

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Fogler Library

---

Spring 5-6-2022

## Becoming oriented: queering bodies and space in Shirley Jackson's the Haunting of Hill House and Toni Morrison's Beloved and Paradise

Kimberly Bartenfelder

University of Maine, kimberly.bartenfelder@maine.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/etd>



Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

---

### Recommended Citation

Bartenfelder, Kimberly, "Becoming oriented: queering bodies and space in Shirley Jackson's the Haunting of Hill House and Toni Morrison's Beloved and Paradise" (2022). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 3583.

<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/etd/3583>

This Open-Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact [um.library.technical.services@maine.edu](mailto:um.library.technical.services@maine.edu).

**BECOMING ORIENTED: QUEERING BODIES AND SPACE IN SHIRLEY  
JACKSON'S *THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE* AND TONI  
MORRISON'S *BELOVED* AND *PARADISE***

By

Kimberly Bartenfelder

B.A. George Mason University, 2020

M.A. University of Maine, 2022

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

(in English)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

May 2022

Advisory Committee:

Dr. Gregory Howard, Associate Professor of English, Advisor

Dr. Michael Swacha, Lecturer of English and Philosophy, Advisor

Dr. Kirsten Jacobson, Chair and Professor of Philosophy, Committee Member

Copyright 2022 Kimberly Bartenfelder

All Rights Reserved

**BECOMING ORIENTED: QUEERING BODIES AND SPACE IN SHIRLEY  
JACKSON'S *THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE* AND TONI  
MORRISON'S *BELOVED* AND *PARADISE***

By Kimberly Bartenfelder

Thesis Advisors: Dr. Gregory Howard & Dr. Michael Swacha

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts  
(in English)  
May 2022

This thesis project is titled “Becoming Oriented: Queering Bodies and Space in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Paradise*.” It attempts to explore how and why bodies and space(s) become oriented towards one another. Key ideas in this thesis are: bodies, space, becoming, potential, queer/queering, normativity, knowledge, narrative, race, and gender.

In exploring how and why bodies and space become oriented towards one another, this thesis is primarily concerned with constructing a conceptual framework of orientation. As such, part of its construction includes a variety of scholars (i.e., Sara Ahmed, Kirsten Jacobson, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emily S. Lee, Sigmund Freud, Sara Robinson, etc) within, generally, the fields of phenomenology, feminism, and the gothic, which often intersect. Namely, this thesis will act as if these scholars are seated at the same table in which I present a queer/queered/queering methodology to orientation as inspired by Sara Ahmed. Queer/queered/queering will

function as the ability to be or make strange or unfamiliar, queer identity (i.e., LGBTQ+), and as an activity that often requires bodies and space to participate in.

This conceptual framework will then be put in conversation with three selected pieces of literature: *The Haunting of Hill House*, *Beloved*, and *Paradise*. When situated in conversation, each text will offer a critical lens to queer/queered/queering orientation. In other words, each chapter will focus on one selected text and one register of orientation: queering normativity and queer positionality in *The Haunting of Hill House* (Chapter 1); queered/queering knowledge as informed by race and gender in *Beloved* (Chapter 2); queering narrative in *Paradise* (Chapter 3).

Ultimately the goal of this thesis is to illuminate how a conceptual framework allows readers to reconsider literature as a site for social change, social participation, and personal reflection. Namely, the conceptual framework compels readers to reconsider their complicity of reproducing established norms by offering a queer/queering lens. As such, a bridge is formed from conceptual-lived framework(s), fiction-reality, reader-writer, and so forth.

## **DEDICATION**

To my family, Noah, and the version of myself that often doubted that I could write this.

We did it!

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I'd like to thank Dr. Gregory Howard for his infectious enthusiasm during every stage of this thesis as it often inspired me to be a better writer and scholar and for his unrelenting encouragement of this project's potential from the start. I would also like to thank Dr. Michael Swacha for challenging me to think more complexly and his careful attention to my intellectual breakthroughs. Additionally, thank you to Dr. Kirsten Jacobson for her endless reading recommendations and generative conversations as they proved to guide my thinking and inquiries. Thank you to Adam Ray Wagner for being my first and most dear friend at the University of Maine. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Benjamin Markey as I have often felt that he took me under his wing as an academic colleague and friend. To all, I am deeply indebted.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapters	
1. ACCOUNTING FOR QUEERNESS: ORIENTATIONS OF THE BODY AND SPACE.....	8
2. ACCOUNTING FOR BOUNDARIES AND THRESHOLDS: ORIENTATIONS OF THE BODY AND SPACE.....	24
3. ACCOUNTING FOR NARRATIVE: ORIENTATIONS OF THE BODY AND SPACE.....	41
CONCLUSION.....	59
REFERENCES.....	61
BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR.....	64

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis titled “Becoming Oriented: Queering Bodies and Space in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Paradise*” grounds itself in my interests of bodies, space, speculative and haunted fiction, and thinking of literary texts as having a palpable impact on not only readers, but communities and their experiences, and theoretical frameworks. In other words, by reading speculative, haunted texts like *The Haunting of Hill House*, *Beloved* and *Paradise* through the lens in which people experience the world, both real and fictional, these texts become sites of potential for reconsidering literature as actionable and providing closer insight into social, cultural, and historical experiences (i.e., new ways of thinking, acting, and responding)—one key idea in this thesis. Notably, this potential manifests as a distinct aspect of social awareness, social participation, and personal reflection. It is with these sorts of potential that this thesis attempts to investigate and further understand what kinds of social contexts allow for (or disallow) social awareness, participation, and reflection by utilizing a framework of “queering” and “orientation.” In particular, this thesis greatly considers Sara Ahmed’s article “Orientations Towards a Queer Phenomenology” as its inspiration because of her negotiation of “queering” and “orientation” as both queer identities and queering as a phenomenological, orienting activity. In considering Ahmed, this thesis makes room for “queering” and “orientation” through a sense of becoming (i.e., a form of relationality). I situate becoming with “relationality” because of the ways in which one becomes, there is a transition or marker that moves a body or space from one meaning or understanding to the next and are therefore relational in their becoming (they both must be present to become). In other words, to queer one’s orientation, specifically that of their body

and/or space, allows those same bodies and/or space to become a site of potential not bound strictly to the text or to the framework, rather, an actualized potential.

To illustrate the impact of Ahmed's article, I invoke Jacques Derrida's "Parergon." Although not explicitly included in chapter discussions, Derrida has informed this thesis' basic methodological standpoint. In "Parergon" Derrida articulates a necessity to reconfigure what is inside the frame and what is outside the frame. He says, "Where is the gap? What gap are we talking about? And if it were the frame. If the gap constituted the frame of the theory. Not its accident, but its frame. More or less restated: if the gap were not only the lack of a theory of the frame, but also the place of the gap in the theory of the frame" (Derrida 9). I understand Derrida in this instance to map that we cannot, or perhaps should not, mistake theory for the gap (and vice versa). In other words, there is motion in the frame to consider what is central and periphery at any given time so that they both may be "central." There is a reciprocal dynamic that centrality and periphery share. They are dependent on the other's presence and therefore must be reconfigured. I perceive Ahmed engaging in such a reconsideration activity (i.e., queer and queering) that Derrida poses to which this thesis also emulates: a negotiation of the "centrality" of normativity or dominant narratives with the "periphery" of queering and/or queerness, perhaps even the haunting/haunted-ness as previously described.

As you will see throughout each chapter, the potentiality of queering and orientation takes shape through keys ideas such as gender and normativity, a racialized and gendered knowledge construction, and through narrative form. In doing so, the body and space become focal points by highlighting that bodies experience "queering" and "orientation" when and if confronted with space that (dis-)allows them to.

In situating this thesis with three texts, *The Haunting of Hill House*, *Beloved* and *Paradise*, two of which are by Toni Morrison, I interrupt what is often recognized as her trilogy—*Beloved*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise*. I intentionally interrupt Morrison’s trilogy by the inclusion of *The Haunting of Hill House* to mobilize a legibility that both informs and challenges normative discourse. In other words, *The Haunting of Hill House* mobilizes queerness as a social legibility that informs the limits of normative discourse while simultaneously challenges the extent to which queerness is active and participates in ongoing discussions of orientation not described in *Jazz*. Additionally, I also situate these three texts in conversation because of their haunted positionalities, both in haunted bodies and spaces. For instance, each text imagines a haunting or the haunted through social frameworks-- *The Haunting of Hill House* through a supernatural haunting of homespace (i.e., a space that is home or considered as home) as well as a residual haunting of heteronormativity on one’s psyche, *Beloved* through the haunting of generational slavery as well as the corporealization of the female (en-)slave(d) body and knowledge, and *Paradise* through the characterization of the haunted and the hunted. In other words, haunting makes room for speculation of social frameworks which I have tasked this thesis to investigate through orientation.

As such, this thesis distinctively situates itself in a conceptual framework -that of orientation—by anchoring itself in evidentiary literature (i.e., literature that offers evidence of such a conceptual framework as opposed to an application of such a framework). In doing so, this thesis diverts from a literary analysis or criticism which might simply apply the conceptual framework and instead imagines and theorizes the work’s potential to understand the very aspects of sociality that the text themselves investigate. In other words, this thesis diverts from a literary analysis or criticism

because it does not maintain that the conceptual framework can or should be limited to the page. Rather, it repositions the text as a site where certain themes and/or frameworks are present to ask: How does this text complicate or provide new inquiries for the themes and/or frameworks that are present in an actionable context? This latter explanation embodies “potential” by allowing my framework to service a more intersectional and interdisciplinary approach to literature. I am able to construct and work within a conceptual framework thanks to philosophers such as but not limited to: Maurice Merleau-Ponty whose emphasis on perception enlightens my discussion of social experiences and Michel Foucault whose emphasis on social interactions complicates my discussion of social knowledge, feminist scholars like bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Judith Butler and Adrienne Rich who all enrich my discussions of positionality and reconsidering “centrality,” as well as scholars like Homi Bhaba, Marilyn Mobley, Caroline Levine, Kirsten Jacobson who also complicate my discussions of the potential of bodies and spaces. In naming these scholars, I draw attention to the fact that many come from various disciplines and/or faculties, various social contexts of their own as well as social contexts they work with(-in) to ultimately create one large dynamic network of scholarship that this thesis attempts to seat them at the same table, myself as part of this conversation.

For this reason, let us take a closer look at the thesis chapters themselves as it will become apparent that they are linked. Chapter 1 titled “Accounting for Queerness: Orientations of the Body and Space” attempts to situate *The Haunting of Hill House* in conversation with queerness—both in the uncanny sense and of sexuality—as bodies are confronted with the homespace whose architecture reproduces a queer reading. In doing so, bodies like Eleanor are drawn and further oriented towards such spaces because her

perceptual, social experiences incline her to. This is not to argue for a preexisting disposition, but rather to articulate that queerness already exists within constructions of normativity. Queerness then must be found through one's bodily and spatial activation (i.e., becoming). This chapter in particular is interested first and foremost in Sara Ahmed and Kirsten Jacobson who both work at the intersection of reconsidering "what is" for "what can be." "What is" articulates the normative patterns of considering the body and space through the white, male philosophical perspective towards "what can be" which articulates a desire to animate the body and space more fully through diverse and complex identities. Specifically, I have structured Chapter 1 as follows: an informed objective of how I will posit and further examine queer orientation, a conceptualization of the homespace and bodies that interact with it, a problematization of said homespace and bodies, and a transition into a discussion that branches from the same vein of orientation, that is sexual orientation. What this structure allows me to do is elaborate on the complexity of orientation through a scaffolding process.

