Spring 2021

“Power and the Orientations of Resistance in Twentieth-Century American Literature”

Victoria Eleanor Chandler

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by

Victoria Eleanor Chandler

Bachelor of Arts
Gordon College, 2013

Master of Arts
University of South Carolina, 2015

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

English

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2021

Accepted by:

Greg Forter, Major Professor

Catherine Keyser, Committee Member

Brian Glavey, Committee Member

Andrew Rajca, Committee Member

Tracey L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the support of the English Department at the University of South Carolina, as well as the Russell J. and Dorothy S. Bilinski Fellowship, which enabled me to focus on research and writing.

I am grateful to my advisor, Greg Forter, for his insights about my work that he gave with kindness and encouragement at every step of my graduate education. I also appreciate the generosity and sagacity of my committee members, Catherine Keyser, Brian Glavey, and Andrew Rajca.

Thank you to everyone who read drafts of this dissertation or offered me advice about this project. I'm especially grateful for the counsel of Kaelie Giffel, Leslie Pearson, Jennifer Blevins, Matt Gassan, Kelsey Flint-Martin, and Susan Courtney.

I am grateful to my family for their love and support throughout my work on this project. And I am thankful for my partner, Sean Birch, who encouraged me, listened to me talk through ideas, and cooked food to sustain me. His quotidian acts of care have been invaluable.

Abstract

"Power and the Orientations of Resistance in Twentieth-Century American Literature" analyzes the intersections of space, power, and the possibility for alternatives to hegemonic structures. I argue that social power circumscribes the spatial possibilities of normative and non-normative subjectivities. In particular, power curtails the ability of marginalized subjects (such as women, queer people, and people of color) to forge alternatives to the current social order. In dialogue with recent scholars of race studies, feminism, and queer theory, this project reveals how dominated subjects employ their quotidian spaces as sites of resistance and survival. The literature I examine in this dissertation identifies how power functions spatially within public and private spaces, and how subordinated people survive by reimagining their spaces through daily acts like walking, redecorating, gardening, and cooking.

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Introduction

In *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates recounts a moment when a white woman pushes his young African American son out of her way in a crowded movie theater. Coates reacts angrily towards the woman and finds himself entangled in a shouting match with a white man who threatens to call the police on him. Upon reflection, Coates regrets his actions because by responding angrily to the white woman's mistreatment of his son's body, he "had forgotten the rules" of this particular space, the predominantly white Upper West Side of Manhattan, and thus put his child in danger (95). The "rules" Coates refers to are the rules that organize which bodies can move in certain spaces and how those bodies can behave. These rules determine who can feel at home in the Manhattan movie theater and who does not move in this space so comfortably. He points out that this woman would never have touched his son in a primarily Black area of New York because she would not have felt emboldened to exert physical force on his body there, but here in overwhelmingly white space, she held power over the Black boy. The rules of this cityscape enable her to assert disciplinary pressure on his body, while they restrict Black men to placating, non-offensive behavior, even when confronted with threats of violence. Coates writes to his son, "My wish for you is that you feel no need to constrict yourself to make other people comfortable" (108). He wishes that the rules structuring the city were different. He wishes that people of color did not have to moderate their behavior, make their bodies smaller, and avoid certain spaces in order to stay alive.

Coates' story poses one version of the set of questions at the heart of my dissertation: how does social power function in daily life by regulating space and ordering bodies? What are the different ways in which such power is inflected, and how do specific (minority) groups pay the price? How, finally, do members of groups disadvantaged by the spatial configurations of power nonetheless find ways of modulating, countering, revising, and/or enacting alternatives to such constraints?

My project focuses on how these questions are explored in U.S. fiction from across the 20th century. These are works in which spatial geography and domination are inextricable. That is, the books explore how power "works" by circumscribing the spatial possibilities of normative and non-normative subjectivities alike, including especially, in the latter category, (white) women, African Americans, queer subjects, and immigrants. The white women I focus on in my first chapter each experience some failure to orient themselves to the normative paths for wives and mothers, which leads them to literally forge new paths in the cityscape, enacting new modes of being that cut against the prescribed paths for feminine life. They walk in ways that lie aslant the straight, normative lines for female movement, and thus create alternative means of living in the world for women, though their deviations ultimately fail to establish new modes of being in any lasting way, at least for these characters. The queer subjects of my second chapter similarly fail to orient themselves to dominant systems of power, this time to heteronormative sexuality, and consequently they are pushed to the margins of the city. Failure to orient himself to heteronormative marriage, and by extension heteronormative masculinity, is deeply ingrained in the queer man and thus any attempt he makes to invent alternative paths for himself collapses, while the queer woman is not so bound by

gendered power dynamics that she can play a bit more freely with creating queer pathways for herself. The African Americans of my third chapter are similarly queer in that they too do not "fit in" with predominantly white cityscapes. As in *Between the World and Me*, white citizens feel more comfortable in spaces they dominate and thus feel more free to exert their power over Black bodies. Lastly, the Asian Americans of my final chapter also do not exist comfortably in white American spaces. They are made to feel foreign, like they cannot inhabit America with ease, and their pursuit of hybridity is a means of finding ways to create spaces that feel like home in such inhospitable space.

Power is expressed spatially in the architecture of cities, the structure of houses, and the design of rooms. Configurations of power can be insidious insofar as power becomes so codified into spatial forms that its operations can be taken for granted. Domination asserts its power in violent ways, but these violences often go overlooked. This dissertation aims to "see" these systems of violence that often go unseen and to map out the tactical ways marginalized people survive domination. Resistance to multiple valences of power happen within structural confines: in the way bodies move through the city, how they inhabit houses, and how they claim spaces for themselves. The subordinated must forge new paths, cultivate different spaces, and mark interiors as their own spaces in order to create new modes of being that will enable them to survive within prevailing organizations of oppressive power.

My project's main theoretical coordinates are twofold. On one hand, I draw on the rich and ongoing traditions that theorize particular instances of domination and the efforts to combat it— queer scholars such as Leo Bersani and Judith Halberstam, feminist scholars Rita Felski and Lauren Berlant, and anti-racist scholars such as Lisa Lowe,

Saidiya Hartman, Darieck Scott, bell hooks, and Sau-ling Wong. On the other, are those theorists who articulate these with important theoretical discussions of space—critics such as Michel de Certeau, Katherine McKittrick, Carolyn Finney, and Christina Sharpe.

Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* is foundational for this project insofar as Certeau brings together a theoretical discussion of space and social control. He considers the correlations of disciplinary structures and everyday practices such as walking and speech, those "stubborn procedures that elude discipline" that can disrupt the disciplinary city structure (99). He theorizes the means by which these everyday practices, like walking, serve as forms of transgression that can carve out new paths, upsetting the systems that organize and surveil the city. Panoptic organizational structures, like the railway, immobilize the body, imprisoning its riders and forbidding transgressive dissent. But the pedestrian, in contrast, can move in spontaneous, uncontrolled ways that unsettle this power structure. Certeau offers a way of theorizing the means by which deviations of movement correspond to transgressive ideologies that forge new ways of inhabiting the world.

In addition to Certeau's conceptual arguments, I draw on antiracist scholars like Carolyn Finney, whose book *Black Faces, White Spaces* complicates this spatial, social power dynamic by revealing how race compounds these problems. Finney presents a historically inflected argument that traces how America's troubled histories with race have shaped its very geography. She argues that African Americans have systematically been denied land ownership, and she analyzes how racism has affected their relationship to the environment. Furthermore, Finney articulates the complexities of race and space by outlining the tensions between the appeal that green spaces like parks, woods, and open

fields have for African Americans, and the violence that prevents them from existing comfortably in such spaces. The woods signify both a place to escape from slavery on the plantation and inside the house; and, at the same time, the woods signal all the terrors of mob violence and lynching perpetrated in ungoverned terrain. Finney reveals how space does not exist outside its historical context insofar as social power is exerted through spatial organization.

For my project, the most significant scholar who theorizes the intersection of space and domination is Sara Ahmed. Drawing on Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology,* each chapter of this dissertation studies how social power functions at the level of the body and its spatial configurations. According to Ahmed's phenomenology, space is not distinct from the body. She says, "Space is not a container for the body…Rather bodies are submerged, such that they become the space they inhabit" (53). This conceptualization of the body is significant for her theories of spatial power. Ahmed argues, "If spaces extend bodies, then we could say that spaces also extend the shape of the bodies that 'tend' to inhabit them. So, for instance, if the action of writing is associated with the masculine body, then it is this body that tends to inhabit the space for writing" (58). In this way, she argues, writing and the spaces for writing become gendered because the masculine body has historically tended to write so much more often than the feminine body. Through the repeated act of writing, the male body shapes those spaces for writing and they become the male domain. In contrast, the couches and chairs in living rooms become increasingly more soft to accommodate "the [female] body that sits" and "the more the body sits, the more it tends to be seated" (59). In these ways, spaces take on the shape of those bodies that inhabit them, and there are power dynamics

and social norms associated with this shaping of space. Writing and spaces for writing are said to "extend" the male body more "comfortably" than the female body. Spaces for writing, cooking, entertaining, etc. all become gendered and raced by taking on the shapes of those bodies that continually occupy them. This does not mean that women cannot write and inhabit spaces for writing, but in order to do so they must encounter the discomfort of dwelling in spaces that do not "take their shape" (58). Ahmed argues, "When bodies take up spaces that they were not intended to inhabit, something other than the reproduction of the facts of the matter happens. The hope that reproduction fails is the hope for new impressions, for new lines to emerge…it involves painstaking labor for bodies to inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape" (62). For the female body to inhabit those spaces that have so long been inhabited by men, they must *work* in order to do so because they were "not intended" to exist in such spaces, and such work is uncomfortable. Creating something *other* than "the reproduction" of what has gone before, forging new lines and new directions, requires effort.

Ahmed's phenomenology theorizes how "resistance" to dominant social powers can function on the level of space and the body. She argues that striking out in new directions that have not been inhabited before may entail ostracization. Those bodies that inhabit space comfortably (the male body that writes or the female body that sits on the plush living room couch) identify those bodies who do not inhabit space comfortably as deviant. In other words, "some spaces extend certain bodies and simply do not leave room for others" (11). Deviants (such as the woman who writes, the queer desiring subject, or the racial minority) have "failed" to orient themselves to the social space. They have failed to fall in line with their community. Ahmed argues, "The lines that

direct us…are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions" (16). Those who fail to repeat those norms are those who are "queer" in some way—they are those who fail or refuse to repeat their community's conventions for gender, sexuality, or race. The community in power may "pressure" the deviant back in line. Ahmed says, "The social pressure to follow a certain course, to live a certain kind of life, and even to reproduce that life can feel like a physical 'press' on the surface of the body" (21). Bodies in power exert that pressure on deviants in order to bring them back into the folds of the group. Ahmed continues, "For a life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one's futurity in the terms of reaching certain points along a life course. A queer life might be one that fails to make such gestures of return" (21). Failing to repeat the norms of the community may entail wandering away from the group or being excluded, which can be uncomfortable. The lesbian who fails to marry a socially appropriate man and have children that will extend her family's line may be shunned for her deviance. The woman who writes, the person who desires queerly, and the racial other will have to work to take those first steps in a new direction that only after many repetitions may become a new normal.

Let me pause to read Coates' conflict with the white man and woman in *Between the World and Me* through the lens of Ahmed's phenomenology. Black bodies do not extend comfortably in this Manhattan movie theater because the movie theater takes the shape of the white bodies that tend to inhabit it. Coates' son literally bumps up against a body that extends this space more easily than his own, and therefore she felt comfortable pushing his body out of her way. Coates felt the need to forcefully assert his right to exist

in this room without the pressures of disciplinary force, and in doing so he forgot the "rules" of this social space. He forgot that because the white man tends to inhabit this area of New York, the white man feels emboldened to threaten the Black man with violence in order to keep him "in line." This does not mean that Coates and his son cannot visit this Manhattan movie theater; it just means they must abide by the social rules that govern this predominantly white space. They must moderate their movements, and "constrict" their bodies, in order to survive in this hostile environment. What my reading of *Between the World and Me* demonstrates is that Ahmed's arguments offer me a language with which to theorize how movement, directionality, and orientations shape identity, and how survival, and some forms of "resistance," against the powers that shape space may be possible.

Each chapter in this dissertation examines how various intersections of power function differently as mechanisms of oppression, and how the subordinated must forge new paths in order to survive domination. The first chapter employs recent feminist criticism and Ahmed's queer criticism in its analysis of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. During a recent panel at the 2020 Edith Wharton's New York conference, several major Edith Wharton scholars noted that the most exciting current scholarship on Wharton comes from queer criticism. While this chapter does not scrutinize the sexualities of the protagonists in these novels, Edna Pontellier and Lily Bart, it does perform a queering of female behavior. I examine how these women *move* in queer directions, rather that perform their gender in normative ways. Their slanted movements and deviations from traditional femininity alienate them

from conventional society while also making room for alternative ways of moving in the world as women.

In this chapter, I examine the patriarchal constraints on female desire and movement, how the protagonists of these novels resist those constraints, and how those pursuits ultimately fail. I ground my main argument in three main theorists: Ahmed, Rita Felski, and Michel de Certeau. The central distinct point that I draw from Ahmed in this chapter concerns her argument that being part of a community entails keeping "in line" with the group. In Edna Pontellier's case, being part of her community entails acting in accordance with the bourgeois values of marriage and motherhood. Her community perceives any other behavior as a deviant failure to orient herself to her society appropriately. Rita Felski fleshes out those guidelines for women living at the dawn of modernity. Felski argues that the feminine is a site of nostalgic longing. Women and motherhood, secured and set apart by domesticity, represent a wholeness that the modern man engaged in public space has lost. This positioning of women as a site of nostalgic longing restricts women to domestic life and precludes them from engaging in modernity.

In defiance of these guidelines for feminine behavior, Edna Pontellier in Chopin's novel and Lily Bart in Wharton's both employ walking, and *wandering* in particular, as a means of resisting the confines of bourgeois marriage and motherhood. Michel de Certeau establishes the various ways power shapes the city, especially in its gridwork for traveling bodies, and how one can walk in such a way as to challenge these organizations of power. Edna and Lily, both literally and metaphorically, wander away from the lines they are supposed to walk, and this nonteleological movement creates space for new, alternative ways of being in the world as women. These deviations do not come without

risks, however. I draw critics of the flâneuse into this conversation to underscore the dangerous implications that walking in public space has for women. Critics such as Janet Wolff, Griselda Pollock, and Deborah Nord explain how women risk being perceived as prostitutes or hazard sexual violence by walking city streets. Edna takes these risks brazenly, while Lily tries her best to avoid them due to her more precarious class position. *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth* imagine how patriarchal power constricts women, and these novels map out ways in which women might begin to resist domination by charting new courses for themselves, even if these new directions ultimately fail to liberate them fully.

While Chapter 1 focuses on queer wandering as a means of resisting patriarchal pressures, the next chapter turns more explicitly to heteronormativity's pressures on queer sexuality. Building off the framework in *Queer Phenomenology*, this chapter complicates Ahmed's intuition that the queer body is the deviant body out of line with conventional society by drawing on Leo Bersani's queer scholarship. Bersani conceives of sex as a mode of self-destruction. Bersani suggests that there is "radical disintegration and humiliation of the self" involved in the powerlessness of being penetrated, but that this disintegration need not be understood as negative (217). He argues that one could, in fact, experience a mode of "mystical" revelation in this "self-shattering," this loss of self (217). But once the self is inserted into this "self-abolition," then sex becomes bound up in the violence of "mastery and subordination," penetration and being penetrated. The latter entails giving up power in becoming the passive subject. It entails becoming abject. Once the self is asserted, then a power struggle begins. Bersani says, "It is the self that swells with excitement at the idea of being on top, the self that makes of the inevitable

play of thrusts and relinquishments in sex an argument for the natural authority of one sex over the other" (218). In this power struggle, the penetrator becomes the strong, masculine master, and the penetrated becomes the weak, feminine object.

Bersani's theories frame the two novels that I consider in this chapter, James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*. In *Giovanni's Room*, heteronormativity seeks to retain its power over deviants by projecting the abjection of sexuality onto queer subjects, physically splitting the city between an *upper*-world of light, cleanliness, and "appropriate" desire, and a *lower*-world of dirt, darkness, and deviation. I argue that, in such a system, queer desire becomes the abject, the base, the disgusting, and the feminine. Baldwin's novel reveals both how this power play functions, and also how it is internalized by Baldwin's protagonist, David. David fears risking his masculinity in queer desire because its abject stickiness might swallow, trap, and enclose him. Jean-Paul Sartre, Mary Douglas, and Sara Ahmed explain how stickiness, dirt, and abjection are terrifying because they dissolve boundaries between one sticky body and another. David's fears of dissolution cause him to reject queer sexuality's confines. *Nightwood* functions in quite the opposite way since Robin Vote is not bound by fears of losing any sense of masculinity. Her gender opens up more room for her to embrace the abjection of queer sexuality and defy the pressures of heteronormativity.

My third chapter builds upon Ahmed's claim that bodies of color become out of place, deviant, suspicious figures in predominately white space. Her phenomenology gives me a language to posit how slavery and later systemic racism affect the ways in which African Americans inhabit space. In this chapter, I draw in addition on racial studies scholars such as Katherine McKittrick, who argues for the value of

contextualizing the geographies of racial violence since so much of American history has been invested in divesting African Americans of their attachments to land, Christina Sharpe, who outlines how slavery still affects the world and its landscapes in fundamental ways, and Carolyn Finney, who contends that slavery has affected the relationship that African Americans have to place—particularly green spaces. McKittrick, Sharpe, and Finney lay the foundation for my argument that, in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha*, domestic spaces are "haunted" by the legacies of slavery. These hauntings prompt African American women to seek out more open green spaces where their bodies exist more comfortably outside the governing gaze of white supremacy. They cannot entirely escape the world as it is dominated by the logics of racial inequality, but open spaces provide them some modicum of reprieve from the onslaught of racist aggression that constricts their bodies.

While Toni Morrison's novel was published in the latter half of the 20th century, her novel well articulates the broad implications of slavery's violence for American life not only in the mid 1800s, but also well into the Reconstruction period. *Beloved* lays the historical groundwork for the racial violence and segregation that Brooks diagnoses a century later, in the 1940s. Morrison's novel reveals how intimately racial violence is attached to place. Sethe's home and the Sweet Home plantation where she was enslaved are haunted by traumatic memories. I argue that because American life is so fundamentally organized by the logics of racial violence, African Americans wander out to uninhabited green spaces where they can structure their lives outside the prevailing forces of white supremacy and outside the grip of traumatic memory. In green spaces, African Americans have the temporary freedom to participate in communal acts of care

that they do not have the liberty to perform elsewhere. Being able to extend their bodies more freely in this open space does not change the systems of oppression that structure their lives, but it is a central survival strategy for these characters. Brooks' later novel, *Maud Martha* identifies how racism still pervasively organizes daily American life, particularly in the form of poor housing for Black tenants, racially restrictive housing covenants, and redlining. Because Chicago's white landowners constrict Black residents to compact, dirty apartments in order to deprive them of living space, Maud Martha longs for open green spaces and clean, spacious housing. Maud's efforts to re-imagine her space as beautiful suggest the multiple ways in which racism engenders pervasive alienation for bodies who do not "fit" into white social space appropriately.

This point brings me to the central concept of my last chapter, which is that power alienates and disorients these bodies that do not "fit in" with the dominant conception of America. White America estranges Asian Americans differently than it ostracizes Black bodies insofar as it positions Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners. In making this argument, I am indebted to both Asian American studies scholars such as Lisa Lowe and Sau-ling Wong, as well as historians, including David Palumbo-Liu and Erika Lee. Lisa Lowe makes the influential argument that hybrid Asian American identity is born out of the violent cultural clash between Asian heritage and a hostile, anti-Asian America that excludes and subjugates them. She argues, "As the narrator of *The Woman Warrior* suggests, perhaps one of the more important stories of Asian American experience is about the process of critically receiving and rearticulating cultural traditions in the face of a dominant national culture that exoticizes and 'orientalizes' Asians" (65). Asian Americans must find ways to integrate both their race and white American's aggressive

marginalization of Asians into their hybridity in order to survive. Even as a dominant white culture homogenizes Asian identity, Asian Americans must find ways to negotiate their cultural differences and survive anti-Asian racism "by living, inventing, and reproducing different cultural alternatives" to subjugation (82). Wong emphasizes how this process of hybridity construction is so difficult for Asian Americans because the American court system positions Asians as eternal foreigners in America. Historians David Palumbo-Liu and Erika Lee concretize those racial violences by outlining the contours of Chinese and Indian immigration and their distinct experiences of racism in America. I focus on Chinese and Indian immigration because my literary texts, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, emphasize the unique experiences of Chinese and Indian immigrants respectively.

Kingston's and Lahiri's stories map the process of hybrid identity construction in first- and second-generation Asian Americans: the struggle between the desire to retain their cultural heritage, on the one hand, and assimilationist imperatives, on the other. To borrow from Ahmed's terminology, Chinese and Indian Americans in these texts grow *disoriented* by being torn in multiple directions. In Kingston's text, her young Chinese American narrator aims to orient herself to American life by assimilating, which entails straightening out the confused stories about China that her mother teaches her in order to map out the truth of her past. By charting the linear narrative of her family's history, she hopes to concretize the elusive elements of her hybrid identity and figure out her place in American social life. What the narrator learns is that she needs to accept the disorientation of hybridity because it is in this ambiguity that she can construct a dual self. In Lahiri's collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*, her Indian Americans similarly feel

disoriented by alienation. But unlike Chinese immigrants who emigrated in such large numbers that they could form supportive communities, Indians emigrated in fewer numbers, which intensified their isolation. They too are divided between their impulse to assimilate to American life (to act as a model minority), and their desire to retain Indian customs, such as cooking traditional Indian foods and learning their history. This chapter maps out the various quotidian spaces (like kitchens, living rooms, lawns, airports, and classrooms) where Asian Americans negotiate their complex, hybrid identities.

Chapter 1

Power and Resistance: Wandering in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*

This chapter focuses on power and spatial forms of resistance in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905). I argue that, in these novels, wandering maps out a productive resistance to patriarchal power, which coerces women to support the current power structure by playing subordinated roles, such that deviating from those subordinated roles is considered bad, improper, unethical, or otherwise lacking in good character. Wandering, as a non-teleological movement through space, can subvert these dominant constraints on women. First, however, I wish to outline the arguments of two theorists on whom I shall be relying, each of whom proposes a way of thinking space, power, and bodily orientation: Michel de Certeau and Sara Ahmed.

In Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Certeau contends that walking is a means of asserting the self, much like speaking is a means of asserting the self. He says, "The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations…Within them it is itself the effect of successive encounters and occasions that constantly alter it and make it the other's blazon: in other words, it is like a peddler, carrying something surprising, transverse or attractive compared with the usual choice" (101). This passage compares the unexpected word to a diagonal line, in that both are unexpected in their deviance. Walking in new or slanted directions has the power to shape a cityscape, just as an unanticipated word can move a conversation in different directions. As an example of

this "rhetoric of walking," he refers to the asyndeton (a phrase in which the conjunctive verb is omitted) and suggests that this speech act is quite like taking short cuts. Since state power organizes bodily movements within a city by designing streets and sidewalks, deviating off these designated walkways (by taking short cuts or cutting across the grass) is a kind of revolt. This chapter will outline several instances in which women take short cuts, amble along unfrequented paths, or deviate off roads entirely and this movement matters because by taking side streets, a pedestrian can cut into the power structures that regiment movement. Acts of walking, then, have the power of speech acts, the power of a speaker to assert a different kind of self than the self produced by staying within the pre-determined grid. Walking off the pre-set grid produces alternate ("transverse" and "surprising") modes of being. Obviously, not everyone taking a shortcut is making revolutionary a move; the point is that wandering *can* be deployed in counter-hegemonic ways.

Social pressure functions by convincing those it subjugates that rejecting their socially determined role is an ideological failure. Edna Pontellier's husband tries to convince her that she fails as a woman because she is not a good mother. Lily Bart's social circle pressures her to objectify herself in order to perpetuate bourgeois marriage. I draw on Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* to explain how this social pressure works because she so well articulates how power and subversions of power are bound up within spatial parameters. She argues that power "pressure[s]" each of its subjects to follow along certain "lines" of behavior, lest they risk becoming deviants. She says, "For a life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one's futurity in terms of reaching

certain points along a life course" (21). We can extend this reasoning to many minority groups, but in terms of women specifically, Ahmed means that for the social body to consider a woman's life as "good," then they must behave, think, feel, and move in ways that are determined by patriarchal power. Power influences women specifically by compelling them to act in service of the future, or in other words, in service of "the Child." Lee Edelman has argued persuasively that state power keeps queer people in line by compelling them to police their behavior for some future, conceptual "Child" in order to regulate the queer person's behavior. Power acts in much the same way for deviant women. Edna knows her husband and her social circle expect her to be a good "mother-woman," even when she realizes that she does not want to be motherly. Power similarly expects Lily to commodify herself for male pleasure and to marry into an upper-class lineage that would replicate her inheritance and extend her family line. Power conditions women to behave by convincing them that resisting authority is a queer deviation away from "good" conduct.

Moving off "official" paths laid down by social structures can subvert the forces that dictate directions. Social power pressures women to not only desire along certain lines, but also to physically walk in certain directions, or halt and hinder their bodies to move within confined circles. Being part of a social group means following along with behaviors and movements that power determines as good. As Ahmed says, "Becoming a member of…a community, then, might also mean following [a certain] direction, which could be described as the political requirement that we turn some ways and not others" (15). For example, being a good woman might mean staying at home when she would rather stroll outside or it might mean calling on her husband's business connections when

she would rather meet others for her own pleasure, as it does for Edna Pontellier. Deviating away from those directions is so radical because it means leaving her community and her socially determined identity behind.

Wandering, in particular, allows women to escape the bounds of male control. In this chapter, I argue that the liberated woman Chopin and Wharton envision diverges from control by drifting in accordance with serendipity and desire, charting a new course toward an as-of-yet unknown location. Edna seeks to walk in transverse ways and "soar above" the pre-determined grid marked out by "tradition," while Lily aims to transcend pedestrian concerns by "keep[ing] a kind of republic of the spirit" (Chopin 110, Wharton 55). Both movements invest in a slantwise, unconventional relationship to femininity, and its embodiments.[1] As *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth* both illustrate, walking in transgressive, slanted ways offers women an avenue for meaningful rebellion against the forces that dominate their lives.

At the same time, Chopin and Wharton also recognize the limitations of the flâneuse, the woman as public, mobile agent. Critics such as Janet Wolff and Griselda Pollock have even argued that women could not possibly have been walkers-in-public since gender divisions were so absolute and entire at the turn of the twentieth century.

[1] Sarah Ensor, in "Spinster Ecology," argues for the value of deviants who live life at a slant, uninvested in traditional feminine norms like reproduction. In contrast to the antisocial theory of queer futurity posited by Lee Edelman and Heather Love which argues that queer subjectivities should reject the future, Ensor suggests that a different kind of connection to the future can exist, one that can invest in the future without directly producing it. She says, "The figure of the spinster can help to resolve these tensions insofar as she practices an avuncular form of stewardship, tending the future without contributing directly to it" (409). She argues that the spinster aunt offers a useful model for thinking through how the queer subject can invest in the future otherwise because she "stands in a kind of slanted or oblique relationship to the linear, vertical paradigms of transmission that govern familiar notions of futurity" (416).

Wolff suggests that women did not tend to walk in the public sphere unless they were there in relation to a man, or if they moved in the public sphere, then they supposedly manifested "mannish" qualities that supposedly undermined their femininity (42). Pollock argues that women were too much the object of the male gaze to walk unobserved and unmolested as the flâneur could. However, *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth* suggest that female public movement is possible, if limited in its possibilities. Women in these novels do walk in public spaces and doing so does not undermine their feminine selfhood but establishes it in contrast to the domesticated self they leave behind. As such, these novels suggest possibilities for a flâneuse figure that are more in line with Jeanne Scheper's model of the flâneuse in her article "The New Negro *Flâneuse* in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*." Scheper argues, "mobility…does not a priori represent liberation…[but *Quicksand* suggests that] resistance is possible, and that mobility can function as a space of productivity, of political movement and resignification, and the enactment of identity's shifting possibilities" (682). I would go further to say that mobility is absolutely a liberation. It is an outright break from restraint in favor of non-dominative agency. Yet, I agree that liberation has its limits. After all, Edna and Lily both die at the ends of their respective novels. Liberation does ultimately fail them because patriarchal power is so dominative over female lives. Mobility is possible for them. The flâneuse does exist, but she has her restrictions.

Patriarchal power restricts Edna and Lily in similar yet distinct ways. While *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth* both reveal how female bodies can move rebelliously yet their movements are ultimately curtailed, Edna is differently privileged than Lily. Edna pursues her awakened autonomy with an abandon cushioned by her own wealth.

Chopin writes that as Edna "descended in the social scale," she felt "a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes, to see and apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life" (124). Although Edna finds "spiritual" ascension in her social decline, Lily's reaction to falling lower in the social scale, as I will explore further, is sheer terror. She recognizes that she requires capital in order to live her luxurious lifestyle, even as she brings her own disaster upon herself by wandering away from the straight, socially acceptable line toward profitable marriage. After all, in Wharton's novel, women can only acquire capital to the extent that they can become capital. Lily can only gain money from others if she is willing to turn herself into a commodity with an exchange value. Therefore, Edna has the ability to pursue liberation in ways Lily does not. In these ways, these two novels offer similar yet distinct models for feminist liberatory potential.

1. *The Awakening*

But let me begin with Chopin's *The Awakening.* I will make three central points about the novel. The first is that it outlines how hierarchical powers constrain female bodies. Power in this novel is patriarchal. It binds women to the confines of domestic motherhood. However, this power is not absolute. Hence, my second point is that women pursue modes of liberation through spatial means. As her awakening develops, Edna's walking becomes guided not by state devised roadways or by her husband's insistence on paying calls to his business partners, but rather her walking is guided by her own pleasure. She wanders unbound, and such free movement awakens her a newly liberated female self. Finally, my third point is that liberation ultimately fails. The novel suggests

that Edna perishes at the end, and I argue that she cannot continue to exist in a liberated state because patriarchal power cannot yet be overthrown.

First, I will outline how patriarchal constraint functions in this novel. On Grande Isle, Mr. Pontellier orders his wife to look in on the children who have recently been put to bed, accusing her of failing to care for them like a mother should. He reminds her that he has quite enough to do outside the home providing for the family. For Mr. Pontellier to take care of the children himself would be a complete disintegration of gender roles. What he implies, but does not explicitly say, is that it would be a humiliation for him to perform feminine labor. Furthermore, one night he instructs Edna to come inside rather than stay out in the hammock. In this encounter, Mr. Pontellier expresses his dominance in explicitly spatial terms. Edna must come *inside* rather than stay *outside*. And she conceives of her resistance in bodily terms, since she continues to lie in the hammock instead of standing up and walking indoors. Chopin writes of this encounter, "Another time she would have gone in at his request. She would, through habit, have yielded to his desire; not with any sense of submission or obedience to his compelling wishes, but unthinkingly, as we walk, move, sit, stand, go through the daily treadmill of the life which has been portioned out to us" (40-41). Before her awakening, Edna would have acquiesced to her husband's request without even thinking about how such compliance is an act of submission. These lines reveal how power becomes so ingrained in the corporeal that its operations are not even accessible on the conscious level. It is also significant that she describes her former compliance as unconsciously walking on "the daily treadmill of life." There is only one direction to move along a treadmill, and thus no room for deviation. The body also makes no progress on a treadmill. She remains stuck in

the same place, exerting effort, but not going anywhere. The 1917 edition of the New International Encyclopedia defines the "treadmill" as a method of using people or animals to walk along a system of bands to generate power, but it also is a word "most generally applied…to a device formerly in general use in prisons in Great Britain for convicts sentenced to hard labor" (438). The Encyclopaedia Britannica describes the nineteenth and early twentieth century treadmill as a long cylinder on which a prisoner would walk, "his weight causing the mill to revolve and compelling him to take each step in turn. In the brutalizing system formerly in vogue the necessary resistance was obtained by weights, thus condemning the offender to useless toil." Consequently, the fact that Edna uses the term "daily treadmill" connects her quotidian submission to that of a convict sentenced to forced, Sisyphean labor. This term also animalizes women. The fact that Mr. Pontellier expects his wife to tend to the children while he works and gambles outside the home illustrates that women in this novel are often reduced to their reproductive capabilities rather than considered fully human, and it is Edna's very rejection of motherliness that leads her husband to find her, not only neglectful, but even "unbalanced mentally" (75). In these ways, patriarchal authority imprisons Mrs. Pontellier, restricting her to the limited movements and emotional expressions that her husband allows.

Male authority takes different forms in this novel, but they all pressure women into what they define as "good" behavior. When Edna refuses to attend her sister's wedding, her father commands Mr. Pontellier to exert his power over Edna's impulsivity. He says, "Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down hard; the only way to manage a wife" (94). Within patriarchal structures, a wife must be managed like an

employee of the household staff. Husbands must push wives down, beneath their status. Mr. Pontellier takes a more subtle approach by seeking out Dr. Mandelet's advice about his wife's mounting assertions of independence (85). He suspects that his wife's inattention to her husband, family, and household are so un-womanly that she might be insane (75). Dr. Mandelet immediately suspects that Edna's inattentions to her family may be due to an affair. His suspicion increases when he joins the Pontelliers for dinner and notices "a subtle change which had transformed her from the listless woman he had known into a being who…seemed palpitant with the forces of life…There was no repression in her glance or gesture. She reminded him of some beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun" (92). He notices that she is "waking up" from a prior slumber—that she is growing more liberated from "repression"—and he draws the conclusion that she must be in love with another man. He is not entirely mistaken in his conjectures, since, after all, Edna is in love with someone else. However, he does not understand the full import of her awakening: that she is waking to a more autonomous self. Patriarchal power either cannot fully understand the implications of female awakening, as in the case of Dr. Mandelet and Mr. Pontellier, or it does not attempt an understanding and blindly demands that women subject themselves entirely to male control, as Edna's father does. But both approaches spring from a conviction that women should subjugate themselves to a patriarchal social order, and when wayward women do not willingly subject themselves, they must be coerced into good behavior.

