ryder family vision, as a whole, into critical relief, showcasing not only Barnes’s commitment to the opening up of livelihood to include such apparatuses as the Ryder family’s, but also Barnes’s desire to ensure that the Ryder vision is not put forth without critique. It seems to me that Barnes wants to avoid a polemicizing of this opening up. In *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*, John Bowlby outlines this type of “opening up” in terms of the traditional or normative family of origin (biological, nuclear), or the “bonded pair” (85), which can be extrapolated and read in terms of  $x$  number of possible family apparatuses:

Whilst each member of a bonded pair tends both to remain in proximity to the other and to elicit proximity-keeping behaviour in the other, individuals who are not bonded show no such tendencies; indeed, when two individuals are not bonded, one often strongly resists any approach the other may attempt. (85)

This analogy seems to sum up the reader's duty in approaching the Ryder family vision, the Ryders' self-critiques, and the reader's own critiques of the Ryder family vision: the reader must not see the Ryder family vision or apparatus as existing on an unvalued or disqualified plane, nor as situated on a graduated spectrum with the reader's own predispositions at the most valued end. In line with this, one finds D.W. Winnicott's following statement:

In health we expect the individual to become gradually able to identify with wider and wider groups, and to identify with groups without loss of sense of self and of individual spontaneity. If the group is too wide the individual loses touch; if it is too narrow there is a loss of sense of citizenship. (215)

While Winnicott's use of "citizen" is not the same as the use of the term in this chapter that is derived from *Ryder's* Chapter 30: "The Cat Comes Out of the Well," it may be understood here to mean the notion of "belonging" to a group of individuals or an apparatus, such as the community or family. Barnes warns the reader and critic (just as within her narrative characters warn one another) against "losing touch" with the notion of the family apparatus as made up of individual beings, as well as against "narrowing" one's scope of investigation to the extent that one perceives the family apparatus as necessarily comprised of a finite set of familial role configurations.

The argument I am putting forth here is not that Julie must have chosen the incestuous subjecthood in order for her to occupy what Barnes would consider a viable livelihood (although, as will be discussed in chapter three, this would make her subjecthood *more* viable); rather, whether or not one chooses (or is afforded to choose), the family apparatus *as the ontological basis* for one's subjecthood is a potential locus of livelihood that Barnes desires to open up to and for readers and critics. It is a potential site of being and relating that, regardless of one's individual moral or ethical objections, Barnes insists be considered as viable. Barnes implores that the individuals involved in such relationships, such subjecthoods, whether chosen or not, be regarded and understood as articulations in the expansion of cultural ideas of what ought to be considered vital and valid

(i.e. viable) lives; she calls for an expanded notion of livelihood (valued modes of being and relating) that will facilitate an environment where such lives are able to flourish.

## II. Members of Society: The Citizen/Outlaw Metonym for Incest

Given the family apparatus as established by Barnes through the Ryders, it is clear why the Ryder family is rife with incest. The feeling of inescapability in regard to one's familial relationships ensures that one will establish one's sexual and emotional relationships within the family apparatus, and will discern one's psychic and physical ontology from the same.<sup>8</sup> The individual involved in incest as Barnes posits is not the "[image] of the self-enclosed – the inability to break out of the ring of the family" (Irwin 59), nor the individual as deficient of self-determination.<sup>9</sup> Barnes suggests that in the incestuous family apparatus the individual attempts to define him/herself through the relationships that pre-existing family members impose on or offer to him/her; whereas in the non-incestuous family apparatus, the individual attempts to define him/herself according to relationships he/she imposes on or asks of pre-existing family members. Of course, these categories involve overlap, but we can glean that the

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<sup>8</sup> In *The Family and Individual Development*, Winnicott explains the individual's "transitional objects" (Winnicott's phrase) as typically necessary to a child to ensure his/her ability to determine the difference between him/herself and his/her environment, as well as between him/herself and his/her mother/caregiver:

These phenomena (that I call transitional) appear to form the basis of the whole cultural life of the adult human being.

Severe deprivation may lead to a loss of the capacity to use the well-tried technique [of comforting oneself with one's own body and with transitional objects "at the time of going to sleep, or at times of loneliness, sadness, anxiety" (18)], with resulting restlessness and sleeplessness. Clearly the thumb in the mouth and the rag doll in the hand simultaneously symbolize a part of the self and a part of the environment. (19)

This explanation, then, for the child whose external environment is rife with incest, whose ontological basis for understanding his/her own psychic and physical reality is the incestuous family, will likely find him/herself with one thumb in his/her mouth, and one hand grasping not a rag doll, but a member of the family of origin. This is because the incestuous family of origin does not strive to facilitate or encourage the differentiation from the mother or caregiver, but an integration of this external reality with the self-conception and self-perception of the child. Incest provides the external reality to be grasped by the child, rather than the inanimate and differentiated rag doll. We see this in *Ryder* with Kate and her daughter sharing a bed, as well as Elisha and Wendell (passages that will be commented on to this effect in later sections of this chapter).

<sup>9</sup> In *Djuna Barnes' Consuming Fictions*, Diane Warren elaborates on Barnes's ability to open up livelihood without demonizing or valorizing something as fraught – in her own life and the lives of her characters – as the incestuous family apparatus: "Barnes' subtle and ambivalent texts retain the ability to unsettle their readers' ethical responses, and it is this, I would argue, that keeps the texts vibrant and engaging" (3).



relationships falling into the former category are more likely to arise out of the incestuous family apparatus, while those falling into the latter category are more likely to arise out of the non-incestuous family apparatus. The fact of a relationship existing between members of the same family (of origin or extension) does not in itself make the relationship incestuous; this would imply that familial is equated with incestuous, and thus both terms would lose their individuated meanings, making attempts to use these terms to illuminate one another fruitless. The Ryders lack (but are markedly not devoid of) choice and agency in terms of how they create and maintain their familial relationships, and are thus criticized by Barnes; we may contrast this with Barnes's celebration of choice and agency in the relationships of *Nightwood*. This contrast places the Ryders in the middle range on the scale of incest-as-viable, which Barnes develops throughout the course of her three major works.

Incest in *Ryder* is defined largely in terms of the following dichotomy: citizen/outlaw. Barnes sets up this dichotomy through Wendell in Chapter 30: "The Cat Comes Out of the Well." Wendell proclaims, in response to demands that his children attend the community's public school: "if you insist, I, being but a humble citizen, can but submit, but I may warn you that Ryder as an outlaw is less trouble than citizen Ryder" (*Ryder* 131). Wendell's utterance of "being but a humble citizen" is here a theoretical gesture; Wendell posits that if, hypothetically, he and his family were to become "citizens," they would be more "trouble" for the community than as "outlaws." The hypothetical "citizen Ryder" is set in contrast to the presently existing "Ryder as outlaw," which here is meant to include all of the Ryder family members. The Ryders' neighbouring "citizens" deem the Ryder children "vagrant non-attending offspring" (129), who "licked up the comfort at home, growing more and more ignorant" in their "delinquency" (128) – or *absence* – from the public school system, from church, while being *present* solely at home within the family apparatus. Wendell states, perhaps simply of his own children, but perhaps of all the children or people in attendance at the community intervention: "It will take him [Timothy Ryder is the one gestured toward by Wendell], as it will take the others [perhaps the other Ryder

children, or perhaps all of the children or people of the community], all his life to unravel the tangle of his upbringing” (131). His statement, associated with the Ryder children, even if no others, puts this sentiment in apposition with the “outlaw Ryders.” The notion of the individual being in the “tangle” of his/her “upbringing” denotes the type of inescapability or “condemnation” associated with the Ryder family.<sup>10</sup> This “tangle” or “condemnation” of the family apparatus is itself found inextricable from the family apparatus as an incestuous apparatus when one engages in further examination of Barnes’s rendering of the citizen/outlaw dichotomy in terms of the family.

Barnes positions the Ryders as outlaw(s) in three principal ways: 1) through the presentation of the Ryder family members as simultaneously occupying multiple familial roles (e.g. Sophia takes up the roles of mother, grandmother, husband, and wife within the Ryder family of origin); 2) through the portrayal of the bodies of the Ryder family members as “other than” – other than *human*; 3) through the presentation of the Ryder family as polygamous, as its own race, with its own religion – an isolated community, full of members of the Ryder family, rather than citizens, with Wendell as the their “Prophet in the Wilderness” (*Ryder* 18). The three criteria that demarcate the Ryders as outlaw(s) also serve as the basis for the assessment of the Ryders as incestuous – although it must be noted that this is not a simple equation of outlaw with incest or incest with outlaw. The family of outlaws is not necessarily the incestuous family; however, in *Ryder*, through the notion of the outlaw versus the citizen, the incestuousness of the Ryder family is established. Chapter 30, indeed, *Ryder* in its entirety, provides

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<sup>10</sup> The sense of condemnation purveyed throughout *Ryder* is further elaborated on in Chapter 33: “Be She What She May.” Regardless of Amelia’s bitterness or anger at Kate for being Wendell’s wife/mistress, and producing children with Wendell, no matter how strongly she cries, “brother could not strike half-brother with that straight justice that descends from like to like” (*Ryder* 141), after Kate’s son Elisha “[chisels] the head of her beloved offspring” (141), Hannel, it is shown that they are all of the same family of origin. After Amelia has “picked up her own child and tried to discover how much of her force in him had been spent and spilled” (141), Wendell addresses his wives, “you and your children!” (142), to which the two wives respond “at once,” “Who and whose children?” (142). Treating his wives as a unitary actor, occupying the same role here within the family, he further addresses Amelia and Kate: “Yours” – refusing to use anything other than the second person plural (or singular), underscoring again the inextricability of the two wives from the Ryder family, the inextricability of their children from each other, and each wife from the other, as well as from Wendell.

neither a whole endorsement, by Barnes or her characters, of incest as “right,” nor does it offer the opposite claim. The expression of incestuous livelihood – the semantic space needed for the existence of such livelihood – does not exist within the realm of the citizen in *Ryder* (again, this is on the level of literary incest). Therefore, to speak of incest through *Ryder*, Barnes must write the Ryders as outlaw. The normative discursive mode used or desired by the citizens (as we see in the confrontation between the Ryders’ community and the Ryders regarding the latter’s schooling) does not allow for the expression of such livelihood, and certainly not for the expression of such as both *positive* as well as negative, in terms of existing as an alternative mode of being and relating with varying degrees of viability.<sup>11</sup>

Following this line of flight, we discover that any family may be outlaw(s) or citizen(s), as this distinction is established via the community’s norms to mean “morally and/or ethically incorrect” or “morally and/or ethically correct,” respectively. Thus, the Ryders are deemed outlaw according to the community’s normative social climate, and presumed to be morally and/or ethically incorrect – which, for the Ryders, speaks to their incestuous family apparatus, and to each of them as a member of such. Barnes is not purporting that such a dichotomy is *necessarily* real or ideal, but rather that it is a part of the relative or subjective perceptions and valuations of a community as applied to members of that community who are outside of the normative structures in place. The Ryders themselves are aware of this judgmental force, defining themselves in opposition to it, and confronting the community in an attempt to subvert its rigid perceptions

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<sup>11</sup> Neither Barnes nor this project seeks to obviate the numerous moral and ethical concerns regarding instances of real or literary incest; however, neither do we seek to silence experiences of those who exist or have existed in such incestuous family apparatuses. Not to speak of such a mode of being and relating would be equally irresponsible as disregarding or trivializing the experiences of incestuous abuse. While it is not the province of this project to elaborate on these real experiences and their attendant theorizations, Judith Lewis Herman’s *Father-Daughter Incest* (with Lisa Hirschman) and *Trauma and Recovery: The aftermath of violence – from domestic abuse to political terror*, Leigh Gilmore’s “Limit-Cases: Trauma, Self-Representation, and the Jurisdictions of Identity,” Beverly A. Ogilvie’s *Mother-Daughter Incest: A Guide for Helping Professionals*, and countless (auto)biographical novels such as Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*, H.D.’s *Asphodel*, Kathryn Harrison’s *The Kiss: A Memoir*, and Elissa Wall’s *Stolen Innocence: My Story of Growing Up in a Polygamous Sect, Becoming a Teenage Bride, and Breaking Free of Warren Jeffs* (with Lisa Pulitzer) present invaluable studies, personal and professional, of incest on the level of the real and the literary.

of morality or ethicality and humanity. Before the normative community confronts Wendell and his family regarding the schooling of the Ryder children in Chapter 30, in the ambiguously voiced Chapter 5: “Rape and Repining!” the narrator or unidentified speaker warns, “Is it not, therefore, imperative that, while in the World, you consider the World’s Eye, and of how many Facets your Crime consists, according to the thing it walks before?” (*Ryder* 25). This warning evokes the censorious attitude of the community-at-large that has the potential to subjugate the Ryders in order to limit their potential for viability; however, the Ryder family remains stalwart in their position as outlaws and confident in their belief of moral and ethical relativity. In Chapter 35: “Amelia Hears from Her Sister in Regard to Timothy,” Ann writes:

I have discovered, dear sister, that what you do is to yourself only what you do, but to the public what they do not, and therefore all this great business of right and wrong, judges and juries, to say nothing of prisons and sentences. Life is too long as it is, my dear sister, for does it not find time in which to be unjust? (154)

Ann, who Barnes otherwise aligns with the citizens’ perspective of the Ryders, here critiques the personal and social burden of normative strictures that attempt to regulate individuals and family structures in harsh and dichotomous ways. Ann recognizes that the Ryders (and, by extension, innumerable real and literary families) are composed of human individuals, and are accordingly unable to fit into any schema that would attempt to be as inhumanely divisive as the citizen/outlaw dichotomy.

The community’s intervention, discussed above, in which the citizens attempt to convince Wendell to have his children attend the public school, ends, unexpectedly, by Wendell’s revelation to the gathered crowd of “women in homespun,” who “held up their babies that they might see this monster [Wendell] at close range and be duly stricken,” and “men,” who “whispered and spat, and slung themselves from left to right in their anticipation” (*Ryder* 129) of Wendell’s being interrogated “on his whys and wherefores” (128). Wendell decrees:

I will ask this illustrious company to go outward toward the well, and leaning over with a little of that curiosity which they now direct towards me, to scrutinize that cistern,—abyss of disease and filth. For as I came up I observed three rats and one cat therein floating, and if they think that a child can stand your system of education with the admixture of contaminated well water, why then, my children, as the children not of outlaw Ryder but of citizen Ryder, will not come to this school until you have dug and furnished a well of pure water [...] Ryder, citizen or outlaw, *as you will*, salutes you! (131-132; emphasis added)

Wendell not only reasserts the above idea that it is the community's norms that are determining whether or not his family will be considered citizen or outlaw, but also underscores the moral and ethical relativity or inessentiality of such distinctions and valuations on the whole, especially in terms of what could be considered the "health" of a family apparatus. Had Wendell not been pressed by the community to have his children attend public school, he would not have interfered with the "well" of the community; however, he is driven to speak out about the condition of the school's water because the community has chosen to involve his family in their collective desire to normalize the Ryders according to their system of beliefs. Wendell is moved to the above speech because the citizens encroach on his family's mode of being and relating – which exists largely outside of the community, as the Ryders are only rarely seen outside their house and surrounding land. The Ryders keep themselves separate from the school's well – from the "wellspring" of the community – and have their own "wellspring," or mode of living, which they may control. Whether or not there were to be a dead cat in the Ryder well would be a matter entirely dealt with by the Ryder family. Wendell seems to be saying: "Before you judge the 'poison' in my home, judge the 'poison' in your own" – a bold statement of defence by Wendell.

Barnes sets up the citizen/outlaw dichotomy as it is enacted by the community only to show its lack of actual practicability, for such an axiological system is always (relative and) exclusionary. The allegations made against the

Ryder family – charges of “growing more and more ignorant”; “growing up in ignorance” (*Ryder* 129) and existing “slovenly” in “delinquency” (128) – are proven unfounded in various capacities throughout the novel, regardless of the adamancy of the citizens to prove otherwise, implying that such charges may, perhaps, be more accurately lobbied against the citizens. Thus, it would follow that incest (the incestuous family apparatus) is not itself directly correlated with the state of being “non-attending,” “ignorant,” “delinquent” – for the citizens themselves have proven all of these things about themselves, yet are not represented by Barnes as incestuous. The citizens are seen only briefly in *Ryder*, despite the didactic presence they attempt to exert over the Ryders; and, while the citizen children attend school, neither the children nor the adults prove themselves to be educated in humanity. The “men whispered and spat, slung themselves from left to right in anticipation” (129) of confronting Wendell, who they desire to berate, but who “s[its] calmly upon his spine” (129). They accuse Wendell, “Do you realize that you are bringing up your children like heathen?” (130), while the reader finds out that the Ryder children are receiving an *alternative* education, but an education no less. The Ryders’ education may make them able to understand what Wendell means when he says, to the “representative” of the citizens, “Do you realize,” “that your heathen put your Europe into that bed which is not your history?” (130), but not able to “render Hamlet backward, and the Commandments sideways” (130). Wendell tells us: “I keep my children at home and teach them better” (130); admitting, “They know both more, and less.<sup>12</sup> I’ve taken my children round by the side path where the truth lies rotting with the refuse, and they already look down upon you from a height” (131). This brings us back to the three principal ways in which the Ryder family is positioned as outlaw(s) and incestuous, which illustrate how the citizens themselves are the normative structure being outlined as a foil to what the Ryders are, who they are, and how they structure their relationships and identities.

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<sup>12</sup> This is another instance wherein Barnes herself refuses to privilege one livelihood over another, seeing both as viable, potentially equal, albeit different.

The first way in which the Ryders are positioned as outlaw(s) and incestuous (marked as “1” above) is one that recurs throughout *Ryder*, *Nightwood*, and *The Antiphon*: the presentation of members of a family apparatus as occupying amorphous, as well as simultaneously multiple, familial roles. In *Ryder*, all of the members of the incestuous family apparatus in question are of the same biological/“biological” family of origin, and, thus, the incestuous relationships that arise from the Ryder family apparatus are perhaps more explicitly understood than those in *Nightwood* (though more covertly established than those in *The Antiphon*, which also occur within a biological family of origin). As we have addressed above, Sophia repeatedly implores people, “Call me mother!” (*Ryder* 12); this gesture becomes incestuous in its implementation when used to bring Amelia and Kate into the Ryder family as wives for Wendell. While Amelia and Kate give birth to numerous children with Wendell, they also bear these children for Sophia, whom they call mother – whom they have married as a mother *before* calling Wendell husband. Certainly Sophia bonds with the Ryder children – Julie, Timothy, Hannel, Gaspard, Elisha, Aaron, Gaybert, and Elise. “By Amelia you have five, by Kate, three” (239), Sophia tells Wendell, and while at times she plays the mother and father figure to them all, by the end of the novel she tells Wendell to choose one of the mothers and her respective children to support (via Sophia’s begging for money). Force the other mother and children to support themselves: “In the end you will have either three or five” (239) children, Sophia proclaims. Wendell and Sophia choose to support Kate and her children, although this does not presume that Amelia and her children will be outside of the Ryder family apparatus after this; Sophia “loved her [Julie] best” (16), and “was she [Julie] not her [Sophia’s] favourite child?” (143). Despite Sophia’s proclamations of love for Julie, Amelia must respond to her husband’s and mother’s decision to separate proximally herself and her children from the rest of the Ryder family:

Ryder, [...] I have thought of you as great oftener than anything else. When you have lain with me, after lying with her, what do you think kept me from coming up from under you? It is twenty-six years that I have lain

under you, knowing everything, and have not judged and have not forgiven. I said, “He has a great sickness that is unknown to other men.” I said, “He is nature in its other shape.” I said, “*He is a deed that must be committed.*” (241; emphasis added)

Again, the sense of inextricability from the Ryder family apparatus is shown here, and this time, though filled with distaste for Wendell, Sophia, Kate, and for their abandoning, physically, monetarily, members of their family, Amelia is “committed” and remains so, agreeing with Wendell that Kate would be less able to take care of herself and her children if she strayed outside the physical confines of the Ryder family home. Amelia and her children may do so without losing their understanding of themselves, and may exist outside the physical Ryder home by their “nature in its other shape” (241).

Integral to this “nature” of the Ryder family is the simultaneous and multiple inhabiting or taking up of familial roles. This “nature” begins with Sophia, and is outlined for the reader in Chapter 2: “Those Twain – Sophia’s Parents!”: “Sophia took up the new-born all in its long clothes, and put it to the sister breast, for she remembered her mother when she was beginning that she had finished” (*Ryder* 8). This is, of course, after Sophia’s mother says, “You have a child. One breast shall be for my son, and one breast shall be for thy son” (7). Thus, here in the inception of the Ryder family story, Sophia is both mother and sister to her brother (a spousal relationship clandestinely formed with her own mother and father), and mother to her own child – Wendell – who will become her “only courtier” (13), as well as the means by which she acquires two wives or daughters – Amelia and Kate – and their children (her grandchildren). This act of taking up several familial roles simultaneously is perhaps best explained in Chapter 3: “Sophia and the Five Fine Chamber-pots”: “Indeed, Sophia’s walls, like the telltale rings of the oak, gave up her conditions, as anyone might have discovered an they had taken a bucket of water to it, for she never removed, she covered over” (13). While this statement by the narrator seems to be discussing Sophia’s method of wallpapering her home with pictures, we find out that “the originals [pictures] were, as she herself was, nothing erased but much submerged”



(13): in taking up new familial roles, Sophia maintains her “originals” and is “much submerged” further in the Ryder family apparatus with “nothing erased.”