Chapter 2 titled "Accounting for Boundaries and Thresholds: Orientations of the Body and Space" works within another register of queered orientation: gendered and racialized knowledge in *Beloved*. In transitioning from queerness (as a marker of identity or experience) to queering (an activity of identity or experience), I posit that orientation must reckon with how different bodies experience space. In other words, bodily and spatial positionalities are informed by social and political circumstances and as such when marginalized bodies such as Black women are brought into the fold of orientation, we must consider the limits and potential of their positionality. This chapter specifically turns to discussions of perception (Merleau-Ponty and Emily S. Lee) in conversation with colonial and decolonial lenses (Homi Bhaba, Audre Lorde, bell hooks)

to eventually explicate Black motherhood in *Beloved* as an oriented knowledge and queer –as in challenging white, normative-- logic. Much like the structure of Chapter 1 which scaffolds orientation, Chapter 2 operates in a similar way: I recapitulate Chapter 1 to illustrate how Chapter 2 complicates the framework of orientation, I contextualize race with perception as a key conceptualization of how one may experience their body and further space, a problematization of such perception, and a transition into instances from the text that help us think through perception and positionality as a bodily, spatial, and cognitive experience.

The third and final chapter is titled “Accounting for Narrative: Orientations of the Body and Space” to investigate once again “the frame.” In other words, “the frame” of a narrative constitutes both the bodies and space in which the reader occupies as well as the more literary inclined bodies and space of characters. When positioned in conversation as a perceptual and active experience for both parties—as opposed to one occupying centrality and the other periphery--, texts like *Paradise* enable the framework of queer orientation to pull the fictional nature of a plot into the realm of reality where readers must be socially aware, are participants in the (re-)production of social values and norms, as well as imploring readers to reflect on their own experiences in light of the text. I am particularly interested in the work of Caroline Levine who articulates social, cultural, and historical connections through the language of “network” and Marilyn Mobley who extends narrative as, what I will argue, a culturally informed perceptual process. Unlike Chapters 1 and 2, the structure of Chapter 3 operates not as a movement into orientation and then how it may be complicated, but rather as a system that is in conversation with itself. In other words, Chapter 3 acknowledges narrative as

an additional register of orientation, but then attempts to contextualize itself with previous examples and frameworks from Chapters 1 and 2.

When I consider these chapters together, I understand becoming oriented as a queer(-ing) process dependent on a conceptual framework. In other words, through a conceptual framework, I am able to theorize possibilities (or potential) that each text begs and bring that theorization into a lived framework. Namely, I am not utilizing texts as an application of my conceptual framework, but more so utilizing texts as examples where the conceptual framework may already be present. This thesis attempts to make this legible for others as a more accessible way to read and respond to literature.

As you will notice throughout this thesis, I provide certain checkpoints. I define a checkpoint as a moment or moments where I want my reader to pause and consider more deeply the effect and/or effectiveness of my argument. For instance, in Chapter 1 I implore my own readers to reflect when I turn the discussion to sexual orientation from orientation as a precursory activity. In Chapter 2, I also provide a checkpoint when I articulate infanticide as a validated knowledge or logic in the context of *Beloved* which may challenge my own readers assumptions or beliefs. The checkpoint for Chapter 3 should be noticeable as to when I bring the preceding chapters back into the fold of the “network[ing]” of the thesis. Namely, these checkpoints offer contemplation in similar ways that the texts at hand already engage—perhaps alternative modes of thinking, being, and/or becoming.

Overall, “Becoming Oriented: Queering Bodies and Space in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Paradise*” seeks to reimagine the potential of literature through a conceptual framework. In doing so, this thesis functions as the starting point for a larger project.

## CHAPTER 1

### ACCOUNTING FOR QUEERNESS: ORIENTATIONS OF THE BODY AND SPACE

“Orientations are about how we begin, how we proceed from here.”

--Sara Ahmed, *Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology* (545)

“The home grounds the ‘absolute here’ of our body insofar as it allows the body a settled territory in which it finds itself—explicitly or implicitly—in its ‘here-ness.’”

--Kirsten Jacobson, *A developed nature: a phenomenological account of the experience of home* (361)

In conceptualizing the body and space, we must first ask, what body or bodies are we trying to identify? What space(s) can we locate them in? In asking these questions, we begin to situate a conceptualization within a narrower lens that may offer itself to specific conversations. Namely, the conversation that this first chapter situates itself in is Sara Ahmed’s conceptualization of queer/queerness/queering in *Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology*. In other words, Ahmed is interested in how phenomenology through a queer lens (i.e., both queer as a marker of identity and as an activity) allow for a renewed understanding of how one experiences their body—how one’s body becomes oriented through this queer lens. Throughout this chapter, I will join Ahmed’s framework as well as complicate it by invoking Kirsten Jacobson’s exploration of home (I will later refer to as homespace for the purposes of this examination) as it more fully details a spatial orientation toward belonging. In doing so, my goal for this chapter is to demonstrate how a conceptual framework of queer orientation is also a lived framework (i.e., that there is a relational ontology among

conceptual and lived and requires both to be fully informed). I will first posit how orientation becomes queer/queering for bodies and spaces at the conceptual register. I will then utilize this framework to more fully animate Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* as a lived framework despite its status as a fictional text. I will then also complicate this framework by examining sexual orientation—a key interest for Ahmed—as it becomes a dynamic marker of queer/queerness/queering.

Let us first explore how the framework of orientation, both conceptual and lived, gets definition from queer/queering. For example, Ahmed notes that, "...Orientations allows us to expose how life gets directed through the very requirement that we follow what is already given to us" (554). In other words, bodies—insinuated as "us" -- come to know where to go and what to do in life by the very means in which bodies are prescribed in certain situations and spaces. This can often be understood through normative lenses such as but not limited to heteronormativity and heterosexuality. Through these lenses, bodies follow the requirement of "what is already given." However, Ahmed also posits that although following this requirement or "line," may make a body "straight," we must be attuned to the "relationship between following a line and the conditions for the emergence of lines [which] is often left ambiguous" (554). Namely, bodily orientation may get definition through ambiguity that is often understood as queer (adj.), in this case strange as it veers (i.e., queering [v.]) from established, normative orientations. For example, queer orientations—both as an adjective and verb-- are part of experiential moments that are full of ambiguity, change, and sometimes even *disorientation*. As such, "how we proceed from there" directs how a queer orientation may be more equipped to handle the ambiguities constructed even

within normative frameworks. In other words, queer orientations allows and accounts for the multitude of bodily experiences as it encounters space(s).

Additionally, queer orientation becomes more expansive and informed through Jacobson's exploration of space as the body encounters it. I argue that she describes dwelling much like Ahmed does with queering, that is that they are both engaged *activities*. Namely, she says that "[w]e are active in our being passive" and in doing so our "experiences of home" are developed through a process of "learning *how* to dwell" which is fundamentally different from occupying a space and belonging in a space (356, my emphasis). Worth noting of Jacobson's description is its situatedness within Heidegger's conceptualization of "dwelling" which describes more of the activity of building and thinking to constitute dwelling. She, on the other hand, I argue, later motions towards queering Heidegger when she says, "[w]e are responsible for making our home, for making ourselves at home, and this is something we must learn how to do, and that we learn to with and through other persons" (362). I read this as queering orientation because it attempts to account for the variance of bodies that will make themselves at home since bodies must first learn how to with others. In other words, if dwelling is a learned process, then it should or may also be rooted in queer/queering in that it is not learned once, but rather experienced time and time again. As such, this marks a transition into (un)belonging, a space such as home that denotes safety (or danger) where bodies may find comfort in orienting themselves.

Here I turn our attention to architect and author, Sara Robinson, who asks us to consider in the preface of *Architecture is a Verb* "what architecture does" (xiii). Namely, this conversation has moved in the direction of further explicating space, such as the homespace and its architecture/construction, as a component in how bodies orient

themselves. Furthermore, Robinson says,

Calling attention to the movement initiated by the verb serves to correct this centuries-old deficit [being the subject-verb-object]. This act of reordering attention forces us to reconsider the realities which the verbs describe and opens new possibilities for thinking in terms of active embodied engagement (8).

Much like Ahmed and Jacobson, who I argue emphasize the activity of orientation and queering, Robinson has a similar vision in mind for architecture, that it is constructed, but continues to be active through “embodied engagement.” For example, the architectural homespace of Hill House in *The Haunting of Hill House* is active and is actively queer. Hill House is initially described as “not sane,” as it “stood by itself against the hills, holding darkness within,” its “walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut” (Jackson 1). However, despite Hill House being structurally sound, it requires its guests to become oriented with it as doors often swing shut unexpectedly, rooms lead to more rooms and not exits, and the map of the house appears irrational, perhaps queer, to normative homespace. As we begin to see how Hill House is active in orienting bodies to it through its queer construction, it simultaneously resists normative homespace as previously mentioned. Robinson adds that “[a]t its most profound level, the character of architecture—like that of matter—is resistance” (4). In other words, queering and resisting normative homespaces make space for non-normative bodies to feel safe, that they belong. In doing so, queer/queering becomes haunting for normative frameworks as it attempts to reconfigure, or perhaps interrupt, what it means to be and experience the world.

So far in this thesis, queer/queering has not been articulated as disruptive or interruptive explicitly. However, we should also read it as such as it allows the bodily

and spatial anxieties of normativity to be grounded by the very means that it attempts to displace. In other words, normative frameworks rest upon the existence of an other—queer bodies, queer space and architecture, queering as the process in which normativity may be uprooted. As such, queer/queering becomes active in establishing a new orientation that haunts its normative counterpart. Let us look more closely at the ways in which Hill House interrupts such a paradigm. For instance, the way in which Dr. Montague has assembled his guests mirrors that of a patriarchal family unit. Dr. Montague occupies the position of scientist and male authoritative figure as he is the one who invites guests to Hill House to participate in his experiment which investigates “supernatural manifestations.” His guests include Eleanor, Theodora (Theo) and Luke all of whom have either a relation to Hill House (Luke) or have a supernatural inkling or experience (Eleanor and Theodora). Upon their arrival Hill House, Dr. Montague assumes a patriarchal role amongst his guests as they jokingly play a game of who’s who: “Since we are listing our cast of characters, [my] name is Luke Sanderson” (40). They continue to orient themselves through bodily appearances: “Doctor Montague has a beard [so] you must be Luke” and “You are Theodora [because] I am Eleanor” (43). In other words, Dr. Montague has invited Eleanor, Theodora, and Luke to Hill House where they all are unfamiliar with one another and the house itself. As such, it seems as if this scene reads as queer (i.e., strange) but also as a queering of constructing their bodily orientations in Hill House through play. In engaging with such play, they are all active in a sense of belonging that is they can belong within the homespace of Hill House because they are all learning how to exist within it together—through Dr. Montague as a

fatherly figure and them as children under his watch (both under his position as this patriarchal head of house and as the observational scientist)<sup>1</sup>.

However, Hill House attempts to bring itself into the fold as an architectural *body* rather than just an architectural homespace to interrupt a patriarchal normativity. It does so through the supernatural. Although this supernatural element is not necessarily a lived framework outside of the text, it exacerbates the extent to which homespaces are participants in queer/queering orientation. For example, there are a series of thresholds that describe the house such as “absolute reality,” “whatever walked there, walked alone” and how it stood for “eighty years and might stand for eighty more” (Jackson 1). As an architectural body and not just an architectural space, what we may notice is how other bodies (of residents and guests) are implicated in every encounter manifesting Hill House to be a participant in queer orientation. In other words, Hill House becomes an oriented (architectural) body because of those it encounters and vice versa. With every body it encounters, it also reciprocates that body’s experiences as they now share an orientation toward one another, perhaps a sense of belonging. However, this belonging can also become haunting to the very bodies it attempts to orient itself with.

