

one another

women's friendship and the matrix of becoming
in twentieth century American novels

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Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where it is otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents my own original work.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Louisa Browne Kirk', written in a cursive style.

Louisa Browne Kirk

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Abstract

For many women friendship is, alongside the romantic and familial, one of the social pillars upon which their life is built. Women writers, culturally encouraged to promote the love plot and the domestic sphere, still integrate women's friendship into fiction throughout space and time. Due to its obscured position, women's friendship has been largely academically ignored, with some key exceptions. In contrast, men's friendship has been well-theorised since Aristotle.

This thesis closely reads the ways in which women's friendship is depicted by American women writers of the first 75 years of twentieth century to answer the question, *What is women's friendship to women in literature?* I argue women's friendship is a space between two or more women which is produced by psychic (re)encounter and requires a play of closeness and distance in a way that is particularly marked in women's friendship, and differentiates it from women's other relationships. Friendship between women is a shared space of self and other co-creation.

The thesis' theory was produced through an engagement with feminist psychoanalysis and literary theory. In particular, I draw on Bracha Ettinger's theory of the matrixial, a feminist exploration of subjectivity, where the self and other is a relationship that can occur because it is a trace of being that begins with the first connection, that between fetus and mother, and repeats throughout a woman's life. Ettinger's primary engagement is with women and their art, most often painting, but I draw out the startling implications her work has for women's friendships. Namely, Ettinger's theory of the matrixial is used to understand women's friendship as a re-encounter with subjectivity first encountered in the womb.

This thesis closely reads *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin (1899), *Passing* by Nella Larsen (1929), *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell (1937), *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson (1959) and *Sula* by Toni Morrison (1973). Although not emblematic, consideration of these novels alongside one another offers an engaging narrative of the first 75 years of the last century. The texts provide a range of perspectives, interpretations and genre approaches to

the question of women's friendship, as well as other interrelated issues of women's personhood within time and place, especially in relation to sexuality, race and identity.

I find that the texts construct women's friendship as a process in which the I connects with an other through shared but different matrixial origins, where the I and the other both have interior lives and are exterior beings. There is a special alchemy to women's friendship; in the novels examined in this thesis, that friendship is worldly and multi-directional, involving multiple participants. In this new theorisation of women's friendship, which is formed through the close reading of texts by American women writers in the twentieth century, women's friendship is a space of repeated encounter, a space formative of the self, the other, and the world.

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There is one another immediately, one another
as the present fullness of a becoming whose arc
may extend no further, whom we must each learn
best to apprehend, fulfill, and bear company.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

To the woman crying uncontrollably in the next stall

If you ever woke in your dress at 4am ever
closed your legs to someone you loved opened
them for someone you didn't moved against
a pillow in the dark stood miserably on a beach
seaweed clinging to your ankles paid
good money for a bad haircut backed away
from a mirror that wanted to kill you bled
into the back seat for lack of a tampon
if you swam across a river under rain sang
using a dildo for a microphone stayed up
to watch the moon eat the sun entire
ripped out the stitches in your heart
because why not if you think nothing &
no one can / listen I love you joy is coming

Kim Addonizio

Introduction

For if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to express it she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been.

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

Interviewer: There have been so few novels about women who have intense friendships with other women. Why do you think that is?

[Toni] Morrison: It has been a discredited relationship.

'The Art of Fiction No. 134'

Writing in 1929, Virginia Woolf made a call to women writers, encouraging them to express how 'Chloe likes Olivia', in order to 'light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been'. In a 1993 interview by the *Paris Review*, Toni Morrison was asked a question which echoed Woolf's assumption about the lack of friendship between women represented in literature: 'There have been so few novels about women who have intense friendships with other women. Why do you think that is?' Morrison answers the question without challenging its basis and so may have agreed with its underlying assertion. The answer she provides, however, illuminates the cultural undercurrent that women writers, scholars and friends must contend with: 'It has been a discredited relationship'. Women's friendship *is* discredited. As Woolf and Morrison note, and as occurs even today, readers and writers are culturally discouraged from noticing the substantial, vibrant and meaningful body of literature that depicts women's non-romantic and non-sexual relationships with each other because these narratives subvert dominant feminine narratives centralising romance and family in the lives

of women.¹ While women fiction writers, especially Morrison, responded to Woolf's call to construct women's textual friendships, scholarly writers, including those whose concern is feminist and literary, tended not to direct their attention toward women's friendship, with some notable exceptions. This lack of critical attention leaves women's textual friendship in the dark; under-theorised and, therefore, unfairly discredited. This thesis seeks to redress the lack of critical literature, joining the small group of scholars studying women's friendship in literature. To do so, I closely read the construction of friendship in a set of novels written by American women in the first 75 years of the twentieth century, seeking to answer two questions: *What is women's friendship to women in literature? How do novels written by women in the first 75 years of twentieth century America construct friendship between women?* I argue that women's friendship in literature is depicted as a central relationship in characters' lives, a space between two beings in which each friend co-creates the other in a play of closeness and distance. This space is sparked by the re-emergence of psychic traces in each friend, traces which originate in the womb and are first generated between mother and fetus as both co-become separately but in relation to each other.