Patriarchal control demands obedience in explicitly spatial ways. When Mr. and Mrs. Pontellier return to New Orleans from Grande Isle, they discuss Edna's callers. Since they married six years earlier, Edna has "religiously" adhered to certain social and

spatial patterns of behavior (66). Chopin writes, "On Tuesday afternoons—Tuesday being Mrs. Pontellier's reception day—there was a constant stream of callers—women who came in carriages or in the street cars, or walked when the air was soft and distance permitted" (65). Social propriety demands that Mrs. Pontellier return these social calls. However, when Edna decides to go out on Tuesday instead of receiving callers because she "simply felt like going out," Mr. Pontellier berates her, saying, "I should think you'd understand by this time that people don't do such things; we've got to observe *les convenances* if we ever expect to get on and keep up with the procession…you can't afford to snub Mrs. Belthrop. Why, Belthrop could buy and sell us ten times over" (66, 67). This passage illustrates how women are expected to walk in certain directions (and also at times to "stay put") to observe social proprieties. They must "keep up" with the rhythms to which their social class marches. The fact that Edna refuses to follow the spatial practices society dictates could cost Mr. Pontellier capital, and thus he pressures her to move in the ways he dictates.

This scene reveals how the city itself holds disciplinary power over women. The proprieties of moving in public space compel Edna to ride in a carriage or in a streetcar (or to walk only to a destination specified by her husband) rather than to walk freely. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century electric streetcars moved along a rational grid, confining them to a straight, regulated course; and carriages were guided by drivers who adhered to city streets. Such transportation did not enable women to move spontaneously, to stop as they choose, or to move impulsively as their desires inspired them. Michel de Certeau argues that "spatial practices in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life" (96). The city is a network of avenues designed for controlling the

movements of its inhabitants, regulating their movements along pre-determined courses. Such movement affords no opportunity to be prompted by sudden impulse. Instead, the city confines women to movements that the state determines.

In this novel, patriarchal constraint on women even requires abolition of independent female identity in the service of the father's will. Bourgeois motherhood compels women to eradicate their individual selves for their husbands (and particularly for their children) and subordinate themselves to the father's lineage. Chopin writes, "Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman…They were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels" (10). For Edna, playing the role of good wife and mother means sacrificing her individual identity. She cannot have both children and her own autonomy. Chopin uses religious language here to emphasize the sacred relationship between the woman (as devotee) and her enshrined sacrifice to convention. Her society pressures her to consider it an honor to forfeit her selfhood on the altar of tradition. Rita Felski offers an overarching analysis of how modernity positions women as objects of nostalgia. She argues that since modern men perceived female life as so quietly domestic, so angelic and outside the bustling chaos of modern urban life, they conceived of "femininity [as] a primitive condition of arrested development or an edenic condition of organic wholeness untouched by the ruptures and contradictions of the modern age" (40). Maternal bodies suggest a "fullness" that contrasts with the alienation so pervasive in the modern city (39). As private domestic entities, women should not belong to modern life and its public spaces. They exist to tend the home and to shelter husbands and children, not to exist as their own individual selves

outside domestic relationships to men (44). As critic Amanda Rooks argues, "The assertion of the Mother's heavenly ordained virtue, it seems, would ensure the suppression of her dangerous sexuality in favor of the necessities of reproduction and the nuclear family (123). [2] Hegemonic power expects women to devote themselves to patriarchal futurity with the same unquestioning faith with which they would observe the strictures of religion in order to keep them in line. Edna's rejection of the feminine position as site of nostalgia, of lost pristine wholeness, is particularly salient to my argument because it means that in doing so, she defies the logics of patriarchal modernity and asserts herself as an actor in public space and as a desiring subject.

Resistance to such power involves awakening to a new identity. Chopin's imagery of religion, treadmills, and transportation suggest the confines of systemic power over the trajectory of women's lives. Edna previously followed her husband's directions "religiously." She obeyed his orders "unthinkingly." Religion keeps believers in line, lest they fall into temptation and sin. Treadmills confined a prisoner to perform repetitive, useless labor by walking on a straight line along a revolving mill. The streetcar and the carriage also keep people in line, lest they get lost and wander away from the destination mapped out for them. To wander and to sin are both a means of faltering and failing to perform social duties. The social tracks of bourgeois marriage and motherhood keep women in line with their heteronormative trajectory. Social discipline is so totalizing that prior to her awakening Edna regulates her own desires and movements. Her awakening

[2] Amanda Rooks further analyzes the warring maternal archetypes of the virtuous Angel in the House and the "Terrible Mother" in *The Awakening* in her article "Reconceiving the Terrible Mother: Female Sexuality and Maternal Archetypes in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*."

disrupts this self-discipline. Towards the beginning of her awakening, Edna "let her mind wander back over her stay at Grand Isle; and she tried to discover wherein this summer had been different from any and every other summer of her life. She could only realize that she herself—her present self—was in some way different from the other self" (52-53). She realizes that it is not her circumstances but her identity that are changing from a previous self to some new, as of yet unconstituted and understood selfhood, and she makes this realization as her mind *wanders* in ungoverned directions.[3] She wakes to the understanding that she can "move" in new ways and hence produce new ways of being. As she begins to occupy space differently, she opens up new possibilities for a self that she defines by her own pleasure and choice, rather than unconsciously producing a self that is delimited by patriarchal influence.

It is also significant, however, that Edna is not purely a victim of social oppression since she plays some role in perpetuating hierarchies of whiteness. Likening motherhood to slavery, she imagines herself as the slave and thus finds a form of fugitivity in Blackness. In her article, "Alien Hands," Michelle Birnbaum argues that Edna identifies with primitive Blackness since she imagines it embodies a sensuous ideal. Birnbaum argues that Edna identifies with and then "displaces" her quadroon nurse over the course of the novel. Birnbaum outlines how Black women in a text signal "unsanctioned sex," thus Edna and the quadroon become textually joined by way they both signify "sexual deviance" (307). Birnbaum's language here is orientational. A

[3] For more on the history of wandering as an act of philosophical discovery, see Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust: A History of Walking,* in which she analyzes the multiple dimensions of walking as an unconscious, undirected act in order to argue that in "the indeterminacy of a ramble" there is "much [that] may be discovered" (10).

sexual deviant's desires are out of line, they are aimed away from socially acceptable avenues, in the "wrong" direction. A deviant is an other— an outcast who departs from usual standards. Racial minorities signify in the same way. To be Black is also to be an other who exists outside the norm. Bodies of color are out of place in predominantly white space. In white spaces like the expensive resort on Grand Isle, women of color like the quadroon nurse and Mariequita are only mentioned in brief passing. While I would disagree with Birnbaum's suggestion that Edna gets initiated into a world of awakened sexuality by women of color, while men function only secondarily in the process of her awakening (311), it is clear that Chopin does describe Edna, in her awakening, like Black women were often described in the 1890s— like animals (314). At the beach, her skin tans to the point that she looks like a different person, and since Black women supposedly loved sex, an awakening into sexuality would naturally be linked to Black femininity (314). However, Birnbaum argues, Edna resists the influence of women of color due to "her fundamental commitment to the status of whiteness" (316). It does indeed seem apparent that Edna's desire to retain her privilege obfuscates the role of Black women and their sexuality in the text. This dynamic does not diminish the fact that white men hold the most dominant role of social and political control over everyone else in this novel, rather it clarifies the intersections of power and resistance that require nuanced attention.

Now that I have outlined how constraint functions in spatial ways in this novel, I will next explain how Edna pursues emancipation from this control. Edna's awakening is limited. Her awakening to the way power functions forces her to realize she will not be able to overturn the system currently in place. Chopin writes, "A certain light was

beginning to dawn dimly within [Edna], –the light which, showing the way, forbids it…In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her" (17). Edna awakens to an understanding of gendered power relations and her position within this system. The light that dawns on Edna both illuminates her understanding about her subordinated social position and shows her a way outside such confines, yet at the same time the light "forbids" her from attaining liberation. In other words, she realizes her narrow position as a wife and mother, relegated to subservience in domestic space, and she wants to wander outside these confines, even as her very recognition of how this power works causes her to realize her limitations.

Part of this awakening is explicitly sexual. Chopin describes Edna's marriage to Léonce Pontellier as "purely an accident" (23). She did not choose Léonce, rather the cultural expectations of bourgeois marriage pressured her into this marriage. Edna feels "fond" of her husband but sees that "no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection" for him (24). In contrast, Chopin describes Edna's attraction to Robert Lebrun in much stronger terms. When she realizes that Robert loves her as she loves him, "She could picture at that moment no greater bliss on earth than possession of the beloved one…she grew numb with the intoxication of expectancy" (148). While she only feels mild fondness for Léonce, she feels passionate "bliss" in her love for Robert, but this attachment is a deviation from her matrimonial bonds. As such, Chopin describes Edna's illicit feelings as "intoxication," suggesting that this emotion is socially prohibited. For a woman to pursue her own sexual pleasure would be a queer deviance from propriety. It would be unladylike for a woman to have her own sexual

needs, improper for her to pursue her desires outside her marriage, and un-womanly to possess a sense of self un-effaced by duty to her husband and children. Edna's attraction to Alcée Arobin is an even more explicit taboo for a woman of Edna's class because he is so well known for his infidelities. Madame Ratignolle tells Edna specifically, "Someone was talking of Alcée Arobin visiting you. Of course, it wouldn't matter if Mr. Arobin had not such a dreadful reputation. Monsieur Ratignolle was telling me that his attentions alone are considered enough to ruin a woman's name" (127). Merely by allowing Arobin to visit her, Edna risks social contempt and condemnation. While his sexual exploits do not affect his class status, "his attentions alone" would tarnish her good reputation and push her further down the public hierarchy. Edna risks losing her comfortable position in the upper class in order to pursue her desire. She moves in uncomfortable directions in order to chart a new course and open up a different future for herself. Chopin writes of Edna's and Arobin's kiss, "It was the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire" (110). Edna regrets that it was not her love for Robert that ignited this awakening, but acting on her desire with Arobin still lifts "this cup of life to her lips" and clears the "mist…from her eyes, enabling her to look upon and comprehend the significance of life" (111). Giving herself up to sexual pleasure stirs a new life in her and gives her a meaning and purpose she did not have before.[4] In spite of the fact that her love for Robert and her attraction to Arobin are social deviancies,

[4] In her article, "The Second Coming of Aphrodite: Kate Chopin's Fantasy of Desire," Sandra Gilbert examines the significance of Chopin describing Edna like the goddess Venus, and the devastating consequences of a woman's struggle for such power. Gilbert argues, "This fantasy of Kate Chopin's shows, from a female point of view, just what would 'really' happen to a mortal, turn-of-the-century woman who tried to claim for herself the erotic freedom and power owned by the classical queen of love" (45).

Edna pursues her own desire rather than the happiness of her husband and family. She reconfigures her bodily needs by following a direction she chooses for herself.

Edna's awakening to sexual pleasure entails becoming an acting agent and rejecting her former position as object. As Wharton expounds upon more fully in *The House of Mirth*, patriarchal ideology considers women to be objects of male possession. When Mr. Pontellier notices Edna's sunburn, he "look[s] at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage" (3). Mr. Pontellier considers Edna to be an object he owns that can rise or fall in value. He perceives her as an expensive furnishing in his house and her placement reflects his own financial position. Mr. Pontellier is a collector of rare objects, like Percy Gryce in Wharton's novel. They both collect beautiful household objects, of which one's wife is the fullest expression. Mr. Pontellier "greatly valued his possessions, chiefly because they were his" (65). They increase his own status position. When Edna moves out of his house, "He begged her to consider…what people would say. He was not dreaming of scandal when he uttered this warning; that was a thing which would never have entered into his mind to consider in connection with his wife's name or his own. He was simply thinking of his financial integrity" (123). The fact that people might think Mrs. Pontellier has been forced out of her sumptuous mansion by financial hardship would be scandalous for Mr. Pontellier's business. He does not even for a moment consider that his wife might have her own motivations for leaving his house. But Edna resolves to leave her husband's house because she refuses to be supported by his wealth any longer. Remaining in his home implies that she belongs to him and "she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself" (106). Moving out into her own space signals her resistance to her

husband's constraint over her body and selfhood. When Robert tells her he loves her but that she was "not free; [she was] Léonce Pontellier's wife," Edna replies that she rejects that object-position (142). She says, "I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose" (143). Here Edna asserts agency over her desire and her physical movement in space. She chooses whom she will love, where she will walk, and how she will live.

Edna resists patriarchal power through the spontaneous act of wandering. When she moves off the programmed grid and along unexpectedly slanted lines, she opens up unforeseen directions and possibilities. Edna's literal meandering through the New Orleans streets metaphorizes her wandering away from the constraints of marriage and "home" and toward a reconfiguration of "awakened" desire. She began "going and coming as it suited her fancy" and she increasingly gives herself over to "any passing caprice," lending her body to any impulse that pleases her (75). The fact that Edna allows her body to move in directions guided by her serendipitous pleasure means that she rejects the prevailing order's control over her movements. Her iterative actions had been producing a self bound by the design of bourgeois motherhood, but now she is producing a new self outside such control.[5] By arguing that wandering is a meaningful break from dominant power, I counter critics such as Jennifer Fleissner who argues that Edna's drifting suggests a "*lack* of will" and an inability to forge a path for herself. Fleissner

[5] In her book *Wandering: Philosophical Performances of Racial and Sexual Freedom,* Sarah Jane Cervenak makes a similar case for the power of free and spontaneous wandering to engender alternative possibilities for femininity, specifically Black femininity, that rebel against racial and gendered oppression. She argues, "wandering—daydreaming, mental and theoretical ramblings—offer new pathways for the enactment of black female philosophical desire" (2).

argues that "to stress only those moments and readings that present Edna as some sort of full-blown feminist heroine—is to cover over not only an entire swath of out-right condemnations of her 'selfishness' (which stretch considerably beyond the earliest 1899 reviews) but also an ongoing voicing of concern that her revolt, as Chopin presents it, seems irreducibly tied to an insistence on rhythmic natural forces and on Edna's own *lack* of will" (235). Fleissner also criticizes Edna's desire for freedom from motherhood since, after all, her "highly privileged" status means her quadroon nurse does much of her mothering labor (237). Edna is undeniably privileged and displays a troubling commitment to racial hierarchies, as I have already outlined. At the same time, Edna's privilege does not mean she is not also subjugated under patriarchal control and that wandering serves as a genuinely powerful means of deliberately *choosing* a new path for herself. Just because her new path does not have a destination does not mean she is not actively engaged in leaving her old spaces behind to find new routes. Through wandering, Edna enacts a non-dominative circulation through space that engenders alternative ways of being. For example, in New Orleans Mr. Pontellier chastises Edna for failing to move within their social circle, making the appropriate calls, and solidifying his business connections in town. Structures that organize a wife's behavior require her to move in some directions, but not others, and Edna rebels against this social pressure. Her "awakening" is coextensive with her rambling away from popular streets and restaurants into such alternative spaces as an unpopulated café, where she runs into Robert (139). Moving off the straight and narrow path leads her to a man bourgeois values forbid from her loving. Patriarchal principles systemically make demands on Edna's physical

movement and inward psyche that she increasingly challenges in spatial terms, by wandering.

In contrast to her previous confined movement on the treadmill, Edna becomes free to drift. Chopin writes, "Sailing across the bay to the *Cheniere Caminada*, Edna felt as if she were being borne away from some anchorage which had held her fast, whose chains had been loosening—had snapped the night before when the mystic spirit was abroad, leaving her free to drift whithersoever she chose to set her sails" (45). Rather than a prisoner moving nowhere on a revolving mill or the confined passenger of a streetcar, Edna sails freely like a boat weighing anchor. Unlike the land which the state can carve up into streets and sidewalks, the sea cannot be thus apportioned. As a sailor drifting on the sea, she can branch off in oblique directions as her fancy takes her rather than stay on a straight course. She realizes her ability to float freely, to meander in whatever direction she chooses in the service of her spontaneous inclinations, and thus she grows progressively unmoored from the disciplinary power that constructed her prior self.

Wandering is movement governed purely by pleasure instead of social control. Chopin writes, "The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation. The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace" (17). Central here is that the sea itself invites her to wander, embracing her erotically, which means that drifting, liberated awakening is rooted in female desire. The word "maze" suggests a tangle of confused paths, and the word "abyss" suggests an inescapable chasm. To resist dominance and create a newly liberated self, Edna must wander so far that she grows

irrecoverably lost. Becoming lost is precisely what the state aims to prevent. The state erects street signs and a rigid city grid to foreclose the possibility that a citizen would act on spontaneous action and get lost. The act of getting lost is a loosening of control. It opens up the possibility for the pleasures of discovery.

Edna learns to create a newly liberated self while "lost" in wandering. On Grande Isle, Edna ambles away from the shore and learns to swim. Chopin describes Edna's swimming as a newly found ownership over her body. She says Edna "was like the tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone…as if some power…had been given to her to control the working of her body and her soul" (36). Chopin emphasizes the connection between Edna's spiritual awakening and her embodiment. She is like a toddler who suddenly comprehends the fact that she can walk on her own. She learns that she can resist the current dragging her along by swimming against it in the direction she chooses. Her realization that she can *move* in new directions spurs her recognition that she can desire differently as well, but she only finds this ability while "lost" in solitude. When feeling happy, "She liked then to wander alone into strange and unfamiliar places. She discovered many a sunny, sleepy corner, fashioned to dream in. And she found it good to dream and to be alone and unmolested" (76). Both physical and internal wandering are modes of discovery. It is when she is alone, not consumed with the needs of her family and household, that she can consider her own desires. Being on her own, led by her own impulses, assists her in "becoming herself and casting aside [her] fictitious self" (75). Just as her solitary wandering enables

her to discover new places, so her internal roaming helps her uncover new desires.[6] Again, this is why wandering and getting lost is key to Edna's self-discovery, because she can only chart a new course by losing the path she previously walked.

Wandering off straight lines and swimming or walking diagonally are non-dominative movements. Solitary contemplation leads Edna off pavement and into grass. While she is with Adèle Ratignolle, Edna remembers a moment in which she was "walking diagonally across a big field… aimlessly, unthinking and unguided" (21). Edna's walking here is not straight, but oblique. Slantwise movement here denotes the unconventionality of the walk. Sara Ahmed argues that "risking departures from the straight and narrow makes new futures possible, which might involve going astray, getting lost, or even becoming queer" (21). Moving off the straight path of the pavement entails deviation from a socially prescribed direction: a road is paved by the state because it is consistently used, so walking off the paved road into the grass implies moving in a spontaneous, as-of-yet uncharted direction. This move off the paved grid may involve getting lost, but it also opens up new routes to be followed in the future. The fact that Edna moves out of Mr. Pontellier's house to live by her own means illustrates this desire to live without patriarchal guidance, leadership, or aim. Every move she makes is a wandering away from established codes of feminine behavior, and every step takes her closer to an understanding of her autonomous self, outside the confines of patriarchal wife- and mother-hood. Edna longs to throw off the shackles of social discipline and

[6] Similar yet distinct from the discoveries Edna makes while wandering are her liberatory experiences with music. Pennie Pfleuger argues that Edna's experience of the sublime while listening to piano music enable her to form a "self-liberating subjectivity" (471).

move in hitherto unforeseen directions. But this passage also signals Edna's awareness that she must "lose" herself to create herself.

While Edna's movements are a valuable means of creating a new, free self, her liberation ultimately fails. Mademoiselle Reisz tells Edna, "The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth" (110). Reisz means that if Edna wants to break with bourgeois marriage and motherhood, then she must "soar above" those confines. She must grow wings like a bird. However, the other winged creatures in Edna's imagination are the "ministering angel" mother-women like Adèle Ratignolle. Growing wings, then, is a contradiction that aligns more with the Angel in the House discourse she sees modeled by Adèle. Growing wings would mean becoming-angel. It would mean becoming spirit and leaving the body behind. In this way, the novel draws a distinction between vertical and lateral movement. Lateral movements like wandering, sailing, and walking obliquely in grass afford Edna queer movements that run counter to domination, but soaring vertically implies a death. Reisz here suggests that the only true break with tradition would involve a vertical break, and such a break has deathly implications.

Spaces in the novel curtail possibilities for Edna's flight on multiple registers. Although she takes an autonomous step by moving into her own house, a little place that she calls her "pigeon house," she remains confined. After all, a pigeon house contains the bird in order to utilize the animal for some purpose: whether to consume its eggs or to eat the bird itself. Rather than serving as a symbol of liberation (like an eagle or hawk might suggest), the pigeon house reminds readers that Edna remains restricted—not allowed to

soar unfettered. In a similar way, Amanda Lee Castro argues that locating the novel on Chênière Caminada suggests that Edna's liberatory project is doomed from the start. Castro explains that an 1893 hurricane devastated the Gulf islands, decimating both the population and the tourism industry for many years. This recent history would have given contemporary readers a sense that this island is not the utopian space it appears to be, but rather it would have felt "post-apocalyptic." The island's "dystopia of eternally recurring natural disaster coupled with the resort culture's utopianism dramatizes the impossibility of fulfilling the utopian promise of liberation, not just from one's social role and biology but also from the natural world order" (Castro 69). The pigeon house and the Chênière settings both suggest that the world itself prevents Edna's pursuit of liberation. Ultimately, Edna must choose between having an autonomous female self or having a life. *The Awakening* asserts that within a patriarchal power system these are mutually exclusive options. Edna can either play the mother-woman, or she can walk out to her death.

Liberation fails for Edna because even as she thinks she is personally breaking free, she remains within the control of patriarchal power. The moment Edna learns to swim should be a powerful assertion of agency, but the effect of this moment is curtailed by the fact that her actions remain encoded within the system of dominant power.[7] For

[7] Molly J. Hildebrand makes a variation on this argument when she contends that Edna's pursuit of liberation (by becoming an artist) fails because she sees becoming-artist as becoming-male. Hildebrand argues that Edna fails to attain the freedom of the artist because "she desires not a fundamental change in the racial, class, and social system of her world, but simply the elimination of the barriers which prevent her from accessing all the vestiges of white masculine privilege" (190). While this argument holds true racially, it does not account for the very tangible ways in which Edna does create a more free female self through the act of wandering. It is not that Edna does not try to establish a

example, the first time Edna "realizes [her] powers" as a swimmer, "a quick vision of death smote her soul, and for a second of time appalled and enfeebled her senses. But by an effort she rallied her staggering faculties and managed to regain the land" (36, 37). The instant Edna gains control over her body, a vision of her destruction confronts her. Women are not allowed to strike out on their own without being met with disciplinary force. Even when Edna believes she is free, she remains under masculine power. When she returns to the shore, Léonce tells her, "You were not so very far, my dear; I was watching you" (37). Despite the fact that she asserts some agency, she stays within the gridwork of the male gaze and its power over her body. *The Awakening* confirms this system in the end when Edna again swims out into the ocean and the novel implies that she drowns. Chopin writes, "It was too late; the shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone" (153). Edna finds that she does not have the strength to overpower the ocean's current. Even within the supposedly non-dominative space of the water, women remain within the grip of controlling forces, just as on the city streets, the flâneuse remains in the grasp of patriarchal power.

In addition to bourgeois marriage, motherhood also retains its control over the wayward woman. Toward the end of the novel, when Edna returns to the Gulf, "The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them" (151). Living as a mother-woman would be akin to "soul slavery" (which, as I've argued, is a problematic racial identification) because she would

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female agency, but that patriarchal power's stranglehold remains too powerful to be broken.

not be free to pursue her own desire and live for herself. The children would "drag" her down rather than lead her or persuade her away. She would have no choice or control over her body. Since her awakening, she has struggled to map out an alternate course for her life, but it is the thought of the children that subdues her. She would not like to "trample upon the little lives" (147). To leave her children would be to crush them, and for this reason she feels bound to them. She can only escape this life that she likens to bondage, a life in "chains," through death. Patriarchal power is too all-encompassing at this point in time to be overthrown.

2. *The House of Mirth*

Like Edna's failure to invent a viable alternative to the norms she also embodies, Lily Bart's resistance in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* also fails to materialize in a lasting way. Much like Edna, Lily also aspires to live outside the confines assigned to women by patriarchal power structures. Unlike Edna, however, Lily recognizes that what it means to sustain identity is self-commodification and submission to the male gaze. This chapter will argue that Lily does desire to construct a self that opposes patriarchal authority, but she also reveals her ambivalence. She cannot decide whether she wants to risk deviating from the straight lines of normative compliance with domination, or whether she would prefer to remain within the safety of its confines.

As in *The Awakening*, the social constraints on Lily are also patriarchal: Lily's society construes her as an art object created for male consumption. Lily tells Selden,

> A girl must [marry], a man may if he chooses…Your coat's a little shabby—but who cares? It doesn't keep people from asking you to dine. If I were shabby no one would have me: a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself.

> The clothes are the background, the frame, if you like: they don't make success, but they are a part of it (12).

Lily recognizes that as a woman she is an art object, and that her material surroundings (her frame) are a vital part of maintaining her high value. [8] It does not matter whether a man appears tattered or poor, but a woman will slip from her high social position if she does not please the male gaze by looking as beautiful as a painting. As Anne-Marie Evans argues, since "women are forced to translate themselves into attractive products for an increasingly lascivious male audience…the female body was increasingly perceived as an extension of public space" (108). Lily's body itself is a space constantly open for public viewing and her value is determined by her ability to manipulate her environment to her advantage. Emily Orlando argues that Wharton responds to her era's hyper objectification of women as living works of art by positioning Selden as voyeuristic spectator and Lily as the art object who has the ability to "manipulate the power of imaging to her advantage by overseeing her objectification" (55). Orlando contends that Lily asserts power over her audience during the tableaux vivant, "bartering" with her body that she has transformed into art in order to secure her class position. Judith Fetterley contests this argument by suggesting that Lily's "beauty is a weapon, an asset, a property, a charge, above all, an 'it' in relation to which Lily is perhaps possessor, perhaps only curator" (201). Throughout the novel Lily describes her life as a battle with advances and retreats. Her beauty is her weapon of choice. She recognizes her

[8] In her article, "The Name of the Lily: Edith Wharton's Feminism(s)," Frances L. Restuccia cautions readers to avoid perceiving Lily as *only* an art object, as merely a victim of social circumstance, since she consistently and duplicitously slips away from the marriages that would convert her into an object. She argues that Lily is "dedicated to a certain freedom from definition" (229).

objectification and tries to play within the rules of the exchange market by making herself appealing, but she knows that her power has limits. While Fetterley contends that Lily's recognition of her body as a beautiful object whose destiny leads to "ambivalences," "indecisions," and "an abiding sense of powerlessness," I concur with Orlando that Lily is not in fact powerless, though it is important to acknowledge the constraints and ambivalence that genuinely thwart her pursuit of freedom (201).

Curtailing her freedom are the same gender dynamics that limit Edna Pontellier to domestic motherhood. While her body does not suggest maternal fullness, as Edna's does, Lily recognizes that her femininity signals a pre-modern wholeness that impedes her from participating in modernity. Lily's relationship to Percy Gryce, and other men throughout the novel, objectifies and domesticates her. On the train, Lily "resolved to impart a gently domestic air to the scene, in the hope that her companion, instead of feeling that he was doing something reckless or unusual, would merely be led to dwell on the advantage of always having a companion to make one's tea in the train" (18). Lily distinctly does not want to give Percy the impression that she is a modern, promiscuous, street-walking woman. Instead, she emphasizes her quiet, settled tea making to suggest her suitability for marriage and motherhood. To use Felski's words, she is positioning herself as "the overt object of nostalgic desire" uncomplicated by the chaos, ambiguity, and alienation of modern public space (37). She knows that her role is to present herself as a beautiful art object, like Percy's Americana, for men to collect.

In this novel, social constraint operates in physical, directional ways. There are multiple moments in the novel when Lily recognizes that bourgeois expectations of feminine behavior dictate her steps. Her status is often determined by where she walks

and who sees her walking. For example, when Rosedale sees Lily emerge from Selden's apartment, she realizes that she will be accused of impropriety merely for being seen walking out of an unmarried man's rooms. Just as Edna's reputation could be sullied simply by walking in the company of Arobin, so Lily's value could depreciate due to walking in the wrong place. Lily also knows she could have "purchased [Rosedale's] silence" merely by allowing people to see her walking with him (15). After all, "to be seen walking down the platform at the crowded afternoon hour in the company of Miss Lily Bart would have been money in his pocket, as he might himself have phrased it" (15). Lily's body entails a social capital that she could have bartered for Rosedale's discretion, had she chosen to play by such laws of exchange. Resisting the rules of exchange and the guidelines by which she should direct her steps puts her in a precarious social position. Wharton makes it clear that women are expected to move in some directions rather than others in order to maintain the expectations of bourgeois femininity.

Wharton portrays social strata in this novel as a series of movements through concentric circles. Social constraint is such a major influence on Lily because she can so easily slip from the center of social power. The innermost sphere of these concentric social circles is inhabited by the Van Osbergs, Trenors, and Dorsets. Their power is, in part, grounded in money. As Wharton says, "Bertha Dorset's social credit was based on an impregnable bank-account" (204). But these families not only have the deepest economic resources, they also have the social capital to keep them in the center. Wharton explains this dynamic when she writes, "It was not in Bertha's habit to be neighborly, much less to make advances to any one outside the immediate circle of her affinities. She

had always consistently ignored the world of outer aspirants, or had recognized its individual members only when prompted by motives of self-interest" (192). Bertha Dorset, Judy Trenor and their set are at the center of an inner circle, and they use their social gatherings to keep outsiders on the margins. As Amy Kaplan writes in her chapter "Crowded Spaces in *The House of Mirth*," Judy "Trenor's identity as hostess stems neither from kindness to strangers nor from the rituals among an established community, but from her power to control the crowd by regulating the influx of newcomers" (90). It is because this inner circle is so powerful and so tightly controlled that Jack Stepney invites Rosedale to its social events as compensation for financial tips. Rosedale is so financially successful that he "plac[es] Wall Street under obligations only Fifth Avenue could repay" (Wharton 188). Despite the racial prejudice that keeps the Jewish businessman at bay for much of the novel, Rosedale penetrates the central circles of traditional class stratification with capital. In contrast, Lily falls further outside the center into the Gormer's circle (which Lily describes as "a social out-skirt which Lily had always fastidiously avoided; but it struck her, now that she was in it, as only a flamboyant copy of her own world"), Mrs. Hatch's set, and then into the Milliner's workshop (182). She slips further outside the center as she fails to "make herself indispensable" to whatever social circle she finds herself in (203). Part of Lily's effort to make herself a valued fixture in each social stratum is her fear that she can unexpectedly lose her footing and slip further outside the center of "good" social standing. Fear of falling outside the center confines her movements to those her circles considered acceptable for unmarried women.

Bourgeois marriage is a confining vehicle Lily keeps trying to leave because she is drawn to the pedestrian. Vehicular metaphors pervade this novel as a means of conveying Lily's perceptions of life. They signify the way Lily sees time as a series of movements from one place to another, and that it is particularly important to her that she choose her method of transportation. In light of this point, it is significant that Lily meets Percy Gryce on a train. In *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Michel de Certeau describes the train as a prison because it flattens one's impressions of the world. He writes, "The unchanging traveler is pigeonholed, numbered, and regulated in the grid of the railway car, which is a perfect actualization of the rational utopia" (111). The train is a "closed system" in which "everything has its place in a gridwork…of panoptic and classifying power, a module of imprisonment" (111). The train restricts the passenger to "a speculative experience of the world…detached and absolute" (111). In contrast to this "detached" experience of reality, Lily prefers to collect exquisite impressions on foot, indulging in the serendipitous pleasures of a short cut (since "sometimes the pedestrian enjoys the diversion of a short cut which is denied to those on wheels") (Wharton 46). But she is trapped on the train by bourgeois expectations for single women. Due to these confining expectations, Lily seeks freedom from the imprisonment of the marriage plot. She calls the upper class society of the Trenors and Dorsets a "cage" in which "the captives were like flies in a bottle" (45). Wharton writes, "[Lily] had been bored all the afternoon by Percy Gryce—the mere thought seemed to waken an echo of his droning voice—but she could not ignore him on the morrow, she must follow up her success, must submit to more boredom…on the bare chance that he might ultimately decide to do her the honour of boring her for life" (23). Percy's voice reverberates with a dull

monotonous hum, like the train he rides when he meets Lily, grinding along on a straight track.

Modern New York offers Lily only two equally restrictive paths: she can either ride a carriage along Fifth Avenue or climb the cramped stairs of back alleyways. In the beginning of the novel, Selden and Lily have a conversation that frames Lily's options as either the pursuit of marriage as a means of remaining in the inner circle of the upper class or declining a profitable marriage and living on the outskirts under more reduced circumstances like Gerty Fisher. Lily disdains Gerty's "horrid little place" that is not large enough to warrant a maid or proper cook (8). Later in the novel, she describes Gerty's stairs as "steep" and "narrow," guiding her to a "cramped blind-alley of life" (205). Narrow alleys do not allow for much freedom of movement. Gerty's stairs signify the "dull" drudgery eked out by "insignificant," small lives (205). Lily cannot bear to be thus confined, and yet she perceives of the upper class as similarly restrictive. As Lily walks Fifth Avenue, she notices "an interminable procession of fastidiously-equipped carriages—giving her…peeps of familiar profiles bent above visiting-lists, of hurried hands dispensing notes and cards to attendant footmen" (205). Like Edna Pontellier, Lily chafes against this "interminable" succession of social calls. She describes the sequence of carriages as "the ever-revolving wheels of the great social machine" (205). Social life itself is an imprisoning vehicle she cannot escape. The wheels of the social engine transform humans into machines, trudging by rote within its disciplinary logics.[9] Lily

[9] Wharton's distaste for the confines of the carriage and the modern train suggests her mistrust of modernity more broadly. For more on Wharton's suspicion of modern technologies and the mechanical qualities they imbue on people, see Hannah Huber's article, "Illuminating Sleeplessness in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*." In his article, "The Futile and the Dingy: Wasting and Being Wasted in *The House of Mirth*," J.

longs for the escape of oblique, pedestrian movement, in which she could deviate from the grid laid out for her.