Furthermore, we know Amelia and Kate to be the daughters-in-law, daughters, wives of Sophia; we know Wendell to be Sophia’s husband and son.<sup>13</sup> In Chapter 19: “Amelia and Kate Taken to Bed,” wherein both Amelia and Kate are each giving birth to another Ryder child, Amelia says to Julie: “Don’t cry, for you were not a girl when I was a girl, and what can you know?” (*Ryder* 95), continuing: “So take warning by my size and don’t let a man touch you, for their touching never ends, and screaming oneself into a mother is no pleasure at all” (95). This provides another critique of the Ryder family apparatus (just as Julie’s “thinking something outside the family” (169) does), showing Amelia as unhappy in her current familial roles. Nevertheless, this does not undermine the structure of the family apparatus, but simply its relative value according to one of its members. Amelia too admits the family apparatus in which she exists “never ends” and that it is a type of “damnation” or condemnation.<sup>14</sup> Julie, taking the place of her mother in the next scene, acts out childbirth with her brother, Timothy (also borne of Amelia and Wendell):

Over the fields and through the fine air [Pat, the labourer,] heard the voices of two women screaming their children in, and through it the childish treble of Julie, crying, “Wendell! Wendell!” as she lay on her bed of playful maternity, aged ten, holding to her breast a rag doll thrown from the door to the immediate left by the strong paternal arm of Timothy, who was God and the Father. (95)

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<sup>13</sup> Although it is not clear who speaks the following passage from Chapter 5: “Rape and Repining!” it provides an apt example of the role shifting and inhabiting that I am discussing here:

Whose child do you harvest? Whose First-Born springs from your Lap? Is he not your Neighbour’s Son, had you clung fast to the Laws of your Country? Is he not made Fatherless by too fast Fathering? Is this not turning the Just Proportion of Generations backward? Does he not ride before his Mother, seeking his Mother? What Nation has the Son first and the Mother second? What Tree springs up before the Orchard, saying, “Orchard, Orchard, here is the Tree!” What Infant gives Birth to its Parent, what Child crawls out of the Cradle, that its Mother may have where to lay her head? (*Ryder* 27-28)

<sup>14</sup> Amelia reinforces this sense of condemnation when she says, of her new child – a new member of her family apparatus: “Now I’ll forget you never, never, never, but be wound in with you at every turn” (*Ryder* 97).

Julie, here sister, daughter, mother, wife, regards Timothy (her biological brother) as her brother, husband, and as a religious figure – speaking to the way in which Wendell (here represented by Timothy) presents himself as the prophet of the Ryder family. Familial role morphism is carried on with another child in Chapter 48: “Elisha in Love with the Maiden.” This passage of simultaneous and multiple role-inhabiting does not mark the Ryders as incestuous simply because it involves the sharing of a bed by father and son,<sup>15</sup> but because Wendell shares the bed with his son, enacting the part of the son’s hypothetical female lover, while simultaneously proffering fatherly advice to his son, who thus plays the hypothetical male lover according to Wendell’s instruction (making him a version of Wendell, as Timothy is in the example above). Elisha “said softly, ‘Tell me, what is a woman?’” as, “[i]n the dark [he] wet his lips” (224); Wendell replies, and the two carry out the scene lying next to each other in the bed. Finally:

Elisha slept, his childish man’s face turned back. With open mouth he slept, and nightlong played down his father’s leg the second movement of the “Sonata Pathétique,” his father’s hand twitching in the midnight scale, sleeping too, breathing down his hairy nostrils, his red hair spread like a girl’s upon a pillow. (226)

Elisha, the “childish man,” and Wendell, “like a girl,” enact an incestuous relationship, as well as prophesy Elisha’s marrying and thus expanding of the Ryder family (of origin and extension). Elisha’s question – “Would he [himself] have been thus had he gone away like other children?” (221) (gone away from the family apparatus) – vanishes when “[he gets] into the bed beside him [Wendell]” (223) and partakes in one of the defining activities of the Ryder family.

Next, we have the positioning of the Ryders as outlaw(s) and incestuous (marked as “2)” above) by means of the Ryder family members presenting themselves as “other than” – other than *human*. This mode of self and other presentation marks the Ryders as other than citizens, which for themselves is

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<sup>15</sup> I here mention the sharing of a bed by mother and daughter, Kate and her daughter, which shares spatial and thematic closeness in the novel to the sharing of a bed by Elisha and Wendell. While Kate and her daughter’s sharing of the same bed does not explicitly reinforce my above claims, surely it suggests that the types of intimate role-morphing I discuss in this section are typical of the Ryder family apparatus.

deemed positive insofar as it marks them as other than the normative community-at-large. Sheryl Stevenson, in “Writing the Grotesque Body: Djuna Barnes’s Carnival Parody,” explains Barnes’s method of writing the Ryders as “other than,” which Barnes does in order to facilitate a reading of their incestuousness as an alternative mode of livelihood, counter to the normative strictures of Barnes’s contemporary clime (and of the present atmosphere in North America and Europe). Stevenson writes: “With a body image that is strongly grotesque (in Bakhtin’s terms), Wendell breaks down barriers between human and animal, celebrating the abundance and fertility of the earth itself, epitomized in his own body” (85). While Wendell is emphasized here, it is not only his province to carry out this carnivalesque rendering of the Ryder family and family apparatus. In Chapter 7: “Sophia Tells Wendell How He Was Conceived,” Sophia explains Wendell’s birth, as well as his (estranged) brother’s.<sup>16</sup> After giving birth to her first son, Wendell’s brother, she became like a cat not wanting to revisit its own vomit (the vomit here represents Wendell’s brother). Sophia “did no sooner close my eyes” (*Ryder* 36) (the closing of her eyes here represents Sophia’s repressing her distaste for her first child, or, at the very least, her distaste in giving birth to him, and her hope for her second child and herself as a mother to the second, rather than to the first child who was not to be “her only courtier” (6)), “and in nine months, by the Christian calendar, I was delivered of you” (36), she tells Wendell. Not only is Sophia a cat (other than human) in this scenario, and Wendell’s brother vomit (other than human), but the one who impregnates Sophia is a “mirage” of Beethoven (other than human): ““God’s jerkin!” cried Wendell, ‘am I to understand that thou hast cohabitated with a mirage and brought forth a

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<sup>16</sup> It is not made clear by Barnes in *Ryder* why Wendell’s brother, Sophia’s first son, is not now an active part of the Ryder family. However, one may suspect that it is because Wendell and Sophia shared and continue to share a vision for the family apparatus that her first son did not. One might also conclude that Wendell’s brother was not constructed by Sophia as “courtier” (*Ryder* 6), nor did he construct Sophia (or so she may have perceived) as anything other than mother (and thus her abandonment of him, or their mutual abandonment of each other once he came of age to pursue such action of his own volition). This brother/son character does not appear in the narrative, except as he is spoken of here; nonetheless, he is discounted as a member of the Ryder family of origin, and may be viewed as making up part of the Ryder family of extension (or altogether only a Ryder in the strictly traditional or normative sense of biological relatedness).

son?” – or rather, “an infusion” than a “cohabitation” (36), Sophia corrects. Stevenson further agrees here:

[Barnes’s] “female” version of Bakhtin’s favorite tradition also shows that the carnivalesque offers women writers a rich source of critical tools – to focus on sexuality and childbearing, question hierarchical authority, and dissect dominant ideologies. Giving a feminist direction to the carnivalesque mode, *Ryder* promotes a reorientation of both critical and creative practice.<sup>17</sup> (91)

Barnes’s representation of the Ryder family apparatus pushes against or resists and challenges the citizens’ attempt to normalize the family apparatus, to normalize livelihood; this “critical and creative practice” contributes to the overarching goal I find throughout all of Barnes’s major works: the ideal of opening up livelihood to include those whose ontology is seated in what is perceived (received) as outlaw.

In Chapter 29: “The Psychology of Nicknames,” summarized by Barnes as the chapter “In which Wendell gives his version of Amelia’s courting” (*Ryder* 125), we find Wendell explaining the spousal, and subsequently, family apparatus:

“In time, an a man and woman live it out to the bitter end,” said he, unclasping his hands, “one of two roads is taken by the heart, and it goes, slowly but surely, in one of these two directions – wisdom or religion, so that she chose wisdom, and called me nothing all day but ‘Oh!’ and ‘Ah!’” (127)

Although the person addressed by Wendell is only identified as “his listener” (127), what Wendell says here of the relationships of “a man and woman” who

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<sup>17</sup> Alex Goody iterates a similarly provocative sentiment about Barnes’s *Ryder* in *Modernist Articulations: A Cultural Study of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy, and Gertrude Stein*:

Such proximities, proximities of grotesque bodies and animals, instigate a further unsettling of the boundaries of the subject and the proper body so that the mutation into an other, a disorganised, improper life-form, is realised. Neither bestiality, or an imitation of primitivism, the becomings-animal of *Ryder* are a full extension of the promise of the grotesque body: not simply positive or negative, enabling or restricting, but a new way of being, a liberation of desire from the stratifications of the human subject into a realm “outside of the imagination and quite beside what men would call the point” (*R*: 119). (169)

“live it out to the bitter end” evokes his own relationship with his mother Sophia, as well as with Amelia. This scenario could, indeed, be Wendell “courting” Amelia by means of telling her of his relationship with his mother – who is, after all, the one who formed the initial relationship of familiarity with Amelia. If we take this to be the case, then what comes next again aligns the Ryder family with the animal – the other than human: “for all things end where they began,” Wendell tells “his listener,” “tail in mouth, like those little fish they serve to pretty gluttons” (127). This perversion of the generative bond typically thought to embody the family reiterates the Ryders as occupying an alternative semantic space. Barnes’s “[c]arnavalesque writing,” reinforces Stevenson, “achieves this effect by representing the body as grotesque, the violative opposite of classical canons which produce a smoothed-over, idealized body in its prime,” “with an emphasis on the body’s openings and protuberances” (84) – its “tail in mouth.”

The last way in which the Ryders are marked as outlaw(s) and incestuous is through their presentation as polygamous, as making up their own race, having their own religion, with their own prophet(s) (marked as “3”) above). Barnes draws upon allusions to the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS) or to the Mormon (LDS) Church more generally<sup>18</sup> to represent the Ryders in this manner. Barnes explicitly mentions the Ryders’ polygamy, their race – “Ryder – His Race” (the title of Chapter 46) – and religious leaders, all of which are a part of the general or mythic conception of the F/LDS philosophy. Wendell is the titular “Jesus Mundane” of Chapter 1, the “Prophet in the Wilderness” (*Ryder* 18); and Timothy, the self-proclaimed “fool of a prophet” (189) of Chapter 43. The polygamy of the Ryders is outlined by an unnamed narrative voice in Chapter 10: “The Occupations of Wendell” – indeed, as an occupation of Wendell as well as his family:

How a man y-thirst, and how he thrives  
On polygamy much; and then astound

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<sup>18</sup> In Chapter 44: “Fine Bitches All, and Molly Dance,” we find a reference to the Mormon “Battle Hymn of the Republic - #60” with the utterance, “Glory, glory, hallelujah, here’s a wonder!” (*Ryder* 195), greatly similar to the Hymn’s traditional lines: “Glory, glory, Hallelujah! / Glory, glory, Hallelujah! / Glory, glory, Hallelujah! / His truth is marching on!” (*Official Website of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*).

With serving witty reasons for his ground. [...]

No *bon vivant* can bide a beddē thin

For lack of little partridges within! (59-60)

The Ryders' polygamous incestuous family apparatus is labeled "experiments" (222) – "experiments" in how people "thrive," and what people may do to "bide" their lives. The Ryders choose, or are expected – each by the other – to remain among their family apparatus – remain "little partridges within" the Ryder family apparatus. These "experiments" not only involve how the Ryders are to relate to each other, but also how they are to procreate: making societies consisting entirely of what they consider to be the faithful, primarily, and often solely, through relationships forged among members of their closed society.<sup>19</sup> Whether or not these F/LDS societies – outlaw to society-at-large, but citizen to themselves – are involved in real incest is not a matter able to be discussed here, nor is it feasible to discuss within the current argument. The current argument relies on this brief and general view of the F/LDS mythos because it is a component of the way in which the Ryders' incest is presented as outlaw (or perverse) in terms of the community-at-large, but as citizen among the Ryders.

Perversion, a term frequently used in discussions of incest, is only suggested by Barnes in *Ryder* insofar as she acknowledges that the citizens view the Ryders as perverse in that they deviate from the norm. Edmunds addresses this in "Narratives of a Virgin's Violation": "Throughout the novel, powerful representatives of capital and the state [the citizens] attempt to expose the Ryders' domestic activity as a set of secret and deviant practices in scandalous need of reform"; "Wendell and Sophia successfully combat this threat to their autonomy by turning the same charges against their attackers" (220). Edmunds's arguments here are in keeping with the notion of relativity that I suggest Barnes intends to purport as part of the constitution of the citizen/outlaw debate. If we follow Edmunds further, we find still greater support for such ideas; she writes: "The

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<sup>19</sup> An introductory account of much Mormon/LDS and FLDS philosophy can be found in Richard Lyman Bushman's *Mormonism: A Short Introduction*. While his account may only serve as a preliminary introduction to the religion and its factions, it is comprehensive enough for informing the current study.

novel does not lend itself to stable oppositions between criminal projects and projects of correction. Indeed, it repeatedly foregrounds the morally suspect and historically variable nature of that very distinction” (232). The citizen/outlaw dichotomy is one of Barnes’s principal ways of presenting the Ryders as incestuous, but is never used as a way to discount or disqualify either side of the binary, which are both afforded viability by Barnes.

Barnes establishes credibility for the Ryders insofar as credibility can be accepted to mean the basis upon which viability-of-existence can be established for a mode of being and relating. This viability implies valuedness, not as “right,” “wrong,” “moral,” or “immoral,” and entails that individuals who take up this mode are understood as able to “contribute in” (borrowing a phrase from Winnicott) to socio-culture-at-large (without what can be considered their ontological basis in incest keeping them “out” of such a position or “away” from such an ability). Barnes presents the citizen/outlaw binary, using the citizens as foil for the Ryders, but ultimately dispenses with any hierarchical or dualistic way of looking at livelihood or valued modes of being and relating. The Ryders are able to occupy space outside of the citizens’ space, to look at the prejudices, inhospitality, and literal disrepair of the citizens’ community, and to “contribute in” alternative or *viable* alternative beliefs, outlooks, and physical organizations of space. Barnes does not legitimate the Ryders by delegitimizing the citizens; she creates *more possible ways* of being and relating.

That which constitutes one as incestuous and that which constitutes one as outlaw are made synonymous by the normative community-at-large within *Ryder*, but this is not what the novel itself, what Barnes herself, propounds or achieves. With *Ryder*, Barnes desires to untie outlaw from incest and incest from outlaw. This is not to say that Barnes has a “pro-incest” agenda with *Ryder*, but rather that she desires to allow the incestuous family apparatus – through its literary incarnation in *Ryder* – to gain a voice, a mode of livelihood within society, to gain viability. The normative community in *Ryder* is composed of human beings, with human capacities, and thus, these individuals’ decision to exclude the Ryders on such grounds as “incest equals outlaw” or “outlaw equals unlawful” is precisely

what Barnes is speaking against in *Ryder* – as well as *The Antiphon*, and *Nightwood*.



## Chapter Two: Expanding the Scale of Viability with *The Antiphon*

### I. Confusion and Abuse in the Hobbs Family

*Ryder* presents a family of biological/“biological” origin wherein incestuous relationships are maintained via a guiding vision driven by Sophia and Wendell; this vision is to realize a race unto themselves, and a socio-cultural reality away from the “citizens,” wherein they may relate to each other (sexually, emotionally, mentally, physically) in an incestuous way. *The Antiphon* presents a family of biological origin whose incestuous relationships are maintained through abuse – an abuse not necessarily part of the vision of the family. The Hobbs family has a vision similar to that of the Ryder family – here directed largely by Victoria<sup>20</sup> and Titus, “Free-soiler, free-thinker, nonconformist” (*Antiphon* 100)<sup>21</sup> (another mother-son partnership, although unlike in *Ryder*, both are deceased by

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<sup>20</sup> The living Hobbses agree upon Victoria’s place as the progenitor of Titus’s vision for the Hobbs family (as do the Ryders with Sophia and Wendell in *Ryder*) – the Hobbs family of origin includes Victoria as its originator. Augusta admits, of her first encounter with Victoria, and thus Titus:

She had my purse, my person, and my trust  
In one scant hour.  
Even stones wear down beneath the lick of flattery  
And I but rock-salt to her stallion son,  
Before whose rough unbridled head I dwined  
At his fast leisure. (*Antiphon* 107-108)

Augusta also gives an account of Victoria’s ability to control those whom she saw as her family of origin:

I said if it’s to be Victoria, I’ll give her.  
There was one who thought herself of Royal Jelly,  
And had, she said, the touch was once the King’s.  
Was I, a country girl, to disbelieve her?  
May I be forgiven, I believed her utterly;  
She was so tender and perfidious;  
A faulty scholar, but a witty one:  
And such a pair of transcendental eyes! (105)

Louis F. Kannenstine, in *The Art of Djuna Barnes: Duality and Damnation*, unpacks these lines from Miranda’s perspective: “Miranda, with Jack’s encouragement, had already begun to visualize her mother’s past by recalling the coming of her polygamous and freethinking American father, Titus Hobbs, to Beewick, and his own mother’s engineering of the meeting with Augusta” (144). In addition, many Barnes critics and scholars provide accounts of the parallels between Victoria (and Sophia) and Barnes’s grandmother Zadel. My project is not seated in the biographical; however, Ann Martin’s *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed: Modernism’s Fairy Tales*, Hank O’Neal’s “Life is painful, nasty and short ... in my case it has only been painful and nasty”: *Djuna Barnes, 1978-1981: An Informal Memoir by Hank O’Neal*, and Bonnie Kime Scott’s *Refiguring Modernism, Volume One: The Women of 1928* have all provided me with a wealth of nuanced biographical information, and I recommend all to the current reader.

<sup>21</sup> All quotations from *The Antiphon* in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, refer to the version of the play published in 1958 in the United States; however, passages that vary significantly from the 1962 version (British spelling) are noted within this chapter.

the time we meet the Hobbsses in the play) – which focuses on “free love” among its members.<sup>22</sup> Barnes, however, presents this vision of “free love” as *less* viable if it is to take place among members of the same family of origin who cannot relate to each other in an incestuous way without abuse. The Ryders are a family wherein the possibility of incestuous relating may be maintained without constant abuse. *Nightwood* presents individuals whose incestuous relating to each other is the very means to their collective viability and livelihood without abuse. In contrast, the Hobbsses are a family whose members are unable to relate to each other outside of abuse – and the incestuous “free love” that has occurred before the outset of the play is the basis of the abuse carried out within the play.

The dynamic between Titus and his upbringing by Victoria and his subsequent desire to become the “prophet” of a family whose aegis is “free love” among family members parallels the upbringing of John Humphrey Noyes who went on to found the Putney and Oneida communities of “free love” in the 1800s (a time in which Victoria, Sophia, Titus, and Wendell live(d)). In *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons*, Lawrence Foster outlines Noyes’s desire to be a “prophet” to a community based in “complex marriage” – not the polygamy of the Mormons, nor the single-family interpretation of the Hobbsses and Ryders – and to facilitate a community that is self-sufficient outside the domain of the “citizens.” These parallels are likely illuminating for the reader who desires to understand further, and without prejudice, the desires of Wendell and Titus for a “free love”-based family apparatus. The goal of this “free love”-based family apparatus is not the

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<sup>22</sup> Jeremy (in disguise as Jack) provides the first description in the play of Titus’s theory of “free love”:

In my mind’s gallery he sits entire;  
In tip-top belly-leather, watch-swag swinging  
At his bulk, like ferry chains on docks.  
Stickler for the freedom of the sexes,  
There ranged behind his easy seated bum,  
Fearfully detained, and standing up.  
(You’ve told me he believed in Brigham Young)  
His pack of wives, in Concord cameos,  
Flushed out in tabby, chatelaines and bugles,  
Their bustles close upon them, like a grudge;  
Flanked by warming-pans, bassoons and bastards. (*Antiphon* 17)

abuse of its members, whether or not abuse of the members by each other is to occur within said apparatus. These parallels also illuminate the idea that a community or family apparatus seated in “free love” may be initially or in theory considered *more* viable, and in turn an example of “free love” that is *less* viable (or, in the extreme, *unviable*) due to its unplanned culmination in abuse (not intended by the guiding vision).