In this thesis, I understand women's friendship to be an affectionate, friendly, non-exclusive relationship between two or more women. It is self-definitional, constituted by its participants, and may include sexual or familial aspects. As this introduction, and indeed this entire thesis demonstrates through analysis, what a friendly relationship between women involves is complex and contested. I develop my working definition of women's friendship throughout this introduction, situating my work in the wider field of studies of literary women's friendship before explaining my theoretical framework and argument, the scope of the thesis and finally, its structure. Before moving into the thesis proper, it is important to

¹ Novels written by women writers which include depictions of women's friendship in meaningful ways include, but are by no means limited to, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1812), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1815), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849) and *Villette* (1853), Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853) and *Wives and Daughters* (1866), L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), Mary McCarthy's *The Group* (1963), Jacqueline Susann's *Valley of the Dolls* (1966), Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), Fannie Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* (1987), Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Cat's Eye* (1988), *The Robber Bride* (1993), Mary Gaitskill's *Two Girls, Fat and Thin* (1991), Rebecca Wells' *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (1996), Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* (2001), Ann Patchett's *Truth and Beauty* (2004), Elena Ferrante's *The Neapolitan Trilogy* (the first of which was published in English in 2012), Meg Wolitzer's *The Interestings* (2013), Liane Moriarty's *Big Little Lies* (2014) and Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (2016).

note I use the term 'woman' (generally, but especially as the participants in women's friendship) to include any person who identifies as a woman, regardless of the sex they were assigned at birth.² In a practical sense, this means that characters in the novels I study are understood to be women when they are referred to as such, and when the pronouns she, her and hers are textually evident. While the novels studied do not overtly explore the specific experiences—or friendships—of transgender women, they are each concerned with depicting gender and womanhood in various, often critical, ways.

Women's friendship

In comparison to the long-term, serious theorisation of men's friendship from Aristotle to the current moment, women's friendship as an area of academic interest is very new. Where men's friendship has been carefully studied and constructed as public, political and important, women's friendship has been ignored and culturally understood as domestic, personal and unimportant.

Western philosophy scholars have always had a deep engagement with friendship. Aristotle believed that the perfect friendship is one based in mutual virtue (130) and Cicero agreed (Mews 71). St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and C.S. Lewis each considered friendship as deeply connected to godliness, a position with which Søren Kierkegaard vehemently diverged (Mews and Chiavaroli 80; Quinn; Lewis; Lippitt 181). Jacques Derrida devoted a book to theorising friendship's love of the other and love of the future with the other (Derrida 29). More recently, in 2016, philosopher Alexander Nehamas offered a new theorisation of

² Defining and policing the boundaries of who and who is not defined as a woman has been, and remains, an ongoing debate in feminism. Making demands on behalf of a group has produced the desire to define that group according to shared experiences or traits, which are themselves at least contested and at most non-existent (Mikkola 168). Several sub-groups of the feminist movement, including those who are described as trans-exclusionary radical feminists (known by the acronym TERFs) and some involved in political lesbian-feminism (a political group, differentiated from individuals or groups who are political, lesbian and feminist), seek to exclude transwomen from the category of woman and the movement of feminism on the basis of biological sex assigned at birth, chromosomes or differing experiences of sexism and social disadvantage (Chu). Others, including some queer theorists, see the aims of queer, transgender and non-binary people diverging from the aims of feminism, although others argue that, despite their differences, both movements are helpful to each other (Awkward-Rich 838). However, other feminists engage in trans-inclusive feminism, which in some cases arises from the understand that excluding transwomen from feminism is incompatible with the movement's aim of combatting women's oppression, unjustly disrespects trans identities and perpetuates the oppression of trans people (Kirkland 6).

friendship: a relation of degree based on distinction and futurity in the everyday. That is, knowing a friend is, for Nehamas, 'a commitment to the future' (Nehamas 133). Importantly for my own argument, Nehamas also sees becoming as a part of friendship because to love the friend is to hope to love what each friend will become because of the friendship (Nehamas 138). Nehamas' contribution is philosophical rather than literary, and he does not deeply consider gender as a factor in friendship. Obfuscated in many of these works is that studies of friendship tend to really consider *male* friendship, which is then universalised. Although the exclusion of women through the universalisation of man has been challenged in the last fifty years (Grosz 71)—and not only in the field of friendship studies—women's friendship remains comparatively understudied and has not yet caught up with centuries of masculinist canonical thought. Philosophical understandings of men's friendship scholarship have a history more than 2000 years old, while serious, in-depth consideration of women's friendship began in earnest only fifty years ago.³