Now that I have explained how constraint functions in *The House of Mirth,* I will move on to describe how Lily seeks liberation. Throughout the narrative, Lily recognizes how social domination circumscribes her movements, and she rebels against this constraint. She finds herself torn between her desire to live comfortably, yet predictably, and her desire to live impulsively, guided by her own desire. For example, at the Trenor's dinner at Bellomont, Lily wavers over whether to marry Percy Gryce and solidify her place within the upper class. She thinks, "The vacuous routine of the life she had chosen stretched before her like a long white road without dip or turning: it was true she was to roll over it in a carriage instead of trudging it on foot, but sometimes the pedestrian enjoys the diversion of a short cut which is denied to those on wheels" (45-46). Percy, like the life and class he represents, is dull, predictable, and confining. His lifestyle involves a long, straight, "vacuous routine," a repetition devoid of meaning. Lily wavers between finding the upper-class life of the Trenors and Dorsets divine and carefree, and between finding this life bereft of beauty and the pleasures of impulsive movements, like taking short cuts, which would entail capricious deviations from proprietal routine. As Michel de Certeau enables us to see, Lily could produce a self within the pre-determined grid marked out by the upper class. Such a life would be luxurious (a carriage ride, rather than a walk). But she also has an opportunity to produce a different kind of self—one that would offer the serendipitous indulgences of walking on her own, taking short cuts that

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Michael Duvall makes a similar critique of modernity's disposable culture that wastes those who cannot turn themselves into useful objects.

offer the freshness of "diversions," free from direction or control. The kind of self she is tempted to pursue is a mercurial self that would move in her own directions and serve her own pleasure.[10]

Lily pursues a liberated self by walking in directions that *she* chooses. She resists tying herself down to a marriage with Percy Gryce by literally wandering away from him. When she should have taken a carriage ride with him and secured a place in his calculations, she takes a meandering walk with Selden instead. Lily's literal walk reflects her figurative wandering. Wharton writes, "With so much time to talk, and no definite object to be led up to, she could taste the rare joys of mental vagrancy" (54). Lily's walk and conversation with Selden have no goal or destination in mind. She is wandering, giving herself over to impulse, much like Edna Pontellier rambles in *The Awakening*. Wharton describes the day of Lily's walk with Selden as "the accomplice of her mood: it was a day for impulse and truancy," which suggests that Lily is skipping out on her duty of pursuing Percy Gryce like a child impulsively skips the drudgery of school (47). Wharton says, "Every drop of blood in Lily's veins invited her to happiness," rather than the miserable boredom of a carriage ride with Percy (47). Lily describes this walk, this indulging in impulse, as a "rare" pleasure because she usually regiments her body into proper "lines" of behavior. She must calculate where she walks, and who sees her walking, so that she can secure her position in the upper class. When Lily tells Selden, "You are always accusing me of premeditation" (54). Selden responds, "You told me the

[10] For an in-depth analysis of how Wharton's facility with writing in different genres demonstrates her more rebellious, revolutionary ideologies, such as her resistance to categorization and her feminist critiques of patriarchal constraints on women, see Laura Rattray's *Edith Wharton and Genre: Beyond Fiction*.

other day that you had to follow a certain line" (54). Lily's movements are usually deliberate. She usually contrives to be seen by certain people in certain places for specific effects, and thus rarely "yield[s] to an impulse" (54). The fact that she acts on impulse is important because, as I have argued about Edna's wandering, spontaneous movements are a deviation away from a planned trajectory and this extemporaneous wandering opens up the possibility for new directions. It is significant that she relaxes her calculations, and breaks with socially dictated lines, to indulge in this walk with Selden that contains no intentions, no secret object, other than the simple pleasure of her whim.

Although Lily pursues a liberated female self by wandering, she has genuinely mixed feelings about whether she actually wants independence. Lily cannot decide whether she prefers the carriage or the pedestrian walk because she is torn between wanting to be provided for and wanting to live for herself. She both resists being indebted to her social sphere and simultaneously wants to sell herself to the highest bidder to ensure a comfortable future. Wai Chee Dimock argues that Wharton portrays Lily's rebellion from the principles of exchange that govern her social sphere as feeble. Dimock says Lily's "repeated and sometimes intentional failure to find a buyer, her ultimate refusal to realize her 'asset'—as her mother designates her beauty—makes her something of a rebel. She is not much of a rebel, of course, and that is precisely the point. For Lily's 'rebellion,' in its very feebleness and limitation, attests to the frightening power of the marketplace" (783). Dimock argues further that most of the novel's inner social circle (Gus Trenor, Bertha Dorset, and so on) decide the terms of exchange and they often get what they want at a considerable bargain, to the extent that "nonpayment is the norm" (787). Lily seeks an "alternative way of being" through her morality and her observance

of the principles of exchange, but this effort only "feeds directly into the mechanisms of the marketplace" (790) because this exchange system is rigged to favor those already in power. Thus, Lily's vacillation over whether or not to rebel against the structures of power that dictate her movements reflect the totalizing power of those systems.

Lily has conflicting feelings about pursuing an independent identity because solitary women walking in public run the risk of being seen as sexually deviant. The very first scene in the novel establishes the fact that giving in to impulsive wandering puts women in a precarious position. Selden suggests they stroll up to his rooms as they happen to pass by his balcony. Lily blushes, but responds, "Why not? It's too tempting—I'll take the risk" (7). She blushes because she recognizes the implications of an unmarried woman entering a bachelor's apartments. Women walking alone in public are physically deviating from socially prescribed directions, which insinuates that they must have illicit reasons for their divergence. Lily can hardly afford to risk such deviance. While the flâneuse is a model of liberation for women, she is also vulnerable to being identified as a prostitute, a "street-walker." In her book *Walking the Victorian Streets,* Deborah Nord articulates how difficult it was for a woman to position herself as an urban stroller in the mid and late-1800s due to the fact that the public tended to sexualize her body in open spaces. Nord writes, "Women alone on the street in the mid-nineteenth-century city were considered to be, as one American historian has put it, 'either endangered or dangerous'" (3). Her presence in the street was perceived as "too-noticeable" and too erotic, implying sexual "transgression and trespassing" (4, 12).[11]

[11] For a more thorough analysis of how Wharton illustrates early twentieth-century America's anxieties about the sexual threat women pose when they enter public space, see Maureen E. Montgomery's *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith*

Wharton suggests that Rosedale draws precisely such conclusions when he catches sight of her leaving Selden's apartment, but Lily brushes off any suggestion of impropriety and gives in to the pleasurable impulse of having tea with her friend. She ignores her own concerns in part because she knows herself to be innocent of any illicit calculations and also because the two were in such different social positions that it would be unlikely for anyone to suspect the two of a romantic relationship. Selden himself knows, "He could never be a factor in her calculations, and there was a surprise, a refreshment almost, in the spontaneity of her consent" (7). Lily's movements through the world function much like a high stakes game, and her impulsive decisions are a gamble with risks.

If viewers perceive Lily walking in sexually compromising ways, she will lose her upper-class position. Promiscuous walking causes women to lose their good social standing, and, in Lily's case, breaking with traditional "lines" of behavior makes her a social deviant. During their walk, Lily and Selden discuss the social pressure Sara Ahmed describes in *Queer Phenomenology*, that patriarchal power "pressures" women into specific "lines" of behavior. For Lily's life be acceptable to the upper class as "good," then she must follow along with social guidelines. To wander away obliquely is a deviation from the straight path. It is imperative that Lily demonstrate she is willing to move in the directions her social circle dictate as good. Unfortunately, she consistently fails to move in the right directions. For example, in a scene that directly parallels Rosedale witnessing Lily walk out of Selden's apartment, Selden and Van Alstyne see

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Wharton's New York. She argues that as women entered public space, riding bicycles and making public displays of leisure, they drew scrutiny for potential prostitution and sexually illicit behavior; and that Wharton used her fiction to critique these "dominant discourses."

Lily leave Trenor's apartment at night. When she leaves Trenor's house, Lily believes she is walking in the correct direction. She believes that onlookers will recognize her morality if they see her leaving his house openly. She does not realize that the very act of leaving Trenor's house openly invites viewers to speculate about her sexual propriety. Lily does not recognize that although she intends to walk out of Trenor's house visibly as a sign of her integrity, people perceive her walking as sexually deviant. Selden and Van Alstyne confirm these suspicions when they notice Lily leaving Trenor's house late at night. As the men watch Lily walk out of Trenor's home unaccompanied by his wife, Van Alstyne remarks, "A—hem—nothing of this, eh, Selden? As one of the family, I know I may count on you—appearances are deceptive—and Fifth Avenue is so imperfectly lighted" (127). Selden then abruptly leaves, "turning sharply down the side street without seeing the other's extended hand" (127). Selden's palpable disillusionment with Lily confirms that a woman alone in the street is sexually suspect. Ironically, Lily was trying to dispel this exact suspicion by letting herself be seen.[12] She does not sell her body to Trenor in exchange for his money because she hopes that demonstrating her morality will secure the good opinion of the upper class. She tries to walk in the right place, but she fails to see that her social circle would prefer her to stay inside and not be seen. They prefer that she commodify her body, as long as she not be seen doing so. Lily's position in social circles is always precarious, and she fears how easily she can fall outside the center.

[12] For more on the significance of public gestures as an engagement with the market of social capital and conspicuous consumption, see Ruth Bernard Yeazell's article, "The Conspicuous Wasting of Lily Bart."

Deviating from social lines of conduct has serious material consequences for women without an "impregnable bank-account." Lily's world is stratified into very distinct social circles, and the more she deviates from the paths expected of "good" women, the farther outside the center she falls. When Lily acts on impulse and visits Selden's apartment for tea, she runs into Rosedale who suspects her of impropriety. She thinks, "Why must a girl pay so dearly for her least escape from routine? Why could one never do a natural thing without having to screen it behind a structure of artifice? She had yielded to a passing impulse in going to Lawrence Selden's rooms, and it was so seldom that she could allow herself the luxury of an impulse! This one, at any rate, was going to cost her rather more than she could afford" (15). Unmarried women who have not secured their social position with marriage must constantly perform their social role as beautiful object ready to be purchased by a husband. Lily's transgression of routine was an impulsive desire, but all such deviations from propriety, from conventional movements through space, are speculative risks that eventually cost her social mobility—and she cannot afford to lose much more, both in terms of fiscal and social capital. Meandering with Selden costs her an advantageous marriage with Percy. Wandering off in Europe and slighting Bertha Dorset by not serving her social ambitions results in her disgraceful ejection from the *Sabrina*. Flirting with married men for financial and social gain causes her aunt to disinherit her. Just as Edna Pontellier's society does not permit wives to live long outside the boundaries of their husband's control, so Lily Bart's society does not permit an unmarried woman to live long without pursuing that society's desired ends: a future delineated by a profitable marriage. Lily struggles for independence, pursuing a life that is both lavish and not reliant on financial support from

men, but her culture (which has trained her for nothing but wifely ornamentation) engineers her failure.

Recognizing the risks of independence, she often leans against it, preferring to follow social guidelines. This preference is the central way she differs from Edna Pontellier. Chopin allows her female characters to seek new, hitherto non-existent modes of attaining sexual desire in a way that Wharton does not. Edna's pursuit of sexual fulfillment is integral to her pursuit of alternatives to domination. It is as important that Edna move out of her husband's house and into her own space as it is that she pursue a sexual intimacy with Arobin and a romantic relationship with Robert. In contrast, Wharton is compelled by chastity, arguing that sexual purity offers Lily a moral high ground that others around her lack. For instance, Lily is horrified that Gus Trenor expects a sexual return for the money he gave her. When Trenor reveals that he has lured her to his home despite the absence of his wife, Lily says, "I can't imagine your object in playing such a stupid trick on me" (113). She literally cannot fathom that he could have sexual intentions. In this scene Wharton emphasizes her protagonist's moral integrity. When Trenor sexually threatens Lily, Wharton writes, "help was in call. Yes, but scandal with it—a hideous mustering of tongues. No, she must fight her way out alone" (116). Lily believes that the worst result of this interlude would be rumors of her sexual impropriety, which is why "an insistent voice warned her that she must leave the house openly" (117). And yet, even though she aims to do the right thing, to be in the right place at the right time, it is this very impulse to walk on the moral high ground that leads to disaster.

Lily tries to follow social guidelines, mistakenly thinking morality is actually a part of the social contract when in fact it is not. Lily longs to walk as an aesthete and collect exquisite impressions, but others name her as out of place. It is ironic that Lily falls further into disgrace as the novel carries on because she constantly struggles to discipline her body. Even though she indulges in gambling during an evening at Bellomont, she forces herself to wake up early the next day to write Judy Trenor's social cards. Although she tries to do the morally appropriate thing by walking about of Gus Trenor's house openly, Selden and Van Alstyne interpret Lily's walking out of his house as sexual indecency. Later in the novel, Bertha Dorset accuses Lily of being in the wrong place. Lily tries to be in the right place by waiting for Bertha with George Dorset in the city rather than return to the *Sabrina*, but she does not realize that Bertha is having an affair on the boat. Bertha casts blame on Lily to screen herself from scrutiny. Again, Lily finds herself in the ironic position of doing the appropriate, moral thing by being out on the streets instead of going inside, but onlookers view her as out of place. Again, an unmarried woman on public streets is perceived as a sexual deviant. Bertha tells Lily it was "upsetting" to George to "hav[e] you so conspicuously on his hands in the small hours…you're rather a big responsibility in such a scandalous place after midnight" (161-162). In this instance, Bertha has the power to name Lily as out of place, even though in reality Lily was right where she was supposed to be. Bertha recognizes that her wealth and position as a married woman will protect her from social scrutiny, but Lily's status as an unmarried woman makes her vulnerable to critique. Bertha knows that because Lily is unmarried, her sexuality will be her liability. In spite of her repeated failures to move in

the directions that bourgeois society determines as good, she still tries to discipline her movements into socially acceptable routes.

Since Lily does not have the financial capital to ensure her upper-class position, she tries to discipline her body to be where it is supposed to be, so that she might find safety. After Mrs. Peniston disinherits Lily due to her alleged designs on George Dorset, she knows that in order to regain the favor of the inner circle of the upper class, she must put herself in Judy Trenor's path. She places herself along the route commonly followed by Judy and her circle. She positions herself in "the restaurants they frequented, where…[Lily] lunched luxuriously, as she said, on her expectations" of reconciliation with Judy (178). But once Judy snubs her, Lily does not know where to move next. She had stayed in town "partly for lack of knowing where to go" (178). Regaining social status would entail some kind of physical movement, but Lily does not know what that movement should be. Her lost inheritance strands her without a sense of how to move forward. Once Judy and her company walk away from Lily, Wharton writes, "Where Judy Trenor led, all the world would follow; and Lily had the doomed sense of the castaway who has signaled in vain to fleeing sails" (179). Without an inheritance or social standing, Lily is lost and stuck on a deserted island like the lone survivor of wreckage. Unlike Edna Pontellier who sets her boat out to drift aimlessly, Lily has miscalculated her direction and run her boat aground. Edna's sailing is pleasurable, but Lily's sailing leads to disaster. She reaches out to Judy because she hopes to find safe harbor under her protection. This desire for safety is part of the reason Lily fails to establish a life outside domination. Women cannot expect to find safety and security

within the patriarchal systems that define them as exchangeable objects *and* live outside these organizations of power.

Lily's pursuit of liberation fails because she wants both the life of comfort afforded to her by patriarchal, bourgeois power and also a life lived on her own terms. She wants both the carriage and the pedestrian walk—both the material world and the republic of the spirit. But the material world subjugates her and the republic of the spirit does not account for women. Selden's "republic of the spirit" involves freedom from financial concerns. Selden says, "'My idea of success,' he said, 'is personal freedom.' 'Freedom? Freedom from worries?' 'From everything—from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety, from all the material accidents. To keep a kind of republic of the spirit—that's what I call success" (55). Selden considers himself above material concerns, which is why he considers Lily's pursuit of a wealthy husband to be so base. But Lily cannot simply ignore her need for money. While men may earn wealth, women must marry into financial security, which is why Lily must regiment her movements with an eye to her future. Selden's republic of the spirit is also troubling because it mirrors the "angel in the house" discourse in *The Awakening*. Rising into the republic of spirit involves shedding the body, just as growing wings and "soar[ing] above the level plain of tradition and prejudice" involves leaving the body and becoming-angel. Both aerial movements suggest that, for women, pursuing freedom has deadly results.

Since the "republic of the spirit" is a vision of freedom that soars above the material, Lily cannot attain its freedoms because she cannot escape patriarchal materialism. Lily's bourgeois femininity is delimited to the material—women are art objects bought and sold for their rarity. As Gerty tells Selden, "You know how dependent

[Lily] has always been on ease and luxury—how she has hated what was shabby and ugly and uncomfortable. She can't help it—she was brought up with those ideas, and has never been able to find her way out of them" (211). Lily's social circle has bred her to value material comfort and has taught her that she must marry well to solidify her position. Carrie Fisher reiterates this idea when she suggests that Lily is either compelled by "flightiness" or "at heart, she despises the things she's trying for" (148). Both observations ring true. Lily acts capriciously *because* she finds the upper class "vacuous" and confining (45). Lily wants to soar above to the republic of the spirit, but women have no means of flying. She hates feeling like an "expensive toy in the hands of a spoiled child" (189), but she can see no alternative to the systems of power that objectify her—she cannot "find her way out" of power's confines.[13] Her attempts to attain liberation through spatial movement fail because patriarchal domination is so powerful that women cannot break out of their position as object.[14]

There are many reasons why Lily's pursuit of a liberated selfhood ultimately fails and chief among them is the tension within Lily to be where she is supposed to be and her desire to choose her own path in life, and this tension thwarts her, in no small part, due to her identification with whiteness. Unlike Edna Pontellier who identifies with Black female sexuality while maintaining her commitment to whiteness, Lily singularly clings to her indelible whiteness as America swiftly grows more heterogenous. In her article

[13] In her article, "The Undecidable Miss Bart: Edith Wharton's Naturalism in *The House of Mirth*," Myrto Drizou explores the tensions in *The House of Mirth* between naturalism's insistence on fatalistic determinism and "the unpredictability that governs human nature" (22).

[14] For more on Wharton's critiques of capitalist acquisitiveness as it pertains to space in her fiction, see Julie Olin-Ammentorp's book, *Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, and the Place of Culture*.

"Extinction, Taxidermy, Tableaux Vivants: Staging Race and Class in *The House of Mirth,*" Jennie Kassanoff argues that Wharton reveals distinctly conservative political anxieties concerning racial purity. She contends that Lily's fall from grace illustrates the fears of elite, white America, that a rapidly industrializing America, with its growing immigrant population, would uproot them from their secure class position. She says, wealthy white Americans worried that "the ill-bred, the foreign, and the poor would overwhelm the native elite, that American culture would fall victim to the 'vulgar' tastes of the masses, and that the country's oligarchy would fail to reproduce itself and would commit 'race suicide'" (61). Lily's fear of becoming deviant exposes her commitment to maintaining racial hierarchies. After all, the deviant is the "other," the improper body. Turning away from prescribed social guidelines would mean losing hold of her racial identity and, in turn, her limited realm of power.

3. Conclusion

Edna Pontellier's and Lily Bart's failures to live out alternatives to patriarchal supremacy in a lasting way does not mean that their rebellions lack value because even their emergent attempts to subvert domination carve out new directions for the future. Even as Edna's awakening to autonomous selfhood is bound up within her own disaster, and while Lily's pursuit of liberty is fraught by her ingrained desire for upper-class comforts, their spatialized rebellions are not inconsequential. Their wandering turns them in new directions that have yet to be walked. These women take the first steps toward a new kind of life that others will follow in the future. In *The Queer Art of Failure,* Judith Halberstam reflects on the value of lives lived against the disciplinary grain. After all, Halberstam says, "Failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline

behavior" (3). Even bodies that fail to succeed in establishing a space alternative to domination are valuable in that they take the first step out of line. Halberstam says, "The history of alternative political formations is important because it contests social relations as given and allows us to access traditions of political action that, while not necessarily successful in the sense of becoming dominant, do offer models of contestation, rupture, and discontinuity for the political present" (19). To contest what is given is to break with current political domination—it is to break away from the straight line and move at a slant. Edna and Lily may not have been able to establish independent lives, but they represent women who did the political work of waking up to their oppression. This work is valuable even when it fails because it can fracture hierarchies of power and offer, if not exactly models to follow, at least the traces of yearnings and possibilities to live and move otherwise.

Chapter 2

Abjection, Sexuality, and the Stratified City in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*

This chapter extends my concerns with how power restricts and spatially delineates, while deviant identities react to such confines. Specifically, this chapter argues that heteronormativity is disgusted by the abjection entailed in intimacy, so it displaces abjection onto queer sexuality. In the novels I examine, heteronormativity represses queer abjection in spatial terms by splitting the city into two parts: an *upper-* and *lower-world*, tightly monitoring the lines that delimit the heterosexual upper-world from the deviant figures on the margins of the city. The fact that queer desire and abjection are relegated to the lower-world in these novels reveals how the social world outside these novels functions. These novels make such divisions overtly concrete in order to expose how heteronormativity beyond the realm of fiction often rejects abjection in more covert ways.

Both James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) and Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936) explore queer abjection in the underworld of Paris. Characters in both novels think of queer desire as dirty, as rotting, and as something that will swallow them whole. What the novels know that the characters do not know is that *all* relationality is abject. All sexuality is viscous and dirty; all relationships break individual selves down in the process of "connecting" them. This unmaking can be frightening because within viscous relationality, one body or identity blurs into another and thus risks dissolution. However,

heterosexuality denies its abjection and projects it onto queer desire, so that heterosexual desire may conceive of itself as clean, superior, and whole.

These texts diverge to the extent that gender plays a role in whether characters accept or reject abjection. In *Giovanni's Room*, David desperately clings to some semblance of heterosexuality because it is so inextricable from his masculinity. Leo Bersani's article, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" sheds some light on how heterosexuality is linked to masculinity. He argues that sex connotes the power dynamics of "mastery and subordination" (216). Sexual partners play either "active" or "passive" roles. The active inserter is the dominator and penetrator, the one expressing active authority, while the passive acceptor is under the master's authority. Since the passive sexual partner is "under" the active partner, Bersani argues, "*To be penetrated is to abdicate power*" (212). This is the central problem for David. To be penetrated in queer sex with Giovanni means giving up the power of his masculinity. For David, active sexuality is masculine, clean, integrated, and coherent, whereas passive sexuality is feminine, weak, repellant, confused, and corporeal. Furthermore, Bersani explains, not only does being penetrated entail a resignation of power, but it also signifies a "radical disintegration and humiliation of the self" (217). Being penetrated is a mode of abjection, a demolition of selfhood. David wants to be in control, not to be broken down and dissolved into Giovanni.

In contrast, Robin does not fear queerness and abjection: she embraces it. In a world schematized by male power, woman is already animal, plant, dirt, and fugus. Feminine sexuality is feared as a cavernous other that could swallow and destroy. In other words, woman is already abject. Throughout *Nightwood*, Robin does not fear dissolution but *becomes* deterioration. While other characters in the novel attempt to

house and contain her, Robin is free to wander away. Her acceptance of abjection makes room for the abject to be experienced as a productive category.

In both novels, embracing a queer relationality would mean accepting demolition. Though individual characters may not realize it, the novels know that necrophilia, debasement, and abjection compose all forms of relationality and identity (not just queer identity) in ways that identity disavows. It would only be through acknowledging the dirt and self-abnegation of identity, dwelling in it and processing it, that one could find new ways of living in the future. In *Giovanni's Room*, David might have been able to accept abjection and work through it if the world were structured differently, without the social pressures of homophobia, but he cannot do so as the world currently exists. While in *Nightwood*, Barnes extends a vision of a woman who revels in the abject and opens up avenues for survival in a world hostile to queer femininity.

1. *Giovanni's Room*

In *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin emphasizes the fact that all desire is constituted by humiliation and self-abasement, but David misconstrues this dynamic as purely a function of queer desire. David mistakenly believes that he could stay clean and safe within a heterosexual life. He thinks that if he were to marry a woman and live in a nice house, then he would gain safety and stability in his masculine identity. Baldwin illustrates David's internalized homophobia by demonstrating his tendency to project disgust and shame onto queerness and *les folles* who occupy Paris' queer spaces. David draws a line between an *upper*- and *lower*-world in Paris. The former charts the world of conventional heteronormativity, and the latter maps out the seedy underbelly of queerness. In this chapter, I argue that by stratifying the city along cleanly separated

lines, David tries to contain the negativity of desire, cleanse himself of the dirt and shame intimacy entails, and avoid the self-demolition that accompanies relationality. The novel recognizes that David is misguided in these efforts, but also that he is driven by the intense homophobia so prevalent in mid-20th century Europe and America. Baldwin figures Giovanni's room as the space in which David struggles with his own homophobia and prefigures a place where desire could be inhabited differently. In Giovanni's room, David could potentially dwell in the dirt and negativity of his desire, do the work of demolishing the self that intimacy requires, and find a way to live queerly. The novel offers us this glimpse of a world that could be inhabited in counter-hegemonic ways, but David's own homophobia proves too powerful for this possibility to become fully livable.

Part of David's resistance to his own desire concerns his conviction that gay yearnings risk the loss of his masculinity. When David recalls his first male lover, Joey, he remembers that after their sexual encounter, he grows terrified of his own sexual attraction to men.[15] He remembers thinking, "*But Joey is a boy*. I saw suddenly the power in his thighs, in his arms, and in his loosely curled fists. The power and the promise and the mystery of that body made me suddenly afraid. That body suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood" (9). In this passage, queerness becomes spatialized as a cavern in which David fears losing his masculinity.[16] A cavern is a large open space beneath the

[15] See Cynthia Barounis' article, "'Not the Usual Pattern': James Baldwin, Homosexuality, and the *DSM*," for more on how *Giovanni's Room* engages with the medical community's classification of homosexuality as a mental illness.
[16] Several critics argue that Baldwin's analysis of sexuality in this novel is coextensive with critiques of gender and race. For more on how the queer is coextensive with the feminine in *Giovanni's Room* see Dwan Henderson Simmons' article "From James' *Portrait* to Baldwin's *Room*: Dismantling the Frames of American Manhood." And for

ground, often linked by a network of tunnels, suggesting a labyrinth of passageways where travelers could lose their way. The cavern implies both a sense of entrapment and disorientation. David fears that Joey's body will dominate him and swallow him whole. He views the sexual encounter like a power dynamic that he is afraid to lose. In this way, David enacts Bersani's conceptualization of sexual power. Constructing a coherent sense of self aligned with the stability and safety of heteronormativity is one of David's primary concerns. He does not want to lose whatever gradually ebbing claim to power and control he has over his life and in his social standing more broadly. He does not want to fall into the cavern and lose his way. For David, desiring queerly threatens his masculinity and his sense of self. He does not yet recognize, as the novel does, that all forms of desire reflect this power dynamic and disintegration of self, not just queer sexual pleasure.

Not only will David lose his masculinity if he desires queerly, but he will lose his whole sense of self. The novel illustrates several spatial metaphors for David's fraught relationship to queerness. David fears falling, sinking, drowning, and sliding because he fears losing his grip on his masculinity which is so intimately tied to his identity. David's fears are consistently represented as falling from great heights, sinking into cavernous holes, or drowning. For instance, David describes Giovanni's room as a place in which "life…seemed to be occurring beneath the sea," which conjures visions of slow, confused movement and a stifled gasping for air (75). As in the cavern image, in which the lover's body entails closure, Giovanni's room also signifies entrapment. He says that in

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more on how Baldwin intertwines his critiques of sexuality and race, see Meg Wesling's "Sexuality and Statelessness: Queer Migrations and National Identity in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*."

Giovanni's room, "Anguish and fear had become the surface on which we slipped and slid, losing balance, dignity, and pride" (75). It is significant that David continuously feels like he is losing his balance and his bearings because, as Sara Ahmed argues in *Queer Phenomenology*, to become queer is to become disoriented. She argues that becoming queer often means moving away from the familiar directions heteronormativity plots. Becoming queer disrupts one's orientation off the straight line and onto new, slanted lines that have yet to be plotted. David experiences this disorientation as "anguish and fear" because he does not know where this new orientation will lead him. He loses the dignity he once felt walking along the straight track because the path was clear, and the ground was level. He knows what kind of life he would lead if he were to marry Hella, have children, and live inside a house. But now he is slipping in unexpected directions. He fears that the room "beneath the sea" will engulf and drown him.

Because David will lose his sense of self if he acts on queer desire, he clings to heterosexuality like it is a foothold on a shifting plane. As David feels like he is slipping and sliding into queer caverns, he reaches out to femininity as a site of stability. He refers to Hella as if her heteronormativity will solidify his masculinity and give him "steady ground" to walk on (104). He says, "I realized that I was dangling from a high place and that I had been clinging to her for my very life" (158). David here refers to Hella as though she is an outstretched tree branch, steady against the changing wind. To be seen with Hella on the streets of Paris would mean being seen as a straight man, and thus "in line" with the social body's definitions of goodness and respectability. He would be safe in ways he would be unsafe with Giovanni. David fears losing his grip on her stability just as he fears falling into the cavern of queerness or slipping off the straight line.

David clings to heterosexuality, home, and nationhood as stabilizing forces because becoming queer induces disorientation. Sara Ahmed argues that the queer body can feel "out of place" in a normative environment, since the queer body is out of line. We can see that David registers his position as an out of place American in Paris because he consistently wants a home. For instance, when he is about to join Giovanni in his room for the first time, he says, "I ached abruptly…with a longing to go home; not to that hotel, in one of the alleys of Paris, where the concierge barred the way with my unpaid bill; but home, home across the ocean, to things and people I knew and understood…I saw myself, sharply, as a wanderer…unanchored" (62). David's physical dislocation is a manifestation of his sexual disorientation. His longing for America is a geographical expression of his desire for a normative home and family space that feels familiar and nonthreatening. Embarking on a journey with Giovanni to explore their queer intimacy leaves him feeling unmoored from the home and the feelings that he is accustomed to. Some of the metaphors Ahmed uses to describe queerness are nausea and seasickness. Nausea occurs when one's visual perceptions of the world, or their expectations, become disjointed from their bodily experience. David's wandering across the ocean to this site of queer desire has left him feeling disoriented and dislodged from solid ground.

Queerness is disorienting in a world that strictly polices sexuality and punishes deviants. *Giovanni's Room* asks how one can live a queer life under the state's pressure to straighten their lines of desire. For example, after Giovanni murders his former employer and patron, Guillaume, the police undertake a vast search for him throughout the streets of Paris. David writes of this murder, "Such a scandal always threatens, before its reverberations cease, to rock the very foundations of the state. It is necessary to find an

explanation, a solution, and a victim with the utmost possible speed" (149). In the wake of such a disturbing crime, the state needs to impose order lest its authority and its heterosexual "family values" be undermined. This particular crime violently rocks the state, and as a result the country aligns Guillaume with respectability—one of the oldest families in Paris—and aligns Giovanni with murderous deviance, racial otherness, and queerness. They do so in order to protect their imagined community from a devious *other*. Baldwin explains, "Giovanni was a foreigner…the press became more vituperative against him and more gentle towards Guillaume. It was remembered that there perished with Guillaume one of the oldest names in France…Guillaume's name became fantastically entangled with French history, French honor, and French glory, and very nearly became, indeed, a symbol for French manhood" (150). France's image of itself is bound up with heteronormative masculinity. The nation cannot allow Guillaume to be seen as queer, lest he dishonor the image France envisions for itself. France's justice system protects the nation's sense of heteronormative identity by punishing social deviance—vilifying and executing Giovanni for Guillaume's murder. It follows that predominantly white France would malign the racial other for threatening the internal stability of the nation's identity. Giovanni is sentenced to death, and thus Paris imposes its sexual social order, bolstering straight, white masculinity and purging sexual nonconformity.

David distinguishes between the *upper*-world of Paris that enforces this heterosexual code and an *under*-world of deviance. The *upper*-world denotes the spaces of heteronormative order, while the *under*-world connotes those spaces of dirt, shame, and sexuality. In the *upper*-world, queerness is tightly monitored, so queer people

experience the streets of Paris differently from straight characters. For example, Hella sees the streets as exciting and safe. She "looked delightedly at all of it, the cafes, the self-contained people, the violent snarl of the traffic, the blue-caped traffic policeman and his white, gleaming club" (120). In the *upper*-world, all Hella sees is movement, color, and pleasure, whereas David sees the threats of police violence and arrest, which are invisible to the heteronormative eye. The streets themselves growl with animosity, and the policeman's weapon unavoidably arrests his attention. David recognizes that being identified as queer puts his body in danger. In the streets, others can identify him as gay and assault him.

If only David could assert his heteronormativity, then he would fit in amongst the upper-world dwellers. The upper-world's warm, comfortable houses protect the normative and alienate the deviant, which illustrates how the state normalizes heterosexual reproduction and rejects queer deviance. David contrasts the precarious image of queerness in public with one of more stable domesticity. He says, "Behind the walls of the houses I passed, the French nation was clearing away the dishes, putting little Jean Pierre and Marie to bed" (104). He notices the houses with "shuttered windows" that "held them in and protected them against the darkness and the long moan of this long night [in a] web of safety" (104). The house protects the body physically from the tumultuous street, but it also denotes being a part of the imagined community of the country. The occupants of these houses are not the doomed lovers in the shadows, but the comfortable inhabitants of the homeland. They are literally sheltered by the state apparatus in ways queer bodies are not. House-dwellers worry about "the eternal problems of the sou, the shop, the church, the unsteady State" (104). The "State" and the

world outside their walls may totter with instability, but inside they are secure in their established communities and unchallenged normalcy. They are the respectable participants of French national life, while the nonconformists, the bodies that would be seen as out of place in the church or in the corner-store, are left outside. David laments, "I wanted children. I wanted to be inside again, with the light and safety, with my manhood unquestioned, watching my woman put my children to bed. I wanted the same bed at night and the same arms and I wanted to rise in the morning, knowing where I was. I wanted a woman to be for me a steady ground" (104). In this passage, David reiterates that being gay challenges national notions of masculinity. Queerness means not having the routine rhythms of life associated with familial existence that he imagines would steady his unstable life. To be identified as gay is to be put in a dangerous position, so (as mistaken as his conviction may be) he believes that marrying into heterosexuality would stabilize his sense of identity and offer him a place of safety.