One of the most troubling belonging experiences in *The Haunting of Hill House* occurs when the house itself actively attempts to consume Eleanor, consume here being like a unification of two selves in the home space: “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME” (107). To this extent, belonging has moved past an orientation and towards a full-blown attempt at assimilation. However, this consumption imagery originates much earlier in

---

<sup>1</sup> See Anthony Vidler’s “The Architectural Uncanny.”

the text: “I am like a small creature swallowed whole by a monster...and the monster feels my tiny little movements inside” (29). If we turn to Ellen Moers “Female Gothic: The Monster’s Mother” we may get a better sense of this consumption imagery and belonging between Hill House and Eleanor, their relationship seemingly operational within the mother-child dynamic queering that of the patriarchal form. Moers explores how the trauma of the afterbirth defies popular concepts of unproblematic motherhoods. Notably, this “trauma” underscores that birthing a child is gruesome, horrific, and even uncanny in that the child is part of you, but not *you*. As such, this trauma of the afterbirth is literarily replicated in Eleanor and Hill House, Eleanor in a sense that her own mother was an invalid and Hill House in a sense that its own origins could not (permanently) house and care for children. Eleanor and Hill House are compelled towards one another based on their shared “feminine” traumas. However, this compelling moves past belonging as previously mentioned.

Additionally, we may ask: In what instance(s) does Hill House extend a welcoming hand towards the concept of belonging to Eleanor? Quite literally, we may look towards the hand that grabbed Eleanor’s in the dark: “God God—whose hand was I holding?” (120). We could posit that the hand was a manifestation of Hill House in a human form to extend its welcome to the homespace. We could also posit that this extension is one that is meant to orient and further unify Eleanor and Hill House, playing into the normative idea of mother-home (and womb). Rather, Eleanor’s inability to identify the hand and take up that extension to belong with or alongside Hill House suggests more that her active orientation in belonging is stunted by something queer, in this case something unfamiliar.

The same inability to orient Eleanor's self is modeled in other homes that she encounters before arriving at Hill House. For example, on her way to Hill House and *before* entering the town of Ashton, she views the stone lions perched on a porch and imagines the way her life might play out in their company. However, this imaginative state is interrupted by the thought "When I died..." (Jackson 12). Noticeably, this sentiment interrupts any possibility for any other way of being and experiencing; she will die. She then stops *in* Ashton where "[she] could live there all alone," but the conditional suggests that the alone-ness at this home is beyond the imagination (15). The "completeness" of this image suggests nothing more than a void. Hillsdale, the stop *before* Hill House, is full of a "disorderly mess of dirty houses" which did not appeal to her either (16). This may imply who is to clean that dirtiness and thus limiting her possibilities of existence—a stay-at-home mother, homemaker, house cleaner perhaps? Hill House becomes more of a suggestive space, rather, one that can be queered without a certainty about it (i.e., like the patriarchal homespace). Namely, each of these homes she passes on her way to Hill House do not have the same reciprocity as Hill House – do not provide the basis --architectural, lived, and imaginative-- to welcome her queer existence and resist normativity (although she begins at this "starting point" with the other Hill House invitees).

In turn, belongingness must be understood as an action. In other words, to belong, bodies and space must actively orient themselves towards one another. The process is one that moves back and forth to reconstitute being. This process, however, is experienced differently for every person thus making the experience(s) queer.

Throughout this chapter, we have explored orientation and belonging through the perspective of how bodies and space are active and complicit in each other's

constitution. Notably, the working framework denotes that orientation is a constantly constituted process, that orientation is active and is not a single result or outcome of bodies and spaces interacting. As such, I also consider Hill House as a body and thus an medium which may give or retract consent at any time.

However, we may now adjust our attention towards *sexual* orientation and how it informs bodies and space more complexly. For instance, sexual orientation opens a window of opportunity for legibility—*how* and *why* bodies come to recognize one another and in what spaces. For example, Merleau-Ponty argues that “Sexuality cannot be submerged in existence, as if it were merely an epiphenomenon” (162). He adds that “sexuality is neither transcended in human life nor represented at its core through unconscious representations. It is continuously present in human life as an atmosphere” (171). In other words, sexuality or sexual orientation is very much present in human relations and, as I argue, orientation. So, I emphasize here that sexual orientation, a continual exploration of sexuality and towards a sense of belongingness, must operate within the realm of queerness, that bodies and space are not and do not become legible one time and one time only. In other words, legibility should not be synonymous with stability. Rather, stability, much like orientation is constantly formed and formulated. As such, “stable” queerness (for the purposes of this examination) speaks more towards the ability to understand positional perception (in that perceiving of an experience is in those fleeting moments yet being queer as an identity is informed by those fleeting experiences/perceptions). And so, our attention should turn towards feminist scholars who work at the intersections of identity and philosophical understandings of being.

Mariana Ortega astutely notes that “...discussion[s] of home, location, and belonging in light of the experience of what I call multiplicitous selves—selves that

occupy multiple positionalities in terms of culture, race, sexual orientation, class, and so on” can allow for an active presence in how bodies come to recognize (perceptual) safety or danger (174). For instance, if a body perceives itself to be safe, such as in a home space, then it might also consider itself in a space of belongingness. Part of this belongingness may be dependent on the body’s positionalities that enables legibility—*how* the body comes to feel safe which could be because they sense a queer presence that is identifiable, relatable. However, the same could be said for the opposite; if a body perceives itself to be in danger, such as in a home space, then it may also consider itself in a space of un-belongingness. Rather, the body has identified though differing (i.e., Differing here denotes the ability to perceive, but the dissonance in which that perception aligns or not with their comfort(s). It would be inaccurate to say “illegible” because the body still identifies the space/being/body as dangerous, unwelcoming, and so forth) legibility something unrelatable, uncanny perhaps, and even threatening. And so, Ortega’s exploration of these “multiplicitous selves” illustrates that orientation, much like Ahmed’s and Jacobson’s exploration, is active is how “we” proceed to engage with other bodies and spaces, specifically the homespace. Particularly, “multiplicitous selves” inform orientation and how bodies become oriented. In turn, this process of engagement does not turn off. Rather, it continues through every perception or experience had and further defines how we proceed.

However, part of this procession includes resistance to established norms. For instance, “deviant” sexual orientations are perceived as resisting hetero-normativity/-sexuality. If we turn our attention back to Merleau-Ponty’s exploration of sexuality, then it exists more so as constituting relations with others, perhaps queer others. As such, resistance is also continuously informed by the bodies and spaces encountered. With

this understanding, sexual orientation as part of Ortega's "multiplicitous selves" informs what a body may be, where that body may belong, and who or what it may encounter.

Let us think about this concept of resistance relational to sexual orientation through the lens of Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality." Rich emphasizes a sexual(-ized) system oriented towards assumed hetero-sexual/-normative ways of being that "women will remain dependent upon the chance or luck of particular relationships and will have no collective power to determine the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives" (659-660). In other words, Rich notes that the "institution" of heterosexuality is so ingrained in Western societies that, women in particular, must reflect on their perceptions of sexuality and experiences to push forth monumental change in how their bodies interact with each other, other spaces, and for the future of legibility. To complicate Rich's conversation I invoke Judith Butler, known for her examinations of gender. In her essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Butler conceptualizes gender as a cycle if you will. I take her process and apply here it to sexuality. In other words, "homosexual" and/or queerness and "heterosexual" are constituted by all the other's presence. Rather, there is no "original" sexuality because to constitute "heterosexual," there's a requirement of what is *not* "heterosexual." As such, queerness is inherent to this process much like orientation, and thus sexual orientation, are to understanding relations and resistance. In summary, (1) Sexuality catalyzes orientation towards other bodies and spaces, (2) Resistance, much like queerness, is inherent to navigating our experiences of existence, and (3) the queer-heteronormative "boundary" is dependent on perceptual experience.

Let us examine a few instances from *The Haunting of Hill House* that offer us a platform for exploring sexual orientation considering the discussion above. At the

introduction of *The Haunting of Hill House*, Eleanor Vance is coded as a heterosexual woman, despite the lack of mention of any sexual experiences. Her “default” sexuality is relegated to heterosexual because of the influence of patriarchal norms that restrict her sexual movement and/or exploration (i.e., compulsory). However, Eleanor’s sexual orientation is never directly discussed but nonetheless becomes a point of contention. Notably, this contention becomes legible for Theo, who at the beginning of the text is coded as “queer” or perhaps “lesbian.” Although Theo is coded as “queer,” her stability as “queer” becomes dependent on who she interacts with to reinforce her understandings of herself. Theo is read as queer as a result of her relationship with Luke which is one without sexual desire or tension. As such, Eleanor, a sexually inexperienced woman with a desire for desire, enables Theo to rely on sexual orientation to actively constitute themselves in the home space of Hill House.

More importantly, their sexual (in-)difference informs their perceptions or experiences at Hill House. We should turn our attention to the following picnic scene:

The path led them to its destined end and died beneath their feet. Eleanor and Theodora looked into a garden, their eyes blinded with the light of sun and rich color; incredibly, there was a picnic party on the grass in the garden. They could hear the laughter of children and the affectionate, amused voices of the mother and father; the grass was richly, thickly green, the flowers were colored red and orange and yellow, the sky was blue and gold, and one child wore a scarlet jumper and raised its voice again in laughter, tumbling after a puppy, over the grass.

There was a checked tablecloth spread out, and smiling, the mother leaned over to take up a plate of bright fruit; then Theodora screamed. “Don’t look back,” she cried out in a voice high with fear, “don’t look back—don’t look—run” (130)!

What is at stake or at play in this scene is the traditional orientation of family life: mother, father, child, puppy, all in a dazed or regulated sense of being with one another determined by the “institution” of hetero-sexuality/-normativity. In Theo’s perceptual field, the picnic scene mirrors a life of restraint, of regulated behavior and understandings(s) of the self. However, for Eleanor, she is not visibly afraid. Rather, Eleanor seems to be confused regarding Theo’s reaction and why her hands were scratched and bleeding upon their return to Hill House. And so, the lack of perceptual experience relayed to the reader about Eleanor’s experience leaves us to question: What did she see? Did she feel comfort or belonging with the picnic and its goers? Did she frighten at the sight of her inevitable restriction if she were to orient herself heterosexually? I posit that Eleanor’s perceptual experience of the picnic scene is left ambiguous because “queer” orientations are not singular, not a one-and-done experience. Eleanor has never known a traditional family unit, so her first interaction with one is more out of curiosity--“Journey’s end in lovers meeting” is a phrase often repeated throughout *The Haunting of Hill House*. This may speak towards Eleanor’s curiosity and the ambiguous nature of the phrase’s usage. Thus, it’s legibility becomes dependent on her continual interactions with similar scenarios. For Theo, the “stably queer” character, she is frightened by the scene because, presumably, her perceptual experiences of hetero-sexual/-normative life disallows her from a sense of safety and belonging established by her “multiplicitous selves.”

Yet, we should turn, once again towards Sara Robinson who says that “There is nothing ‘hard’ about this line [--being assumed norms offered by heteropatriarchy]. The medium which allows and sustains the body is interpersonal, social, biological, symbolic, cultural and political in its myriad, intertwining and interpenetrating

dimensions” (22). In other words, Hill House, as a homespace, is constantly situated by the bodies that enter it and with those bodies the social, political, even biological understandings of themselves they carry with them. It reacts and is active in these orientations with the idea of “consent” at large. In contemporary conversations around consent, one understanding may be the allowance of bodies to interact with one another in sexual manners. However, consent also attempts to understand or allow for the understanding that there are boundaries, thresholds, decisions to be made or had that provide access. I use consent here to explore how the house gives consent to its visitors to roam about it and also how the visitors allow one another to access each other. In both instances, consent draws from conversations around sexuality and/or sexual orientation, but we should also notice that sexual acts are not particularly the concern of this section of this thesis.