The relative viability of a livelihood maintained by incestuous relationships is made apparent in *The Antiphon* through comparison with the incestuous relationships in *Ryder* and *Nightwood*. We see the latter two works as presenting *more* viable incestuous relationships than the former because the incestuous relationships in these two texts involve either no abuse or a lesser degree of abuse than those in *The Antiphon*. We also see the incestuous relationships in *The Antiphon* as *potentially* more viable in their own right were the relationships that make up the Hobbs family not to result in the abuse in which they do. The Hobbses cast into relief the viability of the relationships of the Ryders and of the individuals in *Nightwood* (particularly the latter) by way of *The Antiphon*’s presentation of incest *within* the biological family of origin as a site of abuse. The Ryders introduce this notion of abuse through their disregard for the happiness or safety (i.e. constant childbearing, relegation to domestic work, and being at the financial behest of Sophia and Wendell) of their female family members;<sup>23</sup> this abuse, it seems, stems from the reality that the incestuous relationships among the Ryders are among individuals from the same biological/“biological” family of origin. This reality is also true for the Hobbses, who do not *choose* each other as family, but maintain themselves as a (biological)

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<sup>23</sup> Many critics, such as Louise A. DeSalvo in “‘To Make Her Mutton at Sixteen’: Rape, Incest, and Child Abuse in *The Antiphon*,” Julie L. Abraham in “‘Woman, Remember You’: Djuna Barnes and History,” and Meryl Altman in “*The Antiphon*: ‘No Audience at All?’” assert that it is the women in the Hobbs family, save perhaps for Victoria, who bear the most abuse in *The Antiphon*. Certainly they do bear abuse, as Miranda notes, “And of that marriage pupped truncated grief, / As women must who mother discontent, / And any dream come short” (*Antiphon* 15). However, I argue that it is all of the living members of the Hobbs family that bear abuse, and, though it is experienced and formulated in different ways by Barnes and by her characters, I do not intend to claim that it is a gendered abuse; it is not my intent here to prove that one character over another experiences *more* or *more potent* abuse in the familial system shown in the play, but that this family apparatus implicates all of its members in a system of abuse.

family of origin via abuse. As such, the Hobbsses do not maintain any regard for the happiness of the family as a unitary apparatus, nor for members individually, other than each for him/herself – all but Miranda, and, it could be argued, Victoria and Titus (although this cannot be made unequivocal regarding the latter two, as these individuals only appear to us mediated by the other Hobbsses as the two whose vision has been bequeathed to or forced upon the rest of the family).<sup>24</sup> Thus, this vision seems inescapable to the living members of the Hobbs family, yet is not entirely understood by them. Such lack of comprehension informs the living Hobbsses' mutual blaming, jealousy, and resentment of each other, obsession with Titus, and ultimately their interpersonal abuse.<sup>25</sup>

Condemnation will not be the focus of as much attention as in the preceding and proceeding chapters; however, it is necessary to understand how it is presented in *The Antiphon* in order to proceed in an examination of the Hobbs family's incestuous being and relating, and thus viability. From the outset of the

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<sup>24</sup> James B. Scott assesses the Hobbs family vision and subsequent abuse: "[t]he family spite turns to its original source, Titus, who estranged himself from society with his espousal of polygamy, free love, and 'free everything'" (125) – what Scott calls Titus's "practice" (125), or what is referred to by Burley as his "practice" (*Antiphon* 111), and by Augusta and Dudley as his "credo" (108, 114).

<sup>25</sup> DeSalvo provides an account that is common to the few Barnes critics who have engaged with *The Antiphon*, and with which I do not agree:

Djuna Barnes' *The Antiphon*, a tragic drama in three acts, is a chilling, utterly realistic, and highly accurate portrayal of the psychodynamics and sexual pathology that operate within a family organized so that each child (but especially Miranda, the daughter) will be available for routinized and ritualized sexual molestation that their father, Titus Higby Hobbs, disguises (with the collusion of his dim-witted wife, Augusta) as religious ceremony. (300)

While I agree that there is abuse, sexual abuse, taking place within the Hobbs family, I do not agree that this is the *purpose* or sole directive of the Hobbsses. Rather, this abuse is a byproduct of a vision not understood by all of its members, and not agreed upon by all of its participants. James B. Scott explicates this lack of comprehension as the seat of the Hobbs family abuse, as well, noting: "Miranda [and the other living Hobbsses] is not calling into question the absolute rightness or wrongness of Titus's views of life; rather, she seems to insist upon a notion of justice to self and to others which fails when a person denies his[her] convictions" (129). This suggests that had Titus not strayed from the implementation of the vision founded by himself and Victoria, and had the rest of the family of origin understood this vision, the abuse may not have come about, or at least not become so pervasive. In this vein, Scott continues to address Miranda: "Titus had begun his 'practice' while still at Burley: he had shaped his affairs into a brawl of 'wives,' and his children would total in theirs the sum of his life. [...] Miranda will not be consoled at the expense of truth. Like answering the vesper bell or responding to the antiphon, the bell of the called response, Miranda will face her life" (136). In addition, Augusta, far from "dim-witted," is a member of the Hobbs family of biological origin, and insofar as her confusion matches that of the other living Hobbsses, she cannot be considered a lesser member, or to blame because of lack of intellect.

play, Miranda sets the tone of condemnation with her explanation of her mother Augusta's place in the Hobbs family, and consequently, the places of herself and her brothers, Jeremy (disguised as "Jack Blow" throughout the play), Elisha, and Dudley: "And like a compass whirling without seat / Fell victim to a dial without hours – / Marriage to my father, and his folly" (*Antiphon* 12). In Barnes's figuration of the family's perception of itself as "a dial without hours," she comments on the viability of the Hobbsses in their current state of incomprehension, but not in reference to the viability in general of being/relating in an incestuous family apparatus. "Whirling" with its members who are unable to find their "seats" or to comprehend themselves within a stable conceptualization of familial roles, Barnes commits the Hobbsses to their "compass." This "compass" suggests the family's guiding vision, which, insofar as the Hobbsses currently (do not) understand it, leads to abuse. That the Hobbsses are still searching to understand their "seats" throughout the entirety of the play suggests that their interpersonal abuse is a proxy for the interrogation of their "father, and his folly" (his vision). We can therefore understand that if the Hobbsses cease to abuse each other they may discover for themselves a *more* viable (non-abusive or less abusive) mode of being and relating.

In order to place the Hobbsses on Barnes's scale of viability, we must first look to how their family apparatus is composed in *The Antiphon*. Augusta, marrying Titus, also marries Victoria, his mother, whose "folly" is passed on to her son, and through him, to his wives/mistresses/lovers and children. Burley, Augusta's brother, and steward of Burley Hall, expresses his confusion regarding Titus's (and Victoria's) vision to his sister: "I never really understood how you condoned it" (*Antiphon* 115). Barnes's use of Burley's concern gives voice to a normative reader/audience member response to the morals and ethics of the Hobbs family apparatus. Hereby, Barnes, as in the citizen/outlaw dichotomy in *Ryder*, does not seek to legitimate one mode of livelihood at the expense of another, and encourages a dialogue between modes of being and relating. While the Hobbs children understand (insofar as they have been able to deduce from their lives spent with both Titus and Augusta) how an "escape" from the "folly"

was not, is not, possible, Augusta replies: “Don’t come at me too! I was a victim: / I’ve done my duty to the state – in children” (115).<sup>26</sup> Burley posits, “I give you ‘I love, and I must’” (80), as an explanation for the state of the Hobbs family, and in doing so creates what is perhaps the most succinct explanation of the feelings of condemnation involved in the Hobbses’ type of family apparatus: the idea that one must love one’s family members because they are one’s family members and one perceives oneself to be inextricably and inescapably linked to them.

The lack of understanding of the incestuous family apparatus in which the living Hobbses exist and relate is perhaps what constitutes the basis for their abuse of each other and of themselves. While, for example, in *Nightwood* both Nora and Robin understand that they perceive each other as family and constitute themselves as a family of (constructed) origin (and thus understand that they are within a chosen incestuous family apparatus), neither Augusta nor her children believe themselves to have chosen such a mode of being. Through the respective relationships of each Hobbs, save Miranda, with Titus (via Victoria and via Miranda’s relationship with Titus, especially his sexual relationship with her), each comes to blame, resent, and project feelings of powerlessness onto Miranda. Jeremy (Jack), who has arranged the meeting at Burley Hall, is as confounded as his siblings and mother as to the circumstances that led to their mutual condemnation. “He said ‘Come home to Beewick’” (*Antiphon* 76), Augusta notes of Jeremy, but neither he nor she understand why their supposed reunion is anything other than a mere continuation of the inescapable relationship to each other that they have carried out all of their lives.

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<sup>26</sup> Augusta later goes on to acknowledge her only partial understanding of the inescapable-because-incestuous family of which she is a part: “I won’t ask questions because I find I sweat me / In three several horrid generations, / And would know nothing” (*Antiphon* 136). Whether or not Augusta has always felt that it is not her duty to understand and inform her children of the aegis of their family, or, if they understand this vision, to explain to them the reason that they feel unable to leave the family of origin and feel that they must participate in incestuous relationships to one another, she expresses such self-absolving sentiment here – likely because of her own lack of comprehension. We cannot definitively say that this absolving is sincere, nor that it is a defense against the blame she fears her children will place at her subjecthood for their continued abuse within the incestuous family of origin. Later in the play, without regard or responsibility for the “escape” of her children, she realizes that she no longer has a place in her ancestral home, for her home is with the Hobbses, the family of origin of which she has been contributor and part creator: “How have my reflections gone from out / The pools of Burley. How I’ve fumbled my escape!” (152).

Burley, upon the convening of the Hobbsses at Burley Hall, admits that the Hobbsses were “once instructed” (*Antiphon* 81), and now are not. Augusta interrupts him from further comment, signaling to the reader/audience member that her brother’s sentiment refers to Titus’s instruction of the family, and their lack of direction since his death: “I was coming to my major-general – ” (81). Elisha replies, “*Your* major-general? Miranda’s first cadet” (81). Augusta, ignoring her son’s comment, which reveals the way in which Titus positioned Miranda as his wife/mistress/lover, rather than simply as daughter, and his wife as less than such, goes on to describe the way in which Titus led the family with pageantry and without self-doubt. Titus’s leadership implies a lack of reflection or consideration of input from Augusta and his children, and underscores the living Hobbsses’ dissatisfaction with their lack of comprehension of collective identity or individual identities within the family apparatus. Augusta indicates the major question facing and driving the actions of the characters in the play when she asks, “I wonder who we are, we still have time for it” (102). However, all we find in the discourse of the play is unfinished grasping at understanding of a family identity, pivoting on the sexual relationship between Titus and Miranda and the family’s reactions to it. Miranda replies to Augusta, “Defend a better point; four children hang upon it” (102), informing us of her concomitant desire to establish an understanding of herself within the family from which she is unable to escape, and which is the lens through which she has experienced her entire life. (This is also the lens through which she experiences her death at the close of the play.) Though Titus was presumed her “first cadet” by her brothers and mother, regardless of Augusta’s desire to deny this to her daughter, Miranda is no closer than her brothers or mother to understanding how Titus’s “instruction” could justify their family apparatus and all that it has been to each of them. Perhaps “justify” is not the correct word here; the living Hobbsses, throughout the play, seek not justification of their incestuous family, but comprehension – something that they feel Titus did not teach them, thus providing the means to their confusion and consequent mutual abuse beyond his death.

That the living Hobbsses desire to comprehend their family apparatus and their individual familial roles is perhaps first evident in Act One, when Miranda states: “Most moved. It is not well to be so moved. / *In lost familiarity* – ” (*Antiphon* 16; emphasis added). She hereby not only assesses the communal confusion that the living Hobbsses feel regarding their familial roles and their modes of being and relating within their family apparatus, but also that this confusion is in constant flux and is gaining momentum within them all. Just before Miranda offers this assessment, she speaks of a specific instance of such confusion: her birth. Miranda says of Augusta: “Yet in her hour, became by me, twice headed, / The one head on the other stared, and wept” (15). The inability of the reader/audience member and of Miranda to discern Augusta’s head from Miranda’s shores up this mother and daughter’s ongoing struggle (note here the “weeping”) to comprehend their individual and collective places within their family apparatus.<sup>27</sup> They are all “so moved” but simultaneously “lost.” In Mary Jean Corbett’s *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf*, her use of Christine Froula’s understanding of the difficulty for those involved in incest to articulate their being and relating proves invaluable in this discussion of the Hobbsses’ desire for comprehension. Froula explains that the individual involved in incest who is trying to verbalize or formulate thought to express his/her being must “break every mould & find a fresh form of being, that is of expression, for everything I feel & think” (qtd. in Corbett: 176). This articulation, if achieved, is “a symbol at once of blight and of potential rebirth” (Froula qtd. in Corbett: 181). This expression refers to the “citizen’s” perception of the “outlaw” as a “blight,” which may lead the incest-self to close him/herself off from valuing, validating, and considering *viable* his/her livelihood. If the incest-self overcomes this externally “blighting” force, he/she may be “reborn” (not in a necessarily religious sense) by self-comprehension. Similarly to Woolf,

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<sup>27</sup> After Miranda speaks of her birth, she tells Jeremy (as Jack, who flippantly speaks of Titus’s role within the Hobbs family), “Say less, Jack Blow, for knowing nothing of it” (*Antiphon* 16), to which he replies, “I’d say more, for the very same default. / For who is wiser than the total stranger?” (17). While I do not suggest that “the total stranger” could better comprehend the Hobbsses than themselves, Jeremy’s hyperbolic expression of what could be despair or hopelessness with the Hobbsses’ (including his own) lack of comprehension augments the present discussion.



Corbett continues, Barnes “was aiming [...] at reconfiguring kinship for new uses in new times, without paraging” – “to refigure and refashion the discourses of incest” (200) through her characters. Barnes succeeds in opening up the discourse of incest by presenting the Hobbsses in search of both familial and self-comprehension within incest.<sup>28</sup>

In Act Two, we learn that although Miranda does not fully understand her family apparatus, nor Titus’s (and Victoria’s) motivations for their incestuous mode of being and relating, nor why her father chose her as the child with whom to form a sexual relationship, she does appear to be the only living Hobbs who has found a way of understanding herself while still within the family. Shortly before Elisha and Dudley attack and pin down Miranda and Augusta, in order physically and mentally to torment them as an attempt at some sort of communal understanding of their roles in relation to one another, Augusta remarks: “I’ve observed the more my daughter lives / Up to the general precepts of her scruples / The more she is abandoned” (*Antiphon* 127). Angela Ingram, in *Women’s Writing in Exile* (co-edited with Mary Lynn Broe), speaks to these “scruples” formed in the midst of the “exile” of the incestuous family apparatus. Miranda, the one living Hobbs who does not orchestrate abuse against her family, may be the “center” of this “exile,” which “is always shifting, or, rather, being redefined, replaced” (2). Barnes positions Miranda in the Hobbsses’ family apparatus in such a way that she is the “place of exile” that “can be tomorrow’s center” (2) – the seat in the Hobbsses’ family apparatus from which viability may be extrapolated for a theory of viability for the livelihood of the incest-self. Broe’s ability to say that

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<sup>28</sup> Corbett notes:

A justifiable skepticism notwithstanding, I do take, have taken, and will probably continue to take family fictions as a resource for making change in the ways we live now and for generating a fuller future, because those fictions, viewed in historical perspective, themselves instantiate the very possibility of change. Whether or not change entails greater livability, as Butler might say, is partially up to us. (205)

Corbett here speaks to the living Hobbsses’ desire for comprehension of themselves and of each other in their particular family apparatus, their desire to understand their own “livability,” or what I would call their own *viability*, and their desire to deem their own livelihoods viable. The “fuller future” Corbett speaks of would include the valuation of those whose lives are lived with incest, regardless of the ethical valuations to be placed upon the resultant abuse that may occur therein. To “entail greater livability,” which is “partially up to us,” is Barnes’s project with *The Antiphon*, and the reader/audience member’s responsibility to Barnes’s text.

“[n]ot only incest survivors, but survivors of all admixtures of family intimacy become exiled *within* the discourse of incest” (45) attests to Barnes’s desire through *The Antiphon* to show that incest is not the basis for familial abuse, and that individuals involved in incestuous family apparatuses are not “exiled” *without ability* to articulate themselves. That is, they are not silenced even if they are considered unviable by normative socio-cultural realities. “The voices of exiled survivors are frequently not heard,” and this “silencing” may come across as the simple unviability of a life lived in an incestuous family apparatus; however, this “silencing” (46) comes from outside that family apparatus, from the “citizens” who fear or condemn the incest-selves, rather than from the individuals themselves (i.e. Miranda and the other living Hobbsses, who see that Miranda understands herself as having a possible livelihood in a renewed, “reborn,” *changed* Hobbs family apparatus that they cannot envision with her).

Miranda’s “abandonment” due to her “scruples” involves herself not only being resented, abused, and derided by her family, but also living in near isolation when not directly in her family’s presence (albeit her closest companion is her brother Jeremy in disguise as Jack or “Tom-o-Bedlam, Lantern Jack” (*Antiphon* 36)).<sup>29</sup> While Miranda’s brothers and Augusta yearn primarily for a more informed understanding of their family’s purpose in incest, and their family’s

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<sup>29</sup> A great source of the reader/audience member’s sense of Miranda’s abandonment comes from her brothers’ and mother’s discussion of her lack of children (and husband); they suggest that she is abandoned by themselves, trying to goad her on in their seeming resentment of her, but also that she is “abandoned” by the offspring (and husband) that she does not have. Jeremy (as Jack) begins, discussing his relationship with Miranda in Paris before coming to Burley Hall: “Pushing an empty carriage, where its infant / Nothing lies” (*Antiphon* 42); Dudley continues, “Why sure, but there’s depopulation in her yaw” (135); Elisha contributes, “Manless, childless, safeless document” (141). The brothers and mother also insinuate that it is Miranda’s lesbianism that is the source of her “manless, childless” state, portraying such as negative to suit their purposes as stated above. Dudley suggests to Elisha, as he pins Miranda down in a physical attack against her: “Slap her ears down. Stand her on four feet! / That’ll set her up! I’d say that’s one position / Of which she hasn’t made the most in twenty years” (138). In the 1962 version Dudley says: “Slap her rump, and stand her on four feet! / That’s her best position!” (*Selected Works* 176). This phrasing has similar effect as the 1958 version, although does not suggest “childlessness” or “manlessness” as much as the earlier version. With this Dudley suggests that Miranda has not been penetrated by a man in such a position since she proximally lived with her family of origin; Elisha then offers, “I’ll staff you!” (141), suggesting that he will change this “manless” (perhaps “childless”) state by raping her in this position. Augusta, suggesting that her daughter’s sense of intellectual superiority to the rest of the living Hobbsses is the source of her childless, “barren” (“wintry”) state suggests: “You call it wisdom? I call it winter!” (171).

reason for each individual's unhappiness or dissatisfaction, Miranda seeks not only this, but also a livelihood outside of the current family apparatus. As Elisha and Dudley are attacking her and her mother, respectively, she cries, "Hands off, you too near thing!" (138) to Elisha, suggesting her uncomfortableness with the current scene – not only the physical, verbal abuse, but also (or perhaps because of the abuse) the "nearness" of her family members to herself. Miranda later adds that she is "trying to make us fit to be forgotten" (196). The desire to make her family "fit to be forgotten" to one another speaks to her dually conceived-of self; however, this separation currently proves impossible, and she perceives the incestuous family apparatus to be inevitable, herself to be fated to it.<sup>30</sup> Miranda assents to her mother, just before she is murdered by Augusta, "Nay, sparrow. / I'd lay you in the journey of your bed, / And un-bed you, and I could, in paradise" (201). By this she explains that she desires to show her mother how to escape from the family, if she were able, but is not, given the way in which the Hobbs family has been established, and given the way in which its members, Augusta equally, have ensured the family will never be "free-beaters" (79) – i.e. never be without the family of origin in life or in death. But Miranda dies before ever able to share or teach even these "scruples" to another Hobbs.

Miranda brings together what may seem at first like two contradictory aspects of this chapter: the idea that there is a lack of viability in the incestuous family apparatus presented through the Hobbsses in *The Antiphon*, and that the Hobbsses present a viable mode of being and relating, collectively and as individuals. We have discussed how this seeming contradiction is mitigated by the discrepancy between the vision and practice of the Hobbsses' ideal of "free love," wherein the vision does not include the incestuous abuse resultant from the practice of the vision by particular individuals. Miranda's particular "scruples," her ability to know herself as part of the Hobbsses, but also as having a potential viability for livelihood outside of the incestuous family apparatus is latently present throughout the play – latent because solely understood by Miranda, and

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<sup>30</sup> This echoes the idea of inheritance as it applies to the idea of the inescapability of the Hobbsses from their family apparatus presented in my discussion of the "dial without hours" and "compass whirling without seat" (*Antiphon* 110) metaphors.

misunderstood by her family as her vying for power over themselves. In her essay, “The Daughter’s Seduction: Sexual Violence and Literary History,” Froula comments, citing fellow critic Marie Balmory as her inspiration, “To know all alone [...] is to know as if one did not know. To know with another is conscious knowledge, social knowledge, *con-science*” (127). Similar to Wittgenstein’s idea of the impossibility of a private language, knowing one’s identity, an identity to which no one else will attest, is an isolating and derealizing experience. Because Barnes is able to realize this possible livelihood for the reader/audience member, Miranda’s ability to be visible as viable both within and outside of the Hobbs family is also realized, and so is her family members’ distrust and abuse of this realization that they neither understand, nor are trying to understand (as they cannot strive to understand something of which they are not even cognizant). The reader is able to mediate between Miranda’s private knowledge and the Hobbses’ collective knowledge to understand how Barnes figures Miranda as the only one in the play who may exist both within and outside of the incestuous family apparatus, and who thus, in her ability to understand herself as having potential in both modes of being and relating, renders both modes livable and viable for the reader or audience member.