In contrast to the heteronormative upper-world, David links same-sex desires to turbulent, dark alleyways, and the spaces beneath Paris, associating those spaces with sex and shame. When David, Giovanni, Guillaume, and Jacques take a taxi to Les Halles, David notes, "Mist clung to the river…hiding the city's dreadful corkscrew alleys and dead-end streets, clinging like a curse to the men who slept beneath the bridges" (45). Opposed to the "beautiful and varicolored" homes and church spirals, the mist conceals ugly, shameful areas of the city (45). Dead-end streets signify that the "cursed" people who walk there have no future, much like the doomed Giovanni.[17] David hints to

[17] For more on Baldwin's study of the boundaries between different classes, races, and sexual orientations in Henry James' fiction, see Christopher Stuart's "Finding the Jimmy in James: How James Baldwin Discovered *Giovanni's Room* in Lambert Strether's Paris."

Giovanni that his hotel might soon throw him out on the street because he has run out of money, suggesting that he too will soon become a member of the ill-fated under-world. As he walks the streets of Paris, David thinks about lovers meeting for sexual encounters in "ruins," "coupling, drinking, staring" in the dark "beneath the bridges, in the shadow of the walls" (104). The night "moan[s]" and shudders with erotic potentiality, but it is also frighteningly vulnerable and unprotected. A loosening hold on heteronormative manhood would put him in a precarious position, one vulnerable to the homophobic violences of the public street.

Bodies that find themselves out of place are put in a dangerous position. People are quick to turn on anyone who looks like he does not belong and anyone acting in deviant ways. For example, David and Giovanni "almost always walked the long way home along the river" (76). Along their way back to Giovanni's room, they routinely passed many women, rowers, and firemen along the riverbank. David says, "We passed the firehouse so often on our way home that the firemen got to know us. When winter came again and Giovanni found himself in hiding in one of these barges, it was a fireman who, seeing him crawl back into hiding with a loaf of bread one night, tipped off the police" (76). The fireman alerts the police to strange behavior, and many factors combine to mark Giovanni as out of place. Primarily, he is physically in the wrong place. According to national norms, men should not be sleeping on rafts, but inside houses attending to their families. Giovanni also carries a loaf of bread, and his manner appears

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Stuart writes, "As read by Baldwin, James's novel [*The Ambassadors*] describes the prevailing fantasy of innocence by which Americans imagine themselves as pure by imagining the Other as corrupt and thus beneath the dignity of their gaze" (54). He argues that in *Giovanni's Room*, characters fail to extend empathy across social borders (56).

stealthy, which suggests that he has stolen this bread and does not care to be seen, which also strikes the fireman as strange. But this fireman also knew Giovanni and was familiar with the fact that he regularly walked home with another man. His sexuality compounds his conspicuousness. His queerness is identified as a combination of factors manifested by the ways in which his body occupies certain spaces.

In the *upper*-world of Paris, gay men are at risk of identification and emasculation. This risk becomes clear when David sees a young, handsome sailor walking down a "sunlit" street (91). "He seemed—somehow—younger than I had ever been, and blonder and more beautiful, and he wore his masculinity as unequivocally as he wore his skin" (92). Part of the attraction David feels for this man is his unambiguous manhood. No one questions this sailor's masculinity in the ways they question a gay man's identity. When they approach each other, "as though he had seen some all-revealing panic in my eyes, he gave me a look contemptuously lewd and knowing…had our contact lasted, I was certain that there would erupt into speech, out of all that light and beauty, some brutal variation of *Look, baby, I know you*" (92). What David finds truly unsettling about this sailor's look is how quickly he is able to identify him as a body out of place. The fact that this stranger so easily constructs him as queer means that anyone could recognize that he does not belong in this normative space. The sailor's condescending scorn makes it clear that he both knows David desires him and despises him for his queerness. David cannot bear the thought that the sailor might verbalize his contempt for his failure to perform masculinity adequately.

This passage illustrates how light signifies the safety David finds in heteronormativity, while darkness symbolizes the queerness David is ashamed of.

Baldwin makes a point of noting that this encounter with the blond sailor happens in the open street, bright with sunshine, not in the dark corners or under the poorly lit bridges that David associates with queerness. David says, "One day I would not be with Giovanni anymore. And would I then, like all the others, find myself turning and following all kinds of boys down God knows what dark avenues, into what dark places?" (84). Queer desire gets enacted in the dark *under*-world, where "God knows what" perversions take place. These twisting and turnings of the dark avenues evoke images of Joey's cavernous body. Queerness is fearsome because it is shadowy, and because he does not know where it will lead him.

At the same time that darkness connotes a strange and terrifying queerness for David, the gay bars of Paris's under-world also terrify him because he can become hyper-visible in these places. When Jacques and David venture out to Guillaume's bar and meet Giovanni, David expresses his contempt for the older gay men, cross-dressers and trans patrons who frequent the bar. He says, "There were, of course, *les folles*, always dressed in the most improbable combinations, screaming like parrots the details of their latest love affairs—their love affairs always seemed to be hilarious…they looked like a peacock garden and sounded like a barnyard" (26, 27). "*Les folles*" who play with gender presentations strike David as ridiculous. They dress and speak too loudly, drawing everyone's attention, as if they are animals performing in a zoo. After David has his first conversation with Giovanni, he realizes, "The tables had been turned; now I was in the zoo, and they were watching" (38). David sees queerness as an ostentatious performance that turns him into an animal on display for public view. The last thing David wants is to be made-animal. To be made-animal would entail becoming less-than-man, inferior, or

feminine.[18] Later on when I turn to *Nightwood*, it will become strikingly clear how a queer woman gets associated with these abject attributes, but she does not perceive becoming-animal as a weakness. But as when David runs into the sailor in a sunny street, he fears being identified as a queer zoo animal and being exposed to public ridicule.

In the under-world, queer characters emerge not just as inhuman animals, but also as monsters seeking fresh blood. While drinking in Guillaume's bar, David meets an un-named queer person whom he describes as "a mummy or a zombie…of something walking after it had been put to death. And it walked, really, like someone who might be sleepwalking or like those figures in slow motion one sometimes sees on the screen. It carried a glass, it walked…with a dead, horrifying lasciviousness" (38-39). David initially describes this man as "it," as neither male nor female, and as something no longer human at all. This older gay man has grown horrific with his grotesque sexual desire. David also notes the man's "thoroughly bloodless" face and his "silver crucifix" (39). All of these details conjure visions of cadaverous vampires. His sexual desire suggests a yearning to suck his prey's blood and transform his victim into something no longer fully human—perhaps into something like "les folles" who squawk like caged birds. David worries that these monsters lie in wait for him inside the dark caverns of queer sexuality. Paris's queer under-world, and the queer desire it manifests, is fearsome precisely because it contains such deadly entrapments.

This point returns us to our beginning: Baldwin illustrates how the characters in *Giovanni's Room* have internalized homophobia to such an extent that they believe that

[18] Jessica Kent's article, "Baldwin's Hemingway: *The Sun Also Rises* in *Giovanni's Room*, with a Twist," argues that David's fear of becoming a deviant outcast like *les folles* illustrates white male compulsory heterosexuality.

they can disavow the dirt, shame, and disgust inherent in sexual intimacies and displace it onto queer desire. They believe they can neatly separate Paris into *upper*- and *under*-worlds, straight spaces and queer spaces, and thus contain unruly feelings. The citizens of the upper-world have made every effort to police queerness out of their realm and relegate refuse and shame to the gross under-world. Baldwin demonstrates that even gay characters have internalized homophobia to such a degree that it is only queer desire that is humiliating, and thus that it threatens to consume. The novel understands what its characters do not. It understands that all desire is schematized by a kind of loss. All intimacies require relinquishing power. All desire entails accepting uncertain directions for the future. It is denial of this fact that precludes intimacies and perpetuates homophobia.

Giovanni's room itself serves as the locus of David's struggle to accept the dirty negativity of desire or to reject it, and in order to understand the gravity of the situation, we must examine dirt itself. In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas analyzes dirt and its relationship to religion. She argues that we now consider dirt only in terms of hygiene, but we once intimately connected cleanliness and dirt to sacredness and defilement. Dirt was once considered "matter out of place" in a system of purity (35). She explains how this mentality is still engrained in our conception of dirt since, for example, food is not considered dirty in and of itself until it is spilled somewhere it should not be (36). In this sense, to be dirty is to be out of place, and we see this dynamic reflected in David's disgust with Giovanni's room not just because it is filthy but because it contains queer, out of place, irregular desire. But there is also a further sense in which Douglas analyzes grime. She refers to Sartre's essay concerning viscosity that, she says, "attacks the

boundary between myself and it…to touch stickiness is to risk diluting myself into viscosity" (38). To put this idea in Sara Ahmed's terms from *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, "Perhaps stickiness becomes disgusting *only when the skin surface is at stake such that what is sticky threatens to stick to us*" (90). She argues that it is when a body fills us with feelings of disgust that the body then "*becomes* sticky" (92). We see this dynamic play out in Giovanni's room since David does not want to "stick" to Giovanni and his room. The room materializes the metaphorical stickiness of queer relationality. For David to love Giovanni and dwell in the room would mean becoming part of the room, to dissolve the boundaries between himself and Giovanni, and to lose a cleanly separated sense of self. David resists this viscous queerness in which he fears he will "sink," "drown," and lose his masculinity. He is disgusted by the room and by his own desire, such that he fears sticking to it, becoming part of it, and losing himself within it.

Giovanni's room spatializes the internal debate within David between embracing and rejecting his queer desire by instilling a strong sense of entrapment in him, while also serving as an enclave where queer desire can exist without threats violence. David explains that Giovanni was in the process of remodeling his room and removing the wallpaper when he moved in. In his room, Giovanni enacts a literal and metaphorical demolition. He is both tearing down brick walls and also tearing down the walls between himself and David. Yet even in this interior space, the queer couple is still policed by heteronormativity. Baldwin writes, "One of the walls was a dirty, streaked white where he had torn off the wallpaper. The wall facing it was destined never to be uncovered, and on this wall a lady in a hoop skirt and a man in knee breeches perpetually walked together, hemmed in by roses" (86). This heterosexual couple watches over David and

Giovanni and cannot be torn down from their authoritative position over them. The couple wears traditional, confining clothes, conforming to Victorian propriety. They are also "hemmed in by roses," signaling that though their entrapment is beautiful and conventionally desirable, heterosexuality imprisons nonetheless. David calls them "archaic lovers trapped in an interminable rose garden" (87). A cycle of closure eternally circumscribes their movement, and their presence unceasingly watches over the queer couple. As much as Giovanni would like to tear this paper down in an effort to make his lover stay, he cannot eradicate the eye of heteronormativity and he cannot expunge David's fear of committing to Giovanni, in part because committing to a lover means entrapment, and in part due to David's internalized homophobia.

Throughout the novel, Baldwin uses literal and metaphorical rooms as spaces to work out conflict. When David reunites with Hella, he "kept kissing her and holding her, trying to find my way in her again, as though she were a familiar, darkened room in which I fumbled to find the light" (121). Her body is a once familiar room in which he gropes to find his bearings. When Giovanni runs into David, David says, "He seemed to find my face more transparent than a shop window" (144). Interiorities are rooms into which others can enter or look inside to understand the interior workings of the mind. Rooms are the spaces where conflicts play out. Giovanni's room, in particular, is the central site of David's struggle with his desires.

In Giovanni's room, David wrestles with his conflicting desires to live with his lover and to escape the identification with the lover that such enclosure demands. David recognizes that Giovanni wants him "to destroy [his] room and give to Giovanni a new and better life. This life could only be my own, which, in order to transform Giovanni's,

must first become a part of Giovanni's room" (88). The room has the potential to become a space where queerness could exist unimpeded by the homophobia of the streets. Giovanni senses this possibility and works to physically manifest it by tearing down bricks for bookcases, increasing the space and size of the room. David says, "In a way he was doing it for me, to prove his love for me. He wanted me to stay in the room with him. Perhaps he was trying, with his own strength, to push back the encroaching walls, without, however, having the walls fall down" (114). But it is this very becoming a part of the room, and part of Giovanni, that David resists. In order to transform Giovanni's room, and Giovanni's life, David would first need to become a part of that room, with all of its dirt, disorder, and despair. In this way, Baldwin represents intimate relationships as all too gross in their corporeality and too messy in the disorder of humanity.

After all, Giovanni's room materializes his disordered identity. David says of the room, "This was not the garbage of Paris, which would have been anonymous: this was Giovanni's regurgitated life" (87). The dirt and disorder would somehow have been manageable or bearable had it been impersonal and disassociated from Giovanni himself. But this chaos embodies Giovanni's interiority. It is a vomiting up of his inner turmoil. The room smells "sweet" and "heavy" like spilled wine, but it is rotting like the moldy, "wrinkled potato" on the floor (87). It both attracts and repulses. But David insists that it is not the messiness of the room that unsettles him, but "it was the fact that when one began searching for the key to this disorder, one realized that it was not to be found in any of the usual places. For this was not a matter of habit or circumstance or temperament; it was a matter of punishment and grief" (87). The room is an imprisonment for Giovanni as well as for David. He wants to be rescued from the

decomposing room. David knows Giovanni brought him there "to destroy" the room in order to transmute it into a home where they might find a fleeting reprieve from the external assault of homophobic violence and the internal conflict of David's resistance to self-demolition (88). But while Giovanni wants to transform the abject space through renovation in order to make David stay with him, David wants to escape because the room traps and disorients him.

At the same time that the room reeks of rot and abjection, it also offers a glimpse of alternate possibilities. It offers a look at the satisfaction of dwelling in negativity. David explains that in the room, "I was in a terrible confusion. Sometimes I thought, but this *is* your life. Stop fighting it…Or I thought, but I am happy. And he loves me. I am safe" (88). The room represents the site where desire can be inhabited with hopefulness, even as David's fear of desire curtails his joy. For a brief moment, David feels safe here and at peace with his intimacy with Giovanni. He is aware that he is actively resisting his own passion. He both does and does not want to reside in the room. Sometimes he can resist his impulsive disgust at his queer desire and sometimes he cannot.

Baldwin articulates the possibilities available to David if he grapples with the negativity of desire as a brief glimpse into the Garden of Eden. When Jacques and David discuss his attraction to Giovanni, Jacques says, "Nobody can stay in the Garden of Eden," and David acknowledges that he is right (25). The Garden represents a space where sexuality can flourish. David muses that "Jacques' garden was involved with football players and Giovanni's was involved with maidens—but that seems to have made little difference. Perhaps everybody has a garden of Eden, I don't know; but they have scarcely seen their garden before they see the flaming sword" (25). David suggests

that homo- and hetero-sexuality operate in the same way here. It is only fleetingly that desire can only be inhabited without shame or guilt or humiliation because, again, this novel insists that desire itself involves abjection.

Baldwin underscores how repulsive it is to accept that desire entails dirt, disgust, and humiliation by demonstrating the extent to which his characters resist this knowledge. When David first meets Giovanni, he mentions that his room is dirty, and David replies, "I'm sure it is" (86). Even before he has seen the room, he is sure it is dirty because he sees any relation that he could have to Giovanni as filthy. Queer desire, to David, is inherently rotten. However, he does not accept the idea that all sexual intimacy is rancid. Jacques too mistakenly hopes that David could disavow the dirtiness of desire, rather than dwell in it. For example, before Giovanni takes David to his room, Jacques implores David to love Giovanni and value the moments they have together because "if you think of them as dirty, then they *will* be dirty—they will be dirty because you will be giving nothing, you will be despising your flesh and his. But you can make your time together anything but dirty; you can give each other something which will make both of you better—forever—if you will *not* be ashamed, if you will only *not* play it safe" (57). Jacques aptly recognizes David's hesitation as an association of queerness with dirt and shame, but he does not realize that there is no way to avoid the dirt and grime, the humiliation and self-destruction, inherent in all desire. Jacques thinks there is a way to purify desire, to cleanse the self of dirt and shame. But relationality is itself dirty and sticky. Intimacy requires dissolving the boundaries between identities. David would need to dwell in the filth of Giovanni's room in order to embrace Giovanni. He would need to accept the gooey precarity of desire. However, Baldwin stresses the point that David's

desire for safety is all consuming. To act on queer desire would be to move off the straight and certain line in uncertain directions. It would mean demolishing his vision of security in a definite future. Similarly, Giovanni also recognizes David's revulsion to same-sex desire. He tells David, "You want to be *clean*…You want to leave Giovanni because he makes you stink. You want to despise Giovanni because he is not afraid of the stink of love" (141). Unlike David, Giovanni does not fear the abjection of intimacy. He recognizes that loving someone means disassembling your sense of self in order to incorporate the other, to break the self and down and remake the self differently.

To conclude, this difficulty of accepting the dirt of intimacy is compounded by the historical situation in mid-twentieth century Europe because heterosexuality can disavow the dirt and shame of intimacy and displace it onto queer desire. Foul smell identifies those bodies that are unsavory— those incongruous with good, clean society. Douglas considers dirt as "matter out of place" (35). This sense of the word "dirty" taps into one of David's central fears—a fear of lacking a home. He constantly worries that other people will identify him as queer, a body out of place, and that he will not safely retain his masculinity and comfortable position in heteronormative society. This cultural pressure drives the internalization of homophobia that precludes characters in this novel from realizing that dirt, shame, and self-demolition are constitutive of all forms of desire (not merely queer desire). If the world were different, if homophobic sentiments were not so totalizingly entrenched, then perhaps these characters could inhabit queerness differently. Readers perceive glimmers of this alternative in Giovanni's room. But ultimately, dominant powers crush this possibility.

2. *Nightwood*

Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* differs from Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* in its consideration of gender's role in sexual power dynamics. In *Giovanni's Room*, David imagines queer sexuality as a humiliating femininization, so he resists queer desire in order to maintain his sense of masculinity and the position of power straight men have in his social structure. In *Nightwood*, queer women are not so concerned about the humiliation of queer relationality because women are already abjected by being subordinated to men. Women, and especially queer women, do not have that same social power to preserve. The fact that women are already subordinated to men opens up room for them to inhabit abjection productively. While David categorizes the upper- and under-worlds of Paris in order to contain abjection, Robin blurs categories and embraces the abjection David fears. In contrast to David's desire for a wife, a house, and the stability of being part of the nation, Robin rejects a wife and a home in favor of the instability of wandering. In this chapter, I will argue that Barnes proposes that reveling in abjection affords alternative ways of living in a world that is hostile to queerness.

In this chapter, I consider the various registers in which Barnes conceives of queer women as abject. In 1915, Djuna Barnes published her illustrated chapbook of poetry entitled, *The Book of Repulsive Women*. The collection features a prostitute, a cabaret dancer, and women who died by suicide— all abject figures. What I mean by "abject" women are those who are considered outside the norm: the rude, nasty, unfeminine, outspoken, contemptible, dirty, disgusting, itinerant, or otherwise objectionable. Clearly, Barnes was fascinated by "repulsive" women and she wrote about them with a tender fondness. She writes of Corpse A, in "Suicide," "They brought her in, a shattered small / Cocoon, / With a little bruised body like / A startled moon; / And all the subtle

symphonies of her / A twilight rune" (35). The shattered female body is both broken and beautiful. It speaks its own nighttime language. Barnes here treats this woman's body as one of celestial splendor, without sanitizing her abjection.

Barnes' novel *Nightwood* extends her concern with abjection. Set in the Parisian under-world of gay bars and back alleyways, *Nightwood* is filled to the brim with abject characters. In her article, "*Nightwood* and the Terror of Uncertain Signs," Teresa de Lauretis outlines the many "eccentric expatriates" that compose the under-world of Paris: cross-dressing, phony doctor Matthew O'Connor, false Baron Felix Volkbein, the wandering Robin Vote, and her desperate lover Nora. Lauretis writes, "They are marginal people, social misfits, disasters waiting to happen, of the sort that history omits from the official record and civil society confines to ghettoes, psychiatric wards, or the urban nightworld" (S118). Much like the under-world that Baldwin describes in *Giovanni's Room*, queer characters in Barnes' novel compose the abject underbelly of Parisian society. These characters and their queer sexualities are confined to the "nightworld" that "good" society disavows. As in Baldwin's novel, heteronormativity denies the abjection of sexuality and projects it onto queer underworld-ers. Lauretis explores the abjection of sexuality in this novel when she argues that "the night" serves as "a figure for sexuality as a traumatic, unmanageable excess of affect leading to abject degradation" (S120). While I would agree that sexuality in this novel is confused, desperate, and degraded, I argue that embracing this abjection rather than resisting it would open up space for abjection to be inhabited productively.

Nightwood contains a multitude of abject figures, but the one who embraces the abjection of the under-world is Robin Vote. Robin tends to abandon her romantic

relationships, which causes heartbreak and upheaval throughout the novel. She leaves her husband, Felix, and her son, as well as her lover Nora. For this tendency to desert her lovers, Dr. Matthew O'Connor disparages Robin as something "outside the 'human type'" (Barnes 155). He describes her as "a wild thing caught in a woman's skin, monstrously alone…Every bed she leaves, without caring, fills her heart with peace and happiness. She has made her 'escape' again…she can't do anything in relation to anyone but herself" (155). To Matthew, Robin is monstrous. She is a wild animal, selfish and unfeeling. He describes her much like David describes *les folles* in *Giovanni's Room*. David, as a man culturally influenced by heteronormativity, sees queer men as abject monsters who are no longer human. As a cross-dressing charlatan, Matthew does not represent the same heteronormative voice as David, but he still reviles Robin for her unfeminine lack of care for her lovers and her tendency to leave. The woman who acts for herself, who does not give herself up to others, is seen as less than human.

Robin's abjection involves not just her un-ladylike abandonment of her lovers, but it is also bound up in a bodily nastiness. Matthew and Felix first meet Robin after she has passed out from drinking all night. Intoxication in and of itself suggests a lack of feminine propriety, and Barnes further describes Robin as if she is not just unfeminine but inhuman. Her skin has a "texture of plant life" that hints at "decay" and "luminous deteriorations" (38). Her body here is molding and grotesque. She is gross and not quite human, but rather something that blurs the line between human and plant. Yet at the same time there is something desirable and romantic about her body. Barnes describes her as lying "on a bed, surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly over-sung by the notes of unseen birds, which seemed to have been forgotten"

(37). Her deterioration here has a kind of beauty. She is surrounded by "exotic" plants, not common but rare, and by "cut flowers" whose beauty lasts but a short time before it rots. She blooms brightly for only a flashing moment before she fades away. Here the abject woman's body comes across as both nasty and appealing.

In this novel, abject femininity is both frighteningly repulsive and strangely desirable. The fact that Robin smells of "fungi," her skin is "porous," and her body hints at "decay" is troubling for others (38). Robin has a permeable quality, as if she might absorb her surroundings and become part of them, or as if she might become part of her lovers. In this way, Robin embodies many of David's fears about sexuality in *Giovanni's Room*. He worries that his queer lover's abject body will swallow or drown him, and here Robin is also gooey, oozing, and sticky. But at the same time, no character in the novel has a problem attaching to Robin's porousness. In *Giovanni's Room*, the stickiness of sexuality is frightening because the lover might dissolve and lose their sense of self, yet in *Nightwood* no one is disgusted by Robin. In fact, characters leap at the chance to marry or partner with her. In the end, it is ultimately the viscous Robin who leaves them, rather than the other way around. Robin absorbs her lovers into herself. Nora in particular becomes mired in love for her, though Robin can leave whenever she pleases. Her viscosity does not impede her. She draws others in, and they stick to her. *Nightwood* articulates the dread of relationality for some characters, particularly for Nora, since entering into an intimacy with a lover means you will get stuck. The boundaries between yourself and the other will blend and blur, which is terrifying because it means you will lose a solid sense of yourself as you become part of the other. Yet embracing abjection enables Robin to survive in a hostile world.

Embracing abjection means dissolving the borders between identity categories. Robin blurs the boundaries between masculine and feminine, as well as human and animal. Toward the end of the novel, Robin wanders away from Jenny and ends up in a church where Nora arrives with her dog. Barnes writes, "Standing before them in her boy's trousers was Robin. Her pose, startled and broken" (178). Like Matthew's cross-dressing, Robin dismantles gender binaries by wearing men's clothing.[19] As Robin moves onto all fours and wrestles with Nora's dog, Barnes writes, "The dog, quivering in every muscle, sprang back, his tongue a stiff curving terror in his mouth; moved backward, back, as she came on, whimpering too, coming forward…Then she began to bark also, crawling after him—barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching" (179). The process of Robin becoming-dog does not merely break down gender binaries, but it goes so far as to disassemble the boundaries between human and animal.[20]

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[19] As several critics argue, Dr. Matthew O'Connor's cross dressing serves as another central means by which the novel destabilizes gender identity. Rachel Warburton argues that Matthew blurs gender sartorially because cross-dressing is a means of donning the attributes of the opposite gender in order to bend the firm contours of gender identity. Gretchen Busi contends that gender binaries fail to represent Matthew and the multiple possibilities for gender expression. Sarah Henstra similarly counters ironic readings of Matthew's flamboyancy as "masculinity gone awry" by instead suggesting that Matthew is "strangely alert to the staged or rehearsed quality of language in general and of [his] own identit[y]" (126). His attention to the performativity of gender identity suggests that his character "challenge[s] the social and discursive limits on the construction of the self" (126). Henstra argues that Matthew revises the ways in which language articulates the self (127).

[20] There is a wealth of scholarship on *Nightwood*'s relationship to animality. For further reading, see Anna Christine's "'I Wanna Be Your Puppy': Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* and the Queer Cute Body" in *Affective Materialities: Reorienting the Body in Modernist Literature*, Erin E. Edwards' chapter "Love and Corpses: Djuna Barnes's Queer Posthumanism" from *The Modernist Corpse*, Karen Kaviola's "The 'Beast Turning Human': Constructions of the 'Primitive' in Nightwood," Carrie Rohman's "Revising the Human: Silence, Being, and the Question of the Animal in *Nightwood*," Bonnie Kime Scott's "Barnes Being 'Beast Familiar': Representation on the Margins of Modernism," and Kathryn Bond Stockton's chapter "Why the (Lesbian) Child Requires an Interval of

While David is invested in maintaining categorical boundaries to contain queerness in *Giovanni's Room*, *Nightwood* makes no attempt to categorize and restrain. David classifies gay men as inhuman monsters of the under-world and straight men as clean, desirable blondes in order to contain and repress queer desire. In contrast, Barnes emphasizes the ways in which Robin confuses categorization.[21] When Robin crawls on all fours like a dog, she embraces abjection in a way that both attracts Nora and also repulses her, in much the same way that Giovanni's and Joey's bodies both attract and repulse David in *Giovanni's Room*; but here it is not Robin's queerness that disgusts Nora, but rather it is her inexplicable, animalistic tendency to wander away from home.

Robin's wandering manifests a productive way of inhabiting abjection. Even before Robin becomes pregnant with Felix's child, she "prepared herself for her child with her only power: a stubborn cataleptic calm, conceiving herself pregnant before she was; and, strangely aware of some lost land in herself, she took to going out; wandering the countryside; to train travel, to other cities, alone and engrossed" (49). In this passage, it is not entirely clear why Robin begins to wander. Barnes does not reveal her motivations. However, Barnes does suggest that Robin senses some loss and begins wandering as a response. The fact that Robin notices "some lost land in herself" implies that she has lost her way. She has arrived somewhere she does not want to be; even if she does not know where she wants to go, she knows she wants to leave her present space. In

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Animal" in her book *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* among others.

[21] In his article "Dazzling Estrangement," Brian Glavey argues that literary critics and historians have had difficulty categorizing this novel since "*Nightwood* stymies any attempt to categorize or label" (749). He suggests that reading the novel's modernism and its queerness alongside each other can open up helpful avenues for exploring how it blurs categorization.

contrast to critics like Teresa de Lauretis who describe Robin as the "empty center" of the novel who lives "in thrall to unmanageable impulses," I suggest that Robin exerts more agency in her decisions and movement (S119, S121). Just because Robin wanders without purpose does not mean she does not *choose* to walk away. When Robin is pregnant, she exhibits a comatose calm, but when she finally leaves Felix, she "looked about her, about the room, as if she were seeing it for the first time" (53). Prior to this moment, Robin acts like a sleepwalker, but now she is awake. This instance implies that Robin is only just now becoming aware of her surroundings and her place within them. She realizes that this life is not one she wants, prompting her to leave and wander to find something else. Robin articulates this sentiment again when she first meets Nora at the circus. She says, "I don't want to be here" yet "she did not explain where she wished to be" (60). This consistent habit of leaving her lovers is the trait that Matthew and Nora revile in her, but if Robin is wandering in response to her sense that her current situation is deeply unsatisfying, then she is acting out of a survival instinct. She wanders away from partnerships that confine her too tightly.

Wandering is a means of disrupting disciplinary control over female mobility. Robin's cruising in gay bars and alleyways suggests the "sideways" movements that Sara Ahmed associates with queer possibility. Respectable, straight women would not wander into gay bars since such movement slants off the straight line. Barnes describes Robin's walking as "formless meditation" without shape or purpose (65). As I discussed in my first chapter, walking without purpose disrupts the limited lines that the city maps out for women. Barnes writes, "When Robin, accompanied by Jenny Petherbridge, arrived in New York, she seemed distracted…She said a hotel was 'good enough.'…it was as if the

motive power which had directed Robin's life…had been crippled. For the first week or two she would not go out, then, thinking herself alone, she began to haunt the terminals, taking trains into different parts of the country, wandering without design" (176). Wandering without a direction in mind breaks with traditional movement. It creates opportunities for the walker to stumble in new direction and opens up unforeseen possibilities. Robin's penchant to stay in hotels rather than homes signifies a transience that bourgeois society reviles, particularly in women. Since domesticity denotes the comfortable stasis expected of femininity, to reject housekeeping for wandering without some ultimate goal in sight is a queer break with that tradition. As someone who embraces abjection, Robin wanders to resist neat categorization that would limit, contain, crush, or pin her down.

Although Barnes does not reveal much of Robin's interiority, it is clear that her interiority is always in motion, resisting control. Robin's motivation for wandering and leaving her lovers is never explicitly explained or justified. As Brian Glavey writes, "Each spectator is captivated by Robin's silence and passivity, and each seeks to interpret the image she presents in order to control her. But Robin refuses to participate in the narratives these other characters—not to mention readers—devise for her" (757). Barnes' refusal to present Robin's interiority suggests that she intends for Robin to resist categorization.[22] She associates Robin with plants and animals as a way of playing with category. Classification is a form of limitation that restricts identities to specific labels. It

[22] In *Queering the Underworld,* Scott Herring argues that Barnes was one of a few modernists who "frustrated the compulsion to reveal underworld sexual knowledge" (3). He contends that Barnes' slumming narrative does not conform to genre expectations by shedding light on the queer underworld, but instead "bungle[s] the project of sexual knowing" (3).

is a stasis that does not allow for growth, change, or movement. In Robin, Barnes offers a character who wanders away from home to avoid stasis. Barnes says Robin's "thoughts were in themselves a form of locomotion" (65). She moves as a way to stay alive in a world that would restrain her.

Nora fundamentally clashes with Robin because, in contrast to Robin's interior of motion, Nora's interiority is framed as a static house. Barnes writes, "Nora dreamed that she was standing at the top of a house…an expansive, decaying splendour; yet somehow, though set with all the belongings of her grandmother, was as bereft as the nest of a bird which will not return" (67). Nora's dream house materializes her interiority. Much like the home she once curated with Robin, she feels like a splendid old house falling into decay. She thinks of herself as a nest to which Robin will not return. Matthew uses this same domestic imagery when he articulates Nora's feelings for Robin. He says, "A religious woman…without the joy and safety of the Catholic faith, which at a pinch covers up the spots on the wall when the family portraits take a slide; take that safety from a woman…and love gets loose and into the rafters. She sees her everywhere" (66). Matthew here also articulates Nora's selfhood as a house. Love is fluttering up out of the everyday rooms and into the rafters, about to escape outside. Nora aims to keep Robin securely inside her house and within the confines of her affections, but her grip on Robin is beginning to slip, and her love is flying away from home.

Nora's interior life is organized in domestic terms because she fears the abject outside world. Whenever Robin wanders downtown to drink in bars, Nora worries about her. Nora tells Matthew about a night when she walked downtown looking for Robin. When she finds her, she pushes someone else's hands off her, then Robin chases her

down the street yelling, “You make everything dirty!” (152). Afterwards, when Nora has finally brought Robin back home, she tells her, “Die now, so you will be quiet, so you will not be touched again by dirty hands” (153). Nora here associates dirt with shame, but it is less queerness itself that is shameful than an outside world that threatens to defile Robin. This scene illustrates just how toxic Nora’s love becomes, that she would rather see Robin dead than attached to someone else. Nora cannot stand the idea that other people might touch her beloved and sully the woman she wants to keep entirely to herself. She fears public streets, bars, and other exterior spaces because they contain this dirt and these filthy hands. In contrast, Robin revels in the abjection of exterior space, such that her actions only become “wrong” when Nora perceives them. The fact that Nora witnesses Robin flirting or sleeping with other people makes her actions wrong, when otherwise they would simply exist without such value judgements. Just as Douglas explains that dirt is matter out of place, so Robin’s wandering actions only become detrimental when Nora constructs her body as such— as moving in the wrong places and in the wrong directions. In fact, it is Robin’s very embrace of dirt, viscosity, and abjection that enables her to survive Nora’s deadly love by slipping out of her grasp.

Because Nora fears the abject outside, she clings to Robin too tightly, and Robin rejects the confines of Nora’s housekeeping. Much like Giovanni tries construct a room in which his lover will stay, Nora tries to curate a room that will preserve her lover. Barnes describes the house that Nora and Robin design together as a space in which “every object in the garden, every item in the house, every word they spoke, attested to their mutual love, the combining of their humours” (61). They become entangled in each other, losing the delineations between their identities, and this blending of identities could

be productive, but it grows stagnant. The house becomes a "museum of their encounter" (61). Nora tries to freeze their love in order to thwart any change. While Nora seeks to preserve the life and the relationship she had with Robin, it is this very stasis that crushes Robin, causing her to wander again. When Robin begins to leave her, Nora "went about disturbing nothing" because "if she disarranged anything Robin might become confused—might lose the scent of home" (61). Nora wants to bind Robin within an enclosed domesticity, but she holds onto her lover too tightly, restricting her movement.