This is at odds with the narrative assertion of its insanity in that sanity implies the ability to make decisions while insanity implies the inability to make decisions in a way that aligns with pre-established, normative, behaviors. However, if we read the house in defiance of its narrative insanity, as in queering this normative perspective, then Hill House becomes a site, a being, to make decisions and thus give or retract consent. The architecture of Hill House provides access points to other rooms or locations within the home. However, the architecture of Hill House also resists to give consent to some bodies in designated spaces. In the instance of Eleanor and Theo trapped in the blue room, the threshold of the door resists or disallows the entrance of *something* to the women (96). In other words, this something is prohibited from accessing the women and thus consent from the house is withdrawn, preventing danger. Although this may seem like the sole purpose of a door, to guard or keep out, for Hill House, this moment

signals that the house does not consent to the harm that may follow if it were to open. The house has begun to orient itself with the women to convince them that they belong in it despite, or rather in light of, their senses of “multiplicitous selves.”

Let us look at another instance involving “consent:” Eleanor’s banishment from Hill House. The night before Eleanor’s banishment, she is found climbing to the library tower, unsteady and “unstable.” Her actions lead the other invitees of Hill House, and in particular, Dr. Montague to forcefully remove her from the premises for her own *safety*. In response, Eleanor says, “The house wants me to stay,” signaling her fine-tuned awareness of her and Hill House’s desires and orientations (178). Regardless, Dr. Montague packs her things and directs her to her car. Dr. Montague in this particular instance strips Eleanor of her ability to consent to his charge and thus demands her to heed his directions, which seems characteristic of both heteronormative family and institutional life: the father commanding and his children to follow. As Eleanor begins to drive away following her ejection from the house, she thinks to herself “Hill House belongs to me” and drives herself straight into a tree on the property (181). Betraying the ambiguity of her sense of belonging, her final thoughts are, however, “*Why* am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Why don’t they stop me?” (182). Here we may come to understand that although Eleanor found belongingness with the house, felt its reciprocation, consented to its power, she ultimately becomes detached from a sense of self and requires intervention from others. She, although it’s too late, does not fully consent to her departure or her immediate death.

Ultimately, to strip bodies and/or space of their identities and perceptions/experiences, is to categorize them as passive in their orientations, as if orientation were to denote a singular location or state of being, a capsule. However,

when orientation is situated as sexual orientation, bodies and space become dynamic, not in a metaphorical sense but more so in a sense that the spectrum of sexuality ranges to how bodies can “read” each other—as asexual, heterosexual, homosexual, and queer--all of which are fundamentally constituted by “queer” being. For *The Haunting of Hill House*, sexual orientation adds to our understanding of how bodies and space become oriented and what that lasting (and adapting) impact may have for a lived framework.

## CHAPTER 2

### ACCOUNTING FOR BOUNDARIES AND THRESHOLDS: ORIENTATIONS OF THE BODY AND SPACE

“For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”

--Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, “Master’s Tools” (112)

“This task of making a homeplace, of making home a community of resistance, has been shared by black women globally, especially black women in white supremacist societies.”

--bell hooks, “Homeplace (a site of resistance)” (384)

Chapter 1 of this thesis conceptualized orientation, that is how bodies and spaces are active in *becoming*, through queer phenomenological understandings of Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*. Although not the apparent focus of *The Haunting of Hill House*, it is nonetheless striking to witness the absence of racial orientation as characters are often coded as white and, when considering its publication, the noticeable circumscribing socio-political conversations had about civil rights and race relations. In other words, it seems difficult for a reader to ignore this racial orientation. However, I consider *The Haunting of Hill House* as the inspiration for Chapter 2 in the hope that examining this tension in another text may prove to be more fruitful. In addressing this tension, I indicate that the notions of “boundaries” and “thresholds,” as informed by race, have become foundational to my conceptual framework. In Chapter 1, boundaries and thresholds were read as (1) ideological designations determining “normalcy” regarding sexuality (i.e., heterosexuality and/or

heteronormativity) and as (2) the condition(s) in which a body was privileged to move between and among space(s). Here, in Chapter 2, boundaries and thresholds will be read as (1) perceptual fields of knowing and (2) the condition(s) in which racialized bodies may or may not be privileged to move between and among space(s). What these two reinterpreted understandings do for this examination is reimagine how bodies and spaces *become* oriented. In other words, orientation as an active process should account for the sociality of being. I conceptualize sociality as the social, and often political, understandings or expectations that inform being. In other words, orientation is an active process and thus needs to consider the aforementioned sociality of being. Such activity is central to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* where boundaries and thresholds become exceptionally multiplexed and where it is often hard to differentiate and/or identify with precision. Yet, these notions nonetheless foreground *how* and *why* orientation as a conceptual framework must be constantly negotiated, I will turn to *Beloved* as the central voice in the discussion that follows.

In situating this chapter, and throughout my analysis, I also rely on Audre Lorde's call-to-action that the Black community, and more specifically Black women, must reinvent ways of being, knowing, and resisting and bell hooks' examination of the homespace for the Black community. In doing so, I assert that the Black community cannot and should not be described within the white, western paradigm. This is not to posit the Black community as "Other" but more so recognize that Black experiences are not equitable to White experiences. To strictly engage with a white lens and/or framework dampens how Black bodies and spaces have negotiated their positionalities. Effectively, this constitutes a reimagining of Black bodies and Black spaces supported by my lens of borders and thresholds in *Beloved*.

Let us first turn our attention toward the phenomenological experiences of race that inform orientation. In Emily S. Lee's collaborative book *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race*, she recounts how the history of colonialism determined "beliefs and prejudices about different racialized body features," but more importantly "sedimented" how "one lives one's body, in one's body movements" (Lee 247). Lee continues, "how one stands, sits, walks, and greets another human being, how slowly, or quickly, one moves in a social situation are body movements that develop within a history and exhibit how comfortable one feels and is made to feel in any given context" signaling that how one comes to know themselves, or I argue, perhaps even orient themselves around similar others, is situated within the terms of dominant, historical narratives and prescriptions. In this case, race, although sociality constructed, is a *lived* bodily experience reconstituted by interactions. Providing further insight into this discussion is phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty who notes that,

The civilization in which I participate exists for me with an evidentness in the *tools* that it adopts. When it comes to an unknown or foreign civilization, several ways of being or living can fit over the ruins or broken instruments that I find, or the landscape that I travel. The cultural world is thus ambiguous, although it is already present. There is a society here that we must get to know (Merleau-Ponty 363, my emphasis).

I emphasize "tools" to further draw a parallel between Audre Lorde's "master's tools" and indicate that "tools" will be used abstractly in this chapter. However, in this utterance, Merleau-Ponty describes an interjection of oneself into an existing world. This existing world assumes certain social orders and once a new being or body arrives into such a space, there is an implicit option for them to become complicit in

reconstituting previous assumptions or altering them. The either/or complex articulated should remind us of Lee's claim that racialized bodies are "sedimented" by social orders and thus the perpetuation of these social orders is often hard to diminish.

Underlying Merleau-Ponty's explication of civilization is a sanitized perceptual experience. I understand "sanitized" as a white male and assumed privilege that often attempts to signal or masquerade as a uniform sociality. However, brought to the forefront in Lee is how these experiences are socially informed situations. Experiences are amalgamations of historically defined ways of being and reinventions of ideologies of race (--and gender, sexuality, etc). I argue that this reinvention(s) is where Lorde seeks out our participation—that we must not use the same tools (i.e., conceptual theories, knowledge as absolute or [pre-] determined) as masters; that if the same tools are used (i.e., colonial knowledge) then orientation is limited to the recycling of a white, western paradigm of being, knowing, and sociality.

Though orientation is a negotiated process between bodies and spaces, I argue that there exists a conditional field of knowledge that grounds this orientation. Michel Foucault's *Power* notes that knowledge examines the relations of "struggle and power" (12). More notably though, Foucault's *The Order of Things* explicitly details knowledge through the language of "field(s)." His examination probes knowledge as a field because of the epistemological demands of time and space. The field is also referred to as episteme—a charge not of history but more archaeologically inclined. My intent in using this field of knowledge or knowing is to reimagine it as a "conditional field of knowledge" as mentioned previously to describe more fully an operation, the active process in which bodies and spaces become oriented. I consider the fields themselves to be physical, geographic *spaces* where *bodies* come to make sense of their racialized,

politicized, boundarized conditions. In the case of *Beloved*, the fields are 124 Bluestone --referred to as 124 hereafter-- and Sweet Home including bodies such as Beloved, Sethe, Denver, and Baby Suggs. In each of these fields, and the subsequent conditions, there exists an underlying question that I will attempt to answer: What knowledge is known, preserved, created, or resisted in these fields or spaces?

To begin to answer this question I invoke Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* as it informs what I have started to describe as a field or space. Bachelard notes that the space of the "house is not experienced from day to day only, on the thread of a narrative, or in the telling of our own story," rather, the house comprises historically informed senses of becoming and through the very memories and dreams we carry with us from other spaces (27). Notably, the homespace as a conditional field of knowledge gets definition from a plethora of experiences, memories, and dreams. In a sense, the home does not know, preserve, create, or resist knowledge upon one encounter. The homespace actively generates knowledge.

So, if we first turn our attention to *Beloved*'s 124, then we may contextualize Bachelard's understanding as such: 124 has historically taken up Black residents through the Underground Railroad and served as a more permanent homespace for Black people like Baby Suggs, Sethe, and Denver. In doing so, the experiences and memories housed within 124 are shared through at least three generations of Black women to which Bachelard further claims that the "Past, present, and future give the house different dynamisms, which often *interfere*, at times opposing, at others, *stimulating* one another" (Bachelard 28; my emphasis). In a sense, the house links itself through the bodies that experience it and the memories shared with and of it. The bodies --Baby Suggs an ex-slave, Sethe an escaped slave, and Denver considered neither

slave nor “free”—inhabit their bodies through understanding their racialized boundaries and/or positionality. In other words, through the homespace of 124, ex-slave becomes a condition of freedom, escaped slave becomes a condition of edginess (edge-ness), and neither slave nor “free” becomes a condition of threshold-ness. Oftentimes these conditions *interfere* with another’s like Denver’s eventual draw towards Beloved who also inhabits a threshold space between life and death, while others *stimulate* like Beloved’s corporealized presence and effect on Sethe. For Sethe, the way in which she understands her body and 124 shifts when Beloved’s body also occupies 124.

As such, 124, as a movement to an inside space from an outside space being Sweet Home, is informed by these interferences and stimulations. The most profound of these relations are generations of Black women and the one belonging to a struggle of lost-and-found, namely *Beloved*. She occupies a between field or space, that of life and death. Beloved’s introduction comes from Baby Suggs who says that ““Not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby. My husband’s spirit was to come back in here? or yours”” (6)? The insight provided here may suggest that a baby might not have the memory of slavery or its legacy, that the knowledge of cruelty does not reside in the folds of their brain, the creases of their skin, or the associations of the field/space/house as it would for others; their grief piling up to house rafters to illustrate its immensity. However, the very fact that Beloved’s ghost lingers in 124 *interferes* with how Sethe and Denver, the living residents, come to understand and know 124.

bell hooks understands the field or space of home as the “Construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination” (384). If we consider Sethe’s escape to 124 from

Sweet Home as enacting hooks' sentiment of safety, then we may also posit that her condition of edginess (edge-ness) is only permitted when the threat of Sweet Home interferes with her safety. However, the threshold between safety and danger becomes blurred as no single space ever assumes complete safety or complete danger; 124 as the embodied house of racial trauma, the haunted house due to the baby ghost of Beloved (17), and the escape-to house attempting to negotiate the terms of safe and dangerous.