An important dimension of the Hobbses’ confusion stems from the variable multiplicity of roles that each family member occupies. In keeping with *Ryder* and *Nightwood*, characters in *The Antiphon* take up simultaneous and multiple familial roles. Importantly, however, in *The Antiphon* there is the addition of *confusion* in each family member as to what role(s) he/she inhabits and the function of these roles in and to the Hobbses’ incestuous family apparatus. In searching for reconciliation of multiple and (often) simultaneous roles within him/herself, he/she projects this confusion onto his/her other family members. This projection leads to the abuse of the other family members as media or tools by means of which he/she can come to understand him/herself (examples of this behaviour and dialogue will be discussed at length below). Within the incestuous family apparatus, this reconciliation necessarily relies upon the understanding of the other family members of their own multiple and/or simultaneous roles within

the same family. If the other members are similarly in search of reconciliation and understanding within themselves as to their places within the family and express this through interpersonal abuse, as is the case in *The Antiphon*, then this understanding is not mutually attained, and culminates in continued and escalating abuse of one another. In *The Antiphon*, this escalates to the arranged murder of daughter by mother, arranged by sons/brothers, and the consequent self-death (seemingly occurring because she realizes she has killed her daughter and her sons have left the house) of the mother. The family, while the members are proximally dispersed from each other's company, is still not, even in death and abandonment, able to divide itself into individuals who may relate primarily to others who are not of the biological family of origin, and locks the individuals in perpetual or eternal familiarity.

As Barnes writes in her "Cautionary Note" to the play, "Their familiarity is their estrangement." This suggests that familiarity does not allow them to estrange each other from each other's self, but rather facilitates the communal undoing of each other's bodily or physical being-together, strengthening, perhaps ironically, the resolve of the reader or audience member's understanding of the family as inextricably linked. At the close of the play Jeremy recites, "This is the hour of the uncreate; / The season of the sorrowless lamenting" (*Antiphon* 202). The "lamenting" is a "sorrowless" culmination of murder, death, and proximal dispersion. There cannot be "sorrow" if the family sought destruction only to realize that the destruction of the physical apparatus of the family means the physical destruction of themselves, even though it does not destroy the defining ontology of each of its members. Jeremy continues, "Say I was a man, of home so utterly bereft, / I dug me one, and pushed my terror in" (203). Jeremy, who arranges the bringing forth of a dollhouse, a replica of the Hobbs family home, earlier in the play (to be discussed later in this chapter), who orchestrates his brothers' arrangement of his mother and sister's death, who tries to "push the terror" of his lack of comprehension of his family apparatus, who finds his "home so utterly bereft" of understanding and so rife with abuse and confusion, at the close of the play cannot deny that no part of his plan has worked. He says, "Stand

back, uncle” (203), and leaves Burley Hall, giving himself physical reprieve from the family setting, as his brothers have done for themselves. However, he is unable to reconcile his role(s) within the family in any way that allows him to make amends with himself and the audience, in any way that allows him to state that after all that has been said and carried out within the play, there has resulted any resolve. The confusion at the play’s outset is only heightened, and the abuse and “terror” only amplified by the knowledge that the Hobbs family cannot be escaped, and cannot be “pushed in” – dismembered or disabled.

The confusion about which familial role(s) each Hobbs family member (living and dead) inhabits is the seat of much of the abuse that leads Jeremy to orchestrate and carry out a plan that he hopes will eliminate the Hobbs family apparatus and its power to define each member’s identity. Given Titus’s decision to position Miranda as his wife/mistress/lover, and to engage in a sexual relationship with her, neither her brothers nor her mother know how to relate to her, to Titus, or to each other. Augusta positions herself simultaneously as Miranda’s mother and as her daughter; Jeremy positions himself as Miranda’s lover, brother, and father; Dudley and Elisha position Miranda as their mother and daughter, to be abused as they abuse their mother and, they perceive, as a daughter is abused by her father (given Titus as exemplar). Miranda positions herself according to these roles thrust upon her, and is mother to Augusta, her brothers, and sexual partner to her father and brothers, as well as daughter to them in many of their abuses against her. Dudley and Elisha, jealous of Miranda and Augusta’s partiality to Jeremy, and of their respective places as partners to Titus, project their feelings of displacement or hierarchical inferiority (for they understand Titus to be the family’s aegis, through Victoria) onto Miranda and Augusta through abuses both physical and verbal. Augusta, jealous of her daughter and her displacement of Augusta as the wife/mistress/lover of Titus, abuses Miranda accordingly, but also attempts to take on Miranda’s identity for herself in order to reconcile what she perceives to be a discrepancy in her understanding of her own identity. Jeremy, believing he might be able to dissolve the Hobbs family, takes Miranda as lover (albeit in disguise, though we learn that

Miranda has likely known Jack to be her brother Jeremy since they met) in an attempt to gain Titus's power through a relationship with Titus's daughter, wife/mistress/lover, and to make himself Titus by proxy, and thus control the family's existence or lack thereof.

Another prominent example of simultaneous and multiple role inhabiting occurs when the reader/audience member realizes that Dudley and Elisha perceive themselves in relation to Miranda and Augusta not simply as brothers and sons, respectively, and when Dudley explains their perception of Miranda and Augusta as co-creators of the Hobbs family along with Titus (through Victoria's machinations). Dudley admits:

You know, sometime Mother and Miranda  
Are so entirely breezed up by the Mighty  
That if I saw myself, backward, in their mirror,  
I'm not so sure what sort of beast I'd see.<sup>31</sup> (*Antiphon* 32)

The "Mighty" here is Titus, their father, and by perceiving "Mother and Miranda" as "breezed up" by him, they are indicating they perceive a sort of collusion between Augusta, Miranda, and Titus in the making of the family into some "sort of beast" they cannot comprehend. Augusta, in turn, characterizes her sons' positioning of themselves as their father Titus: "Pay no attention to my boys, they ape their father" (67). Prior to Augusta's utterance of this line, both Dudley and Elisha have been ridiculing Miranda, and asserting both their desire for control of her and their intentions of malice for their sister, as they perceive her to be a threat to their ability to be the "Mighty" in the family. Augusta's assessment that they are merely "aping" their father only serves to induce in the brothers further desire for retribution on both Miranda and Augusta for their unwillingness to

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<sup>31</sup> In the 1962 version, this passage contains several differences:

You know, sometimes it seems both Mother and Miranda  
Are so entirely breezed by the Mighty  
That if they saw me backward in a mirror,

I'm not so sure what sort of beast they'd see. (*Selected Works* 99)

My reading still stands given these changes; the change from "if I saw myself" to "if they saw me," and the change from "I'd" to "they'd" emphasizes the idea of confusion of familial identity and roles.

collude with the brothers in their desire for control over the family, over Miranda and Augusta, which they all believe Titus still possesses.

Elisha attempts to quell his mother's (accurate) suspicions of her sons' abusive intentions by offering, about Miranda, "You know we admire her stubbornly, / With prudence!" (*Antiphon* 76). Augusta only replies, skeptically, "Do I?" (76). From this we can assess that Augusta does not believe her sons; however, throughout the play, Augusta is unwilling to try to protect Miranda from the malice of her brothers, and though she does not believe her sons "admire" Miranda, she does not attempt to reconcile this within herself, nor to offer sympathetic or empathetic dialogue to her daughter. This is largely because she too fears her sons, fears that they are not simply "aping" their father, but that they too control her, and consequently, Miranda. In Act Two, Barnes notes that Augusta is "*Nervous on finding herself alone with her sons*" (126). This "nervousness" belies Augusta's awareness of her sons' sexual and violent intentions toward her and/or Miranda; she utters that Miranda is "magnanimous" (126), that her daughter is too willing to forgive those who have less power than she has. This places Augusta once again at the forefront of her own concern, worrying only about her own "nervousness" in reaction to Dudley and Elisha's aggression, and not the possibility of Miranda's similar vulnerability. "So? The whole fool's present in Miranda" (126), Elisha utters of his sister's orchestrated vulnerability, and his mother's false notion of exception to her sons' viciousness. This utterance suggests that the brothers and Augusta are attempting to position Miranda as the vulnerable centre of the abuses being done, to position her as the "fool" who is able to see herself in relation to her family as inevitable, but not as inevitably abusive. Miranda is able to understand herself outside of the abuses being done to her, and thus the plan to position her as "the fool" is yet another attempt by the brothers and Augusta to undermine her for fear that she may be able to "unseat" their abuses and leave them only with each other to abuse – which they do already, but primarily *through* her. Removing Miranda as medium for abuse and dialogue about comprehending the family apparatus is not desired by the brothers or Augusta, and thus they attempt to assert that the "whole fool's



present in” her, rather than let Miranda know that they are threatened by her “scruples.”

Augusta perceives her daughter not only as the woman desired more than she by her sons<sup>32</sup> and husband, but also as one of Titus’s wives/mistresses/lovers. Accordingly, Augusta calls one of his wives/mistresses/lovers a “vixen” (*Antiphon* 113), echoing an epithet ascribed to Miranda throughout the play.<sup>33</sup> Dudley and Augusta go on to reveal Augusta’s attempts, from Miranda’s childhood onward, to keep her daughter powerless. Dudley iterates: “Mother always liked her when her head was hanging” (121); Augusta replies, “When a little girl, the look was charming – ” (121), indicating that the look was “charming” when it indicated hope for Augusta’s feelings of power within the family. Now Augusta also views Miranda’s seeming powerlessness within the family as her own, threatening further losses of power over the males in her family, and over Miranda as well. Dudley remarks:

You had her so convinced she was the devil,  
At seven she was cutting down the hedges  
To furnish brier to beat her to your favor,  
Then went out hunting for the crime.<sup>34</sup> (121)

Elisha chimes:

Wait now, that reminds me of that dog  
That mongrel that you held down with both hands,  
At father’s orders, while he aimed and cored it

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<sup>32</sup> Augusta remarks in Act Three: “My natural showers have wept unnatural moons. / I’m grinned away, to catch my sons’ attention” (*Antiphon* 175).

<sup>33</sup> Augusta, in attempting to discuss simply Titus’s mistresses, confuses her discussion of them and of her daughter:

Do you presume it possible his mistresses  
Still roam the countryside? I almost wish  
The creatures walked again, I’d have a fourth at bridge –  
But I was coming to Miranda – ” (*Antiphon* 66)

In the 1962 version, Augusta calls them “wenches” (*Selected Works* 124) instead of “mistresses,” further underlining the severity of feeling Augusta is transferring to Miranda.

<sup>34</sup> The last line of this passage in the 1962 version reads: “All the time since, been hunting for her crime” (*Selected Works* 164). This change further underlines the urgency, and perhaps unexpected contemporariness, of this “search” – which continues to take place throughout the play as the living Hobbsees project onto Miranda, and, indeed, direct their individual and collective frustrations toward her.

With a blunderbus, rammed down with your love-letters.<sup>35</sup> (121)

Augusta projects onto Miranda feelings of culpability, shame, and baseness for being in the position of wife/mistress/lover to Titus; Augusta, Dudley, and Elisha prove themselves eager to absolve themselves of what they understand could be considered abuses against Miranda. In positioning Miranda as a culpable locus for the miscomprehension or lack of comprehension of their respective roles in the family apparatus, they reveal their respective denial, acceptance, and resentment of Miranda's place of abused/beloved. Augusta's equation of herself with her daughter is just such an attempt at self-comprehension.

The idea that such destructive being and relating as the physical, sexual, verbal, and mental abuse that occurs amongst the Hobbsses in *The Antiphon* is part of an effort made by each Hobbs to comprehend him/herself and his/her relationships with others may seem bold; however, I argue that the Hobbsses' desire to comprehend their incestuous family apparatus indicates that the viability of such a mode of being and relating in itself may be a *more* viable category of livelihood if the Hobbsses were to achieve a communal understanding of their family apparatus and the roles of each within this apparatus. This is especially true if they were to cease viewing abuse of and power over each other as means for self-comprehension. While any category of being and relating seated in abuse and power struggles of this kind is *less* viable, some aspects of how the Hobbsses exist and relate exemplify what Barnes argues *ought* to be considered viable (a site of livelihood, not merely livability). To explain further the inextricability of identity creation from abuse and power struggles as they operate in Barnes, Ekbert Faas's *Genealogy of Aesthetics* provides an apt synthesis of prevalent constructions of individuality and sameness in nineteenth and twentieth-century

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<sup>35</sup> In the 1962 version, this passage proceeds as follows:

That reminds me of the contra-bitch, the dog  
That with both hands, at father's wish, you held  
Cowering on the selvage of the night,  
While with gun, fed fat on your love letters,  
He cored the beast, just as the moon arose! (*Selected Works* 164)

These changes seem to magnify the sentiment expressed in the 1958 version, and put further abuses onto Miranda.

continental philosophy. Faas discusses marginalized or subordinated – whether by choice or otherwise – beings, or modes of being:

Essentially, Being stands for a basic experience of sameness, thanks to which an animal would ‘identify’ whatever furthers or threatens its survival [or, the animal/human perceives all as same until an instance of that same comes to threaten it, at which point the animal/human perceives that instance of the same as “different”]; for example, a doe, leaves it can feed on, or lions that might feed on it [or a human, humans he/she can have power over, and humans who might have power over him/her]. (229-230)

Faas argues here that one may construct the “other” as an antagonistic or hostile force (who may be perceived as the “same” until one feels threatened or until one may overpower the “other”), turning the “same” into the “other” to protect the self.

We see this desire to “protect” the self from abuse or being overpowered active throughout *The Antiphon*. In the Hobbsses’ abuses of each other, in their attempts to wield power over one another, to turn each other into subordinated beings (“leaves”) for fear of being subordinated themselves (“does” and “lions”), we see this desire to overpower before one is overpowered. This desire coupled with the desire for comprehension may be the largest cause of abuse within the play. This combined force may provide the most clarity and insight into how the Hobbsses’ abuse of each other is understood to facilitate their individual understandings of their roles within their family apparatus and the apparatus itself. The Hobbsses’ “vindicativeness” (Faas 184) is shown in the abuses committed against each other, and the Hobbsses’ “self-torment” and “envy” (184) are displayed in each Hobbs’s constant desire to become the most powerful individual in the family through the respective inhabiting of each other’s familial roles, and through the impossible desire to become Titus (and Victoria via Titus). The motives of the abuse and the abuse itself “[cause] the oppressed to invert the original valuations of good = noble and bad = slavish, and, after [this] overthrow [...], to impose that inversion [...] on their former masters” (184). The Hobbsses,

perceiving themselves as a “sameness” in terms of their family of origin, in terms of their incestuous family apparatus, realize that they do not understand their individual roles within this structure nor the individual roles of each other. Their “sameness” becomes numerous “differences,” and these “differences” translate into the abusive “othering” of each other as outlined by Faas. The objective of this “othering” is to regain an understanding of what their “sameness” would be outside of the context of abuse, if we understand their lack of comprehension to be the wellspring of their abuses, and if we attest to their shared understanding of themselves as inescapably, inevitably condemned to being and relating with each other as a family.

## II. Confusion and Abuse Without Trauma in the Potentially Viable Incestuous Family

The dollhouse, entering the stage just before the close of Act Two,<sup>36</sup> best concretizes the Hobbsses’ family apparatus within the play. Within the play, characters address their relationships to each other – their collective and individual modes of being and relating; however, it is only with the entrance of the dollhouse that the Hobbsses’ family apparatus and its concomitant inevitability and inescapability are concretized at once among all of the living Hobbsses, and thus for the reader/audience member.<sup>37</sup> The dollhouse is a cue that encourages

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<sup>36</sup> We read/observe: “BURLEY and JACK enter, carrying a covered object. Placing it at the center of the table JACK pulls the cover off, exposing a doll’s house” (*Antiphon* 144; emphases added). I emphasize here the position of the dollhouse “at the center” as a site for “exposition” as it relates to the current discussion of the dollhouse as a means more fully to understand the individual Hobbsses and/within their family apparatus. Richard Espley, in “Djuna Barnes’s *The Antiphon*: ‘tedious... because they will not understand it,’” writes of Jeremy’s “model of the family’s early home, a central prop with which he initiates the relation of their history”:

[Jeremy] says that it might be “beast-box... doll’s house, or Ark” (97). The doll’s house is a reassuring image, a simplified simulacrum of the [...] household [...]. However, this is simultaneously revealed to be an ark, a claustrophobic space in which survival is a struggle. Moreover, it is a “beast-box”, with all of the associations of violent sexuality inherent in that word. (191)

This characterization of the dollhouse as “history”-making or explaining is very much in keeping with my arguments about the dollhouse’s role in Barnes’s play, and Espley’s note that the dollhouse highlights the abuses within the Hobbs family only further strengthens the confluence between our arguments. While Espley’s focus is not on the viability that is created or lacking because of this abuse, my stance that the Hobbsses are *less* viable while carrying out abuse is nevertheless supported here.

<sup>37</sup> Sarah Bay-Cheng, in “Famous Unknowns: The Dramas of Djuna Barnes and Gertrude Stein,” points to another way in which Barnes uses the dollhouse itself to serve both her characters and

readers/audience members to situate the Hobbsses in the Hobbsses' past. We see Jeremy, Miranda, Dudley, and Elisha as young children, Augusta as their mother,<sup>38</sup> Titus still alive as their father; we imagine the children occupying the traditional childhood scenario. The poignancy of representing Jeremy, Miranda, Dudley, and Elisha as children lies in childhood (typically) being the fundamental site of development for relationships and identity. Moreover, a child's understanding of being and relating predominantly arises from the family apparatus of origin. As a symbol, the dollhouse represents an object of the family that transcends time; this is to say that the past, represented by the dollhouse in the present, makes static (unchangeable) the family dynamic. As such, the dollhouse incorporates the inevitability of the family's being and relating in the future.

In the dollhouse scene of Act Two, Jeremy (while in disguise as Jack) enters with a replica of the Hobbs family home, and Titus as a doll – both of which he has created. This leaves the reader or audience member wondering whether or not Jeremy's disguise is merely a façade being accepted, knowingly, by the living Hobbsses, as further evidence of their collective confusion as to how to go about finding their individual identities and roles within the family apparatus. The dollhouse serves to showcase the abuses committed against one another in this confusion.<sup>39</sup> Jeremy proceeds, "*Quietly*," "I give you Hobb's [sic] Ark, beast-box, doll's house – " (*Antiphon* 144). Not only does Jeremy's bringing out of the dollhouse serve the characters and reader/audience member in the ways outlined above, but it also draws attention to the power struggles and dynamic between the members of the Hobbs family, living and dead. The dollhouse, the Hobbs family home in miniature, makes the apparatus that encages all of the

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her readers/audience members, and aid them in better understanding the Hobbsses' family apparatus and dynamic. She writes: "By forcing Augusta to look through the window of the dollhouse, Jeremy forces her to look at the past as if it occurs 'onstage.' Augusta assumes the position of the audience looking at the events through the proscenium frame" (133).

<sup>38</sup> We may also view Augusta as an inhabitant of this childhood state, for we hear and see her wish to enter back into "girlhood" with Miranda throughout various scenes in the play.

<sup>39</sup> In keeping with this argument, Susan F. Clark, in "Djuna Barnes: The Most Famous Unknown," notes: "In choosing to write for the theater, Barnes acknowledged the theater's ability to communicate in words as well as by other means" (122) – i.e. the dollhouse as prop.

Hobbses potentially perceptible in its entirety by the Hobbses – perceptible as it *is*, and as it *was*, and thus as they *wish* it to be.

In this vein, I turn to Kitti Carriker's study, *Created in Our Image: The Miniature Body of the Doll as Subject and Object*, and her treatment of miniatures and dolls as it applies to the dollhouse and the Titus doll. Informing her study with a survey of critical perspectives on her subjects, in her introduction she writes of "the latent power of the small and trivial," "the miniature's power to delight and torment," and quoting from a landmark study in her field, G. Stanley Hall and A. Caswell Ellis's *A Study of Dolls*, provides the following: "They write that 'to make small will always be of itself alone a most effective pedagogic method, and will always exert a potent fascination'" (13). This brings into view the role of the Titus doll within the dollhouse scene, whose diminutive appearance is noted by Augusta:

Why it's your father, Titus, tamed! An imp,

A midge, a tick, a peg, a bob, a gnat,

[...]

A chip, a doll, a toy, a pawn,

A little man soon cooled. A nothing!

[...]