Ultimately, Robin embraces abjection and wanders away from domesticity in order to survive Nora's crushing confines. Nora's love becomes so toxic that she would rather see Robin dead than to see her leave. Barnes writes, Nora "knew now that there was no way [to keep Robin] but death. In death Robin would belong to her" (63). Since the only way to keep Robin would be to kill her, their home becomes a "tomb" of their relationship (61). Unlike David who leaves Giovanni because he resists the abjection of queer intimacy, Robin wanders away to resist the confines of a relationship that would kill her.

Robin embraces the decay of her abject body by resisting categorization and wandering away from confines, and in doing so she opens up possibilities for survival. As a figure who blurs the lines between human and animal, Robin represents a rupture in time. Barnes writes of the moment Felix meets Robin, "Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human. Such a person's every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience…Such a woman is the infected carrier of the past…we feel that

we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning" (41).[23] Robin has consumed death and the past, bearing it inside her and disrupting the present. Barnes describes this moment of meeting as though Felix has come across an eland in the forest who is "chapleted with orange blossoms and bridal veil," in a fragile moment before the animal flees. She also refers to Robin as a unicorn, "neither [hu]man nor beast" but something in between (Barnes 41). These moments are both "mirage" and "myth" (41). Mirages are the hallucinatory but transcendent illusions that disrupt the landscape. Myths are the alternative narratives that counter the dominant flow of history as given. They are ephemeral ruptures with geography and historical time running in their fixed course. Something about Robin suggests she carries alternate histories with her (myths rather than History), alternatives that could interrupt the normal course of history with other possibilities that have not-yet become tangible realities. They are the possibilities lying dormant within the prevailing development of historical time. Darieck Scott writes about Johnson's Ex-Coloured man similarly in his book *Extravagant Abjection*. He argues that, by interrupting the flow of time, marginalized bodies rebel against social control because "sequential temporality…helps found habits of political submission" (Scott 118). Characters who can shift outside the dominant current of time can perceive alternative possibilities for the future. Although Johnson's Ex-Coloured man does not believe these

[23] Elizabeth Freeman calls this scene in *Nightwood*, "a glimpse of…queer sociability" in a novel that otherwise tends toward antisociality (759). She argues that this description of Robin as "eaten death returning" "proposes eating the other not only as a movement beyond discourse—as Foucault describes friendship, two people meeting 'without terms or convenient words, with nothing to assure them about the meaning of the movement that carries them toward each other'—but also as time travel" (758). Freeman argues that offering up the body serves as a sacrament that less "shatter[s]" the self than "remix[es]" it (759). The novel thus does not renounce relationality but reimagines it (759).

alternatives are accessible for him, Robin does. The Ex-Coloured man does not "understand that the capacity to resist can be marshaled precisely through an embrace of degradation" (Scott 109). In contrast, Robin embraces abjection in order to live outside the confines of heteronormative domesticity and stasis. Robin's abjection enables her to slip away from the dominant powers that aim to control and oppress marginalized subjects.

3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that *Giovanni's Room* and *Nightwood* both configure abjection as constitutive of relationality. In Baldwin's novel, David sees queer desire as so humiliating that he must disavow his desire in order to maintain his masculinity. He categorizes Paris into an upper- and lower-world to contain and repress queer sexuality. In doing so, he denies the reality that the book acknowledges: that all sexuality entails abjection. All relationality entails the dissolution of self in the other. Intimacy entails viscosity that dissolves the boundaries between one partner and another, which is frightening because losing these boundaries means losing those sharply delineated contours of self. Baldwin advocates for an embrace of stickiness and dirt. Dwelling in the abjection of relationality and accepting demolition would be the transformational thing that would allow for intimacy to become habitable, but homophobia is too co-extensive with queerness in this novel for this process to happen. David thinks that if he can assert his heterosexuality by marrying a woman and having a heteronormative house and family, then he could escape the abjection of intimacy. In contrast, *Nightwood* demonstrates that because women occupy a subordinated position under men, there is more space for them to inhabit abjection productively. Women do not

worry about being “feminized” by queer sexuality or losing gendered power in a queer sexual relationship. Through Robin Vote, Barnes illustrates a means of reveling in queer relationality and its dissolutions. Robin rejects an assertion of heteronormativity in favor of resisting the confines of domesticity. Her abjection enables her to disrupt the categories of masculine and feminine, human and animal, clean and filthy, straight and queer, powerful and weak, good and bad, that are so carefully constructed by heteronormativity. Robin illustrates how an embrace of abjection would allow marginalized subjects to survive structures that aim to repress and crush them.

Chapter 3

Bluefern Spores and Dandelions: Re-imagining Traumatic Geographies in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha*

While my previous chapter considered the sexual power dynamics of the stratified city, this chapter focuses on how African Americans find ways to survive the violence and traumatic effects of slavery and how trauma affects their relationships to the places they inhabit. An examination of the spaces in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha* (1953) reveals how slavery and white supremacy subjugate African Americans spatially and how they create places where they can survive these traumas.

Oppression and resistance operate in similar yet distinct ways in *Beloved* and *Maud Martha*. In the former, Morrison uses the imagery of ghosts and haunted houses in order to demonstrate how spaces retain the memory of slavery's systemic violence. Characters in this novel make these troubled spaces habitable by re-imaging sites of violence and by seeking out green spaces in which they can participate in communal acts of care. In the latter novel, Brooks demonstrates that racist housing practices in 1940s Chicago press Black residents into ever more compact kitchenette apartments or divest them of living spaces altogether. Although white supremacy colonizes Maud Martha's imagination, she resists domination by re-imagining her quotidian, tight, and "ugly" spaces as sites of aesthetic beauty and communal possibility.

Both *Beloved* and *Maud Martha* employ an ecological framework to imagine how African Americans survive oppression. The word *diaspora* comes from the Greek root *διασπορά*, which means "to scatter" or "to sow."[24] The African American diaspora constitutes a scattering of people across the ocean, much like seeds are scattered across space. Morrison and Brooks imagine Black life as if it is a seed growing in a hostile landscape, where it is not expected to flourish. Morrison describes Black lives like the delicate spores that sprout along riverbanks. Such life is precarious and easily crushed. Similarly, Brooks imagines Black life as a small flower growing in unlikely spaces, budding up through cracks in the pavement and defying the concrete's crushing force. In this chapter, I examine the quotidian spaces of African American life to analyze how it grows in spite of these repressive environments.

In making this argument, I draw on race and cultural studies scholars who have argued that racial oppression has spatial dimensions. Katherine McKittrick argues in *Demonic Grounds*, "Black matters are spatial matters. And while we all produce, know, and negotiate space—albeit on different terms—geographies in the diaspora are accentuated by racist paradigms of the past and their ongoing hierarchical patterns" (xii). Examining a history of race and the mechanisms of oppression necessitate analyzing the spaces where violence occurred because spaces carry their histories with them. Race (and its histories of power) affects how bodies can inhabit space. As McKittrick says, "Some bodies belong, some bodies do not belong, and some bodies are out of place" (xv). Due to a history of racial division and subjugation, some bodies feel at home in certain spaces

[24] The New Testament uses the Greek *διασπορά* to refer to the scattering of Jewish people during times of religious persecution.

and some bodies do not feel at home. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed elaborates on this point by explaining, "Whiteness is invisible and unmarked, as the absent center against which others appear only as deviants or as lines of deviation" (121). Whiteness is often taken as given. It is the "I" to which the racial "other" is opposed in dominant discourse, which means that white bodies often feel more comfortable in public space, more in control, more at home, than bodies of color. African Americans, then, are often read as lacking a place, whether due to their fluctuating movements over the waters of the Middle Passage or their shadowy status as less-than-human property. But, as McKittrick argues, "The displacement of difference, geographies of domination, transatlantic slavery, the black diaspora, and the poetics of landscape…are used to indicate the ways in which unofficial or oppositional geographies—which are so often displaced, disguised, or relocated by practices of domination—are socially produced indicators of the imaginative and real work geography can do" (xxiv). Analyzing how Black subjects have been denied personhood and places to dwell combats this historical dispossession.

1. *Beloved*

I will begin my literary analysis with *Beloved*, rather than the earlier *Maud Martha*, because it registers the traumas of slavery, the lingering effects of which *Maud Martha* will later map in the mid-twentieth century. *Beloved* illustrates how trauma bears a relationship to place, and how the African American relationship to space has been affected by the brutality of slavery. The novel maps these effects in three spatial dimensions: spaces of slavery, spaces of escape, and spaces of "freedom." What I mean by "spaces of slavery" are those places in the novel that are positioned in the mid-1800s, within the time and places of slavery. They are confined spaces marked by violence and

imprisonment. Places of escape are liminal spaces in the text. They are the places of limited freedom overshadowed by the threat of a return to violent oppression. Thirdly, spaces of "freedom" are both provisional and haunted spaces, some in the mid-1800s and some in 1873, the post-emancipation period of the novel. Some of these spaces of freedom are figured as green spaces, providing at least a fleeting sense of possibility and renewal through contact with nature. What makes these spaces distinct from places of escape is that they engender genuine moments of liberty from the confines of a repressive world order, even as those moments are fleeting and ultimately curtailed by domination.

Sweet Home, the Kentucky plantation where Sethe and Paul D were enslaved, serves as the main space of slavery's violence in the novel. One of the most traumatic events for Sethe happens at Sweet Home: Schoolteacher's pupils hold her down and steal her milk while Halle watches in horror from the loft above. Even more than she is traumatized by the rape itself, Sethe is traumatized by the fact that Schoolteacher's boys take the milk she needs for her children. While Paul D. is shocked that Schoolteacher would whip her while she is pregnant, Sethe repeats twice, "And they took my milk!" (20). More than anything else, she wanted to provide for her children and keep them safe from slavery, and the boys rob her of her means of protecting them. The fact that the milking occurs in a barn is significant because it is an enclosed space. Two of Sethe's most traumatic moments (this abuse and her later murder of her daughter) occur inside domestic enclosures, which then become weighty with the memory of these tragedies. The milking in the barn is also traumatizing because it dehumanizes Sethe, who resists being treated as though she has no human subjectivity (228). Morrison elides a detailed account of this scene because Sethe does not want to remember the abuse. When Paul D

informs Sethe that Halle saw Schoolteacher's pupils assault her, she wishes her mind would reject this new sorrow. She asks herself, "Why was there nothing [her mind] refused? No misery, no regret, no hateful picture too rotten to accept?" (83). She wants to repress this memory, "beating pack the past" rather than dealing with her trauma (86). As I will explore in more detail later in the chapter, Sethe's repression of her abuse is part of the reason the ghost of her daughter haunts her house. Violence that occurs in domestic spaces leads to haunting that victims of trauma must later confront. Confined, domestic spaces in this novel tend to be haunted, carrying the memories of violence, which leads former slaves to seek out spaces to escape the burden of the past.

Sweet Home demonstrates how spaces of slavery obscure the violent mechanisms that produce its beauty. After all, slavery made the purportedly 'aristocratic' character of Southern life possible. Years after her escape to Ohio, Sethe is confronted with a memory of the plantation. "Suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was…Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys…and she could not forgive her memory for that" (7). The South was built upon the murder and exploitation of Black slaves. Their labor made it possible for white southerners to grow their wealth and construct beautiful spaces. As a result, this very splendor erases the labor that made luxury available to white landowners. Even the ironic name "Sweet Home" disguises the cruelty that enables the plantation to exist. Plantation beauty obscures these processes to such an extent that Sethe's memory rebels against her by remembering the loveliness of

the trees rather than the brutalized bodies hanging from their branches. This scene also reveals the traumatic force of the plantation if it can spring up, unbidden and unwelcome, into Sethe's mind so many years later.

Spaces of slavery in this novel illustrate how places retain a connection to the brutality enacted there. Sweet Home, where blood has spilled into the earth, retains the seeds of violence. Sethe tells Denver she should never go to Sweet Home, the plantation she fled. Sethe says, "If you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over—over and done with—it's going to always be there waiting for you" (43). Even though the enslavement carried out at Sweet Home has long ended, even though the Garners and Schoolteacher are no longer there, the plantation remains haunted. The past is so physical that Denver could literally "bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else" (43). The past structures their engagement with the present. Legacies of slavery result in the fraught relationship that African Americans have to the environment. Environmentalists such as Grace Carroll, Kimberly Ruffin, and Lauret Savoy have explored this historical dispossession. Carroll argues that African Americans endure "mundane extreme environmental stress" due to the continued effects of racism in public environments (4). Ruffin builds on Carroll's argument to contend that the hostility white Americans show toward African Americans in public spaces frame them as "environmental others" (3). Savoy argues that America has been shaped by contradictory histories: the dispossession of land from indigenous people, the arrival of colonial Europeans, and the enslavement of Africans. She says, as Americans, "We carry this history within us, the past becoming

present in what we think and do, in who we think we are. It informs our senses of place." Slavery is inextricable from the fabric of American history, and this historical violence cannot be separated from the place where it occurred. Not only does Sweet Home carry the memory of slavery, but it could also somehow blossom again like the Sweet Home sycamores that flower each spring. Sethe worries the plantation could envelop Denver, though she was never there during the time of slavery. Slavery's violence influences Sethe's and Denver's material relationship to place.

Sethe's struggle to make the plantation a home affects the way she engages with her house years later. As an enslaved person on Sweet Home, Sethe does small things to make the plantation more livable. When she works in Mrs. Garner's kitchen, she "had to bring a fistful of salsify…every day just to be able to work in it, feel like some part of it was hers, because she wanted to love the work she did, to take the ugly out of it" (27). Just as Maud Martha will try to make her tiny kitchenette apartment prettier in Brooks' novel, Sethe tries to make her space more beautiful in order to make it more habitable. She brings flowers into the white woman's kitchen to make it feel a little more like a place she could belong. Morrison says, "A few yellow flowers on the table, some myrtle tied around the handle of the flatiron holding the door open for a breeze calmed her" (27). Surrounding herself with beautiful plants helps her feel more at home and a little more able to survive her crushing circumstances. A breeze from the open green space outside the plantation house helps her breathe more freely. Her experience on the plantation teaches her how valuable it is to be able to call a place home, which is why she is so reluctant to leave 124 Bluestone Road years later even though the house is haunted. She is shocked that Paul D would ask her to leave, "as though a house was a little thing" (26).

Having worked so hard and risked so much to find a home, Sethe cannot imagine abandoning her house, even if it is "packed to its rafters with…grief" (6). In these ways, the traumas that occur in spaces of slavery remain with African Americans and influence their relationship to place.

As Sweet Home retains a hold over Sethe, Alfred, Georgia, maintains a hold on Paul D because the memory of its brutal confines keeps him moving and prevents him from settling down to create a home. Paul D is literally and psychically tied to this space of slavery, since it is a central site of his trauma. He is literally chained to other men in the gang, and they are imprisoned underground. Alfred, Georgia, models an ironic inverse of Baby Suggs' community in the Clearing. While the Clearing serves as a space of communal hope (as I will analyze later), the chain gang is a place of communal despair. Because the men are shackled together, their fates are entwined, such that if one drowns in the mud, then all drown— "one lost, all lost" (130). They sing a mutual song of communion and misery (128). As the rain forms a mudslide around them, Paul D opens his mouth, but it may be another man screaming (129). The gang forces the prisoners to become one body in order to survive. Morrison writes, "Like the unshriven dead, zombies on the loose, holding the chains in their hands, they trusted the rain and the dark, yes, but mostly Hi Man and each other" (130). The men form a community of necessity in order to avoid drowning in the deluge of violence.

Paul D's trauma in Georgia, from his near-death experience nearly drowning in the mud slide while chained to other prisoners, follows him throughout his escape to Delaware and his journey to Ohio. Paul D "didn't believe he could live with a woman—any woman—for over two out of three months. That was about as long as he could abide

one place" because wandering from place to place "was the only way he could convince himself that he would no longer have to sleep, pee, eat or swing a sledge hammer in chains" (49). His ability to move becomes the only way Paul D can convince himself of his liberty. Paul D's traumas sentence him to perpetual vagrancy. The traumas of Alfred, Georgia, inhibit Paul D from connecting with the space around him, even after he escapes. Paul D could not love the earth because "everything belonged to the men who had the guns" (191). Thus, Paul D prevents himself from loving the sky, stars, rivers, trees, and animals around him and instead "loved small" (191). His imprisonment forces him to confine his love to the smallest possible dimensions because loving too much means he will lose too much. He knows that the men with guns are capable of subjecting him to any degradation. The chain gang disconnects him from his environment, causing him to lock his emotions in "the tobacco tin" where his heart should be (133). According to the Kentucky based Filson Historical Society, tobacco was a crop primarily produced by slave labor in Kentucky during the mid-1800s. It is significant that Paul D locks his heart in a tin that contains a product of his enslaved labor because it materializes the fact that the strain of captivity has supplanted his heart. The racist mechanisms of capitalist production have closed off an essential part of his humanity. He refuses to love, to rest, or to build a home, lest he find himself imprisoned again. These spaces of slavery emphasize the geographic dimensions of systemic violence towards African Americans and how these traumas affect their relationship to place.

In contrast to spaces of slavery, spaces of escape are those places in the novel where slaves break free from the confines of slavery. However, these spaces have limitations—they illustrate how provisional freedom is for run-away slaves. For example,

124 Bluestone Road is one such conditionally free space when Sethe first arrives with newborn Denver. Ohio could be a free space, but it is not free in the way that the North seems to promise freedom because it is still under the Fugitive Slave Act. In the time between her arrival at 124 and the killing of her daughter, "Sethe had twenty-eight days…of unslaved life…. Days of healing, ease and real-talk. Days of company: knowing the names of forty, fifty other Negroes, their views, habits; where they had been and what done…All taught her how it felt to wake up at dawn and *decide* what to do with the day…Bit by bit, at 124 and in the Clearing along with the others, she had claimed herself' (111). In those days, 124 was an enclave of peace where Sethe could heal from the lash of Schoolteacher's whip. The house was a gathering place for a community that taught Sethe what it might look like be free and what it would look like to have a home. However, these twenty-eight days end when Schoolteacher arrives to return Sethe and her children to Sweet Home, and 124 becomes a site of trauma. When Schoolteacher arrives at 124, Sethe tries to kill all her children in the shed and succeeds in killing her eldest daughter. Morrison writes from the perspective of Schoolteacher, "Inside, the two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other" (175). Sethe douses the shed with blood rather than see her children enslaved. She transforms the shed from a "place meant for housing wood, coal, kerosene—fuel for cold Ohio winters" into a slaughterhouse (177). What was once a place of security and protection becomes a site of carnage. Like the barn on Sweet Home, this domestic enclosure becomes a site of trauma

that will haunt Sethe.[25] Although she flees to Ohio to escape the plantation, the finds that the North is still within the reach of slavery's violence.

124 further illustrates the provisional status of African Americans in the North by emphasizing the tenuous connection African American renters have to houses. Baby Suggs and Sethe do not own 124, rather they rent their house from the Bodwins. As such they could be evicted at any point. White owners continually hinder Black renters from homeownership and full participation in citizenship, as *Maud Martha* will demonstrate. While the women living in 124 have a genuine connection to this house and to this land, they are precluded from ownership. African American environmentalist Carolyn Finney writes about this dynamic in her book *Black Faces, White Spaces*. Her parents tended an estate owned by a wealthy white family, and they knew that land better than even the owners, yet they could never afford ownership. In her book she argues that slavery and Jim Crow play a significant role in determining racial relationships to land. She argues, "For many African Americans, the ability to name, frame, and claim a green space is partly grounded in collective and individual memories that inform how they navigate and understand such spaces. Whether consisting of simply shared familial experiences or particular historical moments (like Jim Crow), memories prove to be powerful incentives in determining the characteristics of an African American's relationship to the environment." The obstacles white supremacy puts in the path of African American landownership has effects that last well beyond the time of slavery and Jim Crow.

[25] Andrew Hock Ng's article "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Space, Architecture, Trauma" examines in detail the concreteness of 124 as a place, and its significance as a haunted house that bears Sethe's trauma.

In Morrison's novel, the Black community's relationship to the land in Ohio is similarly affected by their experience with slavery in the South. They hesitate to indulge in the fruits of the earth because they realize that their freedom is limited. Slavery can still reach them even in the North. Morrison fleshes out this dynamic through the blackberries Stamp Paid finds near the river and the feast Baby Suggs throws her neighborhood. When Stamp Paid sees Sethe's children thriving, he is moved to care for them. He finds blackberries near the river that "tast[e] so good and happy that to eat them was like being in church. Just one of the berries and you felt anointed" (160). Stamp brings Baby Suggs the berries because he overflows with joy to see Sethe and her children alive and well. Baby Suggs and Stamp Paid are so moved by "the berries that tasted like church" that they extend the fruit to their community. In doing so, they are moved by a politics of care. However, this care is only provisional during the time of slavery. Morrison writes, "It made them furious…the reckless generosity on display at 124. Whispered to each other in the yards about fat rats, doom and uncalled for pride" (162). Baby Suggs' community has experienced immeasurable suffering from slavery, and they intuit that being overly generous is "reckless" for people who have so little, and from whom even the little they have can be taken away. The way they reject the "pride" of generosity parallels Paul D's insistence on loving small. If they are modest with the food, love, and care they extend, then they will be able to save a little for themselves when violence befalls them. This community recognizes that they are not secure from racial violence in the North, so they think it is foolish to give too much away when they are not safe themselves.

Spaces of escape in *Beloved* have dual connotations of both hope and fear. The woods are one such space in the novel that offers an escape from the chain gang in Georgia, but Paul D cannot be sure what he will find along the way. Carolyn Finney elaborates on this duality of the woods. For slaves fleeing plantations, the forest affords a good hiding place. The woods could mark "the beginning of their journey to freedom." They also serve as a space of "transformation and refuge," the space of religious ceremony. But alternatively, forests symbolize the terrors of lynching. Finney says, "A tree became a painful symbol for many black people, reminding them that the color of their skin could mean death."[26] In *Beloved*, Schoolteacher decapitated Paul A and hanged him from a tree (233). Paul D knows that the woods could lead him to renewed violence or they could lead him to safety. Paul D's space of escape from Alfred, Georgia, follows a path bordered by flowering trees that he traces northward. After his escape, he heeds a Native American's instructions to follow "the tree flowers" to the North—the earth physically leading slaves toward freedom. Paul D "raced from dogwood to blossoming peach. When they thinned out he headed for the cherry blossoms, then magnolia, chinaberry, pecan, walnut and prickly pear" (133). Blossoming trees on the northward

[26] Kimberly Ruffin similarly argues that Africans Americans remain alienated from environmental spaces by examining the story of the Jena Six. In 2006, an African American student in Jena, Louisiana requested permission to sit under the school's "white tree," and although the principal granted the student permission, when Black students arrived, white students had hanged several nooses from the tree. When six of these African American students beat up a white student for "making racist comments" about the situation, five of the group were charged with attempted murder. Ruffin argues that this scene reveals "the ecological burden many African Americans face…[as] environmental others who [are] not fully entitled to enjoy the outdoor resources" other white Americans use freely (3).

path anticipate a better future. Cherry blossoms will lead Paul D to Ohio, to Sethe, and to the care they will be able to give each other there.

Sethe's chokecherry tree scars represent a similar duality. After Sethe tells Mrs. Garner that Schoolteacher's pupils have milked her, Schoolteacher's boy viciously whips her back, leaving her with a mass of intertwining scars. These mutilations denote the lingering effects of a brutal history as Sethe's body becomes a site that memorializes her trauma. The fact that these scars look like a tree with multiple branches, hints at the dual significance of trees in this novel, both as a reminder of racial violence and as a hope for escape. When Paul D sees her scars, "He rubbed his cheek on her back and learned that way her sorrow, the roots of it; its wide trunk and intricate branches" (20). Sethe's tree of scars reveals the deep roots of her trauma. At the same time, these scars signify a hopefulness for another kind of future. When Amy Denver sees these wounds, she is the first to interpret them as a blossoming tree. Amy says, "It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk—it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches…and dern if these ain't blossoms" (93). Amy's vision transforms the scars of slavery into a budding tree, bursting with new life.[27] This revision gives Sethe a renewed idea of herself as a solid tree flowering with a child and with the potential for a different life in the midst of an inhospitable climate.

[27] In "A Gathering of Trees: An Examination of Memory, Trauma, and Embodiment in Toni Morrison's Beloved," Kokahvah Zauditu-Selassie examines the relationship that trees have to healing rituals in the novel. Zauditu-Selassie says, "My exploration includes an examination of trees as spiritual locations to heal characters. I argue that Sethe's embodiment of the tree is a necessary 'rememory' reconnecting her to a Black cosmology" (112).

For Sethe, the Ohio River signifies a similar hopefulness as a liminal space of escape that signals the fluid possibilities of birth and new life. As Sethe makes her escape with Amy Denver, she goes into labor on the river. Morrison writes, "As soon as Sethe got close to the river her own water broke loose to join it" (98). The river here is a transitional space between the slave South and the free North, and the fact that Sethe gives birth to her daughter Denver here gestures toward hope for her future. Denver, born on the border between slavery and freedom, will live her life caught between the grip of trauma and the hope that she could live beyond the haunted hold of the past.

While *Beloved* is primarily concerned with Black experiences of grief, the novel also gestures toward a methodology for transforming white consciousness through a spatial form of empathy. Morrison illustrates how this change might occur by attending to the river. After Sethe gives birth to Denver on the river, Morrison compares the fragility of Black life to the bluefern spore. She writes,

> Spores of bluefern growing in the hollows along the riverbank float toward the water…hard to see unless you are in or near them…Often they are mistook for insects—but they are seeds in which the whole generation sleeps confident of a future. And for a moment it is easy to believe each one has one—will become all of what is contained in the spore: will live out its days as planned. This moment of certainty lasts no longer than that; longer, perhaps, than the spore itself (99).

There is so much hope and confidence in a future for the spore and its descendants contained in its birth, but this hope lasts as briefly as the spore's life. Black life is so fragile because under white supremacy it is brutalized, exploited, raped, and murdered. Just as it is difficult to see the spores unless the viewer is "in or near" it, so it is difficult

to understand Black life unless the other dwells closely with it. What it would mean to work through the logics of racism would be for people to live near one another—to see each other and the hope each has that they might live out the fullness of their days unimpeded.

Of course, there are limits to the extent that empathy can connect people. Critics such as Lauren Berlant, Saidiya Hartman, and Ann Jurecic among others have criticized empathy as a methodology. For example, Jurecic argues that reading about racial violence may allow the reader to understand the history and feel sentiment for the suffering, "but such identification can prevent one from recognizing one's own complicity with the social and political structures that engender this violence" (11). In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman criticizes the notion that white people must put themselves in the place of Black slaves in order to understand their suffering. She argues that such a move to supplant the racial other with the self does a kind of violence. Such criticisms are certainly justified. The project of empathy must be critically examined, but such criticism does not necessitate rejecting extensions of empathy altogether. Both *Beloved* and *Maud Martha* call for racial empathy, even as the novels recognize the systemic injustices that prevent such a project from fully succeeding. Living alongside the racial other is only the beginning of dismantling such organizations of power and prejudice. Much as the certainty that the spore will live lasts no longer than the spore, so this hope that Black life might flourish is curtailed by the cultural logics of white supremacy, but it is still valuable that the means by which racism might be overcome in the future begins to be imagined.

In addition to spaces of slavery and escape in the novel, the third form of space is that of haunted "freedom" in the novel's post-emancipation present. Spaces of freedom are places where African Americans can freely extend care to each other even as they are still affected by the traumas of slavery. Even in this period, freedom is still conditional for African Americans because, as Christina Sharpe argues in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, the injuries of slavery are never over. She outlines how the climate or atmosphere of "antiblackness" still lingers in the present, taking on different forms.[28] African Americans continue to live in the wake of slavery's disasters and in the hold of racist aggressions. In reference to Sethe's exhortation to Denver that she never venture near Sweet Home because its violence waits for her, Sharpe says,

> As Sethe tells Denver, memories reanimate the places and spaces of slavery post nominative emancipation…What Sethe remembers, rememories, and encounters in the now is the weather of being in the wake. It is weather, and even if the country, every country, any country, tries to forget…it is the atmosphere: slave law transformed into lynch law, into Jim and Jane Crow, and other administrative logics that remember the brutal conditions of enslavement after the event of slavery has supposedly come to an end (105-6).

[28] In *Scenes of Subjection,* Saidiya Hartman makes a similar point by criticizing the notion that emancipation truly led to freedom for former slaves. She writes, "It is important to consider the failure of Reconstruction not simply as a matter of policy or as evidence of a flagging commitment to black rights, which is undeniably the case, but also in terms of the limits of emancipation" (6). She continues, "Emancipation appears less the grand event of liberation than a point of transition between modes of servitude and racial subjection" (6). The reconstruction era did not end subjection, it simply shifted it into a different mode.

Slavery's logics were and continue to be so pervasive as to constitute the daily atmosphere for African Americans. Since racial injustice is not merely a thing of the past, Sharpe instead suggests that curatorial and memorial work be done in order to extend care to Black sufferers. She argues for the value of communal forms of care because care is necessary to combat the onslaught of racist aggression. Although complete amelioration may not ever be fully attainable, "something like freedom" is something to strive for and envision in the present in order to extend "care." *Beloved* imagines this kind of ethos. The novel suggests that African American communities need a politics of care in order to survive racial violence. Spaces of freedom in this novel enable these extensions of care to flourish.

Firstly, the Clearing is a space of freedom because it is an open green space that allows the Black community to express emotion freely. Unlike the enclosed domestic spaces steeped in racial violence, like 124, the shed, and Sweet Home's barn, the Clearing is an open space that does not carry the weight of hauntings. In the Clearing, Baby Suggs gathers an impromptu congregation for spiritual communion.[29] During these gatherings, women began to cry, but then they "stopped crying and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath. In the silence that followed, Baby Suggs, holy, offered up to them her great big heart" (103). Baby provides Black subjectivities a space in which they can safely process their grief communally. Women who have long suffered and grieved can, at least for a moment, cease their sorrow and

[29] For more on the significance of the Clearing as an open, communal space, see Nancy Jesser's essay "Violence, Home, and Community in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*."

experience happiness. Men who have repressed their emotions, like Paul D who seals his heart in the tobacco tin, are given a secure space to access their feelings and express them openly. Children too are given freedom to express a full range of human emotion without fear of rebuke. While in other public spaces policed by white supremacy, African Americans are strictly regimented and controlled, here they are secluded from a white gaze and thus free to give full vent to their emotions. In the Clearing, they do not repress their grief out of fear but can finally grieve for their losses and support each other. It is a site of communal care. This space enables the community to survive slavery's devastating violence.

As a space of freedom, the Clearing allows the community to openly care for each other. As Paul D says, "To get to a place where you could love anything you chose—not to need permission for desire—well now, *that* was freedom" (191). Masters controlled all aspects of a slave's attachments, not just their romantic intimacies, but their ties to their children as well, which is why so many characters in this novel believe in loving less to avoid pain. The Clearing is the place where they can choose who to love. It is here that Baby Suggs tells her community, "Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it…Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them" (103). Resistance is embodied and spatial for this community.[30] When violence has so long been inscribed on the body, Baby recognizes that it is a radical act of resistance to love Black skin. She continues, "*You* got to love it. This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be

[30] Ashraf Rushdy contends, "In Morrison's novels, understanding self and past is always a project of community, memory always situated within a context of rememory. In *Sula* the context of rememory is that of female friendships, in *Song of Solomon* of familial relations, in *Beloved* of a subjugated culture of slaves" (304).

loved" (104). There are no barriers in the Clearing, physical or emotional, to prevent them from embracing each other. The surrounding woods conceals them from the racial logics of Ohio's streets, and the cleared space offers them a restorative opening to the sky that they do not have inside their houses—houses that are, like 124, too crowded with grief. In the Clearing, Baby Suggs gives Black bodies the space to find the compassion they have lacked.

The second space of freedom I want to highlight is Sethe's house. 124 Bluestone Road is a complicated space because it does not start out as a space of freedom, but rather becomes one over the course of the novel. In contrast to the green space of the Clearing, the house is heavy with traumatic memory—haunted by the ghost of Sethe's daughter. After the barn on Sweet Home, the shed behind Sethe's house is the other most traumatic space for her. Sethe resists remembering that she murdered her daughter and hesitates to grieve that loss, which is why the ghost haunts her house for most of the novel. Rather than grieve, she "beat"s the past away to continue functioning.[31] The history of slavery remains "unresolved" after Paul D banishes the ghost because it is such an overwhelmingly traumatic history that it must be confronted in the flesh. Thus, Beloved appears to take up a new form of embodied haunting in 124. In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery F. Gordon suggests that the imagery of ghosts and hauntings best illustrates how the mercurial complexities of past oppressions retain a hold on the current moment. She argues that haunting occurs due to a victim's inability to articulate the various forces that

[31] As Richard Perez argues, Sethe's "house harbors several unresolved layers of signification: first, in relation to the death of Beloved; next, in negotiating the memory of slavery; and finally, in incorporating the past into a workable knowledge of the self that enables a livable present and more just future" (194).

have traumatized them. These forces are often invisible or only partially visible. They are complicated and difficult to pin down. The first step towards facing these multifaceted forces is to identify them and "call [power] by recognizable names" (3). Gordon argues that the ghost suggests "the complexities of its social relations"—its relationship to the person who has been traumatized and the forces inducing the trauma (179). A ghost "forces a something that must be done that structures the domain of the present and the prerogatives of the future" (179). The ghost signifies the complex social relations that have led to lingering trauma. Again, it is as shadowy as the ambiguous and multifarious forces of oppression. Furthermore, the ghost signifies that some kind of work needs to be done now and in the future in order to "reckon" with the past trauma. Morrison demonstrates how violence that occurred in 124 leads to haunting that Sethe must confront.