As noted in Chapter 1, this dynamic was examined as active and passive dwelling in which the home space became safe or dangerous. On the condition of blackness, the homespace becomes a site of tension, necessary for redefinition of how bodies are active. In other words, safety acts as the motivator for an active orientation and shapes the knowledge of certain locations and who may exist in them. Part of 124's allure to safety is that of freedom as well: "To get to a place where you know you could love anything you chose—not to need permission for desire—well now, *that* was freedom" (Morrison, 191, original emphasis). Namely, to know a condition at present as not free in the hopes of freedom acknowledges a dynamic set of knowledge dependent on space; that one field or space is not free and thus one seeks out that freedom elsewhere as presented in 124.

There's also presumptive knowledge, an orientation that happens outside in physical fields. For example, the presumptive knowledge of Sweet Home, given its name, is that it is a sweet home, a delightful place to live. However, the name is misleading, and the knowledge created at Sweet Home is one of counterfeit equality (i.e., Sweet Home is a slave plantation). Propelled by those like Mr. Garner, Sweet Home's plantation owner, and Schoolteacher, the largely identified white supremacist, they both attempt to express their control over Sweet Home's slaves in deceitful ways. For Mr. Garner, he fosters the illusion that Sweet Home is better than other plantations

because, for instance, Sweet Home (Black) men are treated as (white) men. They are not outwardly and often brutalized like slaves would be on other plantations and when they are disciplined it is because (white) men require order. However, Schoolteacher represents another face to white discipline and knowledge opposite that of Mr. Garner. An interaction between Sethe and her husband Halle indicates this dissonance: “When Halle came in I asked what he thought about schoolteacher. He said there wasn’t nothing to think about. Said, He’s white, ain’t he? I said, But I mean is he like Mr. Garner” (230)? Halle’s declarative response indicated a deeper found knowledge of whiteness and by extent coloniality in that colonial knowledge binarizes Black and white as fixed: “It don’t matter, Sethe. What they say is the same” (231). What is said in this context refers largely to what slaves know about white people, that they own slaves and are all the same no matter how nicely they speak to you.

As such, I rely on the theoretical framework of (de-)coloniality and its knowledge-creation strategy as *Beloved* is clearly set within its parameters. One articulation of colonial knowledge comes from Homi Bhaba who notes that the “colonial and post-colonial condition” exudes Freud’s “unheimlich” because of the way fictions “negotiate the powers of cultural differences in a range of transhistorical sites” (13). In other words, the colonial condition, and perhaps even the colonial legacy, elicits unhomeliness and the uncanny because these “sites” or spaces such as the home “relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence” (15). Drawing again on Halle’s explanation that all white people are the same, by association, the spaces are too as long as there is white dominion over them.

“White” knowledge as represented by Schoolteacher and Mr. Garner is that of a racialized, politicized form that constructs the boundary between who can attain and

maintain it. This differs from the kind of knowledge which I describe with Halle in that knowledge shifts from place and person, there's fluidity, it's migratory and purposefully unstable whereas white knowledge is presented as absolutes, as law, as science. For instance, Schoolteacher documents the characteristics of "cattle" or those bound by chattel slavery such as Sethe as if her physical characteristics "sedimented" her body, body movements, and social reception of her value. Schoolteacher says "No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put [Sethe's] human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up" (Morrison 228). Effectively, the very presence of "human" and "animal" situates her body in the physical field like animals and in a de/un-human conceptual field.

There's a commonality between these fields, 124 and Sweet Home, in that nothing is wholly permanent. The activity of knowledge, of movement, orients bodies and spaces. The people that live in these fields or spaces are migratory, they are between spaces, and *Beloved* is even more so in that she moves between plains. She even defies any absolute knowledge as proposed by Schoolteacher. Orientation here seems to be fleeting and unstable and so, when we consider knowledge and orientation, they both are active, migratory, and service a more informed understanding of *becoming* (social, gendered, racial, political).

Morrison urges readers at the end of *Beloved* that "[this] was not a story to pass on" and that "remembering seemed unwise" (323-324). Bessel Van Der Kolk, author of *The Body Keeps the Score*, might respond that trauma must be confronted, but it takes "courage to listen" (197). In a sense, *Beloved* is a story of trauma, the hauntings of slavery, and also one of resistance—we must have the "courage to listen," specifically to the Black mothers whose narratives we get a glimpse of.

In a sense, Black motherhood is an oriented knowledge and a tool for rethinking coloniality. And so, I argue that this, in collaboration with “knowledge” as examined previously through racialized, binarized colonial knowledge, leads me to examine Black motherhood as a kind of oriented knowledge that does not assume white, colonial theoretical demands such as often conceived of in American women’s suffrage or more contemporarily “mainstream feminism.”

I consider Black motherhood/mother as a *body* of knowledge, both in a literal and conceptual sense. When considering knowledge as literal I mean to suggest a corporeal absorption of actions that are transferred into a knowledge set. In other words, for Black mothers in Morrison’s *Beloved*, violence against and violations of the body are ever-present. However, this “absorption of actions” indicates how Black mothers maneuver such violence against them and transfer that into a knowledge set, manifesting as the necessity to protect their children. At the conceptual level, the literal sense is collectivized as “rememory”—notably, “rememory” functions not as a single recollection of an event, but collective recollection of trauma(s), a haunting—a residual presence similar to *Beloved*’s ghost in 124. In other words, the individual literal experiences of Black women become collectivized through Morrison’s conceptualization of “rememory” and thus activates how Black women navigate their social contexts.

However, we should first examine how colonial knowledge affects Black motherhood and then derail its centrality. Colonial Virginia in 1662 passed a law known as the *1662 law* or *Partus sequitur ventrem* which established that children assumed the condition of their mothers, therefore, prescribing that children inherited slavery from their enslaved mothers. This law not only generated slavery as an “inheritance,” but launched a system in which Black women were considered reproductive machines,

“breeding” children for chattel—effectively dehumanizing Black women. Their bodies became sites to be violated by slave masters and to violently mass produce. In a sense, the colonial knowledge of Black women and thus motherhood initiated a practice of mechanization, commodification, and violence to support the economic stability of slavery<sup>2</sup>.

To overturn this colonial knowledge, Black women faced the challenges of protecting their children from the dangers—most notably rape-- of slavery, specifically female children. As such, this is where *Beloved* begins. Morrison describes in the foreword the historical accounting of Margaret Garner, an escaped enslaved woman who killed one of her children and was arrested for attempting to kill another, the reasoning being that she could not bear to see them “returned to the owner’s plantation” (xvii). And so, by exploring Black motherhood as a body of knowledge, an oriented knowledge, we may come to recognize the impact of decentering generations worth of colonial legacy towards a different *becoming*: “Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle” (234). Rather, Black people were not jungle beings, but humans. Although Black motherhood is not brought particularly into the fold in this utterance, I argue that Black motherhood is a kind of becoming that begins with resisting Black jungle-ness described through humanity’s terms. The sense is more that Black women are included in humanity and their condition as mothers further complicates the terms of humanity.

Let us investigate Morrison’s accounting of the literal, corporeal body of knowledge. As mentioned previously, the conception of children is oftentimes motivated by the

---

<sup>2</sup> Although not the explicit purpose of this examination, but a Marxist analytical lens would comment on capitalist notions of exploited labor and production.

future labor, and perhaps pleasure, they will produce. It is said that Baby Suggs, an ex-slave, was “shock[-ed that] nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children,” of which she had eight (Morrison 28). In this remark, there is a sense of the body as migratory, that it can be placed and displaced by the will of a slave master at any time for any reason. Rather, the Black body seems to be disposable. Notably, the body as “migratory” and “disposable” helps constitute the colonial understanding of Blackness. For instance, Sethe, while at Sweet Home, experienced the trauma of her stolen milk, a violation of her breasts, and ability to provide for her children: “Those boys held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn’t speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back and when it closed it made a tree” (19-20). “Them boys” stole her milk because they knew that by taking it, Sethe could not nurse her children, that she could not mother them. However, because Sethe told on “them boys” she was whipped to which the skin on her back never recovered. She only recounts this to Paul D, an old intimate friend, at 124 where it is relatively safe to discuss, him tracing her “chokecherry tree” (93)—the scarring from the whip: “Her back skin had been dead for years [and] what she knew was that the responsibility for her breasts, at last, was in [Paul D’s] somebody else’s hands” (21). In a sense, Sethe’s body became a site accessible to others, her physical scars open for display whereas her emotional scars embedded into her memory, that which Morrison argues may not be as easily accessible.

Agency (or lack thereof) seems to ground Sethe’s bodily experiences. However, her acknowledgment of the violations of her body and her ability to communicate this

agency in 124 articulates a transition from trauma-victim to a threshold of resistance.

Baby Suggs also acts as an advocate for the bodily agency of Black women:

People look down on [Baby Suggs] because she had eight children with different men. Coloredpeople and whitepeople both look down on her for that. Slaves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them. Still, they were not supposed to have pleasure deep down. She said for me [Denver] not to listen to that. *That I should always listen to my body and love it* (247, emphasis added).

In other words, I argue that Baby Suggs encourages bodily agency, pride, and comfort for young Denver, that she should not feel the shame of or obligation to any slave master or to the legacy of slavery itself. Denver should revolutionize what it means to be a Black woman who may be sexual, loving, and private—as opposed to having a public body, one deemed “rapable” or as a commodity by the terms of slavery.

We should now turn our attention to the conceptual body of knowledge. Morrison writes in “The Site of Memory” that to be an author is to recognize that “no matter how ‘fictional’ the account [or story was] the act of imagination is bound up with memory” (*SM* 98). In other words, fictionalization, despite the imaginative means, is inextricably linked to an author’s understanding and extraction of their own memory, and what I argue, knowledge—historical, social, political, and so forth.

This accounting seems to be in line with Morrison’s authorial utilization of Margaret Garner’s story: “So I would invent her thoughts, plumb them for a subtext that was historically true in essence, but not strictly factual in order to relate her history to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and women’s ‘place” (*Beloved* xvii).

In Margaret Garner's and eventually Sethe's case, infanticide assumes a position in the place of "rememory" that link historicity and Black motherhood—although I should note that infanticide is not to be understood as applying to every Black mother, rather, that its presence is known and "rememored" by many, as Morrison highlights, through slavery and its generational, traumatic legacy (i.e., Baby Suggs, Sethe, Denver, and Beloved). For example, Paul D proposed that Sethe and he should have a baby, but "Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer" (155). "Motherlove" was dangerous, clinging to a child that could be ripped away from you or brutalized was a risk, something Black mothers knew too well. Besides, Sethe had already experienced "motherlove" before Paul D asked her to have a baby with him. Namely, when Schoolteacher came to take her and her babies back to Sweet Home from 124 she "took and put [her] babies where they'd be safe" having been seen "snatching up her children like a hawk" shovel and saw in sight (185, 193). In a sense, safety was not bound to one person or location, rather, a condition that elicits resistance.

Although "motherlove" is written as dangerous, I argue that it functions more dynamically than initially understood. For instance, Sethe's love for her children and desire to protect them from Sweet Home and Schoolteacher drove her, in the name of love, to murder. From this perspective, dead is better than enslaved. Notably, Sethe's reasoning or logic behind a founded racial and gendered knowledge works towards establishing a new sense of becoming for Black mothers/motherhood. This sense of becoming defies a white western reason, logic, and knowledge as it would deem Sethe's actions as "irrational," "wrong," or even "immoral." However, through Morrison, we come to get a better sense that Sethe's infanticide is one context or manifestation of Black motherhood's becoming knowledge in practice. If we consider, again, the

“unheimlich” in a gothic context in which Morrison seemingly operates within, then Sethe’s infanticide is in response to an unhomely western knowledge of how to live and what is deemed appropriate. Rather, this becoming is not about equality of reason, logic, or knowledge but a prompting of how other kinds of knowledge, such as Black motherhood, operate within its own terms and actions—that this knowledge cannot operate within the demands of a white theoretical framework as mentioned earlier in this examination.