A thieving magpie's borne his beard away! (*Antiphon* 145-146)

The Titus doll is an ironic figure in the play: even though Augusta here seems to strip Titus of his power as patriarch of the Hobbs family, noting his emasculation in his loss of beard and in death ("cooled"), and the other living Hobbses appear to revel in her account of Titus, he maintains his power as the initiator and originator of the Hobbs family. While Augusta here boldly belittles Titus, she later admits to Miranda that she is "too old to be so frightened" (178), and that she "[forgives] him" (180). She counsels Miranda:

There's a battlement in every woman's heart

Whereon she keeps perpetual patrol

To scape the man she married, for the man

Heard scratching in the wall. (185)

Yet, she ultimately submits, "Magpie! With my world wrapped in a napkin! / In what pocket have you my identity?" (188), aligning herself with the fate of the Titus doll's beard. A magpie may have stolen the doll's beard, but it has not stolen *his* beard; the magpie steals Augusta's "identity" from her as she lives. The dollhouse and the Titus doll thus shore up for the Hobbsses and for the reader/audience member that Titus is still the holder of the *most* power within their family apparatus. As Titus retains and maintains his power for the living Hobbsses, so the inescapability and inevitability suggested by the dollhouse (i.e. as a closed or insular reality, which cannot be escaped for it is made up of participants (dolls) who do not have such a capacity) becomes metonymic of the corresponding inescapability of the Hobbs family. The living Hobbsses, ironically, become dolls for Titus to play with, highlighting the potency of Titus and his vision, rather than facilitating any growth in power by the living Hobbsses over each other or Titus.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, the sexual and physical abuse of Miranda by Titus is revealed here in the dollhouse scenes, as well as through the resulting abuses of Miranda by her brothers and mother for her supposed power as wife/mistress/lover/daughter of Titus, and for her supposed privilege from the injustices to their respective understandings of their own identities. Jeremy insists that Augusta be the first to see the abuses she so vehemently wishes to deny, or for which she desires to begrudge Miranda (never revealing to her daughter that this is the source of her resentment). Jeremy, "*Tapping on the attic window of the doll's house,*" says, "Put your wink against the window pane, what do you see?" (*Antiphon* 148). Augusta replies, "A bedroom, no bigger than my hand," while Miranda pushes her mother for further observation, "Do you remember what that cock-loft saw? / For that window is become your eye. / What do you see?" (148).

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<sup>40</sup> For further critical reading about *The Antiphon's* dollhouse, as well as other props such as the gryphon and the dressmaker's dummy, which repay further exploration that the space of my current study does not permit, I recommend the following: DeSalvo's "'To Make Her Mutton at Sixteen': Rape, Incest, and Child Abuse in *The Antiphon*," Michaela M. Grobbel's *Enacting Past and Present: The Memory Theaters of Djuna Barnes, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Marguerite Duras*, Deborah Parsons's *Djuna Barnes*, James B. Scott's *Djuna Barnes*, Bonnie Kime Scott's *Refiguring Modernism, Volume Two: Postmodern Feminist Readings of Woolf, West, and Barnes*, and Diane Warren's *Djuna Barnes' Consuming Fictions*.

Augusta, "*Recoiling*," replies, "I don't care what you've done, I do forgive me" (149), implying that she is aware of the sexual abuse of her daughter carried on by her husband in that very room (on a larger scale, of course), but will not let her daughter have the power over her that she feels would become Miranda's if she were to acknowledge her regret, or simply her knowledge of the abuse that occurred there. She attempts to gain power over her daughter and children here by letting them know that she wishes them to feel herself "outside" of the abuse that she has now "[*Put*] her eye to" (148) in front of them. Miranda presses her mother on, seeking recognition from her mother of her abuse, "*Do* you?" (149). Augusta, "*With great agitation*," places the blame again away from herself and onto her abused child, "Stop it, Miranda. I'm a stranger here" (149)<sup>41</sup> – trying yet again to distance herself from the Hobbs family apparatus – indeed here, Hobbs Ark. Jeremy asks, "Stranger or accomplice?" and Augusta feigns, "I do not understand you" (149). The abuse located here in this scene, however, is not to be dismissed with so flippant a reply, for Jeremy is intent on bringing to speech the rape of Miranda that has only been a part of the family's dialogue insofar as it has been spoken around or about but never plainly spoken.

Finally, Augusta admits – still in metaphor, but in plainer terms than she has spoken throughout the play – Miranda's abuse by Titus: "As in a profaned monsternace, see conspire / The fighting shadow of the Devil and the Daughter" (*Antiphon* 150). Jeremy continues her admittance, "The girl, damned, with her instep up-side-down, / Dragging rape-blood behind her, like the snail. / Whimpering 'Glory, glory!'" (150). Miranda concurs:

Howling "Glory, Glory!" for the god  
In the cinders of that blasphemy.  
And beneath her, in a lower room,  
Her father rubbing down his hands.<sup>42</sup> (150)

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<sup>41</sup> In the 1962 version, Augusta says "Stop them" (*Selected Works* 184) rather than "Stop it," focusing the reader/audience member's attention on the brothers' abuse of Miranda and Augusta, rather than on Augusta's blaming of Miranda for the brothers' perceived abuse of their mother.

<sup>42</sup> In the 1962 version, Miranda speaks the following lines: "Miranda damned, with instep up-side-down, / Dragging rape-blood behind her, like the snail – " (*Selected Works* 185). Jeremy finishes with a similar two lines as the 1958 version: "Beneath her, in a lower room, her father / Rubbed



Miranda asserts here that the “Glory, glory!” was not of celebration, perhaps as her mother and brothers would have wished in order to satisfy their ill-directed feelings of resentment and jealousy, but of despair, of a call for help, from someone else within the house, but which no member of the family answered. That Miranda’s exclamation is a call for help is evident in her use of prepositions (“for,” “in,” and “beneath”), and the situating of herself in “cinders.” She describes herself as “Howling” “for the god” – for help – and as being “In the cinders” while no help comes, as her father (and presumably the rest of her family, to whom she is calling) is “beneath her” in the rooms of the house. Elisha, unable to do anything but collude with what Jeremy has put before them with the dollhouse, assents, “Miranda, I give you our weapons. Jack, to you / My compliments. You pulled a trick unseats us all” (153). This recognition of Miranda’s abuse does not “unseat them all” in terms of enabling any of them to escape the Hobbs family, the Hobbs Ark. However, Elisha’s willingness to acknowledge Miranda’s rape and Augusta’s unwillingness to do so set the scene for Augusta’s murder of Miranda, which occurs while the brothers stand outside the windows of the next great scene of abuse to be committed in the “dollhouse”: the murder of self and daughter by mother, after the physical abuse of mother and sister by sons and brothers.

Before the closing of Act Two, Dudley and Elisha carry out their physical and verbal attack on Augusta and Miranda:

[...] *silently and swiftly the two sons – DUDLEY donning a pig’s mask, ELISHA an ass’s, as if the playthings would make them anonymous – rush the two women. ELISHA knocks MIRANDA’S cane away, seizing her and pinning her arms behind her. DUDLEY pushing AUGUSTA about in an attempt to make her dance. (Antiphon 136)*

Augusta mistakes the ambush, “*Thinking they are really playing*” (137), until Dudley, “*Dropping her, dancing about in a crouching position, striking out in*

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down his hands” (185). This change further underlines the reality of Miranda’s sexual abuse by Titus, and the family’s knowledge of it, by making the description of the scene even more multi-voiced.

*light rapid taps, as of a boxer sparring*" (137),<sup>43</sup> pins her so that he and Elisha may verbally and physically abuse her and Miranda. Elisha expresses his own and Dudley's resentment and jealousy of Miranda through his physical attack on her,<sup>44</sup> shouting, "You'd never listen to your brothers, would you, Toots? / Tick-bird, riding out the Grand Conception, / Which father, for lack of guts, left in your corner" (137). With this remark, Elisha strikes Miranda, and tries also to strike at Titus for his relationship with Miranda, which Elisha resents as making Miranda more powerful within the family than himself or Dudley, just as their inability successfully to overtake and rape Miranda here indicates Titus's power over themselves.<sup>45</sup> Suddenly, just before Jeremy brings in the dollhouse and Dudley and Elisha unmask, Elisha recedes in his attack; "She's your hound; do as you like with her" (142), he tells Augusta. Augusta, "*Considering the recommendation*" (142), settles upon, "Fie, fie! I've seen my daughter die before, and make it" (143). This remark could perhaps refer to Miranda's "death" by means of Titus's rape, and Augusta's own inability or unwillingness to help her daughter. This also points ahead to Augusta's murder of Miranda. The scene of Dudley and Elisha's attack of Augusta and Miranda, while showcasing the abuses carried out within the Hobbs family of origin, does not deter Augusta's fatal abuse

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<sup>43</sup> Later in the scene, "*He attempts to make her dance, AUGUSTA tries to obey, her mouth open as one who screams*" (*Antiphon* 143); the idea that Augusta "tries to obey" her sons marks her reaction in grave contrast to Miranda's, who consistently tries to free herself from Elisha's grasp. Augusta, seeking ingratiation into her sons's favour, perhaps more than possession of her own physicality here (indeed, she does try to exchange hers for Miranda's throughout the play), views herself here as wanted, desired, and thus is obliging to her son's grip. This is substantiated further by her remark to the equally pinned Miranda: "You never would – you know you never would / Listen to your brothers" (138).

<sup>44</sup> Barnes outlines Elisha's physical attack on Miranda in the stage directions: "*Pushing MIRANDA from behind with his knee, still holding her arms,*" "*Raising his knee*" (*Antiphon* 137), "*Kicking MIRANDA'S skirt*" (139), "*Snapping his fingers over her head, as in show*" (140), "*He is weeping as he mauls her*" (141), "*Giving MIRANDA a violent shove towards AUGUSTA*" (142).

<sup>45</sup> Elisha further verbally abuses Miranda in terms of her relationship with Titus, in similarly resentful and jealous terms:

The damned and dedicated "victim." Just another  
Self-appointed increment! I never knew  
Such an earnest stinker!

Why couldn't you live up to your brothers? (*Antiphon* 138)

This passage thus also reveals the brothers' projection of their feelings of powerlessness or feelings of being less desired by Titus (who preferred Miranda, they feel) and Miranda (who was raped by Titus, but who will not "allow them" to rape her here).

of Miranda at the close of Act Three, however much it belies the notion of the eternality of the Hobbsses' family apparatus, wherein one may "die before, and make it," evidenced by Titus's continued presence and directive in the lives of all the living Hobbsses.

Augusta shares with Dudley, Elisha, and Jeremy their obsession with Miranda and Titus, whether it is with Miranda via Titus or with Titus via Miranda. Jeremy, in orchestrating the dollhouse scenes, and Dudley and Elisha, taunting Miranda and Augusta throughout, including the above physical and verbal attacks, lead the reader or audience member up to Augusta's murder/suicide. Though it may seem as though I am proposing a causal relationship between the brothers' behaviours and Augusta's, such is not the case. Barnes's play does not allow the events of her dramatic action to be understood as resulting from simple causality – cause and effect as directly correlated – to come to fruition in her play, and purposely so, for to do so would locate the blame for the Hobbs family apparatus's state on an individual family member. Barnes cannot do so because, as she shows, a family cannot exist without the participation, here determined as inescapably so, of its members. While mother-blame or daughter-blame is a common point of discussion or articulation among theories of father/daughter incest,<sup>46</sup> Barnes devotedly does not pursue this line of

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<sup>46</sup> Mary Hamer's *Incest: A New Perspective*, Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," and Florence Rush's *The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children* all provide provocatively in-depth, and prolifically researched accounts of the incestuous abuse that occurs within the family of origin (and, in the latter, sexual abuse that occurs outside of it). They also address the commonly cited issue of "mother-blame," especially in light of the fantastic view of incest in much psychoanalytic thought and criticism, citing "mother-blame" as not accurately descriptive of the complex dynamic that is actually in play in the instance of father/daughter incest, and finding it to be an oppressive mode of assessing or explicating incest in general, for it complies with a sort of dual-victim blame, given the traditionally submissive or subordinate position that females in the family of origin were and often still are given in relation to their male family members. Vikki Bell's *Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault, and the Law* investigates the idea of "blame" as an appropriate term for the discussion of incest, especially incestuous abuse, and whether or not the idea of "blame" simply defers the exploration of the socio-cultural factors that effect or affect abuse at the theoretical and practical levels. Janet Liebman Jacobs's "Reassessing Mother-Blame in Incest" and Rita Sommers-Flanagan and H.A. Walters's "The Incest Offender, Power, and Victimization: Scales on the Same Dragon" present detailed sociological and psychological examinations of the power dynamics of incestuous abuse that may lead some to endorse "mother-blame" – a concept that ultimately does a disservice to the investigation of the incestuous relationships and individuals studied, as well as the socio-cultural climate in which they live.

thought. Though it might seem as though the culmination of the mother/daughter relationship within the play in murder and suicide would place the blame and the guilt (thus the suicide) for the abuse of Miranda on Augusta, the mother, Barnes's play as a whole suggests otherwise. "For we're about a tragic business, mother" (*Antiphon* 176), Miranda tells Augusta at the outset of their discussion leading up to their deaths, a discussion in which both try further to reconcile or understand themselves through each other, and through their perceptions of the other living Hobbsses, as well as Titus. Augusta finally suggests that perhaps their family apparatus is an "excellent arrangement of catastrophe" – "a closed account" (196) from which none of them may escape. Panicking that her sons have gone outside – could *they* have escaped? – Burley Hall (Hobbs Ark and the Hobbs family apparatus, by extension), any progress made toward understanding herself and Miranda and their roles in the family apparatus comes back to blame, jealousy, and begrudgement; she shouts at Miranda, "Stop them! Stop them! You let them get away! / It's your fault! You – you – you!" (200), "You are to blame, to blame, you are to blame – / Lost – lost – " (201). With these cries, "AUGUSTA *brings the ringing bell down on MIRANDA. Both fall across the gryphon,*<sup>47</sup> *pulling down the curtains, gilt crown and all. The ringing ceases*" (201) – the women both presumably dead, in a murder/suicide.<sup>48</sup> Their death does not extricate them from the "closed account," but rather leaves them within in. They remain Hobbsses, and remain in dialogue with the living Hobbsses the same way that Titus and Victoria are throughout the play, and the way that Jeremy is at the close of the play.

The confused ways in which the living Hobbsses relate to each other throughout the play cannot be dissected and studied by looking at each

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<sup>47</sup> The gryphon, Barnes explains in the stage directions for Act One, was "once a car in a roundabout" (*Antiphon* 7), which Titus has cut into two pieces, and which Augusta and Miranda both attempt to put to use as a bed in the final act.

<sup>48</sup> A murder/suicide is implied not only by Augusta's silence after "*Both fall across the gryphon,*" but also in Burley and Jeremy's ensuing conversation. Burley asks, "What's done, Jeremy?" (also indicating that likely all of the living Hobbsses knew Jack to be Jeremy in disguise); Jeremy replies: "Ah, then Miranda knew. What's done? / Why, everything's done, uncle" (*Antiphon* 201). The "closed account" has two more members dead, two more "done," but is not done itself. Burley asks, "Both?" and Jeremy replies, "Both" (202).

relationship in isolation; the play must be taken as a whole, or the reader/viewer has not had success in reading/seeing *The Antiphon*. While we may speak of individual parts of the play, particular relationships, or scenes of relation, as we have done throughout this chapter, we may not isolate one of these scenes as the reason for the abusive incestuous family apparatus of the Hobbses. We do not meet the characters at the beginning of their relations to each other: the children are aged, indeed Miranda uses a cane, and their father and grandmother are dead. Their relationships have existed since Victoria and Titus thought to construct a family apparatus of “free love,” and thus in marrying Augusta and creating children, they *all* succeeded in the creation of a family of origin. This family of origin could not exist without the wives and children. Thus, the blame cannot be placed solely on Titus, and certainly not on Miranda, though the other living Hobbses try in earnest to convince both Miranda and themselves that this is the case.

The living members of the Hobbs family, and we may presume here Titus and Victoria as well, decide to speak, think, behave, relate in the ways they do, discussed above and presented in the play, in an attempt to form or reform how the other family members perceive them. This desire to control others’ perceptions of themselves is concomitantly a desire to control how they perceive themselves, whether this is because they regret abuses committed or abuses not stopped against other family members, or because they desire the powers or positions that other family members, or that they feel other family members, possess. Barnes’s play does not suit the arguments of many of Barnes’s critics who often suggest that where there are cases of alleged incest there must have been traumatic actual encounters. Nor does Barnes’s play conform to the sociological, psychological, legal discourses that strive to place incest as right or wrong, positive or negative, real or imagined – as necessarily trauma.

We may here turn to a discussion of trauma involving Barnes critics and sociological, psychological, and literary scholars.<sup>49</sup> Not only do many of Barnes’s

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Costell refers to DeSalvo’s “‘To Make Her Mutton at Sixteen’: Rape, Incest, and Child Abuse in *The Antiphon*,” as being extremely pertinent to his study of modernist works of trauma,

critics maintain that Barnes herself is writing trauma by composing *The Antiphon* (as well as *Ryder* and *Nightwood*), but also that many of her characters within the play are speaking and relating in a manner that reveals them to have been victims of trauma. Costell's *The Theater of Trauma: American Modernist Drama and the Psychological Struggle For the American Mind, 1900-1930*, while not dealing extensively with *The Antiphon*, as it was first published in 1958, beyond the primary scope of his study, does treat Barnes's earlier plays, and by association, *The Antiphon*, as evidence of writing out of trauma, and of trauma in literature. He introduces his study with Winnicott:

The great English psychiatrist, D.W. Winnicott, referring to what he then called "nervous breakdown," described the impossibility of facing the consequences of trauma. Those consequences would include the "primitive agonies" of the return to an unintegrated state; the feeling of falling forever; the loss of psychosomatic collusion or the failure of indwelling; the loss of the sense of the real; and the loss of the capacity to relate. Winnicott also observed that this fear "*is of a breakdown that has already been experienced.*" (1)

This notion of trauma as the "loss of the sense of the real," I argue, is markedly absent in *The Antiphon*. However, it may mistakenly be seen as present due to the

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although DeSalvo is not as explicit in her stance that Barnes and her characters have experienced trauma as several other critics are. Dalton, discussed at length in chapter one, is a dedicated proponent of Barnes and her characters being seated in trauma, especially in her study of *Ryder*, "Escaping from Eden: Djuna Barnes' Revision of Psychoanalytic Theory and Her Treatment of Father-Daughter Incest in *Ryder*," and her essay about Barnes's earlier dramatic work, "'This is obscene': Female Voyeurism, Sexual Abuse, and Maternal Power in *The Dove*." Bay-Cheng's "Famous Unknowns: The Dramas of Djuna Barnes and Gertrude Stein" puts forth a similar, although less vehement, assessment of Barnes's *Antiphon* as a work borne out of trauma, both Barnes's and the characters'.

Herman, Gilmore (especially in "Limit-Cases: Trauma, Self-Representation, and Jurisdictions of Identity" and *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*), and Diana E.H. Russell's *The Secret Trauma: Incest in the Lives of Girls and Women* all propose cases wherein incest is, with little exception, equated with trauma. These critics place incest as traumatic, as a site of trauma, and see the literary and critical expression of incestuous experience as recuperative of the voices, realities, experiences of those involved in incest, which have been silenced by their traumatic abuses.

Grobbe, in *Enacting Past and Present: The Memory Theaters of Djuna Barnes, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Margeurite Duras*, approaches Barnes's work similarly to my own approach here, as her discussion of the abuse in the play, as well as the incest in the play, does not equate incest with trauma, yet provides a nuanced study of the abuse therein, as well as the possible causes of this abuse, for both author and characters.

lack of socio-cultural recognition of individuals whose ontology is seated in the incestuous family apparatus. Incest-relationships, constituted of incest-selves, such as the Hobbsees, are not recognized by their external socio-cultural environment as viable, and the incestuous family apparatus not recognized as a potential seat of livelihood. Barnes, however, works to dispense with this prejudiced or exclusionary conception of “reality,” and teaches the reader/audience member that the reality of the Hobbsees is equal, insofar as “realness” is concerned, to the non-incestuous-self’s mode of being and relating, to the non-incestuous family apparatus’s existence-in-the-world. Costell’s remark, “The dramatists arrived at the point where there was no longer any psychological language to support them” (11), coheres with my above arguments, as it suggests that because there is no public language for the discussion or articulation of an incest-self or incestuous family apparatus, the dialogue and interactions that are derived from such states of being and relating are deemed incomprehensible except to say that they are abnormal, un-real, or symptomatic of disease. While Costell is speaking to the idea that this loss of “supporting language” is an instantiation of trauma, I believe that, in the case of Barnes, it is the instantiation of a writer who is putting forth a reality alternate to the common or “supported” reality, and which is not symptomatic of a disease or a “mental pain” (11). This “alternative reality” refers to a particular way in which individuals-in-the-world may exist and relate to one another. To equate the “unspeakability” of incest with trauma is to do to incest what has formerly been done, for example, to homosexuality, what was considered an “unspeakable” for centuries. To equate homosexuality with trauma now seems absurd, and, Barnes urges, so too will the devaluation of incest as essentially trauma.