In *Beloved*, the fact that the ghost of Sethe's child haunts 124 is not quite enough to force Sethe to confront her death; the ghost must become flesh in order to demand that Sethe process her violent history.[32] As Beloved remains in the house, Denver realizes, "Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it" (295). Beloved requires Sethe to confront the murder of her child, as well as the history of slavery; and as she does so, Beloved slowly begins to take up more and more physical space in the house while Sethe shrinks away. Morrison writes, "Beloved…took the best of everything—first…and the more she took, the more Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she had suffered, been through, for her children… Sethe pleaded for

[32] Eric Meljac examines how Beloved serves as a bridge in the novel, emphasizing separateness and the desire to connect what is separate. Beloved symbolizes the distance between Sethe and her lost daughter and Sethe's desire for reunion.

forgiveness" (284). It is as if Beloved intends to devour Sethe in her efforts to take and consume. Denver realizes this relationship cannot continue if Sethe is to stay alive, and it is only after Beloved is finally driven out of the house that Sethe could begin to finally work through her trauma. In the end, Paul D tells Sethe, "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (322). The past could not be ignored. It needed to be seen, confronted, and, at last, grieved if they are to have a viable future. This final section of the novel suggests that once Beloved has been exorcised, Sethe may be able to finally process her trauma and fully grieve for her losses.

Ultimately, 124 becomes a space of freedom when Sethe's community extends care toward her by expelling Beloved. The novel parallels the moment when the women arrive at 124 to Baby Suggs' services in the Clearing. As the women being to sing, "Some had their eyes closed; others looked at the hot, cloudless sky…For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voice of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words" (308). As in the Clearing, it is significant that a community arrives to provide help for one of their members. It is only communal care that can confront and expel Beloved, the embodied history of violence. Joining together as a group in a collective space is the novel's central means of finding "the code, the sounds that broke the back of words"—finding the right pitch of resistance that could break the strangle hold of history.[33] Only when the community comes together, do they find the

[33] Jonquil Bailey draws on Morrison's "Playing in the Dark," to argue that *Beloved* reveals the problems of remaining entangled in white discourses that subjugate Black writers. Bailey contends that Baby Suggs' theology is too similar to white master narratives to empower her Black audience. In contrast, Ella's emphasis on action, rather than sermon, and sound, rather than words, more effectively liberates her audience.

"key" to open up the hold the ghost has over Sethe. This communal resistance is so profound that as "it broke over Sethe…she trembled like the baptized in its wash" (308). Baby Suggs' sermons in the Clearing, Stamp Paid's blackberries "that tasted like church," and this baptism by song all suggest that acts of care extended toward a community contain an element of religious transcendence. Spaces where a community comes together to care for each other become as holy as a church, and their resistance to the forces of systemic racial oppression become as profound as their resistance to forces of darkness.

In addition to 124, Denver's emerald closet serves as another space of haunted "freedom" in the novel's post-emancipation present that enables her to breathe more freely and heal from the stifling haunting of her house. In this green space, Denver finds a modicum of relief from the onslaughts of haunting and a hope that, in the future, the traumatic past might be ameliorated. She calls her private place her "emerald closet" (45). Morrison describes the "closet" as a "room" formed by the overhanging leaves of "five boxwood bushes," concealed by large oak trees in the woods behind her house (34). Within the dappled shade of her secret room, "veiled and protected by the live green walls, [Denver] felt ripe and clear, and salvation was as easy as a wish" (35). This space in nature offers Denver "a refuge" from her house that is so saturated with the baby ghost's anger and her brothers' fear of the ghost (35). The emerald closet also offers her a safe space in which she can ripen and mature. Even if it is just in play, the closet allows her the space to imagine that "salvation" from her house might be attainable. Here she feels like she could be safe from unremitting grief. Spaces of reprieve in this text, like the Clearing and this emerald closet, are more open verdant spaces, as opposed to bounded

domiciles haunted by the ghosts of slavery and oppression. Morrison allows her characters these spaces in nature to breathe, free from ghosts, in order to imagine a restored future and to engage in healing.

In Morrison's and Brooks' novels, spaces of freedom allow African Americans to breathe freely. Sharpe objects that although many Black writers have written about breath and fresh air as freedom, this longing has not changed the political "climate" in any significant way.[34] Sharpe says the demand for breath has not radically changed the "atmosphere" of racial injustice. African Americans, then and now, do not have access to fresh air due to the all-pervasive logics of racism. Demanding air does not change structures that aim to stifle and repress. However, I suggest that this does not mean the cry for breath is unimportant. Voicing protest and demanding radical change is ongoing work. Even as recently as May 25, 2020, Minneapolis police killed a Black man named George Floyd, whom they arrested on suspicion of forgery, in a manner unsettlingly similar to Eric Garner's murder six years earlier. According to multiple news sources, video footage shows an officer kneeling on Floyd's neck while he says, "I can't breathe" (Hauser, et. al). Floyd's death has led to global protests, which have already resulted in the Minneapolis City Council pledging to dismantle their current police system in favor of a system more oriented toward community support and racial justice (Andone, et. al). While this result does not solve the overarching problem of police brutality and systemic

[34] To this effect, she refers to the 2014 murder of Eric Garner by the police. An NYPD officer arrested him on suspicion of selling tax-free cigarettes and put him into a chokehold to restrain him. Garner begged repeatedly for air as he died of strangulation. Sharpe argues that although this case and Garner's words "I can't breathe" became a rallying cry for the Black Lives Matter Movement, Black men and women continue to die due to police brutality.

racism, it does suggest that protesting structural injustice rallies communities together—communities that can extend care and some modes of protection. Communities rallying together in the Clearing and at 124 Bluestone Road does not alter the dominant structures of racial oppression, but it does extend support. Struggling to breathe fresh air, and the communal support such struggle engenders, opens up habitable avenues within all-encompassing systems of subjugation. To this effect, characters in *Beloved* continually reimagine sites of trauma and extend care to each other in order to survive.

Spaces of slavery, escape, and freedom all illustrate how race affects African Americans' relationships to space. Spaces of slavery denote the ways in which the earth absorbs and retains the traumas of racial violence. They are the principal sites of trauma for characters in *Beloved*. Spaces of escape offer glimpses of hope that these structures of oppression could potentially be otherwise, but the hope is foreclosed by the novel's awareness of the need for radical, systemic change. Thirdly, spaces of freedom demonstrate how even the ostensibly "free" present remains haunted by the traumatic past, even as characters reclaim such spaces to model care and the possibility of a large-scale social working-through.

2. *Maud Martha*

In turning now to Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha,* I want to underscore the fact that racial injustice reverberates into this text in geographic ways. *Beloved* illustrates the spatial dimensions of trauma and its immediate effects—the ways in which African Americans who suffered slavery's violence continue to live within haunted spaces and how they create communal spaces to survive their trauma. *Maud Martha* reveals the extent to which, as Christina Sharpe would say, America remains "in the wake of

slavery" (130). This chapter will articulate how racism continues to cause systemic inequities that affect Black residents of mid-twentieth-century Chicago (and beyond). The slavery depicted in *Beloved* continues to affect the way African Americans relate to space a century later.

The mid-twentieth century real estate market reflects how the relevant afterlives of slavery for Brooks' novel affect African Americans spatially. Urban centers like Chicago contained racially segregated housing that specifically restricted Black renters to run down, tightly confined apartment buildings and houses. Robert C. Weaver's 1944 article in *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* argues that the influx of Black residents to northern states caused a lack of housing and overcrowding. White landlords limited the amount of available housing, which meant apartment buildings would overcrowd and wear out even more quickly than otherwise expected, leading to lower property values. He contends that a lessening of property value as well as the normal wear and tear on buildings was exacerbated by "an artificial restriction of the number of housing units" offered to Black renters, since white landlords believed Black tenants would lessen property values (183). According to Ta-Nehisi Coates' 2014 article, "The Case for Reparations," white landowners created restrictive covenants that precluded African Americans from buying or renting homes in white neighborhoods.[35] Coates also explains how The Federal Housing Administration instituted redlining, by which they classified neighborhoods inhabited by people of color as "D" neighborhoods, indicating

[35] Ta-Nehisi Coates writes, "From the 1930s through the 1960s, black people across the country were largely cut out of the legitimate home-mortgage market through means both legal and extralegal. Chicago whites employed every measure, from 'restrictive covenants' to bombings, to keep their neighborhoods segregated."

the neighborhood as economically unstable; while they labeled neighborhoods inhabited by white residents as "A" neighborhoods, which designated the neighborhood as more economically stable, making it next to impossible for Black residents to acquire a mortgage.[36] Furthermore, in *Family Properties*, Beryl Satter outlines how African Americans wishing to purchase a home could not acquire traditional mortgages because their only option was to "buy on contract," which meant that white men would purchase homes at market value, then sell those homes to Black buyers at higher prices the families could not pay. When these buyers missed their first payment, they were evicted and lost their down payments, as well as each of their monthly payments. Weaver, Coates, and Satter all reveal the spatial ways in which Black life was compressed into ever more unlivable places.[37] Racism in the real estate market affected where African Americans could live and what kind of home they could acquire.

Maud Martha offers an imaginative exploration of the social harm caused by restrictive covenants and redlining, providing ways of thinking through these problems, as well as imaginary "resolutions" to them. As with my analysis of *Beloved*, I will move from analyzing spaces of racist *restriction* into an analysis of spaces of "*freedom*." Throughout the novel, Maud's relationship to Black space is fraught. She nostalgically longs for her parents' more open house and yard while hating her cramped apartment. On

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[36] In *The Color of Law*, Richard Rothstein expounds upon how neighborhood segregation was not only caused by the choices of individual landowners, realtors, and renters, but that segregation is grounded in governmental policy and law. Rothstein explains how "federal, state, and local governments purposely created segregation in every metropolitan area of the nation…The government…was imposing segregation where it hadn't previously taken root" (13-14).

[37] For more on racism in real estate and architecture, see Adrienne Brown and Valerie Smith's *Race and Real Estate*, Adrienne Brown's *The Black Skyscraper*, and Jess Row's *White Flights*.

the one hand, Maud's Chicago kitchenette materializes her sense that Blackness is defined by its proximity to refuse and effluvium, while at the same time she also finds that the apartment offers her a space of reprieve from the daily onslaught of racism that she experiences in other public spaces.

Maud Martha Brown's family home serves as a space of restriction for the Black family insofar as it models the influence of racism in real estate. When Maud is young, the Brown family nearly loses their house after they miss a loan payment. While Maud's father negotiates a loan extension, the Brown family worries that they will very likely lose their home of fourteen years. What chiefly concerns Maud is that she will lose the ground that gives her family stability. Brooks writes, "What had been wanted was this always, this always to last, the talking softly on this porch, with the snake plant in the jardiniere in the southwest corner, and the obstinate slip from Aunt Eppie's magnificent Michigan fern at the left side of the friendly door" (28). The house and its growing things give Maud a sense of permanence and stability in an unstable world. In this scene, Brooks reveals that homeownership was stacked against Black residents. She writes, "There was little hope. The Home Owners' Loan was hard" (29). What Maud does not say, but becomes apparent upon a historical understanding of the racism pervasive in home rentals, is that it would be hard for her father to acquire an extension because he is poor and Black.[38] However, the Brown family proves to be as resilient as their

[38] In *Zami*, Audre Lords similarly writes about her family's experiences with racism in New York. Her family moved to Washington Heights, a neighborhood of New York, in the 1930s, just as many other Black families were moving to the area. Lorde writes, "Two weeks after we moved into the new apartment, our landlord hanged himself in the basement" because "he finally had to rent to Negroes" (59).

"obstinate" fern. Maud's father gets the loan extension, and they continue to carve out a living despite the systems that aim to uproot them.

Kitchenette apartments in the novel are also spaces of restriction, not just because they reveal the racism of the housing system, but also because they are literally tight and cramped. Brooks writes of the kitchenette apartment Maud rents with her husband Paul, "The two rooms were small…Only one of the burners worked, the housekeeper told them" (60). The room is both small and run down, but it is the only space Maud's husband can afford. The building's stairs are "narrow" and "complaining" (77). In the apartment, "There was a bathroom at the end of the hall, which they would have to share with four other families who lived on the floor" (61). Brooks emphasizes the tightness of this living space, where Black families are crammed on top of each other. In "Housing the Black Body," GerShun Avilez writes, "Along with the lack of a definite place of value, Black bodies do not have the freedom to move that space indicates" (146). Brooks draws attention to the fact that Black renters do not have space to move freely and they do not have fresh air to breathe. Maud describes the apartment buildings near her childhood home as filled with "cramp, inhibition, choke" (5). Tight confines and spatial restrictions characterize Black urban spaces, making it impossible for African Americans to escape suffocation.[39]

[39] Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods write about the devastation Hurricane Katrina dealt Black communities in a way that reflects the environmental racism of the mid-twentieth century. They argue, "The politics of citizenship, specifically the rights and protection of those residing in…the United States, are clearly not available in some communities, which suggests that the black and poor subjects are disposable precisely because they cannot easily move or escape" (3). In the same way that poverty necessitated that many Black neighborhoods had no access to escape from the ravages of Hurricane Katrina, so the segregated housing policies and the atmosphere of racism in the

The fact that Maud must share a bathroom with other tenants on her floor is significant because Maud hates her building's proximity to bodily fluids and trash. Maud detests the gross "grayness" of her restrictive building. Brooks writes,

> The sobbings, the frustrations, the small hates, the large and ugly hates, the little pushing-through love, the boredom, that came to her from behind those walls…via speech and scream and sigh—all these were gray. And the smells of various types of sweat, and of bathing and bodily functions…and of fresh or stale love-making…these were *gray*. There was a whole lot of grayness here (63-64).

Maud associates grayness with the petty, mundane, and ugly, all of which connote a life lacking in color, vivacity, and beauty. The apartment is grey rather than black because blackness, to Maud, is not a lack. Blackness, she describes as "cocoa" with varying amounts of cream (53). Thus, to be Black is to be rich in delicious color. But grey, in contrast, suggests a lack of color and a lack of life. All of the anger and frustration with life that accompanies poverty and close quarters seep through the grey kitchenette walls like a foul smell. Residents of this building live near to each other's bodily secretions in ways that make Maud uncomfortable. Brooks here portrays the building as stifling and dull, and those living within it as gasping for air, which connects to the seeking out of open, green spaces in *Beloved*, places where the oppressed can breathe more freely.

Black living spaces reveal the racism of the real estate market by showing how white landowners segregated Black residents into worse areas of town because they considered African Americans to be "dirty" and they believed Black renters detrimentally

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mid-twentieth century made escape from stifling living conditions impossible for many Black residents in city centers.

affected the neighborhood. Coates argues, "Black people were viewed as a contagion," and Maud understands that white people view her in this way. For instance, she anticipates that white people believe "colored people's houses necessarily had a certain heavy, unpleasant smell" (17). She expects that the white boy who visits her home will perceive her house as diseased. Even as a child, Maud is aware of the racial stereotyping that associates Blackness with stench and dirt. She recognizes this stereotype as false, yet even as she knows this fact, she still raises all her windows to avoid being perceived as dirty and poor. When she grows up and moves into a kitchenette with her husband, the novel consistently attends to Maud's disgust with the apartment. The room attracts roaches in spite of her daily scrubbings with "soap and Lysol" (63). No matter how hard Maud works, she cannot cleanse the kitchenette from its intimate association with dirt and foul odor. She does not want to model the white perceptions of her body and space as "dirty." She would prefer to present her body, her living space, and her life as "clean" and, therefore, as "good."

Spaces of racist restriction in the novel, like the movie theater, mark Black bodies as out of place in white spaces insofar as the movie theater juxtaposes the diametric distinction between African Americans and their living spaces as dirty and whiteness as cleanly. Brooks explains that Maud's outfit makes the white women at the theater "think, somehow, of close rooms, and wee, close lives" (76). Maud's cheap dress and her Blackness cause these women to associate her with a narrow room and, relatedly, a narrowly circumscribed life—her social mobility curtailed by her appearance. The movie theater is a hostile space in the sense that its inhabitants mark the Black woman as a body out of place within dominantly white space. In the movie theater, Maud thinks,

> You felt good sitting there, yes, good, and as if, when you left it, you would be going home to a sweet-smelling apartment with flowers on little gleaming tables; and wonderful silver on night-blue velvet, in chests; and crackly sheets; and lace…Instead of back to your kit'n't apt., with the garbage of your floor's families in a big can just outside your door, and the gray sound of little gray feet scratching away from it as you drag up those flights of narrow complaining stairs (77).

This scene reveals much of what Maud loves: sweet smells, flowers, clean domestic spaces, and luxurious textures and fabrics; and it also reveals what she hates: the tight confines of a small room, proximity to so many other people, and the immediacy of refuse and vermin. The movie theater reinforces the idea that the Black body does not belong in white spaces marked by cleanliness and order. Black bodies are those marked by dirt and disorder, the kinds of bodies that decrease property values in poor Chicago neighborhoods. Maud recognizes that the luxuries of a large, clean house are outside her economic orbit, but what she does not quite recognize is that this aesthetic she loves is a white aesthetic. She does not fully understand the means by which white supremacy has taken such a deep root in her as to colonize her very sense of artistic beauty.

Maud tries to change her restrictive, "ugly" space into something more beautiful and thus more habitable, but (as the movie theater suggests) her aesthetics are subject to white standards of beauty. Brooks writes, "Maud Martha loved it when her magazines said 'New York,' described 'good' objects there,…recalled fine talk, the bristling or the creamy or the tactfully shimmering ways of life… bits of dreamlike crystal…Her whole body become a hunger" (48). The "good" things Maud desires in this passage are

"creamy" white. They glisten with the kind of cleanliness that she only experiences in the white woman's house she cleans. On the one hand, Maud's desire for her space to be "nice" and "clean" is deeply sympathetic because racial discrimination has positioned racial minorities in tightly cramped, run-down buildings. On the other hand, this yearning for the spaces inhabited by white people also betrays that whiteness still dictates standards of worth. Maud does not recognize that her love of upper-class materials and spaces is a different mode of her husband's attraction to light skinned Black women.

The Foxy Cats Club similarly identifies Maud, a dark-skinned Black woman, as out of place among the light-skinned members of the club. As her husband, Paul, dances with a light-skinned woman, Maud reflects on the differences between the lighter woman's desirability and her own darker skin as less beautiful. As she does so, she imagines her interiority as if it is a garden with plants that extend outward, linking her to other people. Maud says of her relationship with her husband, "What I am inside, what is really me, he likes okay. But he keeps looking at my color, which is like a wall. He has to jump over it in order to meet and touch what I've got for him" (87). Paul's colorism erects a wall between them. This imagery of a wall surrounding a secret interiority conjures images of an intimate garden surrounded by an exterior hedge. The space of the club reinforces colorist valuations of her worth. Maud says she "could scream" due to her frustration with Paul (88). However, she restrains herself, musing, "But if the root was sour what business did she have up there hacking at a leaf?" (88). Trimming the leaf, the manifestation of Paul's colorism, would not save the plant, Maud's relationship with her husband. Pruning back her anger is Maud's means of staying alive within a repressive reality.

Maud must contain her anger in another space of racist restriction in the novel, the white woman's house she is employed to clean. In this space, the white woman treats Maud like an inferior. The first day she arrives, Mrs. Burns-Cooper tells her to "always use the back entrance" (158). Telling Maud to use a service entrance is a spatial means of asserting her superior class status over the Black woman. She also tells Maud, "I disapprove of mops. You can do a better job on your knees" (160). Instead of allowing Maud to use a kitchen tool to clean the floor, she compels her to clean the floor on her knees, literally forcing her to bow before the white woman. Furthermore, Mrs. Burns-Cooper assumes Maud's house is small due to her race. When Maud remarks that Mrs. Burns-Cooper's kitchen is "big." She says, "'I'll bet…you're comparing it to your *own* little kitchen.' And why do that, her light eyes laughed. Why talk of beautiful mountains and grains of alley sand in the same breath?" (160). Such indignities in spaces of racism chip away at Maud's humanity, and she struggles to find an outlet for her frustration. As Mary Helen Washington argues, "*Maud Martha* [is] a novel about bitterness, rage, self-hatred and the silence that results from suppressed anger" (249). Spaces of racism in this novel position African Americans as out of place and inferior while simultaneously demanding extraordinary grace and composure from them.

In contrast to these spaces where racism restricts Maud, the novel posits spaces of limited "freedom" for her. These provisional protected spaces provide her with the means to survive oppressive structures. One such space is her own interiority, which she imagines as a garden. In the opening pages of the novel, Maud reflects on the dandelions that grew in the backyard of her childhood home. Brooks writes, "She liked their demure prettiness second to their everydayness; for in that latter quality she thought she saw a

picture of herself, and it was comforting to find that what was common could also be a flower" (2). Brooks then explains that Maud's chief desire is to be loved, despite the fact that she is "common" like a dandelion. Dandelions cost nothing to grow, and they flourish even under the most inhospitable conditions. According to Columbia University's Species Summary Project,

> Dandelions can grow just about anywhere, namely fields, lawns, forests, gardens or even wastelands. They tend to grow more in areas laden with sunlight rather than under trees or shady spots. The plant can be found more commonly in disturbed areas such as an avalanche site, a burned forest and marshlands to name a few and anywhere from sea level to high alpine elevations.

Just as the dandelion can grow even in wastelands or in woodlands that have been devastated by natural disasters, Maud finds ways to flourish despite her racist environment. Even when white homeowners, real estate agents, and government officials have done everything in their power to preclude Black life from existing—where nothing could have been expected to grow—Maud defies such forces. This concept reverberates within Maud's family home in the snake plant and the fern from Michigan. Like dandelions, snake plants and ferns require little care. Even though they prefer full sun, snake plants can flourish even in shaded rooms. Similarly, Maud longs for a sunlight filled backyard, rather than tight apartments that block out the sky, but she grows like a weed through the cracks in cement covered ground. It encourages Maud to think that even though she is "common," poor, average-looking, and growing up in a hostile climate, she might still be as valued as a flower—that even what is ordinary, hated, or dismissed as an undesired weed, can be beautiful. Valuing herself in this way makes her

life a little bit more livable under these oppressive circumstances. Just as Sethe brings flowers into Mrs. Garner's kitchen to make that space of slavery more habitable, Maud's interest in surrounding herself with beautiful growing things helps make her situation more bearable. At the same time that Maud's aesthetics have been colonized by whiteness, she still uses an aesthetic sensibility to carve out livable space within a hostile environment in meaningful ways.

Like Maud's interior garden, her childhood backyard also functions as a liberatory space. Brooks positions the backyard against the confining apartments that surround Maud's childhood home. These tight apartments strangle the air from Black residents' lungs and restrain them from living a more fulfilling life. When Maud's husband Paul returns to the kitchenette stinking of tobacco, Maud reflects on "her parents' back yard. Fresh. Clean. Smokeless. In her childhood, a snowball bush had shone there, big above the dandelions. The snowballs had been big, healthy…so beautiful, so fat and startlingly white in the sunlight" (86-87). Maud's space of reprieve is, like the Clearing or the emerald closet in *Beloved*, a more open green space in which she can breathe fresh air and feel the sun on her face. African American poet Camille T. Dungy writes about the value of cultivating beautiful outdoor spaces in her essay "Dirt." When one of her neighbors tells her that she is wasting her time by planting seeds in her rented garden, she says, "I remember feeling angry that she didn't believe our block, our rented house, deserved such a demonstration of care. I know it might take a lot of work, I told her, but I want to grow something beautiful." For Dungy, growing a garden is an extension of care. Black living spaces, even rented spaces, deserve such attention and beauty. Wendell Berry argues that cultivating a garden can serve as an act of resistance against repressive

systems, and Alice Walker contends that growing flowering gardens was one of the few ways Black women could quietly express the artistry that was nearly beaten out of them by overwork, thereby resisting the oppressive structures that aimed to grind them down into submission. Like Walker's mother and the Black women she describes, Maud gravitates toward beautiful, open, green spaces as a survival strategy. Surrounding herself with flowers enables her to hope that she will endure, even in confining conditions.

Brooks uses plant metaphors to describe how part of creating a livable life under oppressive circumstances for Maud involves groundedness—or growing roots. She loves houses with backyards full of flowering plants and she loves traditions weighted with routine significance. At the Foxy Cats Ball, when she feels like something light "stirred" by her anxiety, she wants Paul to "be the tree she had a great need to lean against" (84). But he leaves her alone without anything to hold onto as she is blown about by feelings of insignificance. After the dance, she recognizes, "People must have something to lean on. But the love of a single person was not enough" (100). Because love can wane, it is undependable; but she thinks it must be human nature to contain "a seed, or root…of constancy, under all that system of change" (101). Thus, she believes it is better to lead a routine, quotidian life: "a marriage made up of Sunday papers and shoeless feet, baking powder biscuits, baby baths, and matinees and laundrymen, and potato plants in the kitchen window" (101). A good marriage is "plain" and "plateaulike" (101). These routines offer solidity to an unreliable world. Such routines are common but they are certain and secure. She wonders if, "the whole life of man [is] a dedication to this search for something to lean upon" (101). As such, it is telling that one of her routines is growing potato plants in her kitchen window. Even without a garden, she seeks out ways

to surround herself with growing things, particularly with root vegetables. Maud seeks out material, spatial methods of establishing a life with roots, a life not easily deracinated.

Maud's apartment building also serves as another "free" space that shields her from the onslaught of racism she experiences in the city. Even though it does not ameliorate her internalized self-hatred, as evidenced by the ways Maud associates its poor Black inhabitants with bodily filth, the kitchenette still enables her to access modes of humanity that are denied her in more public spaces monitored by whiteness. As GerShun Avilez argues, segregated housing in U.S. cities like Chicago led Black communities "to feel estranged from their domestic spaces" (135). Yet, Avilez continues, at the same time that African Americans experienced distance from their home spaces, they also considered their domestic spaces to be a "refuge from the racism and oppression" they experienced in the city (136). bell hooks extends this point by arguing that Black domesticity was often a space of quotidian, radical resistance. She argues, "Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty" (42). Black women continually performed this work of home making as a means of identity construction—a means of confirming Black humanity and self-possession in a culture that strove to objectify them and deprive them of their humanity.

In her kitchen, Maud finds the freedom to work through what it means to be human, and to be treated as such. For instance, when she cooks a chicken, she meditates on its personhood. She thinks, "The chicken was a sort of person, a respectable individual, with its own kind of dignity. The difference was in the knowing. What was unreal to you, you could deal with violently. If chickens were ever to be safe, people

would have to live with them, and know them, see them loving their children, finishing the evening meal, arranging jealousy" (153). Much like Morrison's meditation on the bluefern spore, Brooks' passage also contemplates what it would take to overcome racism in the future. It is easy for people to treat racial others with cruelty and violence when they have not experienced the fullness of their personhood, their individuality, by living near them. Understanding the other begins with this work of living in close proximity to the racial other.[40] Subjugation and oppression operate in spatial ways. When one does not live closely with the other, it becomes more difficult understand the other's selfhood. In *Beloved,* one must make the effort to notice small precarious lives, and in Brooks' text, in order to understand the other, people must dwell in all their disgust for the other's body—its stickiness and difference. But as we see by Maud's ultimate eagerness to devour the chicken, ("When the animal was ready for the oven Maud Martha smacked her lips at the thought of her meal,") even Maud herself cannot fully empathize with the chicken. Ultimately, all subjects are deeply colonized by white supremacy's fear of the other, to the extent that it is almost impossible to break free from it.

In addition to acting as a space in which Maud can conceptualize an alternative to white supremacy, the kitchenette apartment illustrates what alternatives to the dominant social order might look like. She reimagines the space, transforming it from a single, constricted unit, into a connecting carapace with multiple lives and experiences

[40] In addition to the racial other, this passage could also indicate the gendered other. In reference to this passage in *Maud Martha,* Valerie Frazier argues, "Only when men can empathize with the plight of women will they discontinue the destruction of women's existential selves as perpetuated through the domestication of females" (139). Frazier points out that the subjugation of women through domestication can only be overcome in spatial ways.

connected by the apartment building. These intersecting lives create alternatives to oppression. For example, Marie and Oberto are one of the happy couples in the apartment. Brooks describes Oberto as a cheerful man who adores his wife in spite of what Maud calls her "domestic sins." Maud notes, "Marie dusted and swept infrequently…Her meals were generally underdone or burned. She sent the laundry out every week…Her own clothes, however, she ironed with regularity and care. Such domestic sins were shocking" (109). By failing to perform the domestic tasks expected of a wife, Marie does not conform to traditional femininity. She is not simply slovenly, however, because she will tend to her own clothes and meals with care; she tends to her own needs rather than the "master" of the house's needs, and Oberto loves her regardless. This communal space offers Maud a glimpse of what an alternative to heterosexual domination might look like. The Whitestripes similarly illustrate a fulfilling relationship, unfettered by colorism or domination. Brooks writes, "The Whitestripes were the happiest couple Maud Martha had ever met. They were soft-spoken, kind to each other, were worried about each other…Often, visiting them, you were embarrassed, because it was obvious that you were interrupting the progress of a truly great love" (120). Maud's life has been plagued by the sense that she is not beautiful enough, not fair enough, to be loved. Social structures reinforce the notion that Black people belong in cramped, dirty spaces, and that they do not belong in clean, more open spaces. This couple demonstrates to Maud that it is possible to be liberated from the dominant conception that Blackness is not beautiful, and even a dark-skinned girl could find love. Even though such fulfillment is not possible for Maud with Paul because he is "no 'Coopie' Whitestripe" (121), and even though structural racism and oppression is not overcomable for African Americans

at this point in time, these glimpses of an alternative offer us visions of what transformation and healing is possible in the future. Maud does find ways to make livable such unlivable spaces.

3. Conclusion

Beloved and *Maud Martha* both illustrate the spatial dimensions of oppression and survival. The spaces of Black life demonstrate how the past haunts the present in ways that not only make it difficult for former slaves to grieve the traumas of slavery, but that make it difficult to lead a livable life. Christina Sharpe argues that, despite dominant beliefs to the contrary, America continues to live "in the wake of slavery" (130). Slavery established racial inequities that continue to have tangible, geographic effects. Ta-Nehisi Coates elaborates on this point when he argues for reparations by outlining the persistent effects of racism in the housing industry. African Americans have continually been uprooted from homeownership and full participation in citizenship. Neither Sethe nor Maud Martha own their homes. Edward Bodwin contemplates selling 124 out from under Sethe, even before she threatens his life when she mistakes him for Schoolteacher. African Americans have only a shadowy connection to the land and to full citizenship. Sethe's and Maud's only means of resistance is to make these rootless spaces habitable by reimagining the houses and apartments haunted by racism, and by seeking out more open, fresh green spaces in which they can breathe. Finding room to breathe in an oppressive climate does not change that atmosphere, but it does keep Black women alive in an environment that actively seeks to crush them.

Chapter 4

Kitchens, Living Rooms, and Lawns:

Spaces of Hybridity in Asian American Hybridity

While earlier chapters of this dissertation focused on gender and sexuality, this chapter extends my previous chapter's argument that white supremacy pressures racial minorities into tighter spaces, divesting them of living spaces, and minorities must find ways to make those hostile spaces livable. This chapter concerns how Asian Americans construct hybrid identities in order to survive the disorientation of immigrating to predominantly white America.

In both Maxine Hong Kingston's 1976 memoir *The Woman Warrior* and Jhumpa Lahiri's 1999 short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*, Asian American characters struggle to construct an identity predicated on both their attachments to their Asian heritage and traditions as well as their engagement with American culture. Western racial power dynamics affect which bodies can successfully orient themselves to their environment and which bodies get disoriented because they are made to feel so out of place in public space. Racial power affects which bodies can feel at home in chiefly white spaces and which bodies do not feel at home. Asian Americans construct hybrid identities out of the violent racism that causes them such disorientation. I will argue in this chapter that the process of creating a hybrid Asian American self is born out of America's violent subjugation of Asian immigrants and that this conflict gets worked out spatially.

In order to support my argument that Kingston's and Lahiri's stories imagine how creating a hybrid Asian American identity serves as a survival strategy, I turn to Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts*. Lowe argues that Asian immigrants generate a complex, dual identity through the tactical survival strategies they employ to combat racial violence. Racist perceptions of Asians "as a 'yellow peril' threatening to displace white European immigrants" have divided and dispersed Asian immigrants and their descendants (4). Becoming Asian and American, then, entails creating a dual identity out of this clash between cultures. Lowe says, "Hybridization is not the 'free' oscillation between or among chosen identities. It is the uneven process through which immigrant communities encounter the violences of the U.S. state, and the capital imperatives served by the United States and by the Asian states from which they come, and the process through which they survive those violences by living, inventing, and reproducing different cultural alternatives" (82). Asian Americans cannot easily shift between Asian and American cultural identities. Developing a hybrid identity entails confronting the discrimination of a dominantly white culture, finding ways to survive that violence, and creating a dual Asian and American self out of that conflict. This chapter builds off Lowe's argument, that hybridity is a product of racial violence, in order to identify those racial violences that Asian Americans encounter. I argue that the forces that compel Asian characters in these stories to construct a hybrid identity revolve around the complex combination of patriarchal power over Asian women, white beauty standards, the racist alienation of Asian Americans, American educational praxis, and the pressure on Asian Americans to be a model minority. In this chapter I will demonstrate how Kingston's and Lahiri's

characters feel torn between Asian and American spaces and how hybrid identity is born from that struggle.

For much of American history, hybridity has been reviled by white America. The work of creating a hybrid identity contradicts white America's history with eugenics and anti-miscegenation. In his book *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier,* David Palumbo-Liu explains the fears of miscegenation and interbreeding that proliferated in the 1920s and 30s. He explains that vice president "Calvin Coolidge's essay 'Whose Country Is This?' published fittingly enough in that primer for managing domestic space, *Good Housekeeping*, in February 1921…maintained the integrity of American space by carefully distinguishing between the 'right kind' of immigration and the wrong kind, between that which was needed to meet the national interests and that which would only destroy the State" (26). Palumbo-Liu explains that white Americans believed hybridity would destroy the nation because they thought Asian men tended to marry "near-moron white girls" and that their union would bear intellectually inferior children who would become a "social burden" (34). In this way, racial mixing was not only undesirable, but deeply feared. Racial hybrids would depress the American economy, sully the purity of the white race, and destroy the neatly kept "house" of America by allowing foreign threats into white domestic space.[41] Kingston's and Lahiri's pursuit of hybridity is anti-racist work that flouts deeply ingrained American conventions.