As Van Der Kolk writes, “Traumatic events are almost impossible to put into word” (233). This sentiment echoes in Morrison’s “unspeakable thoughts, unspoken” (235). In other words, to articulate that “motherlove” and murder are reasonable and are necessary seem monstrous. Paul D passes judgment saying that “What you did was wrong Sethe” that “You got two feet, Sethe, not four” clearly drawing a parallel between her act of infanticide and an animalistic nature. Notably, this is the knowledge of Black *mothers*, not Black *men*. Notice Paul D assuming the positionality of a Western moralist or rationalist due to assuming “the master’s tool” as his own. He seemingly objects to Sethe’s infanticide even though he does not subscribe to the becoming orientation and knowledge of Black motherhood. As such, infanticide as “monstrous” as animalistic reinforces the same knowledge that Schoolteacher and Mr. Garner nourish at Sweet Home, absolute-ness, one-ness. In turn, this new kind of oriented becoming and knowledge creates its own logic that the Black women of *Beloved* know.

This knowledge came back to haunt Sethe and the women of the town where 124 exists. Word spread that Beloved corporealized, that as she grew, Sethe became weaker and smaller, I argue simulating a parasitic relationship (294). At the news, the women gathered into three groups: “those that believed the worst; those that believed none of it;

and those like Ella [a Black woman kidnapped and abused by a white father and son for years], who thought it through” (300-301). We should note here that Ella, having first-hand experienced years of rape and isolation, somewhat sympathized with Sethe and Beloved seeing that “she didn’t mind a little communication between the two worlds, but this [Beloved’s corporealization] was an invasion” (302). At last, thirty women arrived at 124 to confront Beloved and Sethe and what they find becomes more horrifying than Beloved herself. Instead of finding the residents of 124 on the porch, they see themselves: “Younger, stronger, even as little girls in the grass asleep” (304). They saw a picnic scene, laughing abound, playfulness as it once was in Baby Suggs’ yard. They all began to pray and when Sethe heard them from inside 124 she runs away, deserting Beloved to join the women, effectively reorienting her body towards other safe bodies.

Beloved, it is said, disappeared, no one quite sure how she went and where, but they “forgot her.” However, forgetting is not the inversion of memory, rather “Down by the stream in the back of 124 her footprints come and go, come and go. They are so familiar, Should a child, an adult place his feet in them, they will fit. Take them out and they disappear again as though nobody ever walked there” (324). The “courage to listen” to Beloved’s story reminds Black women and mothers of a slave past but encourages them to resist that past for a better future, one where new knowledge can be created and lived. Additionally, notice here how the logic of Black motherhood manifests not through infanticide, but through futurity. In other words, Black motherhood as an oriented knowledge describes more to its logic than infanticide, one that is more hopeful for Black children relational to other bodies and spaces, a post-slavery imagination.

Effectively, *Beloved* operates within the boundaries of colonial knowledge, but also seeks to demolish and resist it. This is the legacy that colonialism cannot deter. As

such, what is at stake in orientation—knowledge, boundaries, and thresholds-- is not only its activity, but also its reverberations, that through continual constitutions of orientation in the present --a decolonial perspective-- implies that it will redetermine the past and affect the future. The experiences of Black women and mothers in *Beloved* may not precisely occur in the twenty-first century, but the remnants of their memory cling to the understanding of Black bodies and Black spaces resisting.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**ACCOUNTING FOR NARRATIVE: ORIENTATIONS OF THE BODY AND**  
**SPACE**

“The verb ‘to narrate’ is rooted in the word for coming to know—and the presence of narrative in all cultures and historic periods suggests the critical role that narrative plays in ordering human experience”

--Sara Robinson, *Architecture is a Verb* (179).

Throughout this thesis thus far, I have examined a few registers of orientation, that is queerness as queering normativity (Chapter 1) and the queering of knowledge in conversation with race and gender (Chapter 2). The goal of this third and final chapter is to investigate narrative as an additional register of orientation. In other words, narrative as Robinson describes, as an activity in “ordering the human experience,” should negotiate the social and cultural contexts of, what I will argue, both readers and characters. In doing so, this third chapter begins to expand its understanding of orientation by queering the role of the reader as complicit in assembling, specifically, the fragmented narratives within Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*.

To investigate queering narrative as an orientation more thoroughly, I will first examine a reader’s role or participation with *Paradise* as a methodology. I will then offer my reading of *Paradise* regarding how bodies and spaces become implicated in such a framework (i.e., offering checkpoints for my own reader from previous chapters). Finally, I will make concluding remarks on how queering narrative in *Paradise* advances the potential of literature/fiction. In doing so, I invoke the work of Caroline Levine’s

*Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* specifically her examination of “network,” “cooperation,” and “narrative closure” to detail the activity of queering I propose. I also invoke Marilyn Mobley’s book *Folk Roots and Mythic Wings in Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison* and her article “Spaces for readers: the novels of Toni Morrison” to detail the socio-cultural impact that readers and reading have on texts like *Paradise*.

To briefly overview the literature, many scholars have investigated narrative form. For instance, some have investigated narrative form through the lens of “folk culture” (Byrd), a sense or structure for belonging (Bieger), as a function of a culture, nature, personal triffecta (Hernandi), and as the potential implications of temporality, that is past, present, and future (Ordóñez). However, narrative form has not been extensively researched in Morrison’s *Paradise* comparable to her other texts like *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), and *A Mercy* (2008). Although it is not the aim of this chapter nor thesis to be a comprehensive study of narrative, this chapter nonetheless attempts to open readers of *Paradise* to the discussion and importance of narrative.

Let us first examine reader participation as methodology-- as a narrativizing experience. In Mobley’s “Spaces for readers” she says that Morrison offers readers “windows” into the lives of characters in the specified contexts of the novel as well as “windows” into the lives of the people behind those characters whose contexts are much more complex than the text describes. It is through these “windows” that Levine’s “network” better informs. Levine describes a “network” as a form that “first and foremost affords connectedness” and allows us to understand “how many other formal elements— including wholes, rhythms, and hierarchies—link up in larger formations.” Namely, a network is “crucial to our grasp of significant assemblages—including society itself” (113). If we consider both Mobley and Levine with respect to readers, then what is

produced is a larger network of considering characters' contexts in light of readers' contexts (and vice versa). For instance, these contexts may include bodily and spatial experiences to which this thesis has largely been interested. Effectively, in recognizing that readers are participants in a text, specifically that of narrative, is a queer process that is often overlooked as a text is assumed to be fiction(-al) on many, if not all, accounts.

Morrison also compels readers to engage with such a methodology as she explicitly outlines in *Paradise's* preface: "The perceptive ones [readers] read them [women of *Paradise*] as fully realized individuals- whatever their race" so that "the narrative [may seek] to unencumber itself from the limit that racial language imposes on the imagination" and so that they may "search for one's own space" (xvi-xvii). Present here is Morrison's attempt not to "color blind" her readers but implore them to contemplate how and why lived bodily experiences (i.e., race and/or gender) generate a search for "one's own space" without reading characters as completely defined by such (i.e., assumptions, biases, stereotypes, etc), rather as influences. In other words, readers are encouraged to navigate *Paradise* as if they were part of its initial construction and part of its reconstruction. Mobley might consider both readers and authors (like she does for Morrison as author) as "cultural archivists" who should "implicitly and explicitly propose a *revision* of reconceived notions of gender and class and, in Morrison's case, race as well" (9, my emphasis). Effectively, we are urged to participate through our role as readers and thus *our* lived experiences to make sense of characters' bodies and space in which we may recognize or be unfamiliar with. In doing so, every reading of *Paradise* becomes dependent on the individual reader and their experiences giving the text momentum to continue to be a queer activity of becoming oriented. In

continuation of this charge, this examination will specifically follow the narratives of Mavis, Grace and Consolata in *Paradise* (although more female narratives are included) and their bodily experiences of homespace such as but not limited to Ruby and the Convent.

As I am *one* reader of *Paradise* and a participant in its activity of becoming oriented, I argue that as readers, our ability to connect Mavis and Grace's fragmented narratives may be reflective of what Mobley notes as "all narratives move in at least two directions at once—toward recovering the past and toward being heard or told" (168). In other words, Mobley describes a recovery effort as well as an emancipatory cause. I read Mavis and Grace as embodying a recovery effort of both their narratives as we, readers, must contextualize their separate experiences through one another while simultaneously acting as the conduits for emancipation, that is of a social justice or awareness that is embedded in the text (i.e., female liberation from stringent gender/sex roles or perhaps even sexual freedom/agency). In doing so, we again partake in Levine's network of articulating a cultural consciousness or conversation. Namely, through Mavis' and Grace's fragmented narratives, readers may begin to consider them as well as *Paradise* as a cultural artifact—I have extended the language of Mobley's "cultural archivist" to the cultural artifacts readers unearth. In other words, a cultural artifact comes to be through the cultural conditions inside and outside of the text that compels readers to consider the text as such. For example, one of the cultural artifacts in *The Haunting of Hill House* is sexual orientation at odds with or despite heteronormativity. When sexual orientation is considered an artifact through the narratives of Eleanor, Theodora, Luke, and even Mr. and Mrs. Dudley, it is because the narratives themselves are fragmented and are ultimately brought together or "networked" because of Dr. Montague, his

invitation bringing each of those bodies to the homespace of Hill House. *Beloved* on the other hand compels readers to consider the artifact of generational slavery amongst women whose narrative network becomes established through the orientation of related bodies: Baby Suggs, Sethe, Denver, and *Beloved*. However, in *Paradise*, we as readers must discern the cultural artifact and network as characters' bodies are not brought to spaces like Ruby and the Convent in the same ways nor through the same means as the previously mentioned texts. In other words, the artifacts and narratives that have been networked in previous texts are not upheld in *Paradise* therefore our positionality as reader requires us to become more active, in fact queer, in finding when, where, how, and why, for instance, Mavis, Grace, and Consolata are linked.

Now that we have a better grasp on reader methodology, let us now turn our attention to specific instances from *Paradise* where my reading of bodies and space are implicated in such a framework of orientation. Notably, I will examine at great length Mavis as I read her narrative as informing Grace's (this will become apparent through a later metaphor of "double"). Mavis Albright's narrative is a compelling one for a reader because of, what I argue, an apparent queerness described through her bodily and spatial experiences. Much like my previous examination of *The Haunting of Hill House* and *Beloved*, there is an overwhelming sense of mother/mother-home in *Paradise* to which we get an initial glimpse of through Mavis. Her narrative begins with her experiences of motherhood and marriage, distinctly Mavis' failure as a mother as her neighbors recount how "seem[ingly] pleased [they were] when the babies *smothered*" (21, my emphasis). Her babies, the twins Merl and Pearl, were her youngest and when she left them in the backseat of the mint Cadillac as she ventured into the grocery store for "weenies" they smothered. If we read Mavis as "fully realized" as Morrison implores

us to, then we cannot necessarily argue for an oriented knowledge—black motherhood—as I do in Chapter 2 of this thesis which posits a specific time, space, and body that can embody this knowledge. Rather, we should examine the narrative of motherhood like Chapter 1—that is through how mothers, and by extent children, find limitations through this relational set (mother-child). Namely, there is a set of traumas experienced in this relationship where Eleanor (*Hill House*), the child, sought orientation in a motherly presence whereas Mavis begins to find orientation through a lack of her motherly presence, a literary topos.