Barnes’s language in *The Antiphon* is markedly different than the contemporary English that would have been spoken in the time of Barnes’s writing of the play, which appears to be an intentional difference given the time during which she hoped *The Antiphon* to be performed.<sup>50</sup> One might argue that

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<sup>50</sup> The only stage performance of *The Antiphon* was in Swedish, by Sweden’s Royal Dramatic Theatre (“Dramaten”). Eminent literary figure, and Barnes’s friend, Edwin Muir, “had something

this difference is Barnes's method of defamiliarization, used in order to alert the reader to the atypical or taboo content of her play. Bay-Cheng, in "The Transcendental Realism of American Verse Drama," notes such an opinion held by Lionel Abel, who "assert[ed], 'no human being would ever talk like that'" (18). Kime Scott notes Eugene Jolas's similar opinion, quoting him: "Instead of choosing the dessicated [sic] language matter of her contemporaries, Miss Barnes gives us what at first sight seems an archaic style, but which is merely the resuscitation of a highly charged word mechanism that succeeds in electrifying us" ("The Look in the Throat" 163). Espley discusses Daniela Caselli's articulation of this argument, as well as the dangers of such an approach to Barnes's language:

However, even in the apparently approving responses [to Barnes's language, to her play] that Caselli discusses, Barnes's own words are at risk of being marginalized. Obscurity is troublingly treated here as a stable, univalent phenomenon that need only be recognized, not explored. (189)

What Espley is picking up on here is that to qualify Barnes's language as *difficult* or *different* must be, if it is to be, a starting point, not the culmination of an assessment of Barnes. Indeed, I go so far as to argue that Barnes herself found her idiom, the pseudo-Jacobean-Elizabethan language of *The Antiphon*, to be familiar to her, rather than *obscure*, which throws the notion of difference into even more relativity. This is not causally to align Barnes's used language in literature with her language of personal comportment, nor to align Barnes's language in *The Antiphon* as coeval with the play's content. Caution must be maintained when reading Barnes and her critics so that one does not equate the discussion and

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to do with Barnes's continental reputation, for in his enthusiasm for *The Antiphon* he convinced Dag Hammarskjöld, the United Nations secretary-general, to read the play," Phillip Herring notes in his biography of Barnes, continuing, "Hammarskjöld, in turn, communicated his favorable impression to his friend Karl Ragnar Gierow, director of Sweden's Royal Dramatic Theatre" (278).



presentation, as well as reading or hearing, of incest in a particular *different* idiom with incest itself.<sup>51</sup>

Whether one sees the play performed by actors on a stage, or reads the play, one is subject to the directorial decisions of someone: i.e. the acting company's director, the actors' decisions, or one's own directorial lens when reading the text. Barnes, writing *The Antiphon* to be performed as a dramatic work, is aware of this reality concomitant with her text, and thus it is not ill-advised to accept that I have directed my own presentation of *The Antiphon* accordingly, and that this "performance" is what my arguments are hereon based. In keeping with the idea of "performance," my arguments about *The Antiphon* are also seated in the staged relationships, the dramatic scenarios of the Hobbsses, rather than only rooted in the words on the page.<sup>52</sup> My assessments of kinship patterns and power dynamics come as much from the lines spoken by the characters as they do from the tensions in the spaces between these lines, the locations of the characters upon the stage, the stage directions given by Barnes, and the assumptions of continued character activity even when the characters are not in direct view. That there is no "narrative frame" of this dramatic text relegates such framing to the characters and the director (in the case discussed here, reader). The Hobbsses are present throughout the play in their incestuous family apparatus of origin, and while they may gesture toward the past and the future, indeed, may concretize their past, and make decisive comments about their future, we see them only within this apparatus. This directorial prerogative concretizes my assessment that the Hobbsses exist in inescapable, inevitable relationships to one another (within their family apparatus), and are inextricable

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<sup>51</sup> If we consider the example of William S. Burroughs as writing about drugs, as having experienced drugs himself, and attempting to convey those drug experiences in his writing, we still may not say that his language is "druggie" or "drug" language. At most, Burroughs writes using his language from the reference point of his experiences. Similarly, Barnes's language is not "incest language" but language used to represent incest, whether or not she has experienced incest.

<sup>52</sup> The following works address Barnes's language in a careful way, albeit not at any great length: Abraham's "'Woman, Remember You': Djuna Barnes and History," Altman's "The Antiphon: 'No Audience at All?,'" Robin Blyn's "From Stage to Page: Franz Kafka, Djuna Barnes, and Modernism's Freak Fictions," Clark's "Djuna Barnes: The Most Famous Unknown," Dalton's "'This is obscene': Female Voyeurism, Sexual Abuse, and Maternal Power in *The Dove*," Kannenstine's *The Art of Djuna Barnes: Duality and Damnation*, and Edwin Muir's *The Present Age From 1914*.

from one another in this condemnedness. I suggest that Barnes is playing with meta-theatrics in regard to the present discussion: just as the actors in a performance of *The Antiphon* are acting out “an inevitability” in their following of Barnes’s script, so are the Hobbsses seemingly inextricable from the family apparatus that proves their “inevitability.” We know nothing of the Hobbsses outside of this apparatus – save for Miranda, as discussed within this chapter, whose potential for livelihood outside the incestuous family apparatus of origin is considered viable insofar as the other living Hobbsses perceive her “scruples.” However, the past, present, and future of the Hobbsses presented in the play (conjecture or potential aside) allow for the realization that abuse is not concomitant with the incestuous family apparatus (or the ideal of the Hobbs family vision imagined by Victoria and Titus), although the play does not stray from the singular family apparatus of the Hobbsses.

Incest, as detailed throughout this chapter, as seen in the lives that comprise the Hobbs family apparatus, is not trauma, though certainly there is abuse. The reader must differentiate abuse from trauma. There is no trauma in *The Antiphon*, or as the source of the *The Antiphon*, as trauma is unspoken, and Barnes is not silent. The voices of those involved in an abusive family apparatus are boldly heard. The viability of lives lived in an incestuous family apparatus is not negated by Barnes’s play; rather, it is opened up for discussion as it is presented. The livelihood of the Hobbs family members is presented, is lived for the reader/audience member, and sustains the qualifications for viability through Barnes’s caution in teaching how the incestuous family apparatus may thrive *best* without abuse, but may still be viable in its presence if critically understood by the family and by society.

### Chapter Three: Constructing and Choosing Incest in *Nightwood*

#### I. Viability in the Constructed Family: Nora and Robin

Where the Hobbses in *The Antiphon* represent the least amount of viability across Barnes's three major works, and the Ryders represent a more viable livelihood, *Nightwood*'s Nora Flood and Robin Vote represent the most viable instantiation of the incestuous family apparatus. In both *Ryder* and *The Antiphon*, Barnes presents incestuous relationships *within* the biological/"biological" family of origin; however, in *Nightwood* the incestuous relationships take place *without* the biological/"biological" family of origin. To suggest that the relationships I will discuss in this chapter are not incestuous because they do not occur between members of the same biological/"biological" family of origin would be to conceive of incest in a much narrower way than Barnes herself does. The characters in *Nightwood* who are involved in what Barnes identifies as an incestuous relationship *create* their own (constructed) family of origin. While the characters are thus not related through blood, they construct their relationship in a way that shows them to be related to each other *as though they were*. Both Nora and Robin *choose* to become a family, and have already left their respective biological/"biological" families of origin. The primary incestuous relationship of *Nightwood* and of discussion in this chapter is between Nora and Robin; the relationships between Felix Volkbein and Robin, Jenny Petherbridge and Robin, and the intermediary role of Dr. Matthew O'Connor in the relationship of Nora and Robin will also be discussed, as they provide necessary insight into the relationship between Nora and Robin.

Before we may see the incestuous family of origin that Nora and Robin create together with the aid or despite the intervention of other characters, we must see how Barnes presents both Nora and Robin as occupying familial roles traditionally found in the biological/"biological" family of origin (as in *Ryder* and *The Antiphon*) with each other. Nora as mother to Robin, and Robin as child (son and daughter) to Nora is the most prominent of familial relationships, the most pervasive combination of familial roles presented in *Nightwood*. The most blatant utterance of this relationship comes from Dr. O'Connor as he discusses "the

night” with Nora, after Robin has left her, left their shared home: “You, who should have had a thousand children and Robin, who should have been all of them” (*Nightwood* 101).<sup>53</sup> While O’Connor says “should,” we see throughout *Nightwood* that this “should” is metaphorically substantiated for and by both Nora and Robin. Carolyn Allen, probing the same relationship, asks: “If your lesbian lover wanders out night after night looking for love but always comes home to where you keep her safe, who has the power in the relationship? And do you feel like a wife? A mother? Both? Neither?” (“Erotics of Nora’s Narrative” 177). I argue: “Both.” Nora and Robin are not only lovers, but also prominently mother and child. The relationship between Nora and Robin as mother/child and as lovers will be discussed in terms of the incestuous family apparatus established by Barnes across her three major works, as well as the resultant scale of viability.

Allen describes “Nora’s [being] protective mother to Robin’s disconcerted child” (“Erotics of Nora’s Narrative” 183), citing the moment of Nora and Robin’s encounter at the circus as the progenitor of their “mother/child dynamic” (183), wherein the circus ring is described as “the belly of the great mother” (*Nightwood* qtd. in “Erotics of Nora’s Narrative”: 183). The “belly” or “womb” that spreads out in front of Nora and Robin serves to locate the pair in the discourse of the family, specifically mother and child.<sup>54</sup> While the idea of inescapability in the incestuous family apparatus will be discussed at length below, we have here an indication that the relationship between Nora and Robin has the permanence of a mother/child relationship, albeit chosen unlike those of Amelia and Julie in *Ryder* and Augusta and Miranda in *The Antiphon*.<sup>55</sup> Through *Nightwood*’s narrator we learn that Nora “was by fate one of those people who are born unprovided for, except in the provision of herself” (*Nightwood* 53), and that

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<sup>53</sup> All quotations from and page/chapter references to *Nightwood* come from the 1961 New Directions edition.

<sup>54</sup> I believe that while Nora and Robin figure predominantly as mother/child, this scene could also be a site of sibling/sibling relating wherein they could both be understood to be in the same “womb.” This can only serve further to underline Nora and Robin’s relationship as incestuous, deriving from a creation of a family of origin.

<sup>55</sup> This is not to suggest a hierarchy of permanence in mother/child relationships in general, but to indicate that in the three works by Barnes discussed here, the mother/child relationship attains permanence when the mother and child are biologically (or, by extrapolation, “biologically”) related, but also when they choose such permanence as in *Nightwood*.

Robin “kept repeating in one way or another her wish for a home, as if she were afraid she would be lost again, as if she were aware, without conscious knowledge, that she belonged to Nora, and that if Nora did not *make* it permanent by her own strength, she would forget” (55; emphasis added). Nora positions Robin and Robin positions herself as child, which facilitates Nora’s “providing for herself” a family of origin, and “provides for” Robin’s “wish for a home” – home a synonym for the family apparatus (beyond the biological/“biological” family of origin).

That the family apparatus both Nora and Robin seek in each other is an apparatus of a family of origin is partially shown through their desire for mutual blood, for shared biology, within a constructed and chosen mode. Although not all families of origin are biologically related (refer to the outline of “biological” in the introduction), of course, the desire for such biological relation is nevertheless indicative of a desire for a family of origin in its traditional formulation of biologically related parent and child.<sup>56</sup> Nora and Robin “collect their lives together” (*Nightwood* 56), but shortly after they have established their home together – wherein “every object in the garden, every item in the house, every word they spoke, attested to their mutual love, the combining of their humours” (56) (the humours being a function of the body, as well) – Robin begins to stray from the home. Nora “became aware that her soft and careful movements were the outcome of an unreasoning fear – if she disarranged anything Robin might become confused – might lose the scent of home” (56), like a child who, while alone without his/her mother (parent), becomes lost, cannot find his/her way

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<sup>56</sup> In “*Nightwood*: ‘The Sweetest Lie,’” Judith Lee gestures toward Barnes’s opening up of livelihood to include the created mother/child relationship as viable:

she [Barnes] deconstructs the opposition between masculine and feminine because it does not define the most fundamental experience of difference: the difference between the identity one imagines (the self as Subject) and the identity one experiences in relationship with someone else (the self as Other). In defining this difference, central to the experience of women, in terms of the opposition between mother and child, Barnes raises the possibility for a new figuration of female identity. (208)

Allen, in “Writing toward *Nightwood*: Djuna Barnes’ Seduction Stories,” remarks upon a confluence between this dynamic in *Nightwood* and Barnes’s earlier work “Cassation” (originally titled “A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady” (1925) in *Spillway* (1962)): “Were she [Gaya in “Cassation”] successful, she, like Nora in *Nightwood*, could have her intimate as her child and be both her companion and her caretaker” (61).

home, and looks for safety from those people he/she finds surrounding him/her. Were Robin the age of a child, those who surround her may be her source of help in finding her way back to her mother, to her home; however, Robin instead finds companions with whom to drink, have sexual relationships, and who invite her in to their homes, not as a child for whom to care (save for Jenny Petherbridge, which will be discussed later), but as an adult with whom to engage in “mischief” (61). Nora is the parent waiting at home for her child to return: “realizing that if she herself were not there” as a party to the “mischief,” “Robin might return to her as the one who, out of all the turbulent night, had not been lived through, Nora stayed at home, lying awake or sleeping” (59). Nora chooses for herself that “the body of Robin could never be unloved, corrupt or put away. Robin was now beyond timely changes, except in the blood that animated her” (56) – Nora’s blood, her mother’s blood – and so Nora waits for Robin to return home. Robin inevitably does return home – chooses to remain in constructed familiarity with Nora – regardless of how many other people have attempted to “change,” “corrupt,” or “animate” her (i.e. Felix before Nora, Jenny after and before Nora, and the anonymous others with whom Nora knows or sees Robin has been).

The narrator informs us that “in the heart of the lover will be traced, as an indelible shadow, that which [s]he loves. In Nora’s heart lay the fossil of Robin, intaglio of her identity, and about it for its maintenance ran Nora’s blood” (*Nightwood* 56). Robin has Nora’s blood, her mother’s blood, within her body, and is taken care of by Nora, who has this same blood in her body. Lee elaborates on this (constructed) biological aspect of their mother/child dynamic:

Nora and Robin thus share a symbiotic bond; Nora’s identity depends upon Robin’s presence as much as Robin’s existence depends upon Nora. At the same time, the presence of Robin changes Nora’s identity. Before meeting Robin, she was self-contained, “unidentified, endlessly embroiled in a predicament without a problem” (*N*, 53); after meeting Robin, however, she experiences a split within herself, a double identity as both child and mother. (213)

This “double identity” speaks to the idea that Robin, as Nora’s child, has Nora’s blood, while Nora, the mother, has her own blood, as well as Robin’s by extension of their permanent bond as mother/child.<sup>57</sup> This physical, biological, sanguine extension of oneself as mother in one’s child is proposed again when Nora finds herself alone in their house on another night (the nights that Robin “strays” are taken in the novel as one massive absence, rather than individual episodes):

Robin’s absence, as the night drew on, became a physical removal, insupportable and irreparable. As an amputated hand cannot be disowned because it is experiencing a futurity, of which the victim is its forbear, so Robin was an amputation that Nora could not renounce. As the wrist longs, so her heart longed, and dressing she would go out into the night that she might be “beside herself,” skirting the café in which she could catch a glimpse of Robin. (*Nightwood* 59)

Nora fears that Robin “could be spilled of” (56) their shared blood, and so, as O’Connor observes, Nora is the “mother of mischief,” of Robin, “running about, trying to get the world,” Robin who is the microcosm of this world,<sup>58</sup> “home” (61).

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<sup>57</sup> This permanence will be discussed in detail below, in the section dealing with condemnation, inevitability, inescapability, and inextricability as they figure in the incestuous family apparatus in *Nightwood*.

<sup>58</sup> Nora as the “mother of mischief” whose “world” is devoted to the maintenance of her family, which she has chosen in Robin, is further emphasized by the narrator:

Nora had the face of all people who love the people—a face that would be evil when she found out that to love without criticism is to be betrayed. Nora robbed herself for everyone; incapable of giving herself warning, she was continually turning about to find herself diminished. Wandering people the world over found her profitable in that she could be sold for a price forever, for she carried her betrayal money in her own pocket. (*Nightwood* 51-52)

Nora, having “found” Robin, is “diminished” only insofar as any part of herself that she gives to Robin, her blood, her care, her home, is not returned by Robin; however, whether or not Nora views this as diminishing cannot be said, especially as it seems that given Nora’s penchant for being “profitable” to others about whom she cares, whom she loves, she is rather made *more* herself by this giving, by this taking care of Robin, of her child. Furthermore, this “betrayal money” or “selfless” loving is not an attribute shared by the mothers in *Ryder* or *The Antiphon* (whose family apparatuses are both *less* viable than Nora and Robin’s), which speaks to the relative viability of incestuous family apparatuses throughout Barnes’s three works. Nora and Robin are *most* viable as they have a chosen family apparatus of origin that is constructed *without* the biological/“biological” family of origin. Whether or not Robin returns to her home with Nora after each night she spends away from the home, or whether or not it is her encounter with Nora

Allen's assessment of the mother/child relationship between Nora and Robin in "Writing toward *Nightwood*" focuses on this dynamic as part of lesbian discourse, or the encoding of lesbian erotics in literature:

So, although Robin and Nora are alike because they are both women, they are also lesbians with a Difference [Barnes's phrase used in *Ladies Almanack*]. And even in their likeness, they are different people, a differentiation marked especially in the text's casting of Nora as mother, Robin as child. Here is the second dynamic in two of *Nightwood*'s lesbian relationships – one's lover is not only one's self but also one's child: "Robin is incest too" (N, 156), a girl-child dressed as a boy who plays with toy trains and soldiers. The lovers' relationship is infused with an imbalance of power of mother to child righted when Robin the lover expresses her adult autonomy by leaving Nora to sleep with other women. At the same time the mother-child relationship is shot through with eroticism since mother and child are also lovers. (56)

While I largely agree with Allen's notion that in *Nightwood*, for Nora and Robin, "one's lover is not only one's self but also one's child," I believe this dynamic to be in service of Barnes's presentation here of love as incest, of the lovers as creating an incestuous family apparatus. Of course, given that Nora and Robin are both females, this may point to a lesbian relationship,<sup>59</sup> but I argue that Barnes's attention is to the way in which these two individuals choose to position themselves inextricably as mother and child, as family. While it is possible, and certainly argued by many Barnes critics, that the mother/child – familial – mode of being and relating is in service to the expression of one "unspeakable" – homosexuality – rather than another – incest – given Barnes's body of work on

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and her dog in the last chapter that signals her "return," we know that Nora is "forever" Robin's family, and while it remains unclear at the close of the novel whether this "betrayal money" that has been "robbed" is ever "returned," we know that the permanence of the mother/child dynamic as established through the entire novel remains. Equal "give and take" does not signal a familial relationship, or a relationship of any kind; it is an attribute of a relationship or it is not, but it is not the determining factor of the existence or lack of a relationship.

<sup>59</sup> Throughout *Nightwood* both Nora and Robin inhabit multiple roles. As a result, Robin is figured as a trans-gendered, trans-special character. It would be at a disservice to the complexity of Robin's character and Barnes's writing to understand Robin in only one of the roles she occupies.



the family, I think that a case can certainly be made for the mother/child dynamic (the familial dynamic) as indicative of Barnes's discourse on incest.<sup>60</sup>

O'Connor discusses Nora and Robin's relationship with emphasis on their both being women; however, this emphasis leads him to the reality of their being related as family, shifting the discourse from a possible script of lesbian erotics as the familial to an examination of the familial as incestuous. O'Connor says to Nora:

You are [...] experiencing the inbreeding of pain. Most of us do not dare it. We wed a stranger, and so "solve" our problem. But when you inbreed with suffering (which is merely to say that you have caught every disease and so pardoned your flesh) you are destroyed back to your structure as an old master disappears beneath the knife of the scientist who would know how it was painted.<sup>61</sup> (*Nightwood* 129-130)

O'Connor suggests that Nora has "inbred" with her "suffering" in that when Robin, who is her child, her family, suffers, or when Robin causes Nora to suffer,

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<sup>60</sup> Looking to Allen's discussion, in "Barnes' Seduction Stories," of the mother/child relationship as indicative of lesbian erotics, we find the following passage: "[...] the conflation of child and intimate. It assumes a female world, then gives up the shifts in power, conventionally marked masculine and feminine, as a comment on the consequence of the ultimate female role – mothering" (62). Allen once again lands on *mothering*, and on the *family* dynamic as expressive of the lover-lover relationship, rather than the inherently feminine or female attributes of this mother and child. This is in keeping with my assertion that, indeed, Barnes's emphasis, if not her aegis, in the presentation of Nora and Robin's relationship is on its incestuous mode of being, their incestuous mode of relating, rather than as a potential script for lesbian erotics. This is further supported in Barnes's figuration of Robin as a child, neither strictly daughter nor son, but a combination of both male and female child. We hear Nora say of Robin: "I saw her always like a tall child who had grown up the length of the infant's gown, walking and needing help and safety" (*Nightwood* 145); "Sometimes [...] she would sit at home all day, looking out of the window or playing with her toys, trains, and animals and cars to wind up, and dolls and marbles and soldiers" (147); "Sometimes if she got tight by evening, I would find her standing in the middle of the room in boy's clothes, rocking from foot to foot, holding the doll she had given us" (147); and, the narrator notes, "Standing before them in her boy's trousers was Robin" (169). Nora and the narrator position Robin as a child, assuredly, but neither position her as a distinctly gendered or sexed child – whether culturally or anatomically – and certainly not distinctly female or feminine by such standards.