[41] Anne Anlin Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race* argues that racial minorities were permissible in America as long as they remained subjugated to dominant white America. Cheng says, "Racialization in America may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a dominant, standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others" (10). Since minorities were othered in order to secure white dominance, racial hybrids threatened the racial hierarchy.

Of course, Chinese and Indian immigrants experienced America differently due to their unique histories and their distinct experiences of racism. In her history of Asian immigration to the United States, Erika Lee explains that, in the early twentieth century, Chinese men immigrated in much greater numbers than women and children, which means that they felt fragmented and split across the ocean (68). Late nineteenth-century courts limited the kinds of Chinese immigrants who could become citizens (and the number of citizens the U.S. permitted), which prevented women and children from emigrating with their husbands who would often work for years in America before they could send for their families (68). Feeling separated from family was not unique to Chinese immigrants, but they experienced this separation on a massive scale compared to other Asians emigrating to America. This history contributes to Kingston's portrayal of how state power compels her Chinese immigrants (Brave Orchid and later her sister Moon Orchid) to feel torn between China and America.

The specificities of gendered power dynamics affect these characters' experience of space. Lee argues that Asian immigrant women "lived circumscribed lives. They often spoke no English and were confined to the enclosed world of their families and communities by their husbands and fathers and by the patriarchal values in both Chinese and American societies" (79). I argue that, in *The Woman Warrior*, some of Kingston's women retreat into their enclosures as a response to the acute disorientation of being divided between spaces, as well as experiencing the dual forces of racism and sexist violence in public space, in spite of remaining subjugated to patriarchal control at home. Characters like Moon Orchid build enclosures to protect themselves from the threatening

outside world. But other characters, like the narrator, resist this impulse to retreat into their own familial space.

The narrator mistakenly believes her mother wants to build such walls around her family by instilling China in her American space. She thinks that part of this work involves silencing her because Brave Orchid slit the frenum of her tongue when she was born. She believes Brave Orchid cut her tongue in order to turn her into a model Chinese daughter. In response, the narrator gravitates toward American culture. She wants to illuminate the history her family has concealed from her—to straighten out the histories that her family has only given to her in circuitous, distorted forms. At the same time, she simultaneously wants to be a good Chinese girl. Ultimately, however, Brave Orchid's daughter realizes that she was wrong about her mother. Brave Orchid was trying to offer her daughter the fluency to speak in multiple languages and thus create a hybrid identity. The narrator finds that to be Asian American means inhabiting the space in between the here and the not here. It means creating a dual identity, and a cross-cultural language, out of the oppressor's space and tongue. In this way, Kingston's memoir knows that in order to survive the oppressor's violence, the subjugated must adopt the oppressor's language, customs, and spaces in order to generate a new self—a successfully oriented, hybrid self.

I use the terminology of orientation in order to describe how some bodies feel at home in America, while other bodies feel out of place. As in my other chapters, I draw on Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* to ground these terms. Ahmed explicitly links the process of becoming oriented with the process of migration. She argues that "we learn what home means, or how we occupy space at home and as home, when we leave home" (9). In other words, we only learn which places our bodies move and extend in

comfortably when we leave those places and experience discomfort. We learn our place when we feel out of place. Therefore, "migration" is a form "of disorientation and reorientation" (9). She continues, "The disorientation of the sense of home, as the 'out of place' or 'out of line' effect of unsettling arrivals, involves what we would call a migrant orientation. This orientation might be described as the lived experience of facing at least two directions: toward a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not yet home" (10). This is precisely the position in which Kingston's and Lahiri's characters find themselves. They all experience the disorientation of migration—of facing multiple directions at the same time. They are pulled between the space they have left behind and the space they have yet to transform into a home. I would add to this argument that what it would mean for a migrant to become oriented to their environment (as Kingston in particular demonstrates) would be for them to confront the violent meeting of these two spaces and create an entirely new identity out of this duality—an identity that is both Asian and American.

Indians emigrating to America similarly experienced this disorientation and discomfort in their new environments, but South Asians experienced a heightened sense of isolation in the United States. In contrast to Chinese immigrants who relocated in such numbers that they were able to form communities like Chinatown in San Francisco, South Asians migrated in significantly fewer numbers during the early twentieth century (Lee 151). Like the early Chinese settlers, South Asian immigrants were also primarily male, either single men or men who left families back in India or Pakistan. Being fewer in number meant they were not able to congregate in immigrant communities, which contributed to their greater sense of alienation in America. Although South Asians were

emigrating in much greater numbers by the time Lahiri writes *Interpreter of Maladies*, this distinct history explains her emphasis on the intense isolation her Indian immigrants still experience in American cities.

Lee also explains that Indians in the U.S. had an acute awareness of their unequal social condition despite being British subjects who should have been given all the rights of such status. Instead, they feel the full brunt of anti-Asian racism. South Asians experienced unique vitriol in the early and mid-twentieth century since many supported Indian independence, which white Americans perceived as a dangerously violent ideology (165). Lee writes, white America considered South Asians "the least assimilable of all the Asian immigrants" (163). This sense that Indians in America were considered so undesirable informs Lahiri's depiction of her Indian Americans because all of her characters recognize that their racial difference marks them as radically out of place in chiefly white space. In this chapter, I will chart how her characters either resist assimilation to the social forces that threaten their bodies, as Mrs. Sen does, how they feel acute disorientation as a body out of place and struggle to figure out how to construct a hybrid identity in between Indian and American space, as Lilia does in "Mr. Pirzada Comes to Dine," or how they work extraordinarily hard (at the expense of their own happiness) to meet all the cultural expectations of Indian and American success, as Sanjeev does in "This Blessed House."

As I have intimated, this identity construction happens within distinct spaces in both *The Woman Warrior* and *Interpreter of Maladies* because experiences of power shape experiences of space. Primarily, I will focus on how racial and cultural identity is formed within domestic spaces like living rooms, kitchens, schools, cars, and other

quotidian places. I dwell on these spaces because they are where the most fundamental identity formations happen in these texts, and also because the home is a principal metaphor for national belonging. Sau-ling Wong expounds on Erika Lee's earlier point that Asian Americans are the "unassimilable" immigrant. Wong argues that white America pushes them to the margins to such an extent that Asian Americans feel like "permanent houseguests in the house of America" (6). The mundane practices of homemaking are bound up with political questions about racial belonging and citizenship.

1. *The Woman Warrior*

I will begin with Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* because the question of how an Asian American can construct a hybrid identity is central to this memoir. Kingston begins her narrative with the story of her disgraced aunt because it maps out how Chinese Americans struggle to create hybrid identities: a new American life that is also shaped by Chinese history and culture. Kingston's narrator says,

> Whenever she had to warn us about life, my mother told stories that ran like this one, a story to grow up on. She tested our strength to establish realities. Those in the emigrant generations who could not reassert brute survival died young and far from home. Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America (5).

Here, the narrator describes her Chinese heritage as an ephemeral framework that she must map onto her American realities. Her Chinese heritage, the stories and traditions her mother teaches her and surrounds her with when she is young, is something she cannot quite see. It is narrative, myth, and ritual. Despite the elusiveness of this history, it has

material effects. Chinese narratives that immigrants carry with them to America affect their material acculturation. Her ability to survive hinges on this ability to live between these two histories and construct a dual identity.

Throughout her aunt's story, the narrator learns that the process of constructing hybridity involves disorientation because hybridity entails being pulled by conflicting desires, histories, and cultural practices. She wants to tell her aunt's story, to give history a "concrete" shape. But in telling her familial stories, she learns that she must learn to be more comfortable with the disorientation of hybrid experience.

The narrator's impulse to learn her aunt's story conflicts with her relatives' insistence on concealing history in order to survive in white America. Kingston writes,

> The emigrants confused the gods by diverting their curses, misleading them with crooked streets and false names. They must try to confuse their offspring as well, who, I suppose, threaten them in similar ways—always trying to get things straight, always trying to name the unspeakable. The Chinese I know hide their names; sojourners take new names when their lives change and guard their real names with silence (5).

It is doubly difficult for the narrator to construct the straight line of her own history due to the disorientation of immigrant experience coupled with the ways her parents confounded such endeavors. These immigrants did not want to be found. Sara Ahmed also discusses this straightening out of histories, this flattening out of deviations into what is "normal" and what is "given." She argues that it is a colonial and patriarchal impulse to straighten out the deviant. Since bodies extend the spaces they inhabit, whiteness, as the dominant power, makes itself the norm against which all other bodies are seen as

aberrant. She says, "Whiteness…is assumed to be given. The effect of this 'around whiteness' is the institutionalization of a certain 'likeness,' which makes nonwhite bodies uncomfortable and feel exposed, visible, and different when they take up this space" (133). In a contradictory way, this is exactly why Kingston's parents enact these zig-zagging strategies, while she would rather straighten out what they have attempted to confuse. Brave Orchid attempts to conceal herself and her family from discovery with silence and change. Keeping her history in flux should protect her from forces that try to pin her down. In contrast, her daughter feels all the discomfort of being a foreigner with strange ways. She hates feeling like a body out of place. Unlike her mother, she believes that straightening out her history would make her less alien, would make her less "exposed" and less "different." She thinks that articulating her past might help her find where she belongs.

However, the narrator's desire to learn her family's history and tell her aunt's story opposes her knowledge that silence protects Asian Americans, since immigrants who reveal too much could be deported. For instance, Kingston recalls the moment her mother came to America. When the immigration officer asks her when her husband cut his hair, a fellow Chinese man motions for Brave Orchid to keep silent, lest she implicate her husband in a political controversy (96). Such experiences teach Brave Orchid that it is vital to maintain silence in front of "white ghosts," since they can use her words against her, and she teaches her daughter to maintain this same reticence. Kingston laments the silence immigration forced on her. She writes, "There were secrets never to be said in front of the ghosts, immigrations secrets whose telling could get us sent back to China"

(183). Straightening out the past could lead to the material consequences of suspicion: deportation, a return to a place that may be dangerous or may no longer be home.

Creating comfortable homeplaces has historically been a fraught process for Asian Americans. Arif Dirlik argues, "Asians were rendered into a racial and cultural formation in their construal as 'Asians,' 'Orientals,' or 'mongolians' by the hegemonic discourse. This discourse also rendered Asians into permanent foreigners, culturally and even genetically incapable of becoming 'real' Americans, an attitude that would serve as justification for their exclusion from 1882 through World War II" (32). These historical biases make it difficult for Asian Americans to create habitable spaces in America. Sau-ling Wong similarly argues that the American court system's tendencies to contort the meanings of whiteness and non-whiteness in order to exclude Asians from American citizenship "suggest that Asian Americans have historically functioned as a peculiar kind of Other (among other Others) in the symbolic economy of America" (5). Because their culture is so foreign to white Americans and their political orientations so suspect, Asians are the "unassimilable alien" in America (6). If America is a house, then it is important to analyze who can comfortably call this house their home, and whose bodies do not exist so comfortably.

In *The Woman Warrior*, the narrator wants to figure out where she belongs in America by learning the reality of her family's history, but this drive to concretize her familial history is an American, assimilative project. She says,

> I had to leave home in order to see the world logically, logic the new way of seeing. I learned to think that mysteries are for explanation. I enjoy the simplicity. Concrete pours out of my mouth to cover the forests with freeways and sidewalks.

> Give me plastics, periodical tables, t.v. dinners with vegetables no more complex than peas mixed with diced carrots. Shine floodlights into dark corners: no ghosts (204).

She grows up wanting to speak in hard, solid realities, rather than elusive myth and imagination. She has to leave her home, where truth and myth are too much blended together. Concrete offers her a paved road on which she can walk with sure footing. She covers the forests with concrete, since the forests are the spaces of myth, of twisting pathways where a traveler could easily loose her way. She also wants plastics, scientific reasoning, and American staple foods, eaten in American places (in front of the tv). These are solid, tangible, factual, and they are American. They are not haunted by the ghost of another space, and they are not themselves ghostly (as her mother calls America and Americans). She wants no darkness, no confusion, no ghosts, no elusive intangibility, and no hauntings. But in writing this book, she finds herself more entangled than ever in mercurial hybridity. Ultimately, she finds that she must learn to be more comfortable with ambiguity.

In turning now to the nameless aunt's story, I will attend to one of the first lessons the narrator learns from her aunt's story, which is that Chinese women cannot have independent lives apart from their communities. This lesson is disorienting for her because it contradicts ideologies she is learning in America. "No Name Woman" follows the disgrace of the narrator's aunt. She remains an unnamed figure because the villagers discover she has become pregnant long after her husband has left China, and her family maintains her disgrace after her death. When the nameless woman comes to full term, the villagers wreck her house, killing all her livestock, destroying her stored food, and

ripping apart her clothes. Afterwards, the woman gives birth in the pigsty and then and drowns herself and her newborn in a well. Several spaces demand attention in this narrative, but the first I will focus on is the house itself. There is a reason why the villagers "show [the narrator's] aunt and her lover-in-hiding a broken house" (13). The villagers enact, on a smaller scale, the disaster they believe this adulterer has already caused the community. The no-name aunt has broken the peace and safety of the village. Kingston writes, "One human being flaring up into violence could open up a black hole, a maelstrom that pulled in the sky" (12). One individual "acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them" could cause the whole village to collapse in on itself as if it were sucked into a whirlpool (13). Houses are the spaces of familial life and maternal domesticity, which means that the nameless woman's adultery has broken a family, and even jeopardized the community's future. The woman's role of keeping the family together is particularly important in this rural Chinese village because each family cares for its elderly and leaves food for ancestral spirits. Breaking a family breaks this direct line of care. Villagers destroy the no-name woman's house to show her how she has shattered their safety. The fact that Chinese women cannot have lives apart from their communities conflicts with what the narrator is learning in America about individualism, about the centrality of having an autonomous life apart from one's community or even one's family. By telling her aunt's story, the narrator is finding a divergence of values.

Gender, of course, inflects the lessons the narrator is learning from her aunt's story because Chinese women have distinct roles to play in their houses and communities. They are uniquely bound to them. Villagers punish the narrator's aunt in part because she jeopardized the safety of the village, and in part because she broke so

many strictures for female behavior. Her neighbors blame her for adultery, despite the fact that she was most likely raped. Kingston writes, “Women in the old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil” (6). But it is not only that the nameless woman had an affair, it is that she had an affair and a child in “starvation time” (6). The problem is that she betrayed her community by *indulging* in sex and birth. “Adultery, perhaps only a mistake during good times, became a crime when the village needed food” (13). It is significant that the villagers shatter her house as a result of her “extravagance”: consuming for herself, in excess, while the community starves (6). Her house must be literally destroyed because she has symbolically demolished the notion this community has of home, and she has deviated from what it looks like to be a good Chinese woman. Chinese husbands and fathers who leave for America can be loose with rules or “traditional ways,” because “the heavy, deep-rooted women were to maintain the past against the flood, safe for returning” (8). Wives and daughters are supposed to maintain the house and ground the social group against collapse, preserving their cultural way of life while the men are far from home. They are supposed to put communal well-being above their own safety or happiness. Kingston writes, “The villagers punished her for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them” (13). Having an affair suggests to the villagers that the no-name woman was attempting to carve out a life for herself, independent of the group. It suggests that she was not considering the harm she could cause the village by building an independent life, a life that did not maintain tradition and proper feminine behavior. “Indulging” in sex and birth, deviating from good Chinese womanhood, is a divergence that the village cannot stomach.

From this story, the narrator finds that her female relatives construct enclosures to protect themselves from the outside world, which contradicts her impulse to open up and assimilate rather than close herself off. As the no-name aunt gives birth, "She turned on her back, lay on the ground. The black well of sky and stars went out and out and out forever; her body and her complexity seemed to disappear…She was one of the stars, a bright dot in blackness, without home, without a companion, in eternal cold and silence. An agoraphobia rose in her… she would not be able to contain it" (14). Out in the darkness, she feels too exposed to the sky. Kingston says she felt, "flayed, unprotected against space" (14). To flay a body is to beat or whip it until the skin peels away from the muscle. The nameless woman feels as though she has been stripped apart and peeled open in the face of a callous void. She loses her "complexity," her particularity stripped away, leaving her a lonely point of light in an unfriendly sky. Too much open space causes her to feel agoraphobic, which is to say that it causes her to panic and seek out a space that might offer protection. Agoraphobia resurfaces in Moon Orchid's need to protect herself from the outside world, which means that this impulse to protect the self from external violence echoes throughout the narrator's matrilineal line. Due to this agoraphobic instinct, the no-name aunt walks to the pigsty because women used to give birth there to divert malicious spirits who might steal the infant, and as she gives birth she felt "good to have a fence enclosing her" (14). Since her house no longer protects her, she has been forced to locate a makeshift domestic enclosure; but even the pigsty does not offer lasting protection for the new mother. She knows that soon her neighbors will find her. Thus, her story ends in the bottom of the well. The narrator of this story has an

impulse to straighten out the confused lines of this narrative (to name her nameless aunt), but telling this story does not straighten out the confusion of her own hybrid identity.

Telling her aunt's story creates more ambiguity for the narrator than she expected. The narrator gives this story shape because she is looking to her aunt for "ancestral help." She wants to understand herself and her place in the world in between Chinese histories and American realities. But in straightening out this story, she becomes even more disoriented. She writes, "My aunt haunts me—her ghost drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper to her, though not origamied into houses and clothes. I do not think she always means me well. I am telling on her, and she was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water" (16). The fact that this story haunts her means it ruptures her present. While she hoped that telling this story might make her place in life more clear, it has only made it more murky. Instead of vindicating her, telling this story prevents her aunt from lingering unnoticed in the water or wreaking ghostly vengeance on her enemies. Like Brave Orchid, the no name woman herself does not want this story told. The narrator does not give her clothes or housing, instead she exposes her. Telling this story is both a feminist reclaiming of her aunt's narrative, identifying her as a rape victim rather than the whore her village claims she is, and telling the story is also a betrayal of her aunt's desire to remain anonymous. Straightening out the confused tangles of her history does not help the narrator orient herself as much as she wanted.

Her aunt's story teaches the narrator that it is terrifying to be a woman, and particularly an Asian American woman, which makes her position in the world more ambiguous and out of her control. She imagines that her aunt most likely had to interact

with her rapist on a daily basis. Kingston writes, “She might have separated the rapes from the rest of living if only she did not have to buy her oil from him or gather wood in the same forest. I want her fear to have lasted just as long as rape lasted so that the fear could have been contained” (7). She wishes that her aunt did not have to continually merge her life with her rapist’s so that she might be able to compartmentalize her dread. If she did not have to meet him every day, then she might have been able to close herself off to the fear and thus be able to survive. However, “women at sex hazarded birth and hence lifetimes. The fear did not stop but permeated everywhere” (7). Moving in the world as a woman puts the body at risk of sexual violence; and for a woman, sexual trauma does not end with the assault, but can result in a child as a constant physical reminder of the traumatic experience. It is significant that the narrator uses more metaphors of containment to illustrate her aunt’s fear. The narrator hopes her aunt was able to contain her terror, to direct its flow to just the single moment of rape, but she knows it was impossible for her to do so within her social context. This imagery parallels the way she imagines her aunt’s fear as the villagers raid her house and she wanders out into open space. There too her terror grew too wide to be managed, so she seeks a more fortified space in order to control her fear.

Learning about these risks of sexual violence for Asian women makes the narrator feel even less in control of her body than she previously felt. Kingston writes, “As if it came from an atavism deeper than fear, I used to add ‘brother’ silently to boy’s names. It hexed the boys, who would or would not ask me to dance, and made them less scary” (12). She eludes intimacy with boys due to these narratives that taught her how dangerous it is to be sexual as a woman. She does not allow them to come close because she does

not know how to "control" her sexuality (12). Of course, race compounds this confusion because not only does the narrator have to moderate her expression of sexuality, but she wants to only attract Chinese boys. She says, "If I made myself American-pretty so that the five or six Chinese boys in the class fell in love with me, everyone else…would too" (12). Becoming "American-pretty" might attract too much unwelcome attention and potential violence from white boys, boys whom she cannot call "brothers" and thus de-escalate their advances. She learns that her body is a space that must be strictly regimented. Her aunt's story teaches her that the body, its appeal, and its feelings need to be controlled lest they spill out into the world and invite violence. In this way, the narrator struggles to negotiate the "invisible" narrative world from China onto her "solid" surroundings as a child in America. She is not quite sure how to protect herself from the open stares of too many eyes, all of which are looking for her to show signs of wayward sexuality.

The narrator looks to her aunt's story to find her place as a Chinese girl in America, but learning Chinese history serves to disorient her rather than orient her. The unnamed woman represents what has been left behind in China. She is a memory that Brave Orchid and her husband would rather forget, just as they conceal much of their histories and rituals with silence in order to divert curses. But the ghost cannot be left in the past. Brave Orchid is still compelled to tell her story as a warning for her daughter. She tells her, "Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us" (5). By virtue of being a Chinese woman, the narrator inherits this story. It is a story she has been compelled to research, to question, and ultimately to imagine in an effort to understand her place in between the "solid" realities

of America and the elusive Chinese narratives she is only half told. Narratives that have been half-left behind disorient her in a place she is trying to make habitable.

Moon Orchid's story in "At the Western Palace," also teaches the narrator how disorienting it is to create a hybrid identity. Moon Orchid's journey to America complicates the "no name" woman's story by revealing that Chinese women build enclosures to protect themselves because it is so difficult for them to make America livable. Brave Orchid convinces her sister to move from China to California and re-join her husband and daughter. It is clear from the start that Brave Orchid's sister is too delicate for the hard labor expected of immigrants in America. She cannot seem to acquire the basic skills necessary to make herself useful to Brave Orchid in the laundry, so Brave Orchid adjusts her expectations, but she still demands that Moon Orchid take her rightful place as First Wife to her husband, now a successful neurosurgeon with a second wife and three children. The sisters' conversation with Moon Orchid's husband makes it clear how out of place Moon Orchid is in California and how far afield Brave Orchid's expectations of his conduct were. She expects him to act like a Chinese husband, and she expects Moon Orchid to act like a Chinese First Wife, even in America. She tells Moon Orchid's husband, "I told [Moon Orchid] how welcome she would be, how her family would welcome her, how her husband would welcome her. I did what you, the husband, had time to do in these last thirty years" (152). Brave Orchid believes the doctor will be shamed into acting like a proper Chinese husband, but instead he acts like an American, telling her that here a man can have only one wife. He shames Moon Orchid for her age and her lack of fluency in English. He tells Brave Orchid, "'Look at her. She'd never fit into an American household. I have important American guests who

come inside my house to eat.' He turned to Moon Orchid, 'You can't talk to them. You can barely talk to me'" (153). The doctor's concerns here are centrally about his economic and social capital. He will not jeopardize his business for an older woman who could not entertain his guests. Brave and Moon Orchid open themselves up to his ridicule for not acting sufficiently American. Moon Orchid cannot figure out how to make herself sufficiently American for her husband's approval, while also adhering to Chinese customs to fulfill her sister's expectations. She is caught between these two positions, throwing her into an embarrassed silence during this confrontation. She feels the full force of her husband's rejection and it sends her spiraling into acute disorientation.

When Moon Orchid's husband rejects her, she falls into increasing disorientation, which causes her to construct enclosures to protect herself from a world she finds hostile. After Moon Orchid confronts her husband, she lives with her daughter in Los Angeles, and she steadily grows paranoid. Kingston suggests that Moon Orchid is beginning to suffer from dementia. Her daughter writes Brave Orchid, explaining, "Moon Orchid said that she had overheard Mexican ghosts plotting on her life. She had been creeping along the baseboards and peeping out windows" (155). Moon Orchid turns her daughter's house into a fortress to protect herself from imagined threats. She later does the same thing to Brave Orchid's house. Kingston says, "Each day Moon Orchid slipped further away. She said that the Mexicans had traced her to this house. That was the day she shut the drapes and blinds and locked the doors. She sidled along the walls to peep outside" (157). This impulse to conceal herself inside closed spaces is reminiscent of the narrator's drowned aunt. Both women were uprooted from their homes, and both experience hostility from people they trusted to keep them safe. Houses should be spaces of peace

where the body can spread itself out comfortably. Instead, Moon Orchid turns the house into a barrier between herself and the outside.[42]

Moon Orchid's story fleshes out the terror of becoming hybrid, since traveling too far away can dislodge spirit from body. When Moon Orchid moves back in with her sister, Brave Orchid realizes that her sister's spirit has wandered too far. Kingston writes, "Tears fell from Brave Orchid's eyes. She had whisked her sister across the ocean by jet and then made her scurry up and down the Pacific coast, back and forth across Los Angeles. Moon Orchid had misplaced herself, her spirit (her 'attention,' Brave Orchid called it) scattered all over the world" (156). Brave Orchid experienced this same wandering from her body when she was at school in China. Terror loosed her soul from her corporeality and she had trouble finding her way back. Moon Orchid's spirit has wandered from her body, just as her body wandered too far away from home. Despite Brave Orchid's best efforts to chant her sister's spirit back to her body, she cannot tether her back to reality. Moon Orchid's wanderings ultimately land her in an asylum, paralleling the narrator's no-name aunt's story that ends with her death. The stories of Kingston's aunts closely resemble each other in this respect. In the first story, Brave Orchid's refusal to speak of her husband's sister, this "deliberate forgetting," causes her ceaseless wandering, unmoored from the realities of speech and the historical record. In the second story, Brave Orchid's too forceful assertion of her sister's wifely rights and presence displaces her soul from her body and causes her spirit to wander. Untangling the

[42] This language of "creeping" alongside the walls of the house also harkens to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." Female loss of sanity tends to manifest itself as an unsettling merger between the female body and the house. Constructing ever tighter enclosures does not keep them safe, instead it leads to isolation and death.

confused stories of her mother and aunts leads the narrator to deadly endings and more confusion.

"Shaman" extends the concerns of "At the Western Palace," that creating a hybrid identity involves the terror of a spirit wandering away from its homeplace. As the daughter of immigrants, the narrator is figuring out what it means to call a place home because having a safe place to return to is a matter of life and death. In "Shaman," Kingston recounts a story from her mother's time spent studying to become a doctor at To Keung School. Many girls at the school believe one room is haunted, and they challenge Brave Orchid to spend a night with the ghosts. Brave Orchid agrees, but before she goes, she tells the girls, "If I am very afraid when you find me, don't forget to tweak my ears. Call my name and tell me how to get home" (68). Fear and sleep send a spirit wandering from the body. In order to call a spirit back, one needs to know how to guide the spirit home. Brave Orchid does meet a ghost during her night in the haunted room and her fear does send her spirit wandering, but her friends are able to recall her spirit back to her body. Kingston writes,

> When she got scared as a child, one of my mother's three mothers had held her and chanted their descent line, reeling the frighted spirit back from the farthest deserts. A relative would know the personal names and secrets about husbands, babies, renegades and decide which ones were lucky in a chant, but these outside women had to build a path from scraps. No blood bonded friend to friend…and they had to figure out how to help my mother's spirit locate the To Keung School as 'home' (75).

This passage outlines how Brave Orchid makes a place into a home. Brave Orchid's mothers knew the details of their family and lineage. For Brave Orchid, home is a return to a center after traveling away. After the spirit wanders from the body, it can return by following the path constructed by an intimate familial connection. New friends do not have these familial links and do not know her ancestry, which is why it is more difficult for them to recall Brave Orchid's spirit to the school. Their attempt to call her spirit back to her body is also a method of forging a home in a foreign environment. Figuring out how to find a way home is one of the central concepts of, not just this story, but of the memoir as a whole. Chinese immigrants in America have literally gone wandering away from their homeplace and they must reconfigure what home means. Just as these students had to piece together a way to call Brave Orchid back to the school, so Chinese immigrants have been hurled across a vast expanse and they must figure out how to call each other back to a new place that is not yet home.

First generation Chinese immigrants have trouble establishing a home in America because they feel out of place in an environment that feels unreal. Everything real is back *home* in China. In America, Brave Orchid tells her daughter, "The White Ghosts can hear Chinese. They have learned it. You mustn't talk in front of them again. Someday, very soon, we're going home, where there are Han people everywhere. We'll buy furniture then, real tables and chairs. You children will smell flowers for the first time" (98). The fact that Brave Orchid calls Americans "ghosts" gestures toward her resilient attachments to China. Everything of solidity and substance is there. Even the flowers in America are not *real* flowers. They are merely the illusion of flowers. She does not buy tables and chairs in America to furnish a permanent home. She refrains from such purchases

because to buy furniture would acknowledge this new place as a place where she will remain. Her disengagement from her present environment due to her belief that she will return to China puts her in a liminal, in-between space.

In "At the Western Palace," Brave Orchid's time in the airport spatializes the immigrant's existence in between the tangible *here* and the intangible *there*. While waiting for Moon Orchid to arrive from Hong Kong, Brave Orchid spreads herself across space to be present with her family members. Kingston writes, "Brave Orchid would add her will power to the forces that keep an airplane up. Her head hurt with the concentration. The plane had to be light, so no matter how tired she felt, she dared not rest her spirit on a wing but continuously and gently pushed up on the plane's belly" (113). Brave Orchid spreads her spirit out between the airport in California and the airplane to protect her sister in flight. But it is not only her sister, she must keep in flight, she must also keep her son safe in the sea. As soldiers in the airport remind her of her son, "She sat up suddenly; she had forgotten about her own son, who was even now in Vietnam. Carefully she split her attention, beaming half of it to the ocean, into the water to keep him afloat" (114). An airport is one of the most literal liminal spaces. It is a transitional space for travelers moving between locations. Kingston materializes the airport to illustrate how Brave Orchid is consistently scattering herself out across sea and sky. She is constantly living within liminal space, feeling like her home is somewhere else.

As she lives in America, Brave Orchid develops a new hybridity predicated on retaining her familial structure in America. Part of what this new Chinese American identity means to her is that her family would stay in one place. Toward the end of

"Shaman," Brave Orchid tells her daughter that they have lost their land in China, so they "have no more China to go home to" (106). The narrator replies that home can be anywhere she chooses. It does not have to be fixed to one specific location (107). Brave Orchid tells her, "I don't want to go back anyway…There's only one thing that I really want anymore. I want you here, not wandering like a ghost from Romany. I want every one of you living here together…Whichever room I walk into overflows with my relatives…That's the way a house should be" (107-8). Brave Orchid wants her daughter to stay in one place, rather than to wander "like a ghost." Remaining in one place would materialize her and keep her selfhood together, unlike the way Moon Orchid split her soul from her body by wandering too far away. This new way of living is not strictly Chinese, but it is not the isolated, individualized way most Americans live either. It is something new, born out of the meeting of these two cultures.

While Brave Orchid cultivates a hybrid Asian American self, her daughter misunderstands her mother's efforts to help her create her own hybridity. As she lives in America, Brave Orchid accepts the value of learning English and establishing a homeplace outside of China, while retaining all her cultural attachments. Brave Orchid wants her daughter to be cosmopolitan. For her, America is a hostile, ghostly place but it can become habitable if a self is asserted strongly enough. This is why she cut her daughter's frenum when she was born, so that she could speak fluently "in any language" (164).[43] Cutting her daughter's tongue suggests that she wants her daughter to speak in

[43] Jeehyun Lim analyzes the interconnection of language and the racialized body in Kingston's novel. Lim explores the history of tongue-cutting in Asian and Asian American communities, the social pressure for Asian American children to gain fluency with English, and the anxieties this pressure causes.

order to hold her body and spirit together in this threatening "ghost country," but her daughter mistakenly thinks her mother wants to impart on her a model of Chinese femininity: a silent self-effacement.[44] The narrator thinks she is resisting her mother by aiming to "pour concrete" out of her mouth to establish reality over mythology. But, in actuality, her mother wants to impart a more hybrid model of Chinese American identity to her. It is only at the end of the memoir, when mother and daughter have their explosive conversation, that the daughter understands her mother's intentions. She understands that Brave Orchid cut her tongue so that it could speak in any language, so that she could assert a dual self, not so that she would be silent. She finds that her mother had been trying to extent to her a hybridity that would successfully orient her to life in between China and America.

By telling her female relatives' stories, the narrator finds that being Asian American entails accepting the ambiguity of her duality. It means forever untangling "what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese" (5). Asian American identity is not a homogenous set of signifiers but, rather, a process of identity construction. As Lisa Lowe argues, "Rather than considering 'Asian American identity' as a fixed, established 'given,' perhaps we can consider instead 'Asian American cultural practices' that produce identity; the processes that produce such identity are never complete and are always constituted in relation to historical and material differences" (64). The process of

[44] For more on the cultural distinctions between American and Chinese connotations of silence and speech, and how Kingston negotiates these differences, see Chingyen Yang Myer's "Breaking Silences: Telling Asian American Female Subversive Stories in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone.*"

constructing a hybrid self, of figuring out how the "invisible" realm of China and its stories maps onto the "visible" world of America, is never finished. Through writing *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston understands that she cannot simply tell the straight lines of a story that would establish her identity. She wanted to pour concrete from her mouth to establish realities, but she finds that determining an identity is an ongoing process.