For instance, when the death of Mavis' twins hit the news, one journalist asked her “Is there something you want to say? Something you want other mothers to know” to which Mavis had no clear response. Perhaps underlying in this instance is the dissonance between Mavis' condition as mother and its associated responsibilities and a queerness indicating more of a foreignness, an uncanny sense of her role as someone's mother. As Sara Ahmed notes in “Disorientation and Queer Objects”: “To make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things” (161). Mavis seemingly embodies Ahmed's sentiment, her life disturbed and reordered by the infant twins' death and generally with her inclusion in the mother-child dynamic/relationship. Reiterated in Ellen Moers “Female Gothic: The Monster's Mother” is how the trauma of the afterbirth denotes that a woman is no longer herself; she is attached to someone else who is part of her but not her: “She was sure Sal [her daughter] squatted there—ready to pounce or grab her legs. Her upper lip would be raised showing eleven-year-old teeth too big for her snarling mouth” (26). Notably, we may read Mavis' understanding of her children through a parasitic lens, that they take from and threaten her like little monsters out to destroy her—her perception of them feeding into this parasitic lens of the trauma of the

afterbirth. Similarly, if we turn to Levine and “network,” Mavis’ narrative becomes composed of the threads of cultural assumptions of motherhood, its deviations, and the very bodies (her children) that create Mavis’ traumatic experiences.

Although I have invoked Freud previously through the language of “the uncanny,” I also invoke Freud’s “unheimlich” as it extends the *activity* of motherhood because activity insinuates cooperation that Mavis rejects thus making her experiences uncanny, foreign, queer. However, the uncanniness of motherhood as an activity is better suited for Freud’s discussion of the uncanny double in literature:

The author has piled up too much of a kind; one’s comprehension of the *whole* suffers as a result, though not the impression it makes. We must content ourselves with selecting those themes of uncanniness which are most prominent, and seeing whether we can fairly trace them also back to infantile sources (9, emphasis added).

In other words, Freud’s uncanny double may illustrate in Mavis’ narrative the self she experiences in a patriarchal home, the normative way of living while her double functions as what she feels—the foreignness to her body, home space, and her children and husband. Rather, she is not Mavis, she is a version of Mavis.

Regarding her marriage to Jim Albright, Mavis also (traumatically) experiences her body and specifically their shared homespace as foreign: “Mavis tried not to stiffen as Frank made settling-down noises on the mattress. Did he have his shorts on? If she knew that she would know whether he was looking to have sex, but she couldn’t find out without touching him” so “Frank snapped the waistband of his boxers” and Mavis “permitted herself a sigh” (25-26). At this moment in Mavis’ narrative, she seems accustomed to having her body regulated by her children (from birth onwards) and by

her husband and his sexual appetite. I characterize these experiences as queer because of a sense of the traditional western family-unit. Similarly paralleling Chapter 1's discussion of the uncanny home (Vidler), the Albright household operates within a set of patriarchal parameters: heteronormativity, female sexual obligation, unrelenting commitment to children to which Mavis disengages. Notice here my exclusion of "white" in western family-unit because as Morrison notes we are supposed to read the women as "fully realized" and as such cannot, or perhaps should not, racially code them. However, we can utilize the western perspective as grounding *normativity* as she clearly experiences. Moreover, if we consider an "alternative" to normative, patriarchal homespace we cannot displace place it with a matriarchal homespace—this formula only operates within a substitution or binary, which we as readers, witness when Mavis appears at her mother's doorstep.

For instance, we further see Mavis' queer understandings of her body *and* space—rejecting that of motherhood—as she escapes in the early morning from her house to her mother's (Birdie), leaving all children and husband behind: "Getting out of the house had been so intense, she was pulling the Cadillac away from the curb when she realized she had no idea of what to do next" (27). We, as readers, are to imagine the sense of urgency Mavis *lives* in this moment and from one moment to the next despite her narrative progressing in what we may initially consider a linear pattern. Levine might suggest Mavis' narrative seemingly operates within this linear structure, but the narrative itself is not composed of or defined by one instance that is queer, rather, many fragmented instances that create her oriented network—part of the network including Birdie. Birdie appears to be a "voice of reason" although only from a normative perspective: "You still have children. Children need a mother. I know what you've been

through, honey, but you do have other children” (31). If Mavis’ considers Birdie’s request to haul herself back “home” then Mavis’ becomes trapped once again in the demands of her husband and “monster” kids. However, Mavis says ““They’re going to kill me, Ma,” I suggest, to illustrate the urgency of her own safety and the *desire* to find belongingness elsewhere, that “elsewhere” not quite known to Mavis yet (31). Seemingly stunned, Birdie makes an executive decision to phone Jim and alert him of Mavis’ visit. Birdie’s call appears to be an attempt to “correct” Mavis’ violation of her motherhood status, to “normalize” her behavior, body, and space she exists in stifling her back into what is considered culturally “appropriate” and “proper.” At overhearing this phone call, Mavis flees once again and in the eventual direction of the Convent, an appropriated space existing once as both a patriarchal and matriarchal homespace. I briefly turn our attention to Laura Bieger’s conceptualization of “home sense” as it seemingly characterizes Mavis’ narrative informed by negative space—what she knows she doesn’t want (motherhood), but also not a promise of what she does want (something ambiguous but not motherhood).

I argue that Grace’s “Gigi” narrative should be read through Mavis’. In other words, Mavis struggles with being a mother, her (sexual) “obligations,” and what course of action to take whereas if we read Gigi as Mavis’ “double” then we may also get a better sense of what Levine describes as “cooperation,” the cultural recognition of the network and its whole. Perhaps the doubleness articulates why Mavis and Gigi come to hate each other so much; it’s because they are parts of a whole, a narrative, a story, experiences—two versions or sides of the same coin. We may even extend this sense of doubleness towards Mavis and the reader as the reader may embody a different worldview much like Gigi does.

Unlike Mavis' narrative, Gigi's narrative begins as one intentionally consumed by and with *desire*. Her boyfriend, Mikey, said that in Arizona there was a mountain that looked like "A man and woman fucking forever. When the light changes every four hours they do something new [and] nothing can stop them. Nothing wants to" (63). Gigi, captivated by the story of these lovers, plans to visit the site with Mikey. The site was notable among locals, specifically the "concerned Methodists" because it "Was believed by some, who had looked very carefully, that the couple was two women making love in the dirt [others] said no, there were two males" (63). As mirrored in Mavis' narrative through heteronormative and furthermore heterosexual relations, the potential of two women or two men having sex suggest that queer sex and/or love, perhaps as a culture of desire, must be regulated by the "concerned Methodists," or at large the socio-cultural appropriateness of what bodies may be oriented towards one another. However, when Gigi and Mikey plan to visit the lovers in the desert, he's a no-show. Notably, his absence brings Gigi closer, or more closely orienting her body towards the Convent because instead of heading home to her granddaddy, perhaps the comfort of a traditional home space/sense, a stranger's story of a "lake in the middle of a wheat field [and] two trees [that] grew in each other's arms" that produced such an ecstasy intrigues her (66). It is in this moment that Gigi decides to set off for Ruby, Oklahoma, the place with the lover's tree. As readers, we are implicitly asked to consider Gigi's movement: Is it spontaneous and irresponsible? Is it motivated and daring? Could it be both? I argue that these questions will be answered differently per every reader and in these answers, readers will find how their own contexts inform their responses. For myself, I'm compelled by Gigi to suspend my judgment as her network is not my own. Additionally,

I find it more useful to assemble Gigi's narrative in light of Mavis as I have already mentioned.

As previously mentioned, the text becomes a cultural artifact for readers. However, if we are to specify what kind of cultural artifact the text functions as, we may get a better sense of how we as readers are supposed to find ourselves complicit in its narrative. Let us examine "desire" as a cultural artifact, one that has been constructed and silenced, through the story of Ruby's and the Convent's spatial origin. In other words, Ruby's residents often emphasize the body as a cultural, historical site and artifact—i.e., slavery as the historical condition of Blackness "sedimented" by white coloniality as discussed in Chapter 2. However, Blackness and the Black body is not the only bodily artifact "sedimented" or perhaps "regulated"—the female body and sexuality. Let us turn to Ruby's origin story to make sense of Ruby and Convent residents.

The ancestors of Ruby residents composed of Black families fleeing from the whiteman's laws, discrimination, and cruelty in 1890. It is said that these families migrated from Mississippi and Louisiana parishes towards Oklahoma with a warning of "Come Prepared or Not at All" indicative of homesteaders, but their Blackness stained them as slaves: "They don't know we or about we, [Us] free like them ["lucky" Black homesteaders]; was slave like them. What for is this difference" (14)? Namely, they were not welcomed among other Black communities for being poor, a class divide projected by whiteman's laws for success and failure. So, in the search for their own space for their own bodies, the caravan settled in Haven. However, in 1924 twins, Deacon and Steward, were born and later set out to "repeat what the Old Fathers had done in 1890" (16)—migrate "Out There" where it was free, no link between the Black and white man. So that's what they did, settling in "New Haven" until one special

woman, Ruby, died. Her name was paid as tribute to renaming New Haven. What is ironic in Haven, New Haven/Ruby's history is how the community's migration depends on men seeking out or *desiring* freedom from oppressive white, patriarchal society. However, the very naming of Ruby as *Ruby* suggests a potential female orientation. The irony rests in how the town's name is a tribute to a woman, but the town never uplifts female voices or narratives. The latter is left to the Convent which eventually *becomes* a threat to Ruby men: "They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time" (3). The rationale of Ruby men for targeting Convent women rests upon their desire to maintain order, faith, and freedom which Convent women, from their perspective, violated:

Yet here, not twenty miles away from a quiet, orderly community (Ruby), there were women like none he knew or ever heard of. In this place of all places.

Unique and isolated, his was a town justifiably pleased. It neither had nor needed a jail. No criminals had ever come from his town. And the one or two people who acted up, humiliated their families or threatened the town's view of itself were taken good care of. Certainly there wasn't a slack or sloven woman anywhere in town and the reasons, he thought, were clear. From the beginning its people were free and protected (8).

In each of these instances of Ruby's history, a common theme emerges: freedom and goodness. However, in aiming to create a community unmarred by white, patriarchal laws, Ruby men end up replicating them: "They think they have out-foxed the whiteman when in fact they imitate him. They think they are protecting their wives and children [from the Convent and its women], when in fact they are maiming them. And when maimed children ask for help, they look elsewhere for the cause" (306). When we, again,

consider desire as a cultural artifact, the Convent women *become* “impure” as outsiders “unholy [because they were] fornicators at the least, abortionists at most,” and because Ruby men “could” control them, it was “what being an 8-rock meant to them and was also what the ‘deal’ required” (297). In other words, Convent women only *become* a threat to Ruby men because of desire—Gigi’s sexual comfortability, Mavis’ unholy desire to not be a mother, and most importantly, Ruby’s women who turn to the Convent for help—their desires ranging from a safe temporary space to stay to abortions and contrastingly saving babies (midwifery).