<sup>61</sup> During a carriage ride with Jenny and Robin, wherein Jenny is increasingly jealous of Robin's affections for others, and takes to physical abuse during the ride, O'Connor says: "Love of woman for woman, what insane passion for unmitigated anguish and motherhood brought that into the mind?" (*Nightwood* 75). This hearkens to my assertion that the relationship between Nora and Robin is that of the incestuous family apparatus. Jenny is trying to create such a relationship with Robin, trying to "squat" where Nora has been Robin's mother, but she cannot because Nora and Robin have chosen each other as family, and have rendered this relationship fundamentally and inextricably theirs.

it is because of their shared familial bond that it “destroys” Nora – but only “*back to*” their “structure,” not “destroying” their “structure” – the fundamental structure of their relationship being the family. Both Felix and Jenny are these “scientists who would know how” this family apparatus “was painted,” but cannot, as the family of origin is between Nora and Robin, and no one else. In not “wedding a stranger,” Nora has secured her “inbreeding of suffering”; however, suffering is not posited by Barnes as inescapable or inevitable, while once the choice has been made by Nora and Robin to relate to each other as a family, their relationship *is*. They may “have caught every disease,” but they are “painted” and their “origin” is fundamental in both of them, while “the fundamental condition of completion was in neither” (69) Jenny nor Felix, nor any of the “mischief” Robin meets at night. “Suffering” is not an inevitable part of the incestuous relationship between Nora and Robin, but it is something they encounter and that they thrust upon each other as (existentially free) individuals.<sup>62</sup>

Nora implores O’Connor, “She is myself. What am I to do?” (*Nightwood* 127); she asks, “have you ever loved someone and it became yourself?” (152); and she declares of Robin (and their relationship), “I can’t live without my heart!” (156). O’Connor attests to this mutuality of their identities; they are both of the same family of origin, and because they have chosen this as the site of their love, of their lover-relationship, their individual existences depend on their collective existence: “You were a ‘good woman,’ and so a bitch on a high plane, the only one able to kill yourself and Robin!” (146). Nora is the progenitor of her child, and thus, the only one able to take out of the world what she has “brought” into it; however, if she were to take out Robin, she would be taking out herself, their dyad of mother/child. “My life was hers” (147), Nora informs us, and she “can’t live without her heart,” nor can she deny her intuited sense that Robin is asking, “You have got to stay with me or I can’t live” (143). O’Connor sums this dynamic up for Nora: “And then think of Robin who never could provide for her life

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<sup>62</sup> Here we may look to the incestuous relationships in *The Antiphon* for further proof that the incestuous relationship for Barnes is not inseparable or concomitant with abuse, but that abuse may occur in such a relationship, as it could in any relationship. Incest, in Barnes, does not equal abuse, nor does abuse equal incest, much like outlaw in *Ryder* does not equal incest, nor does incest equal outlaw.

except in you” (128). As well, the reader already knows that Nora has “provided” (constructed) this family of origin for herself, and has, with Robin, co-created their family apparatus as an inescapable one: “I love her as one condemned to it” (137), Nora says, and in this we hear her speak for Robin as well.

In the last scene in the novel, with Robin, Nora, and Nora’s dog, in Nora’s chapel, the two lovers are once again featured as mother and child, although this time as Madonna and child. Robin, standing before “a contrived altar, before a Madonna” (*Nightwood* 169), thus stands before a surrogate Nora or Nora-by-proxy, until Nora enters, and Robin turns to her.<sup>63</sup> As Madonna and child and simultaneously as lovers, we see the culmination of the incestuous family apparatus between Nora and Robin, and the inescapability of this apparatus for the two of them. The eternality suggested by the religious coupling emphasizes Nora’s earlier statement: “Thus the body of Robin could never be unloved, corrupt or put away. Robin was now beyond timely changes, except in the blood that animated her” (56). This “animating blood” is here a figure “beyond timely changes,” as suggested by the static figure of the Madonna, the deification of a woman and child at a particular time in their lives into an eternal coupling. We are reminded of Nora’s argument that “Man, [...] conditioning himself to fear, made God; as the prehistoric, conditioning itself to hope, made man – the cooling of the earth, the receding of the sea. And I, who want power, chose a girl who resembles a boy” (136). This “girl who resembles a boy” looks forward to the novel’s last scene in which Robin, the “girl,” is the “child” of the Madonna, thus “resembling the boy” of this coupling. Nora sees that Robin, too, believes herself to be and conducts her life according to the belief that she loves Nora “as one condemned to it” (137), just as Nora does Robin. The “condemnation” of the Madonna/child dyad is not one easily considered either “positive or negative,” “right or wrong”; accordingly, the incestuous family relationship between Nora and Robin that is partially based on this inescapable socio-cultural or religious iconography is not easily deemed evidence of the existence or lack of a viable mode of being and

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<sup>63</sup> Of note here is that the scene’s “stage” directions, like the scene itself, and like Barnes’s concept of family, is littered with multiple roles/positions to be filled.

relating, of “condemnation as punishment” or “condemnation as livelihood.”<sup>64</sup> Barnes’s choice to locate Robin as neither strictly girl child nor boy child throughout the novel repays itself in this final scene where the ambiguousness of Robin’s child-ness allows the reader to see Robin as the child of the Madonna, the boy.<sup>65</sup> Yet we still see Robin as “the girl,” and to that end, we see that Barnes is not suggesting that Nora and Robin *are* an incarnation of the religious figures, but are an incarnation, or, more precisely, an instantiation, of a mother/child dyad, which cannot easily be dismissed as unviable. Susana S. Martins recounts this mother/child, this lovers’ scene once again:

There Robin, wearing boys’ clothing, has created a sort of shrine to Nora, with an image of the Madonna, two candles, flowers, and toys. Once again Nora must be struck with the sight of *what she is to Robin*; as she comes upon the vision of Robin the beloved and Robin the lover, worshipping the Madonna, *Nora becomes both desiring subject and object*.<sup>66</sup> (122; second emphasis added)

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<sup>64</sup> Julia Kristeva has written extensively on the incestuous reality and potential of the Madonna/child relationship, as well as of the holy trinity, and of the family in general in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, more obliquely in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, and most prominently in *Tales of Love* (all English translations by Leon S. Roudiez). In addition, in “*Nightwood*: ‘The Sweetest Lie,’” Lee contributes to this discussion: “Barnes makes the mother-child bond an ironic version of the Mother-Son heurosis that is the central Christian image for redemption” (214). Situating Nora and Robin as an “ironic version” of the Madonna/child dynamic or dyad, Lee suggests that Barnes is subverting the traditional understandings of this relationship through her instantiation of it as an incestuous and sexual one, and through her positioning of Robin as an ambiguously gendered and sexed child.

<sup>65</sup> Catherine Whitley, in “Nations of the Night: Excremental History in James Joyce’s ‘Finnegan’s Wake’ and Djuna Barnes’ ‘Nightwood,’” speaks to the ambiguity of Robin’s gender and sex as it emphasizes Robin’s place as the child in the Madonna/child relationship with Nora: “Robin suffers from being in the ‘middle condition’ in *Nightwood*; she challenges the gender binary by being a member of the ‘third sex’ in Matthew’s terms – a boy in the body of a woman” (89-90). This assessment places Robin as an “other,” leading the reader to Jane Marcus’s assessment of the mother/child relationship: “Djuna Barnes in *Nightwood* laughs at Leviticus, brings all the wandering Jews, blacks, lesbians, outsiders, and transvestites together in a narrative which *mothers the Other*” (157; emphasis added).

<sup>66</sup> There are many critics who understand Robin as lacking agency and/or subjecthood, which could be a basis for understanding her involvement in an incestuous relationship (family apparatus) as unviable; however, I argue that Robin’s agency and subjecthood are not only markedly indicated by Barnes, but also contribute prominently to an understanding of Robin’s incestuous relationship with Nora as viable. For example, Phillip Herring, in “Djuna Barnes and Thelma Wood: The Vengeance of ‘Nightwood,’” bases his understanding of Robin as lacking agency and subjecthood in her being the fictive counterpart of Thelma Wood, Barnes’s lover; this understanding is further explained in Herring’s biography of Barnes, *Djuna: The Life and Work of Djuna Barnes*. A further example is David Copeland’s “The Innocent Children of *Nightwood* and

The shared belief in themselves as a family of origin and as lovers, and the shared choice to create themselves as such does not directly lead to the last scene discussed above, however, for there are numerous interventions and attempts to dismember Nora and Robin's self-created family by three characters: Felix, Jenny, and O'Connor.

Before we look at the machinations of these three characters, and how they affect or cast into relief the incestuous family apparatus of Nora and Robin, we must look at the way in which Nora and Robin cast themselves not simply as mother and child, but how they occupy multiple familial roles simultaneously to that of mother and child. Before we meet O'Connor, and encounter him as Nora's grandmother figure (to be discussed in the proceeding section), we have Nora's dreams of her grandmother and Robin.<sup>67</sup> Just before Nora has the dream of her grandmother-cum-Robin, she is "running about," so that she "might know that she had a part in Robin's life" (*Nightwood* 61). "Returning home" (61), she "fell into a dream which she recognized; though in the finality of this version she knew that

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Hayford Hall" wherein he assesses Robin as "the blank screen upon which everyone in the novel projects his or her passion" (121). I argue that Robin, as well as *Nightwood's* other characters, has her own passion and agency, and "projects" her own desires as the other characters project their desires (merely one example is that Robin projects her desire for a mother onto Nora, and Nora projects her desire for a child onto Robin).

Conversely, Robin Blyn's "Stage to Page: Franz Kafka, Djuna Barnes, and Modernism's Freak Fiction" suggests that readers, not simply *Nightwood's* Nora, Felix, and Jenny, "desire to penetrate and assume the spectacularized Robin Vote as the characters in the novel" do (152); however, unlike the above critics, Blyn does not suggest that this desire is possible to satisfy, and names it "unrequited" for the characters and reader alike. Louis F. Kannenstine, in *The Art of Djuna Barnes: Duality and Damnation*, shares his own disagreement with an idea presented by Joseph Frank that Robin embodies a "passive center" (116).

<sup>67</sup> In keeping with this argument, we have the following passage from Deborah Parsons's *Djuna Barnes*: "In a surreal set of associations, O'Connor's role metamorphoses again, as he becomes one with both Robin and the grandmother, [...] and a matriarchal authority for Nora herself" (77). We also have the following passages from Marcus's "Laughing at Leviticus": "Barnes's doctor-transvestite is only posing as a gynecologist, and he identifies with the maternal principle" (159);

It is as if Djuna Barnes had decided to include in *Nightwood* every word, image, and story women have never been able to tell, to flaunt every possible taboo from the excretory to the sexual, and to invent, in Nora's grandmother incest dreams, her *nonology* [...]. (167)

Marcus also notes that "[i]n the typescript of the novel" (held at the McKeldin Library, University of Maryland) "the following lines are crossed out: 'with what cunning had his brain directed not only the womanly, but the incestuous garment? For a flannel night dress is our mother'" (182). Here Marcus is referring to Barnes's figuration of the doctor as grandmother (a mother) to Nora, and the incestuousness that results from Robin-as-grandmother in a sexual relationship with Nora-as-grandchild as presented here through O'Connor and Nora's interaction.

the dream had not been ‘well dreamt’ before. Where the dream had been incalculable, it was now completed with the entry of Robin” (62):

Nora dreamed that she was standing at the top of a house, that is, the last floor but one – this was her grandmother’s room [...]. Nora said to herself, “The dream will not be dreamed again.” A disc of light, which seemed to come from someone or thing standing behind her which was yet a shadow, shed a faintly luminous glow upon the upturned still face of Robin, who had the smile of an “only survivor,” a smile which fear had married to the bone.

From round about her in anguish Nora heard her own voice saying, “Come up, this is Grandmother’s room,” yet knowing it was impossible because the room was taboo. [...]

With this figure of her grandmother who was not entirely her recalled grandmother went one of her childhood, when she had run into her at the corner of the house – the grandmother who, for some unknown reason, was dressed as a man, wearing a billycock and a corked moustache, ridiculous and plump in tight trousers and a red waistcoat, her arms spread saying with a leer of love, “My little sweetheart!”—her grandmother “drawn upon” as a prehistoric ruin is drawn upon, symbolizing her life out of her life, and which now appeared to Nora as something being done to Robin, Robin disfigured and eternalized by the hieroglyphics of sleep and pain. (62-63)

While this is not a direct one-to-one rendering of Robin as Nora’s grandmother, the suggestion that Robin figures for Nora a familial role other than child is clear. Nora’s dream is not of her biological grandmother, it is of someone “not entirely her recalled grandmother,” someone whose gender is ambiguous in her “trousers” as is Robin in her “boy’s trousers.” That the grandmother’s room seems “taboo” to Nora only before she enters it signals to the reader that, once entered, she realizes the familiarity of Robin within the room, and dispenses with the taboo related to the “recalled grandmother” – the one who does not “provide for” Nora – and changes into the one (Robin) who Nora has “provided for” herself. Robin as

the “only survivor” suggests that Nora’s fear of losing Robin is tied to Nora’s fear of being left “unprovided for” after she has created a family with Robin, who now figures as her child and grandmother. This “something being done to Robin” that places Robin as grandmother to Nora in this dream recalls the narrator’s statement, “In Nora’s heart lay the fossil of Robin, intaglio of her identity, and about it for its maintenance ran Nora’s blood” (56). The child-grandmother of Robin is “beyond timely changes” (56), beyond the spatio-temporal restrictions of the traditional family apparatus, and is simultaneously able to be both child and grandmother to Nora, who is concurrently able to be both mother and grandchild to her lover.

In keeping with Nora’s fear of losing what she has “provided for” herself with Robin – the family apparatus of origin that they have created – we have Nora’s second dream wherein Robin figures as Nora’s grandmother – again, not her “recalled” (biological/“biological”) grandmother. Nora recounts:

There in my sleep was my grandmother, whom I loved more than anyone [...]. This I have done to my father’s mother, dreaming through my father, and have tormented them with my tears and with my dreams: for all of us die over again in somebody’s sleep. And this, I have done to Robin: it is only through me that she will die over and over, and it is only through me, of all my family, that my grandfather dies, over and over. I woke up and got out of bed and putting my hands between my knees I said, “What was that dream saying, for God’s sake, what was that dream?” For it was for me also. (*Nightwood* 148-149)

Nora’s admission, “This I have done to my father’s mother, dreaming through my father,” indicates that this dream is not *of* her “father’s mother,” that it goes “through her father,” and that it is what she had “done to Robin” that she dreams of here. Robin as grandmother in Nora’s dream couples Nora with the role of “grandfather,” making sense of why it is “through me, of all my family, that my grandfather dies, over and over.” In line with this dream, we have the narrator’s following assertion:

To keep her (in Robin there was this tragic longing to be kept, knowing herself astray) Nora knew now that there was no way but death. In death Robin would belong to her. Death went with them, together and alone; and with the torment and catastrophe, thoughts of resurrection and second duel. (58)

Much like in Nora's second dream of Robin as grandmother, Barnes here presents Nora as understanding that her relationship with Robin, seated in the mutual creation of their family of origin, their incestuous family apparatus, is inevitable, is inescapable, and that they are "condemned" to one another. They will "die, over and over," and "in death" they "belong to each other" – as they do in life – regardless of the spatio-temporal distance that may at times separate them, just as the generations separate grandmother and grandchild, or mother and child. At the close of the novel, Nora recalls Robin as "my lover and my child" (156), and continues:

For Robin is incest, too; that is one of her powers. In her, past-time records, and past time is relative to us all. Yet not being the family she is more present than the family. A relative is in the foreground only when it is born, when it suffers and when it dies, unless it becomes one's lover, then it must be everything, as Robin was; yet not as much as she, for she was like a relative found in another generation. (156)

Nora here secures the family apparatus she has created with Robin as one that takes up the role of the constructed family of origin, and is an incestuous family apparatus ("past-time *records*, and past time is *relative* to us all" indicative of a familial genealogy). Their family of origin consists of the two lovers inhabiting multiple and simultaneous familial roles, across traditional generational restrictions; it is a family apparatus that "is incest, too."

O'Connor intervenes between Nora's two dreams of grandmother-Robin, and himself plays the grandmother in his discussions with Nora of her relationship with Robin. Nora encounters O'Connor with his "full gun-metal cheeks and chin, [...] framed in the golden semi-circle of a wig with long pendant curls, [...] heavily rouged and his lashes painted" (*Nightwood* 79); and exclaims, "God,



children know something they can't tell; they like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed!" (79). This sexualized image of the grandmother recalls Nora and Robin's incestuous familial relationship as lovers, wherein Robin figures as the grandmother. Immediately after Nora comes upon the doctor-as-grandmother, she begins to ask him to tell her about the "night," about Robin by proxy of the night, where Robin is often found in "mischievous." O'Connor, during their conversation, calls, "Nora, my child" (96), and instantiates once again the grandmother-grandchild dynamic between Robin and Nora. In this vein, Ann Martin, in *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed: Modernism's Fairy Tales*, writes: "Robin Vote, Nora's lover, is another figure in *Nightwood* that Barnes characterizes through a combination of identities. Like the Wolf-as-Grandmother, Robin first appears in bed" (126). The confluence between Robin and the doctor here, both figured as grandmothers, ensures that the reader remains aware of the incestuous family apparatus that Nora and Robin have created, and carries on this relationship for the reader, as well as for Nora and Robin, through Nora and O'Connor's discussion while Robin is with Jenny.<sup>68</sup>

While O'Connor does not intervene in Nora and Robin's relationship in order to dismember their created family apparatus and take up a relationship with either Robin or Nora, Jenny, the "squatter," attempts to penetrate their family apparatus and disband it from within. While Jenny neither makes it into the family nor destroys it, she "squats" with Robin, trying to be Nora, and playing at mother-lover. The narrator introduces Jenny with her "second-hand dealings with life," and immediately notes "the photograph taken of Robin for Nora [that] sat upon her table" (*Nightwood* 66), for "Jenny knew about Nora immediately; to know Robin ten minutes was to know about Nora. Robin spoke of her in long, rambling, impassioned sentences. It had caught Jenny by the ear – she listened, and both loves seemed to be one and her own" (71). The narrator tells us that Jenny "had a

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<sup>68</sup> O'Connor also briefly positions himself as Nora's child for the reader, taking up the role of the Madonna's child, just as Robin has, reminding us also of this configuration of familial roles that Nora and Robin inhabit. As Nora and O'Connor discuss her relationship with Robin, we have the following passage:

Suddenly Dr. Matthew O'Connor said: "It's my mother without argument I want!" And then in his loudest voice he roared: "Mother of God! I wanted to be your son – the unknown beloved second would have done!" (*Nightwood* 149-150)

continual rapacity for other people's facts" (67), and that "[s]he wanted to be the reason for everything and so was the cause of nothing" (67-68). Jenny being the "cause of nothing" indicates that she could not be the "cause" or "creator" of a family of origin with Robin, but because of her "continual rapacity for other people's facts," she tries to re-create the family that Nora and Robin have already created, to take over the role of Nora, rather than create her own role in relation to Robin.<sup>69</sup> Though Jenny does spend a proportionately large part of the narrative with Robin, Nora and Robin ultimately reconvene as the family they have created, uninterrupted by Jenny's attempts to take Nora's place in this creation. Jenny "thought of little else" but the "desired [...] spirit of love" with Robin, but, ultimately, "was unable to attain it" (68). Jenny, who, "with the burning interest of a person who is led to believe herself a part of the harmony of a concert to which she is listening, appropriating in some measure its identity" (71), ultimately is not able to take part or take *a* part in Nora and Robin's family apparatus, however much pain her spatio-temporal intervention causes Nora and Robin.