Being a hyphenated American requires constant renegotiation of identity in terms of place. Kingston's final story "A Song for Barbarian Reed Pipe," suggests how complicated this work is for Asian Americans. In the final pages of this narrative, Kingston tells the story of Ts'ai Yen, a poet whom barbarians kidnap and teach their own language. She detests the brutality of these "primitives," and she particularly hates their language, which the barbarians also teach to the two children she has in captivity. The barbarians uproot the children's mother tongue, replanting it with their own language. Ts'ai Yen also hates the barbarians' music, their war cries, until she realizes they have another kind of music, a music that "translated well" into her own Chinese language (209). The barbarians here represent the white Westerners who have kidnapped and raped the Eastern people, supplanting their language and dislocating them in space. But the Chinese captive has learned to use the songs of her captors to communicate her "sadness and anger" at being taken from her home (209). King-Kok Cheung argues that this passage suggests a unifying bridge between two cultures because "instead of struggling against her Asian past and her American present, she now seeks to emulate the poet who sings to foreign music" (183). In the same way, Asian Americans using the English language to articulate how it feels to be dislodged from their mother tongue and mother country is a means of working through a hyphenated identity. Kingston says the barbarian

songs can communicate Ts'ai Yen's "wandering" (Kingston 209). Ts'ai Yen's wandering complicates her identity construction. Since she brings the barbarian songs back to China, her language becomes not only Chinese but also inflected with barbarian music. Wandering between two lands creates hybridity because it is in this traumatic meeting of two spaces that dual identity is formed. As Lowe argues, creating a hybrid Asian American identity is not a simple act of wandering from one space to another; it is a survival strategy generated from racial violence. Ts'ai Yen does not choose to wander with the barbarians. She is kidnapped and forced to learn their language and their songs in order to survive and to communicate her suffering. And she does not just survive this torment; rather, she creates something generative out of the dominant power's music. For Kingston, negotiating Asian American identity does not mean returning to settle in China or purely assimilating to America; rather, it means learning how to move in between this traumatic meeting of the two spaces. Having a hybrid identity means never being able to settle on one space and call it home because home is not fixed, but ever changing.

2. *Interpreter of Maladies*

Kingston's and Jhumpa Lahiri's stories have much in common. Both Kingston's and Lahiri's characters struggle to construct a hybrid identity that is both Asian and American while confronted with the pressures of anti-Asian racism and alienation. As in Kingston's memoir, Lahiri's collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*, also negotiates the relationship Asian American immigrants have to their past and present spaces. However, as Erika Lee suggests, the fewer numbers of early Indian immigrants in America led to a greater feeling of isolation that persists in Lahiri's later twentieth-century text. To use the spatial metaphors I have been using so far, Kingston conceptualizes America as a house

in which only white inhabitants feel at home, whereas immigrants feel like strangers who need to board up their houses in order to feel secure. In contrast, Lahiri conceives of America as an empty house on the margins of community. In her stories, her houses are hollow, and her characters are barren or isolated. She emphasizes the loneliness Indian immigrants experience as they adapt to American life, an emptiness that is rarely mitigated by the amount of time spent in the country. In Lahiri's stories, the emptiness of American life is particularly severe for Indian Americans because they are considered so foreign, even compared to other Asian Americans, in primarily white spaces.

First, I will focus on "Mrs. Sens's" because this story most directly attends to a new Indian immigrant struggling to adapt to American, predominantly white space, and how her attempts to make her new space livable only result in exacerbating her alienation. This story is told through the perspective of a young American boy named Eliot whom Mrs. Sen babysits. Through Eliot's eyes, the reader recognizes that the cold barrenness of the boy's life bonds him to the lonely immigrant woman. Eliot compares Mrs. Sen's isolation in her Cambridge apartment to his own solitary beach house, where, even though he is surrounded by neighbors, he does not have any personal connection to them. Mrs. Sen is similarly isolated, and she laments the community she lost by moving to Boston with her husband. She lives in a small "university apartment" with her husband, "located on the fringes of the campus" (112). Not only does their racial difference marginalize them, but the fact that the university has pushed them to the edge of campus isolates them further still. She tells Eliot that compared to the bustling life she led in India, "Here, in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence" (115). In India, Mrs. Sen was surrounded by an active coterie of

friends and family. People would come to her aid when she called them, as opposed to American life, in which neither Eliot nor Mrs. Sen know their neighbors, nor are they surrounded by family. Instead, both live in relative isolation and quiet.

Like Brave Orchid in *The Woman Warrior*, as a new immigrant, Mrs. Sen identifies India as home, and thus lives in a liminal space in between an absent home and her present "not yet" home. Early on in the story, Eliot and his mother visit Mr. and Mrs. Sen to interview her for the babysitting position. Lahiri describes the Sens' apartment as perfectly manicured. "Inside, intersecting shadows left by a vacuum cleaner were frozen on the surface of a plush pear-colored carpet" (112). "Frozen" lines in the carpet, coupled with Mrs. Sen's aloof introduction of her husband, "as if they were only distantly acquainted," imbue the apartment with a lonely stasis. The room suggests that its occupants are stuck in place. Mrs. Sen "looked around the room, as if she noticed in the lampshades, in the teapot, in the shadows frozen on the carpet, something the rest of them could not. 'Everything is there'" (113). The scene reveals the extent to which Mrs. Sen is at odds with her new space. Again, the shadows in the carpet are "frozen," fixed in place. The fact that Mrs. Sen says "everything" is back home in India invests the furniture in her house with a hollow quality. Her furniture has substance, but she has not cathected any personal value onto this substance. This sentiment echoes Brave Orchid's refusal to buy a permanent set of furniture, since she intended to return home to China. Mrs. Sen's furnishings, meant to infuse rooms with the firm contours of familiarity, are unfamiliar and empty. She does not yet feel at home in America, and she continues to long for her life in India.

In order to mitigate this American isolation, Mrs. Sen engages in rituals of food preparation as a means of connecting with her Indian community. Every day, she cooks elaborate meals for herself and her husband, chopping an array of colorful vegetables and seasoning them with Indian spices. She tells Eliot, "Whenever there is a wedding in the family…my mother sends out word in the evening for all the neighborhood women to bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables" (115). Since preparing meals was such a meaningful communal tradition for her in India, Mrs. Sen finds that continuing this ritual in America links her to home in a way that is more powerful than merely memory— it is active participation. To contrast this sentiment, Lahiri draws a sharp parallel between Mrs. Sen's cooking and Eliot's meals. Every night Eliot's mother drinks wine and eats cheese before ordering Eliot a pizza, which she is often too full to eat with him. Eliot's fast-food meals represent American values of rapid consumption and individualism over community.

The kitchen in this story serves as a bridge linking Mrs. Sen to her community in India. Laura Anh Williams has conducted an extensive analysis of the relationship Lahiri's characters have to food. She argues, "In Asian American literature, food as metaphor frequently constructs and reflects relationships to racialized subjectivity and also addresses issues of authenticity, assimilation, and desire" (70).[45] She argues that Lahiri's women prepare and cook food as a means of racial identity construction that can

[45] In her book *Consumption and Identity,* Jennifer Ho similarly explores Asian Americans' relationships to food and assimilation. She argues, "Food is a critical medium for compliance with and resistance to Americanization, a means for enacting the ambiguities of an Asian-ethnic American identity that is already in a constant state of flux" (3).

"assert agency and subjectivity in ways that function as an alternative to the dominant culture" (70). This is precisely how food operates for Mrs. Sen insofar as she insists on preparing elaborate meals just for two people. She asserts her agency by tenaciously pursuing her tastes, buying fish despite the many obstacles she faces getting to the wharf. By cooking, Mrs. Sen can assert her difference, a foreign-ness that dominant culture prefers to erase and assimilate.[46] The kitchen is one of the few places Mrs. Sen can feel fully Indian.[47] After all, she cannot wear her many colorful saris around Boston, but she can fully immerse herself in the spices that remind her of home (Lahiri 125). Participating in the ritual of cooking fish connects her to her family in India.

Cooking and the memories attached to particular smells can be a powerful means of orientation. Sara Ahmed argues that spaces "extend our skin" (10). Place becomes part of the body to the extent that some bodies, like migrant bodies, who travel from distant places can feel uncomfortable in places that make them feel out of place. But Ahmed suggests that cooking, and particularly the scents of spices, can help travelers make foreign spaces more habitable. She explains that when she moves into a new house, she

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[46] Janice Mirikitani's poem, "Why Is Preparing Fish a Political Act?," makes a similar assertation. In this poem, the speaker's grandmother resists a white woman selling Western cooking utensils, preferring to instead prepare her fish by her traditional methods. The poem insists that even this personal, quotidian act is a political act—a refusal to assimilate and tone down her difference.

[47] Sau-ling Wong's essay, "Big Eaters, Treat Lovers, 'Food Prostitutes,' 'Food Pornographers' and Doughnut Makers," argues that Asian American literature is often marked by its characters' capacity to eat anything, even distasteful foods in order to survive discrimination and poverty in America. Mrs. Sen's insistence on eating fish to preserve her Indian-ness parallels Wong's argument about Brave Orchid's ability to eat anything, to even consume ghosts, as a means of overcoming hardship. Wong notes that the narrator revolts against her mother by asserting herself as an assimilated American. Wong writes, "Revolted by what she perceives as the Chinese people's cult of ruthless and indiscriminate eating, American-born Maxine vows, 'I would live on plastic'" (25).

likes to spread her objects, the things that constitute herself, around the rooms. She says, "I concentrate on the kitchen. The familiar smell of spices fills the air. I allow the cumin to spill, and then gather it up again. I feel flung back somewhere else. I am never sure where the smell of spices takes me…Each smell that gathers returns me somewhere" (10). Scent is a form of orientation. It can transport the body to a distant time and place. Cooking with certain spices can draw someone back home, which is precisely what Lahiri writes about in her short story, "The Long Way Home." She explains that her mother cooked elaborate Indian dishes, which intimidated young Lahiri. Over time, she learned how to cook with Indian spices like coriander and ginger, ultimately drawing her closer to her mother and her Indian heritage—closer to home. The smell of familiar spices operates differently for Mrs. Sen because while these scents do orient Mrs. Sen toward India, this orientation prevents her from making her house in Cambridge more like a home. Instead, her memory of Indian spices causes her to resist her new house. Scent here works more like a nostalgia that precludes her from cathecting an emotional attachment onto her new house.

Mrs. Sen resists adapting to an Americanized lifestyle in American spaces, preferring to retain her own cultural customs. The different ways characters in this story drive symbolizes their level of comfort with American life—to use Ahmed's terminology, the extent to which American space extends their skin. Eliot thinks,

> It seemed so simple when he sat beside his mother, gliding in the evenings back to the beach house. Then the road was just a road…But when he sat with Mrs. Sen, under an autumn sun that glowed without warmth through the trees, he saw how

> that same stream of cars made her knuckles pale, her wrists tremble, and her English falter. 'Everyone, this people, too much in their world' (121).

The American road concretizes the fast pace of life that Mrs. Sen resists. Mrs. Sen finds that the pace of American life is more rapid and cutthroat than she prefers. The rapidity of cars on the highway parallels the ruthless pace of capitalism. Eliot's mother manifests this mentality. Driving to work in order to participate in the machinations of capitalist production leads her and her son into worn out isolation. The domination of capitalist power, as manifested by the speed of the road, causes Mrs. Sen's English to "falter," returning her to her native language. Mr. Sen's resolve that his wife learn to drive suggests his insistence that she assimilate to the pace of American life. Mrs. Sen's hesitation to merge into the fast lane parallels her resistance to assimilation and her desire to live differently, apart from capitalist production.

Mrs. Sen retreats into her apartment as a means of creating spaces of enclosure that protect her from the threatening external world, much like Kingston's female relatives in *The Woman Warrior*. When she receives word that her grandfather has died, she listens to a recording of events that happened in her town on the day she left for the U.S. "Mrs. Sen translated for Eliot: 'The price of goat rose two rupees. The mangoes at the market are not very sweet. College Street is flooded.' She turned off the tape. 'These are things that happened the day I left India'" (128). These sounds loop over and over, returning her to a fixed point in time. By returning to this single moment, she turns her apartment into a time capsule to preserve her link to India. Through both her acts of cooking and her returning to this moment in time through cassette tapes, Mrs. Sen builds walls that protect her but prevent her from accessing a world beyond her borders.

Part of Mrs. Sen's resistance to assimilation and her tendency to construct enclosures for safety have to do with her experiences in public space. For example, when she and Eliot ride the bus home after buying a fish at the market, a white passenger on the bus treats her with suspicion. Lahiri writes, "On the way home an old woman on the bus kept watching them, her eyes shifting from Mrs. Sen to Eliot to the blood-lined bag between their feet" (132). The old woman mentions the pair's suspicious behavior to the bus driver before leaving the vehicle. "The driver turned his head and glanced back at Mrs. Sen. 'What's in the bag?' Mrs. Sen looked up, startled. 'Speak English?…The smell seems to be bothering the other passengers'" (132-133). The fact that the driver questions whether or not Mrs. Sen can speak English draws attention to her racialization. This confrontation causes her to realize how vulnerable she is as an "other" in public space. She suddenly becomes a racialized body once the white passenger turns her gaze on her. This encounter parallels a scene from Nella Larsen's "Passing" that Lauren Berlant analyzes in *The Female Complaint*. Berlant argues that women and minorities "have never had the privilege to suppress the event of the body" because they are so visible in "a culture that values abstraction" rather than individuation (111). She suggests that America values normalcy and homogeneity amongst its members. The nation encourages women "to rework the details of [their] history to become a vaguer or simpler version of [themselves]" in order to feel like they belong (7). The nation fosters belonging amongst those bodies that look alike, such that women of color would like to belong, but their bodies mark them as different. Amongst these other white New Englanders, Mrs. Sen stands out. She is as out of place as a fish on a bus. As Anita Mannur writes, Mrs. Sen "does not understand that she is expected to suppress the fishy odor of otherness, so

latently offensive to the other passengers on the bus" (65). The smelly fish parallels Mrs. Sen's racialized body, which offends the white passengers for being out of place.

As this example suggests, Lahiri does not represent Mrs. Sen's resistance to assimilation as a disproportionate response to her situation. Instead, Lahiri suggests that American life itself is cold and empty, even for native born Americans, as illustrated by Eliot's fast-food meals eaten alone in a cold, glass house where he roams the empty beach and does not know his neighbors. Mrs. Sen's story instead reveals that there are alternate means of inhabiting American spaces other than the dominant means of participating in capitalist production and American individualism. The story insists on the value of communal and familial bonds over the individualism represented by Eliot's mother.

Next, I turn to "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" because it imagines an alternative means of constructing a hybrid Asian American identity: instead of creating an enclosure to protect herself from the racism of American life, like Mrs. Sen, Lilia negotiates the racial and cultural differences dividing her from white Americans and those parallel differences that divide India. This story is told from the perspective of ten-year-old Lilia, a second-generation Indian American whose parents work at a university near Boston. Lilia's parents befriend Mr. Pirzada, a Bengali man studying for a year in America during the war between India and Pakistan. Every night, Mr. Pirzada arrives for dinner and they all eat on the couch while watching news about the war in Dacca. The spatial identity politics of Partition hovers over this story. When Lilia mistakenly calls Mr. Pirzada a Muslim, her father gives her a history lesson on Partition and the lines that separate Muslims from Hindus. Partition severed Muslims and Hindus along hastily

drawn lines. In his history of partition, Nisid Hajari outlines the personal and political dynamics that led to the 1947 partition of India and the bloodbath that resulted from this demarcation. Hajari explains that as Britain prepared to withdraw from India, granting the nation independence, political conflict flared between Jinnah (leader of the Muslim League) and Nehru (President of the Congress Party). They disagreed over whether India should remain a whole country, as Nehru argued; or whether the country should be divided along religious lines, into a Muslim nation and a Hindu nation, as Jinnah contended. Nehru argued in favor of keeping the nation together, with people of different religious orientations living together harmoniously. In contrast, Jinnah argued, "We are different beings…There is nothing in life which links us together. Our names, our clothes, our foods—they are all different; our economic life, our educational ideas, our treatment of women, our attitude to animals" (Hajari 9). Jinnah reasoned that there was nothing to "link" Muslims and Hindus together, that their means of occupying space were so different that they could not both occupy the same land comfortably.

In response to the devastating history of India's partition, "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" proposes that the ways Muslims and Hindus inhabit space are much more similar than they are different. Once Lilia's parents teach her that Mr. Pirzada is different from them, she starts to look for his peculiarities, but she finds that her parents have much more in common with Mr. Pirzada than they do with other families in Massachusetts. While Lilia's father tries to explain to her that Mr. Pirzada is not Indian, she cannot quite square this information with all the practices they have in common. She notes,

> Mr. Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, looked more or less the same. They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every night for supper with their hands. Like my parents, Mr. Pirzada took off his shoes before entering a room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, for dessert dipped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea (25).

Mr. Pirzada and Lilia's parents share cultural customs and tastes despite geographic and religious divides. They inhabit space in similar ways. They eat the same foods in the same manner, move through rooms in the same style, and have the same tastes. Even though Lilia's father impresses upon her the notion that Muslims and Hindus are radically opposed to each other, Lilia recognizes that their mutual lifestyles make them much more alike than they are different, especially compared to the community around them in America. Mr. Pirzada and Lilia's parents are so similar that she will later remember them during this period as "a single person, sharing a single meal, a single body, a single silence, and a single fear" (41). Their communion is so strong, their emotions so strongly oriented toward the same point, that it is as if they inhabit the same body. In writing this story, Lahiri is, in part, suggesting how tragic it was for Muslims and Hindus to engage in such violence against each other when their means of living in space are so similar.

Lilia's struggle to understand India's history indicates the liminal status of Asian American immigrants living "in between" countries. Lilia's living room becomes a liminal space that links New England and Dacca. Although Lilia's parents and Mr. Pirzada anxiously follow developments of the war, in part because Mr. Pirzada's family

remains in Dacca, Lilia notices that no one outside of their living room talks about the war or even seems to know it is happening. Her American friends' family does not watch the news every night. Their living room is calm compared to the anxiety that fills her own house. Lilia has trouble making sense of her incongruous living room: of a safe space being transported into an unsafe space. She says, "I tried not to think about Mr. Pirzada, in his lime-scented overcoat, connected to the unruly, sweltering world we had viewed a few hours ago in our bright, carpeted living room" (32). Lilia tries to block her imagination from letting Mr. Pirzada move into the violent world on the tv because the two worlds are so incompatible: one chaotically violent and the other soft, safe, and mundane. They are connected in an ethereal way that she cannot fully comprehend.

Much like Kingston's Brave Orchid, Lilia finds that America is an "unreal" space compared to the more "real" spaces abroad. Lilia notices that Mr. Pirzada wears a pocket watch set to Dacca time. She says, "Life, I realized, was being lived in Dacca first" and only secondarily in Massachusetts (30). This sense of time lagging behind for Lilia and everyone in the U.S. makes her anxious. Anything terrible could happen in Dacca, and it would take time for them to learn about any disaster. She says, "Our meals, our actions, were only a shadow of what had already happened there, a lagging ghost of where Mr. Pirzada really belonged" (31). As in *The Woman Warrior*, America becomes a ghost country for people whose emotional invests lie elsewhere. Life in America, at least for Mr. Pirzada, is only the ghostly afterimage of events lived out in Dacca, where Mr. Pirzada would rather be—the place he calls home.

Due to her dual allegiances to India and America, Lilia finds herself torn between the two spaces. Throughout the story, Lilia struggles to construct a racial self. Her father

expresses his surprise that her school does not teach her Indian history and he takes it upon himself to educate her on the conflict playing out on the television every night. But her mother objects, "Lilia has plenty to learn at school…We live here now, she was born here" (26). Lilia's mother is proud that Lilia will now be sheltered and have more educational opportunities. Lilia says, "In her estimation, I knew, I was assured a safe life, an easy life, a fine education, every opportunity. I would never have to eat rationed food, or obey curfews, or watch riots from my rooftop, or hide neighbors in water tanks to prevent them from being shot, as she and my father had" (26). Despite these assurances that America ensures her a safer life, Lilia remains interested in her hybrid racial identity. All she learns in school is American history and ideology. When she tries to read a book about Pakistan, her teacher rebuffs her, confining her to textbooks on American history (33). Since she is barred from learning about the conflicts on tv, and yet her father insists this knowledge is important for her to understand, Lilia is not quite sure what her racial allegiances should be, and she is not sure where she belongs.

Lilia's education plays a central role in molding her national identity. When Lilia's father asks what she is learning in school if she is not learning about Indian and Pakistani history, Lilia notes that her school teaches her American history, and specifically American geography.[48] She thinks,

[48] In his analysis of this "Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," Keith Wilhite explores how maps concretize the fraught complexities of racial identity and national belonging. He argues that Lila's encounters with maps help her understand her "emergent sense of Indian American identity" (78). American maps present a "sanitized" version of colonial history that her father's map of Partition unsettles by showing Lilia how "national spaces [are] products of ongoing tumult and transition" (80).

> That year, and every year, it seemed, we began by studying the Revolutionary War. We were taken in school buses on field trips to visit Plymouth Rock, and to walk the Freedom Trail, and to climb to the top of the Bunker Hill Monument…During tests we were given blank maps of the thirteen colonies, and asked to fill in names, dates, capitals. I could do it with my eyes closed (27).

Of course, there is much to be said about the fact that what qualifies as an American education is a centrally white history, but it is also significant that Lilia does not just read about these places in textbooks. She actually walks the trails that are so weighted with historical significance. Field trips to historically significant sites around Boston concretize American history in the students' minds. American space becomes so ingrained in Lilia that she can map out the thirteen colonies instinctively. In contrast, her teachers prevent her from acquiring knowledge about Pakistan. She knows she is Indian, and she knows this history is important to her in some obscure way, but she does not know how to map half-told stories of India onto her American life. Straddling these two histories and geographies disorients her.

Lilia's hybrid identity disorients her because, despite her American birth and historical knowledge, her race marks her as out of place. She is becoming aware that her family lives differently from other American families. In addition to her realization that no one else follows the news about the war in Dacca, Lilia is coming into an awareness of her body as racially marked. Throughout her story, she is trying to pick up on what makes Mr. Pirzada different from her parents, and similarly what makes her different from others in America. When she goes trick-or-treating, people point out her racial difference. She says, "Several people told [her] that they had never seen an Indian witch before,"

which suggests that no matter how "American" Lilia becomes, her race still marks her as an anomaly and an outsider (39). In these ways, this story resonates with Sau-ling Wong's argument that Asian Americans are always perceived as foreigners, no matter how much they assimilate.

Lilia's parents seek out Mr. Pirzada in the first place because in the "house" of America, they feel more like guests than permanent residents. Like the Sens, Lilia's family lives on the "fringes" of a university campus in Boston. Lahiri writes, "The supermarket did not carry mustard oil, doctors did not make house calls, neighbors never dropped by without an invitation, and of these things, every so often, [Lilia's] parents complained" (24). Lilia's parents feel out of place in this town. Stores do not carry the spices that are familiar to them, so they cannot fully participate in the cooking that might orient them toward India, as Mrs. Sen does. And as in "Mrs. Sen's," they live in relative isolation from their neighbors. Their bodies do not spread out comfortably in this environment but sharing their space with someone similar to themselves makes them feel more at home. This story complicates what it means for Indian immigrants to construct a hybrid identity. Instead of walling themselves off from the outside world, as Mrs. Sen does, Lilia's parents seek out other people who inhabit space in similar ways. They recognize that their ways of occupying space are different from those around them, but they hope that their daughter will grow up Americanized, that she will blend seamlessly into her environment and thus be safe. Lilia, however, cannot and does not choose to blend in. Multiple geographies pull her in different directions, making it difficult for her to live comfortably in her home.

The last story I will turn to in Lahiri's collection is "This Blessed House," in which I argue that the main character, Sanjeev, strives to become a model Asian American citizen by fulfilling cultural expectations of both his Indian parentage and his white suburban neighborhood, but he finds that attempting to become such a model citizen ultimately leaves him feeling alienated and divested of a homeplace. "This Blessed House" explores the homemaking of newlyweds Sanjeev and Twinkle. Like Lahiri's other stories, this narrative also emphasizes the loneliness of American life, a loneliness compounded by racial difference and the disorientation of immigrant experience. This story more than the others illustrates Indian Americans literally trying to make American space into a home. Sanjeev's efforts to turn his house into a home where he can live comfortably among his New England neighbors is a very literal working through of the metaphorical homemaking Indian Americans do to feel at home in overwhelmingly white space. But this process is fraught for Sanjeev because he finds that American life is much emptier than he anticipated. The story makes this clear by emphasizing the fact that Sanjeev and Twinkle were little more than strangers when they married, and their sense of each other's strangeness only deepens while they live together. When this couple moves into their new house, the cracks in their relationship start to show as Twinkle finds Christian artifacts tucked away in drawers and cabinets of the house. Amongst other things, "there was a 3-D post-card of Saint Francis done in four colors, which Twinkle had found taped to the back of the medicine cabinet, and a wooden cross key chain, which Sanjeev had stepped on with bare feet…There was a framed paint-by-number of the three wise men…tucked in the linen closet" (137). These "treasures," as Twinkle perceives them, delight her, but they irritate Sanjeev (141). The

fact that the objects are taped behind cabinets, rolled behind furniture, and hidden away in the attic suggests a deception that Sanjeev tries to root out. I would argue that it enrages him to think that his expectations that this house would materialize his American dream have been subverted, leaving him feeling even more lonely than he did before he married Twinkle.

Sanjeev's "blessed" house spatializes the plan he had for his life before he married, and it reveals that he does not see that plan coming to fruition. Lahiri makes a point of mentioning all the details Sanjeev looked for in a house, and these details indicate the kind of life he expected to lead within its walls. Lahiri writes,

> Sanjeev had found the house on his own before leaving for the wedding, for a good price, in a neighborhood with a fine school system. He was impressed by the elegant curved staircase with its wrought-iron banister…There were two working fireplaces, a two-car garage, and an attic suitable for converting into extra bedrooms if, the Realtor mentioned, the need should arise (145).

Several parts of this description are worth examining. Firstly, Lahiri notes that Sanjeev bought this house without consulting Twinkle. Her own vision for her life and their life together was clearly not his priority. He had an idea of what his own life would be with a wife and family that did not account for Twinkle's needs, wants, and desires. He also assumes they will have children, but it is not clear whether or not he has had such a conversation with Twinkle, since they only knew each other for four months before they married. If he is not even sure that his wife loves him, since she has never said so before, then it is unclear to what extent this couple mutually planned out their future together before moving into this house (147). Lahiri also points out that Sanjeev was "impressed

by the elegant curved staircase," which gestures toward his fixation on appearances. In addition to the house being located in a good neighborhood, featuring a grand staircase, and boasting such a large size, its two-car garage also asserts the owner's material prosperity. Clearly, it is very important to Sanjeev that he appear happy, well adjusted, and generally living the American dream with his pretty new wife.

Successfully living the American dream is important to Sanjeev, as an isolated Indian American, because it is important to him that he feel "at home" in the "house" of America. Keeping up appearances are a central part of this dream. He begs Twinkle not to display the tacky Christian paraphernalia around his house since he will be hosting a housewarming party for his work associates and friends. They vehemently argue over a kitschy Virgin Mary statue that Twinkle finds in their bushes and wants to feature in front of their house. He tells his wife, "I can't have the people I work with see this statue on my lawn" (147). Confusedly, Twinkle replies, "Why does it matter to you so much what other people think?" (147). She does not understand Sanjeev's need to appear normal and successful to other people. He "dread[ed] the raised eyebrows of his guests as they viewed the flickering ceramic saints…Still, they would be impressed, he hoped, by the lovely bay windows" and other grand qualities of the house (150). Even though the guests Sanjeev invites are only casual acquaintances, it is painfully important to him that he impress these people with his house because the house incarnates his material accomplishments, and furthermore he does not want to appear strange to his business associates. He does not want to feel like an outsider; he wants to feel at home.

In addition to the house as material sign of his prosperity, having a good wife is also part of the American dream for Sanjeev. This is why he takes so much pride in his

wife's stunning appearance at the housewarming party, beaming when Professor Prabal expresses how impressed he is by her beauty (153). But it is also due to his desire to present himself as a model Indian immigrant that he regrets marrying Twinkle. She does not cook elaborate Indian dishes and she does not tidy the house like he expected her to. Lahiri writes, "He thought with a flicker of regret of the snapshots his mother used to send him from Calcutta, of prospective brides who could sing and sew and season lentils without consulting a cookbook" (146). Despite being lovely and spontaneous and captivating, Twinkle does not live up to Sanjeev's culturally inflected expectations about how a wife should behave. He wishes he had married someone more properly domestic.

Externally, Sanjeev may appear to have achieved the American dream, but the interiors of this life are hollow. Even at the zenith of his glory, when all his guests are admiring his new home and his beautiful wife, he hides from his guests and relishes his momentary isolation. As his guests explore the attic, looking for more hidden relics, he imagines locking everyone away. Lahiri writes,

> With one flick of his hand he could snap the ladder back on its spring into the ceiling…He thought of all the thigs he could do, undisturbed. He could sweep Twinkle's menagerie into a garbage bag and get in the car and drive it all to the dump, and tear down the poster of weeping Jesus…pour himself a gin and tonic, and eat a plate of warmed rice and listen to his new Bach CD (155).

He longs for the kind of life he led before he got married, even though it was a life he once found monotonous. He wants to listen to his beloved classical music undisturbed, music that Twinkle dislikes and does not understand. Their disagreement over music is just one of the many dissonances in this marriage. Sanjeev would rather sweep this new

life away because his dreams for what his life could be, what the American dream might offer him, have revealed themselves to be false promises.

Similar to Mrs. Sen's realization that the material contours of her life (the couch, the teapot, and the carpet) have physical substance but lack any emotional value, so Sanjeev finds that the material trappings of his own life have substance but not substance that is invested with any meaning. The vast house that was meant to impress his friends and colleagues with his success, with how well he presents himself as an average American, quickly loses its value when he realizes he does not actually care about the people he has been trying to impress and that he does not genuinely love his wife. He reveals this sentiment at the end of the story when Twinkle and the party guests find a bust of Christ with "undeniable value" in the attic (157). It surprises Sanjeev to realize that he hates this bust even more than all the other kitschy objects she has found *because* it possesses "dignity, solemnity, beauty even" (157). He thought he hated the other items because they were tacky. They did not have the financial value that would impress guests and neighbors. Instead, he realizes that he hates this thing of beauty and value even more than all the rest, and he hates it chiefly "because he knew that Twinkle loved it" (157). Sanjeev married Twinkle because he was lonely and because his Indian upbringing expects men to marry, not because he loved her. He buys a large house and seeks out beautiful, expensive objects because such material signifiers are valued by America's capitalist society, not because he had attached any personal meaning to them. Sanjeev finds that navigating the expectations of Indian and American social structures (marrying an Indian woman he does not know and buying a lavish house to achieve status in New England) ultimately leave him feeling empty.

3. Conclusion

All three of the stories from *Interpreter of Maladies* that I have analyzed in this section reveal the interior emptiness of American life for Indian Americans. In "Mrs. Sen's," American life has material substance, but it leaves Mrs. Sen isolated and lonely, so she turns to cooking as a means of connecting with the community she longs for back "home" in India. In "Mr. Pirzada Comes to Dine," Lilia's living room serves as a liminal space linking the out of place Pakistani Mr. Pirzada with his family in Dacca. Lastly, in "This Blessed House," Sanjeev attempts to achieve the heights of both Indian and American social expectations by buying a house to symbolize the material wealth and status of the American dream and by marrying a respectable Indian woman, but he finds that attempting to meet all these expectations does not reap any fulfillment. For Indian Americans, trying to successfully construct a hybrid identity leads to a disorientation that exacerbates the isolation of American life.

Both Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* reveal the extent to which racism in America turns Asian immigrants into outsiders. Pervasive alienation makes America disorienting for Asian immigrants, prodding them to find means of orienting themselves to their new lives. The process of orienting the self to new environments looks different in each book. In *The Woman Warrior*, first generation Chinese immigrants orient themselves by turning their houses into fortresses to protect their bodies from the hostile outside, and by orienting their attachments toward China, the space they left behind. The book exposes this position as futile and instead suggests the more integrated position of constructing a home and a language out of the oppressor's domain. In *Interpreter of Maladies*, Indian immigrants find nothing to ground themselves

in America. While America glitters with the exterior promise of a better life, these characters find the interior of American life to be hollow.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the spatial mechanisms of power and the possibilities for survival and resistance. I have analyzed how bodies in literature become oriented toward certain forms of power, and how they turn away from such confines. Power in the texts I have considered is embedded in space: in the formation of the city, in the mapping of streets, and in the construction of houses. Because power is so deeply rooted, characters sometimes do not realize their cooptation into systems of power, and other times they "awaken" to the possibility that there are alternatives—that they could find ways of living otherwise. Those characters who awaken to these possibilities strike out in new ways by wandering, cooking foreign foods, learning counter-histories, and cultivating plant life on concrete covered grounds. Through these quotidian acts, these characters become deviants. They act in aberrant ways in pursuit of alternatives to the current order. They wander away. They get out of line.

In this project, I have asked what it means to become oriented toward alternatives to power, and what happens to deviants. Some embrace the deviancy of wandering, like Edna Pontellier and Robin Vote. But, as Sara Ahmed argues, deviant movements entail a kind of nausea, a loss of one's bearings, a sea sickness. This experience of nausea is, in part, why other characters, like Lily Bart, David, and Sanjeev, resist deviant movements or desires in favor of safety and stability. They seek out sturdy ground. They want to do the right thing—to be in the right place—because to get out of line can cause a

rupture and can lead the oppressor to violently force the deviant back in line, as Kingston's No-Name Aunt's story illustrates.

Thus, for some characters, hesitating to wander away from the hegemonic social structure is a survival strategy. David resists the houseless alleyways in favor of the firm contours of a house. Kingston's young narrator wants to pour concrete highways over the forests of mythology: to make straight lines that lead to clear answers. Lily Bart recognizes the comfort of the carriage ride along defined streets rather than the dangerous ramble that can lead her in alternate directions. But the queer body does not inhabit the heteronormative house comfortably. Direct, concrete answers do not encompass the complexity of hybrid identity. And the restrictive carriage ride does not allow for the pleasures of impulsive movement. Deviants do not "fit" comfortably within the confines of the straight and narrow path.

While some characters in these novels are ambivalent about pursuing alternatives to power, each novel, in its own way, establishes some modicum of living otherwise for its characters, if only as a fleeting reprieve from the violence of structural oppression. For Edna, this modicum of reprieve looks like her capacity to wander in uncharted directions. For Sethe and Maud Martha, this respite looks like bringing flowers into oppressive domiciles or seeking out green spaces where they can participate in communal acts of care. Hegemonic systems ultimately curtail alternatives to power, but these quotidian acts open up the possibility for lives to be lived at a slant in the future. It is only in the iterative actions of embodying the world otherwise that these alternatives could be lived out by those who follow such oblique lines.

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