However, desire as a cultural artifact has its own grounding at the Convent. It is worth noting that a fuller description of the desires of those who have occupied the Convent are weaved into Gigi’s narrative, paralleling the many facets of desire—wealth and fame, sexual, colonial and imperial, familial. It is said that Gigi discovered a range of explicit objects from the original owner’s sexualized architectural desire. There were “female-torso candleholders in the candelabra,” “nursing cherubim emerging from layers of paint in the foyer,” “nipple-tipped doorknobs, “a Venus or two among several pieces of nude statuary,” “brass male genitalia that had been ripped from sinks and tubs,” “testicles designed to release water from the penis,” [and] “alabaster vaginas in the game room” (72). However, by the time that the nuns took over the house to maintain an Arapaho boarding school, these various pieces of architecture were torn down or hidden from sight. By the time the Arapaho schoolgirls left, it appears that the vulgarness of genitalia and sexual images were not as bothersome. In this description of the Convent, readers witness how appropriated the space becomes when different bodies enter it: The sexual overtones from the original house’s architect and owner to the prudish nature of the nuns who converted the house to an Arapaho boarding school,

to the disorganized, unmoved nature of the current residents. Rather, there's no prescribed narrative at the Convent – it's a space that opens itself up to those who are in “search for one's own space.” So, when new bodies come to the Convent, so do their stories/narratives just like Mavis and Gigi, their first encounter illustrating how they experience their bodies differently: “Lady, are you looking at something you never saw before or something you don't have or you a clothes freak or what” (76)? “Lady” in this exchange is Mavis, who appears to be shocked at Gigi's nakedness, enacting the very “normative” behavior she's accustomed to which is to reserve one's body for private spaces even though she previously found that private space between husband and wife (and children) uncomfortable. Gigi, on the other hand, finds comfort in her body and gives a sense of personal freedom or pride. So, what we begin to get a sense of is Ruby's history and cultural definition at odds with the Convent --the Convent welcomes anyone and everyone, a safe home, and for these reasons it's perceived as dangerous. Yet, if readers are following closely, these reasons are similar if not the same as Deacon and Steward resettling in Ruby—to be free, to *desire* to be free. Moreover, we can read the narrative of the Convent also acts as a double for Ruby, but the Convent achieves something that Ruby does not—reorienting how to be when new bodies and circumstances come and go.

As I have described both a reader's participation as methodology and specific instances that demonstrates this, we may now come to consider narrative as a site of and for potential. In other words, this potential not only rests on the shoulders of the reader as a narrativizing and queer activity that occurs singularly, but also the consciousness of said reader and their society. To recall Mobley's recovery effort and emancipatory cause, the reader should and can utilize *Paradise* as a spokesbeing (like

spokesperson) for enacting social change and awareness. For example, *Paradise* compels a reading of female liberation to which a reader may then seek out instances or opportunities in their own socio-cultural contexts to partake in liberatory practices: protests, theory, teaching, further reading, etc.

Additionally, *Paradise* also compels a hauntologically-inclined narrative which allows for readers to speculate how their own contexts may queer the experiences of characters (i.e., whether their experiences allow for such a queer reading or limit the reading to the reproduction of normative values). This is similar to the discussion I pose of Hill House in Chapter 1 and 124 in Chapter 2 allowing for the speculation of space as bodies enter or come into contact with it. For example, what haunts Hill House and its residents is a cultural and social system predicated on the presence of a white, western, patriarchal narrative. However, queerness may also haunt the white, western narrative as it attempts to redefine being and experience. What haunts 124 is also culturally and socially informed experiences of race and knowledge, but also the supernatural, mythical, “folk lore” component of Beloved’s corporealization. Namely, her corporealization does not manifest through the white colonial imagination, but through the imagination of African folklorists which haunt both white people as unfamiliar, but also Black people in that it may remind them of a forgotten, or perhaps stolen knowledge. For the Convent, it’s haunted by spiritual means—Mavis often hears her twins playing in the house—but also by lived realities: “Scary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside” (39). In essence, the perception is that “Other” spaces and bodies are haunted, but is what’s haunted the spaces and bodies that are habituated, a blinded sense of “normalness” only recognized by displacing and disorienting another? Mobley might argue this is a cultural, racial phenomenon that readers are tasked with

identifying and Levine might argue that this is the larger cultural network that narrative orients us (readers, authors, and characters) towards.

Although many women and their narratives are weaved into *Paradise* (Seneca, Divine, Patricia, Lone, Save-Marie) throughout their own narratives and chapters, each one does not exist without Consolata or “Connie.” Again, if we turn to Levine’s definition of “network” Connie appears to be at the center. Connie seems to be a body that exists only in relation to others, perhaps a commentary on her provisional status, that her body exists much like the space of the Convent—to (be) reshape(d) by those it encounters. To use the language of Chapter 2, Connie is “boundarized.” Connie’s narrative grounds the other female narratives repurposing a “matriarch” figure as “keeper” through her associations and orientations to other bodies which I would argue is a queer positionality and activity: (1) To Mother (the last boarding school maintainer), colonization, (2) To herself, as a young girl of nine perceived as “rapable” as a colonized person, (3) To Deacon, a lover or a sexual release, (4) To Convent women, a pseudo-mother, (5) To Ruby men, a harbinger of sin, (6) To Ruby women, an outlet to protect or abort their babies. Under each of these categorizations, they mimic “unspeakable things unspoken” in Morrison’s *Beloved*—Connie, in fact, has or is the *keeper* of the oriented knowledge I examine in Chapter 2. In other words, her body also acts as a space to house secrets, memories, and knowledge that others seem to have forgotten or never learned. As such, she tells the women who have come to the Convent “If you want to be here you do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for” (262). The response: “No one left. There were nervous questions, a single burst of frightened giggling, a bit of pouting and simulated outrage, but in no time at all *they came to see that they could not leave the one place they were free to leave*”

(262, emphasis added). The Convent women were different, free, perhaps desired nothing than what they had because they were no longer “haunted” only “hunted” (266). Distinctively, “haunted” and “hunted” operate within a paradigm of the spectral: specter and spectator that can be occupied at the same time when readers consider the network.

Morrison said in a 2012 Ingersoll Lecture on “Altruism and the Literary Imagination” that “Evil has a blockbuster audience; Goodness lurks backstage. Evil has vivid speech; Goodness bites its tongue” (15). So, although our attention as readers might linger on the men of Ruby who set out to “hunt” Convent women, we may be encouraged to reorient our attention to the narratives that matter, Convent women. In other words, Ruby (8-rock) men are evil, and their voices are the ones that vibrate among the first pages and through the Convent in their hunt of Convent women. However, the last words we read are from Convent women reminding us that their narratives are good, are worthy of our attention, and should be the narratives we discuss in our own cultural contexts. Namely, we have been participants in *Paradise* when we continue to discuss the Convent women and question Ruby (8-rock) men. We’re also implicated just like characters to witness the complexity of lived experiences through bodies and spaces. Yet, we’re left to consider the aftermath of the Convent’s intrusion as bodies are not found inside the Convent—so where are they? We know they “shoot the white girl first” but we’re also left with an ambiguous end. Levine calls this “narrative closure” which attempts to spatially orient a reader: “The ending’s political force depends not on resolution and finality, but on repetitions that will extend past the time represented in the text. To call this closure and containment is to overlook the future implied by the text, a deliberately uncontained temporal process” (41). We should heed Levine’s “narrative closure” as our dutiful role as the reader—to actualize literature,

specifically *The Haunting of Hill House*, *Beloved*, and *Paradise* as cultural artifacts and us as cultural archivists (Mobley). In other words, these texts, as I have argued, should all open discussions of the potential that readers have on reimagining or limiting narrative.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis project “Becoming Oriented: Queering Bodies and Space in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Paradise*” has attempted to investigate gender and normativity, racialized and gendered knowledge construction, and narrative form as ways of becoming oriented. In other words, this thesis operates within the framework of queering orientation to more fully animate how queerness, race and knowledge, and narrative are purposefully critical lenses to understanding one’s bodily and spatial experiences. In doing so, it foregrounds *The Haunting of Hill House*, *Beloved*, and *Paradise* as exemplary texts in which we may situate this framework as well as how these texts are already sites of potential for this framework.

Additionally, this thesis orients itself towards various bodies of scholars and scholarship to closely resemble the intersectional awareness and experiences that corporeal bodies and spaces are shaped by and reshape. Namely, this project enacts Derrida’s frame which negotiates the terms of “centrality” and “periphery” as a social activity and more so in line with Ahmed’s perspective of experiencing the world through a queer lens. Although not articulated as such previously, I consider this project as embodying feminist aspirations including but not limited to validating and representing various identities, valuing experiences as personal, collective, social, and political, and offering a space to rethink normative ideologies, assumptions, and behaviors for a more fully informed world in which we live. In other words, the labeling of such feminist aspirations has not been encountered through a direct discussion, but through the framework I have created by positioning such texts, scholars, and scholarship in conversation, a more implicit kind of networking strategy.

Although this project has come to a close, I hope that it encourages others to think critically about the purpose and potential of literature through a conceptual framework as we all are complicit in a larger network.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmed, Sara. "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology." *GLQ*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2006, pp. 543-574.
- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, 2006.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Penguin Classics, 2014.
- Bhaba, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Bieger, Laura. "No Place Like Home; or, Dwelling in Narrative." *New Literary History*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2015, pp. 17-39.
- Butler, Judith. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Abelove et al. Routledge, 1993.
- Byrd, Rudolph P. "Shared Orientation and Narrative Acts in *Cane*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Meridian*." *MELUS*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1991, pp. 41-56.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Craig Owens. "The Parergon." *October*, vol. 9, 1979, pp. 3-41.
- Foucault, Michel. *Power*. Edited by James D. Faubion, translated by Robert Hurley and others, The New Press, 2000.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Vintage, 1994.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." 1919.
- Hernadi, Paul. "Why Is Literature: A Coevolutionary Perspective on Imaginative Worldmaking." *Poetics Today*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2002 Spring 2002, pp. 21-42.

hooks, bell. "Homeplace (a Site of Resistance)" (1990)." Available Means: An Anthology Of Women's Rhetoric(s), edited by Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001, pp. 383-90.

Jackson, Shirley. *The Haunting of Hill House*. Penguin Classics, 2006.

Jacobson, Kirsten. "A developed nature: a phenomenological account of the experience of home." *Cont Philos Rev* 42, 355-373 (2009).

Lee, Emily S. "Body Movement And Responsibility For A Situation." *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race*. State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 2014.

Levine, Caroline. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." *Sister Outsider*. The Crossing Press Feminist Series, 1984. pp.110-113.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*, "The Body as a Sexed Being" and "Others and the Human World." Translated by Donald A. Landes, Routledge, 2014. pp. 156-178, 363.

Mobley, Marilyn. *Folk Roots and Mythic Wings in Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison*. Louisiana State University Press, 1991.

Mobley Mckenzie, Marilyn. "Spaces for Readers." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Moers, Ellen. "Female Gothic: The Monster's Mother." *The New York Review of Books*, 1974.

Morrison, Toni. "Altruism and the Literary Imagination." *Ingersoll Lecture*, 2012.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Vintage Books, 2004.

Morrison, Toni. *Paradise*. Vintage Books, 2015.

Morrison, Toni. "The Site of Memory." *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, edited by William Zinsser, Mariner Books, 1998, pp.183-200.

Ordóñez, Elizabeth J. "Narrative Texts by Ethnic Women: Rereading the Past, Reshaping the Future." *MELUS: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1982 Winter 1982, pp. 19–28.

Ortega, Mariana. "Hometactics: Self-Mapping, Belonging, and the Home Question." *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race*, edited by Emily S. Lee, State University of New York Press, 2014.

Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1980, pp. 631–60.

Robinson, Sara. *Architecture is a Verb*. Routledge, 2021.

Van Der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score*. Penguin Books, 2015.

Vidler, Anthony. *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*. The MIT Press, 1996.

## **BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR**

Kimberly Bartenfelder was born and raised in Fredericksburg, Virginia. She graduated from Colonial Forge High School in 2016 where she then attended George Mason University from 2016-2020. She graduated from George Mason University with her bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Women and Gender Studies. She then moved to Maine to join the English graduate program at The University of Maine in the fall of 2020. After receiving her master's degree, Kimberly will be joining Louisiana State University's community and English Ph.D. program. Kimberly is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Maine in May 2022.