Further emphasizing the solidity of the family apparatus that Nora and Robin have created, we have Felix's attempts to locate his former wife, Robin, and reconstruct what was their brief family of origin: Felix, Robin, and their child, Guido. Upon Felix's initial encounter with Robin – the doctor just having woken Robin from her swoon on the bed while Felix looks on – Felix imagines himself as one half of the whole that he envisions the two could make:

Something of this emotion came over Felix, but being racially incapable of abandon, he felt that he was looking upon a figurehead in a museum, which though static, no longer roosting on its cutwater, seemed yet to be

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<sup>69</sup> Jenny also tries to create a familial structure for herself with other characters: "A little girl (Jenny called her niece, though she was no relation) sat at the far end of the room" (*Nightwood* 70). Jenny later attempts to procure a picture of Felix's grandmother in order to forge a further "familial" connection with Robin; Felix and Robin were married and have a child, and thus, by acquiring the portrait of Robin's grandmother-in-law, she would become more "familiar" with Robin herself (114-115). This is precisely an instance of what the doctor is referring to when he speaks the following lines to Nora of Jenny: "She has a longing for other people's property, but the moment she possesses it the property loses some of its value, for the owner's estimate is its worth" (98). O'Connor's statement is further clarified for the reader who knows the "estimate" such a picture holds for Felix, whose obsession with "the past" and with the creation of his own familial lineage is seemingly insurmountable.

going against the wind; as if this girl were the converging halves of a broken fate, setting face, in sleep, toward itself in time, as an image and its reflection in a lake seem parted only by the hesitation in the hour.<sup>70</sup>

(*Nightwood* 37-38)

After Felix and Robin marry, he still observes: “He felt that her attention, somehow in spite of him, had already been taken by something not yet in history” (44). Felix desires Robin to create with him a family of origin; he is constantly trying to put his initial biological family of origin under erasure in favour of a constructed aristocratic family apparatus, and believes that with Robin he can finally secure this in biology, with their child. This looks toward Nora and Robin’s creation of such a family apparatus, which is “not yet in history,” and which will prove the “fate” “toward” which Robin is moving “in time.” Felix’s interventions, prior to Nora and Robin’s relationship as well as after, are not known to Nora in the same way that Jenny’s are. Perhaps Felix’s interventions are not thought to be as threatening to Nora, as Robin has left Felix and their child before she meets Nora, while Jenny’s interventions are attempts to “dismember” Robin of Nora and to take her place. Felix desires his own particular place with *a* Robin (and arguably *a* Guido, whose existential identity he only resigns himself to at the close of the narrative) of his own creation; he desires to take Nora’s place

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<sup>70</sup> The suggestion of inevitability or condemnation here in Felix’s observation of his potential relationship with Robin looks forward to these realities of Nora and Robin’s relationship; while such will prove true for Nora and Robin, it will not for Felix and Robin, even though Felix thinks they have later secured their “fate” through marriage and the birth of their son. The narrator recalls: “When he asked her to marry him it was with such an unplanned eagerness that he was taken aback to find himself accepted, as if Robin’s life held no volition for refusal” (*Nightwood* 42). This “as if” proves untrue for Felix, as Robin “refuses” him his “fate” with her, and refuses to mother their child, instead taking up the role of child and grandmother, as well as lover, with Nora. He recognizes this “refusal” in subsequent passages: “looking at her he knew that he was not sufficient to make her what he had hoped” (44); “If I should try to put it into words, I mean how I did see her, it would be incomprehensible, for the simple reason that I find that I never did have a really clear idea of her at any time” (111). He still believes, “She is with me in Guido; they are inseparable, and this time [...] with her full consent” (117); however true the first part may be to Felix, however biologically true it may be, the latter part of his statement proves false, as Robin “refuses” this as well, regardless of Felix’s denial to himself of this reality. Robin has created a new family of origin with Nora, not including Felix and their child, and refuses to be a part of the family apparatus that Felix desires to have with her and Guido, though he may comfort himself with the idea that such a family apparatus still exists.

as Robin's intimate, her family apparatus of origin, but not to become or to inhabit the roles that Nora inhabits for and with Robin.

We now come back to the idea that Nora and Robin are inescapably connected, are "condemned" to one another, are inextricably related because of their decision to relate to each other as a family apparatus of origin. Initially, O'Connor suggests that Nora, Robin, *and* Jenny are all "condemned" to each other:

[...] and thinking of you, and how in the end you'll all be locked together, like the poor beasts that get their antlers mixed and are found dead that way, their heads fattened with a knowledge of each other they never wanted, having had to contemplate each other, head-on, and eye to eye, until death; well, that will be you and Jenny and Robin. You, who should have had a thousand children and Robin, who should have been all of them; and Jenny the bird, snatching the oats out of love's droppings. (*Nightwood* 100-101)

While the first part of O'Connor's speech proves untrue, the latter part, as we have already seen, proves true: Robin is Nora's child (her position as an ambiguously gendered and sexed child metaphorically suggests multiple children), and Nora her mother. We have seen Jenny try to "snatch" a place in Nora and Robin's "love's droppings"; however, it is Nora and Robin's love that closes the narrative, and Jenny's "antlers" are decidedly absent. The doctor, shortly after, revises his assessment of Nora, Robin, and Jenny, while he is recounting to Nora his experience with Jenny and Robin in a carriage (where Jenny physically attacks Robin, who is paying more attention to others than to Jenny, as noted earlier):

And then Robin was going forward, and the blood running red, where Jenny had scratched her, and I screamed and thought: "Nora will leave that girl some day; but though those two are buried at opposite ends of the earth, one dog will find them both." (106)

Again, only part of O'Connor's prediction proves true: one could argue that Nora leaves Robin as much as Robin leaves Nora, in terms of spatio-temporal distance

between the two, especially when Robin is with Jenny; and, while “one dog” “finds both” Nora and Robin at the close of the narrative, it is because Robin has come to find Nora, not because they are “buried at opposite ends of the earth.” Nora and Robin come together in the novel’s last scenes and carry out for the reader their chosen “condemnation” to love one another, to be each other’s family apparatus. To Nora, the doctor utters, “And Robin? I know where your mind is! She, the eternal momentary” (127); this “eternality” on Nora’s “mind” proves to have begun when she met Robin and they created their family as lovers, as Nora and Robin are “both found” by “one dog.”<sup>71</sup>

## II. Endorsing Viability in Incest: Scaling *Ryder*, *The Antiphon*, and *Nightwood*

Now we come to questions of livelihood and viability in *Nightwood*. These are questions best explored by situating *Nightwood* in relation to *Ryder* and *The Antiphon*, and by examining how Barnes’s ideas of livelihood and viability for individuals involved in incestuous family apparatuses progress through *Ryder*, *Nightwood*, and *The Antiphon*. We have seen how Barnes creates the biological/“biological” family apparatus and the constructed family apparatus in like terms, and how she presents these structures as inescapable and inevitable, whether the individuals involved in them have chosen to “condemn” themselves to each other or not. Nevertheless, Barnes appears to create a *scale* of viability, determined by the *degree* to which livelihood is attained or maintained, through the three primary works discussed within this project.<sup>72</sup> Because the incestuous relationship between Nora and Robin in *Nightwood* is chosen, and does not involve abuse as it appears in *Ryder* and to a greater degree in *The Antiphon*, we

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<sup>71</sup> We are reminded here of Nora’s statement, discussed earlier: “I love her as one condemned to it” (*Nightwood* 137). This condemnation does not preclude viability, as this condemnation is part of how Nora and Robin exist and relate to one another, and is chosen by them as a way in which, non-abusively, they may thrive as a family apparatus. Their shared condemnation is indeed necessary for their family apparatus to thrive.

<sup>72</sup> Contrary to the aims of this project, we have Clare L. Taylor’s arguments in *Women, Writing, and Fetishism 1890-1950: Female Cross-Gendering*, wherein Taylor asserts that Nora and Robin’s relationship is “impossible,” the characters themselves “impossible,” and *Nightwood* itself “sick” (149-190). I believe this assessment undermines the progress Taylor may be trying to make in bringing the marginalized into focus as an area of livelihood, and is indeed antithetical to the aims of my project.

may conclude that the incestuous family apparatus that occurs among a constructed family apparatus of origin is *more* viable than those of the Ryders and the Hobbsses. While Barnes does not present incest as “right or wrong” or “positive or negative” in any of these three works, she does suggest that the *more* (or *most*) viable form of the incestuous family apparatus is attained and maintained when the individuals have *chosen* to relate to each other as an inescapable family unit, have chosen “condemnation.”<sup>73</sup> Common to all of the incestuous relationships discussed throughout the above chapters is the idea that the individuals involved in them are ontologically defined or ontologically define themselves through incest whether by choice or not; family is the aegis of their relationships. In exploring this commonality through all three works, we realize that Barnes determines the *most* viable instantiation of this commonality to be that of Nora and Robin in *Nightwood*, for its existential freedom (constructed, chosen) – leading to *greater* agency in livelihood – and for its absence of abuse as it is present in the other two works.

Looking to agency in livelihood, we find that in *Nightwood* the relationships between Felix and Robin as well as between Jenny and Robin do not include the potential or realization of existential agency that is present in the relationship between Nora and Robin. This agency is also present in Nora and Robin’s incestuous family apparatus where it is absent in those of the Ryders and Hobbsses. Immediately after meeting Robin, Felix “admitted” (*Nightwood* 38):

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<sup>73</sup> Whitley, in “Nations of the Night,” highlights Donna Gerstenberger’s support of Barnes’s opening up of binary oppositions that serve to marginalize or “other” individuals who do not subscribe to one or the other side of a binary of identity, and Barnes’s desire to explore modes of being and relating that are located outside of binary structures as viable, which is in keeping with the aims of my project at hand:

[*Nightwood*] is a novel that rages against the imprisoning structures of the language and narratives of the “day,” which create a history built on the oppositions of night/day, past/present, reason/madness, “normal”/“abnormal,” truth/falsehood, gender, and origins (both historical and textual). It is a book that relentlessly undermines grounds for categorization. The ideal and the real, the beautiful and the ugly, subject and object become irrelevant distinctions; even the language of the novel works to slip the acculturated binary assumptions of signifier and signified, and the nature of narrative itself is destabilized as traditional categories are emptied of meaning. (Gerstenberger qtd. in Whitley: 86)

[...] he wished a son who would feel as he felt about the “great past.” The doctor then inquired, with feigned indifference, of what nation he would choose the boy’s mother.

“The American,” the Baron answered instantly. “With an American anything can be done.” (38-39)

Felix determines what he wants from and for Robin (“The American”) before he has spoken to her, before they are married. While Robin *chooses* to marry Felix, she rejects what he believes to be the ideal formulation of the family apparatus (we later discover, in favour of the created family of origin with Nora).<sup>74</sup> Robin tells Felix, “I didn’t want him!” and, “[r]aising her hand she struck him across the face” (49).<sup>75</sup> Finally, Robin tells Felix, “I’ll get out,” and she is next “with Nora Flood” (49).<sup>76</sup>

As we know, before Nora and Robin are spatio-temporally together again at the end of the narrative, Robin is with Jenny. Jenny attempts to confine Robin to her vision of their life together, much like Felix, although Jenny wishes to position Robin as her child in order to fulfill the role of Nora for Robin. Jenny tells Felix that Robin “always lets her pets die. She is so fond of them, and then she neglects them, the way that animals neglect themselves” (*Nightwood* 115).

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<sup>74</sup> When Robin is giving birth to her son, Barnes figures Robin as a child herself, which suggests her “birth” as the child of Nora, and her disengagement (if one could say she was ever engaged) from Felix and her newborn child:

Amid loud and frantic cries of affirmation and despair *Robin was delivered*. Shuddering in the double pains of birth and fury, cursing like a sailor, she rose up on her elbow in her bloody gown, looking about her in the bed as if she had lost something. “Oh, for Christ’s sake, for Christ’s sake!” *she kept crying like a child* who has walked into the commencement of a horror. (*Nightwood* 48; emphases added)

In this vein, we also learn: “For three or four months the people of the quarter asked for her in vain. Where she had gone no one knew. When she was seen again in the quarter, it was with Nora Flood” (49).

<sup>75</sup> Not only is this an instance of Robin’s rejection of her lack of agency in her relationship with Felix, but also an instance of physical abuse that does not occur in Robin’s relationship with Nora. Jenny also physically abuses Robin as discussed earlier.

<sup>76</sup> In keeping with the notion that Robin’s livelihood lies with Nora as her mother, and herself as Nora’s child, we have the following statement from O’Connor to Nora: “Donne says: ‘We are all conceived in close prison, in our mothers’ wombs we are close prisoners all. When we are born we are but born to the liberty of the house – all our life is but a going out to the place of execution and death’” (*Nightwood* 97). Not only does this expression suggest that outside of the mother’s “womb” or care is death (which could only be considered quite opposite to “livelihood” or a “viable life”), but it also suggests that the “condemnation” or “close prison” of the incestuous family apparatus created by Nora and Robin is what keeps them both alive, viable, maintains their livelihood.

This admission serves to tell the reader that Robin, who clearly does not wish to be a mother herself (she leaves Guido with Felix), also cannot “mother” herself; she is in need of a mother, which she does not have in Jenny, who is only playing at being Nora, Robin’s chosen mother, and the mother who has chosen Robin.<sup>77</sup> The inability or lack of desire in Robin to be a mother further underlines the viability of her role as child in relation to her lover Nora. That Jenny is not able to “provide for” Robin as Nora does is made clearer by Robin’s decision to “condemn” herself to Nora. This also speaks to Robin’s agency as integral to her relationship with Nora, as it is her means of securing her own livelihood in the co-creation and maintenance of an incestuous family apparatus. Jenny, like Felix, tries to force Robin’s affections upon herself where they do not desire to be, however much Robin may have initially chosen to be with either one of them. Jenny attempts to bring Robin’s attention to herself, to secure her place as Robin’s beloved:

As the initial soft weeping had not caught Robin’s attention, now Jenny used the increase and the catching in her throat to attract her, with the same insistent fury one feels when trying to attract a person in a crowded room. [...]

Then Jenny struck Robin, scratching and tearing in hysteria, striking, clutching and crying. Slowly the blood began to run down Robin’s cheeks, and as Jenny struck repeatedly Robin began to go forward as if brought to the movement by the very blows themselves, as if she had no will, sinking down in the small carriage, her knees on the floor, her head forward as her arm moved upward in a gesture of defence; and as she sank, Jenny also, as if compelled to conclude the movement of the first blow, almost as something seen in retarded action, leaned forward and over, so Robin’s hands were covered by Jenny’s slight and bending breast, caught in

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<sup>77</sup> We also know that Robin tests out the role of mother with Sylvia (the girl who Jenny calls her niece), but again withdraws from the role. Felix relays: “it appears that this little girl Sylvia had ‘fallen in love’ with the Baronin and that she, the Baronin, kept waking her up all through the night to ask her if she ‘loved her’” (*Nightwood* 115). Robin, not able to mother herself, is also not able to mother another, whether animal or human, and takes on the role of needy child in relation to Sylvia.



between the bosom and the knees. And suddenly the child [Sylvia] flung herself down on the seat, face outward, and said in a voice not suitable for a child because it was controlled with terror: "Let me go! Let me go! Let me go!" (75-76)

That Robin appears "as if she had no will," and "Jenny also" appears "as if compelled to conclude the movement of the first blow," here indicates that this relationship has much less agency than that present in the relationship between Nora and Robin. Jenny initially appears to have agency, to be attempting to take agency from Robin (and via Robin, from Nora), but she, in the scene above, ultimately succumbs to its mutual lack in her relationship with Robin. Not only is agency lacking in the relationship between Jenny and Robin here, but also just as Robin has with Felix, Jenny resorts to physical violence or abuse as a way to inject agency back into the relationship.

The act of resorting to physical abuse in order to gain a sense of control or agency in one's livelihood in *Nightwood* looks forward to this phenomenon, although on a much larger scale, and to a greater degree, in *The Antiphon*. *Ryder* also speaks to this method of gaining control, although to a lesser degree than in *The Antiphon*. In *Ryder* we see two of the Ryder children physically abuse each other, we see Julie attack Kate, and we hear verbal violence among Amelia and Kate, and suspect verbal violence from each toward Wendell. However, unlike the violence in *Nightwood* involving Felix and Robin and Jenny and Robin, the Ryders choose to remain "condemned" to one another, as do the Hobbsses in *The Antiphon*, where abuse is rampant (physical, verbal, sexual, mental). That *Nightwood* contains Barnes's most viable example of the incestuous family apparatus as it exists between Nora and Robin suggests that violence or abuse (physical, verbal, sexual, mental) is not *necessary* to or resultant from the incestuous relationship. I argue that Barnes demonstrates that abuse is not concomitant with either the circumstantial (biological/"biological") incestuous

family apparatus or the constructed incestuous family apparatus.<sup>78</sup> While neither Felix and Robin nor Jenny and Robin composes the chosen incestuous family apparatus, their attempts suggest that violence is equally possible in the chosen as in the circumstantial incestuous relationship. It is likely that Barnes suggests the integrality of agency in Robin's relationship with Nora because she believes chosen incest is a livelihood that is *more* viable. However, whether or not *Nightwood's* incestuous family apparatus is *more* viable than those of the Ryders or the Hobbses does not negate Barnes's assertion that the modes of being and relating of those involved in all of the above discussed incestuous family apparatuses are deserving of endorsement, are lives that are valued by the individuals themselves, and ought to be valued by both "citizens" and "outlaws" as viable.

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<sup>78</sup> Victoria L. Smith contributes to the present discussion of Barnes's presentation of the incestuous family apparatus as viable and as opening up discourse to include the possibility of considering a mode of being and relating seated in incest as viable. She writes:

My aim here is to show how Barnes counters "unspeakable" losses in and of culture and history through a speaking or performance of those losses. The public display of Barnes's *Nightwood* offers a series of textual and psychic strategies, a lexicon, if you will, for speaking unspeakable losses and desires – unspeakable in the sense of "the love that dare not speak its name" [...]. The text paradoxically performs unspeakable loss and demands that we recognize loss (of history, of a lover), as well as recognize the subject who speaks. (195)

## Conclusion

In the previous three chapters we have seen the greater and lesser degrees to which Barnes's implied theory of the viability of incest is demonstrated as it develops through *Ryder*, *The Antiphon*, and *Nightwood*. We have seen how Barnes expands normative definitions of the category of family, and revises the definition of what may be considered viable modes of livelihood beyond received limits or socio-cultural normative standards of her (as well as the present) time. We may see this by looking simply at *one* of Barnes's three major works; taken together, all three of Barnes's major works present a scale of the examples that can facilitate this expansion and revision. Her works propose a continuum of lesser to greater degrees of viability of the incestuous family apparatus based on Barnes's presentation of the biological/"biological" and constructed family of origin (and extension) in various incarnations in her three major works. In exploring *Ryder*, *The Antiphon*, and *Nightwood* as I have in the chapters of this project, I push against arguments from Barnes critics (for example, Dalton, DeSalvo, Chisholm, Rohman, and Seitler) that suggest that what I read as the livelihoods of the Ryders, Hobbsses, and Nora and Robin are merely "livable" – dire expressions of "livability," rather than what I have explored as viability.

In each chapter I have emphasized the idea that individuals involved in incestuous family apparatuses tend to inhabit simultaneous and multiple familial roles. This mode of role inhabiting (included in a mode of being and relating, and thus a mode of livelihood if the conditions obtain) is a principal indicator of the progression of Barnes's theory of the viability of incest across the three works. By the time she writes *Nightwood*, this method of (re)presentation has become not simply a way of understanding the incestuous relationships among members of the biological/"biological" family apparatus of origin, but also of constructing the family apparatus of origin from *without* the biological/"biological" family: the constructed family – which is also the seat of greatest livelihood in incestuous relationships. Each member of the Ryder and Hobbs families as well as Nora and Robin inhabits different and multiple roles (e.g. Sophia Ryder is a mother and "entrepreneur"; Nora is a mother, and runs a salon); however, Barnes's theory of

incest, and thus my project, focuses specifically on the familial roles. In this project the simultaneous and multiple role inhabiting refers to an individual assuming familial roles (e.g. Sophia Ryder is mother and grandmother; Nora is mother and grandchild). We are looking here at the roles within the category of the family. In Barnes's works, these roles remain the same set of roles as in received normative theories or accounts of family, but are arranged and may be arranged in an innumerable number of combinations (making up innumerable particular apparatuses). According to Barnes's vision, a family may thus include, for example, a mother, daughter, grandmother, and grandchild or a father, father, father, and daughter and not be considered "lacking" any role or in "excess" of any role (i.e. there is not a "missing" father, nor "extra" fathers, respectively); these roles derive from the general category "family," but are configured into *x* number of particular family apparatuses – each viable, each a structure containing livelihood.

The family apparatuses in Barnes's three texts are, as I have demonstrated, *incestuous* family apparatuses. Thus the question may arise: must the family be a closed structure, as the incestuous family is understood to be in Barnes's texts, in terms of the ontological basis for each individual's mode of being and relating? This project, and I argue Barnes herself, suggests that the family is closed in terms of possible roles (i.e. mother, father, sister, brother, etc. of the received traditional family of origin), but not in terms of the combinations of these roles or the individuals who may fulfill them (i.e. an adult male may be a mother, daughter, etc.). As is implicit in Barnes's three major texts, the age, sex, gender of the individuals who inhabit roles in the incestuous family apparatus do not determine each individual's place within the family; the relationships created and maintained in Barnes's texts determine the roles. How such roles function together forms the incestuous family apparatus.

When taken together, these apparatuses, roles, these texts, and this theory of incest, implicitly developed by Barnes as she determines the degree of viability of the family apparatuses in each of her works, open up what may be considered not simply livable, but valuable and valued – viable – modes of being and

relating. Barnes's (e)valuation of these modes of being and relating is suggested by the system of viability and livelihood created through the fictions of *Ryder*, *The Antiphon*, and *Nightwood*. While such a theory, as Carolyn Allen suggests (a discussion begun in the introduction), emerges from fictive texts, its application moves beyond Barnes's texts themselves, beyond the finite array of incestuous family apparatuses presented in these texts, and beyond literary fiction itself. Barnes's theory of incest, moving from fiction to real world application, expands livelihood to include those whose lives ought not, Barnes encourages, be confined to the idea of taboo, unspeakability, or mere livability. Barnes presents varying degrees of viability for the incestuous family apparatus, and gives the reader, audience member, and critic the necessary *theoretical* apparatus to understand not only her own works out of which this theory implicitly emerges – *Ryder*, *The Antiphon*, and *Nightwood* – but also the family apparatuses, both incestuous and non-incestuous, in other fiction and the surrounding socio-cultural reality.

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