Early scholarly work on women's friendship in literature focuses on women's historical connections and tends to frame women's friendships in terms of their (connected) relationships with men. Early works examine the extent to which friendship helped or hindered what was considered the major focus in novels, the love plot. Janet Todd's 1980 monograph *Women's friendship in literature* presents a study of eighteenth-century English and French depictions of friendship by Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen and Samuel Richardson, among others. Todd's contribution remains one of the most comprehensive theoretical studies of women's literary friendships to date. Todd reasons that women's friendship can be categorised into five overlapping but nevertheless distinct categories: sentimental, erotic, manipulative, political and social. These categories are a valuable way to consider women's connections with each other and help account for differences among representations. Several novels analysed by this thesis could be considered using Todd's framework; for example, the friendships depicted in both *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) and *Sula* (1973) engage with aspects of sentimental friendship, which involves engagement so close as to be 'suffocating, prying, exacting, hortatory, and eulogistic' (Todd 307). However,

³ Different fields have begun to consider women's friendship seriously, including contributions from cultural studies (for example, Alison Winch, Karen Hollinger), history (for example, Marilyn Yalom, Linda W. Rosenzweig) and sociology (for example, Pat O'Connor).

Todd's focus on the specificities of eighteenth century literature means that her framework and conclusions are not easily transferable to current studies. While, as Todd notes, it is 'virginity or chastity' that is the ideological concern of the 'eighteenth-century heroine' (Todd 403), twentieth century American literature has its own feminine ideologies with which to contend or negotiate. This, alongside Todd's focus on friendship within heterosexual romance plots, steers Todd's framework and conclusion in a direction different to this thesis'. This becomes even more obvious when attempting to apply certain aspects of the framework to American novels. For example, on erotic friendship Todd finds that erotic love may mark friendship but rarely troubles it, 'and the raptures, although passionate and prolonged, are insistently "chaste" and "virtuous"' (319), an argument that could not easily be made in relation to twentieth century novels.

Following Todd is Tess Cosslett's 1988's *Female friendship in Victorian fiction*, another significant contribution to the field that also engages with women's friendship in fiction and examines it in relation to heterosexual structures of desires. Cosslett takes as her focus the relationship between women's friendship and the conventional marriage plot. She suggests that the containment of friendship within the structure of the marriage plot does not devalue women's connections with each other but rather illuminates their importance to the plot. That is to say, while the overt story may not be about women's friendship (and is much more likely to be centred on the heterosexual romance), women friends play crucial roles in the narratives of the novels and poetry she studies, which include novels by Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot and Elizabeth Barrett Browning (Cosslett 3). Cosslett argues that relationships between women are textual sites in which women writers play out the conflicts between different types of feminine ideology. The connection and partial merging between friends of differing types, including 'angels and monsters, Madonnas and Magdalens', challenges the rigidity of these archetypes (Cosslett 4). The novels Cosslett studies are ambivalent about the revolutionary potential in women's relationships; while friendship is vitally important, to both character and plot, it is nevertheless contained, 'safely insulated from the world of everyday events' (Cosslett 11). Cosslett's work facilitates meaningful consideration of the radical and normative intersection between women friends and the ideology of femininity. However, by focalising her analysis through archetypes of womanhood, Cosslett tends to move away from analysis of

the internal dynamics of the relationships between women characters and into their overall meaning for the society in which they take place. This is not to suggest that Cosslett's textual analysis is weak—on the contrary, it is valuably in-depth—but that Cosslett's approach represents a kind of mirror-image of my own; where I closely read the internal mechanisms of friendship and then consider the structural implications of women's connections in my chosen texts, Cosslett takes as her first priority the structures of Victorian womanhood and then examines friendship in that analytical light.

A different aspect of inquiry into women's friendship, both in theory and in fiction, considers its relationship to another manifestation of romance and sexuality: lesbianism. This body of work has its origins in the scholarship of the 1970s lesbian feminist movement but crystallised with the rise of queer studies in academia in the 1980s and early 1990s. The most well-known contribution to women's friendship and lesbianism is Adrienne Rich's 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (1980) in which she argues for the mapping of a wide range of 'women-identified experience[s]' along a 'lesbian continuum' (27). Rich argues that the meaning of the term lesbian should be expanded beyond its clinical connotations to include experiences as diverse as 'women's passion for women, women's choice of women as allies, life companions, and community' (34). This is an attempt to acknowledge the way women's energies and investments have been wrenched away from themselves, other women, and 'women-identified values' (Rich 18). Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981) also argues for an expanded definition of lesbianism 'as a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other', irrespective of desire (17). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 1985 *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, which will be addressed more thoroughly, similarly conceives of a connected array of women's relationships: 'an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations links lesbianism with the other forms of women's attention to women: the bond of mother and daughter, for instance, the bond of sister and sister, women's friendship, "networking," and the active struggles of feminism' (*Between Men* 2). Of course, this thesis is primarily concerned with women's friendship in literature. Rich's and Faderman's arguments are theoretical, and while Sedgwick's work studies literature, she closely reads it for the desirous dynamics of men. Yet these frameworks are also useful in relation to women's

friendship in fiction. In 'Lesbian Spectacles' (1993), Barbara Johnson provides an example for reading texts in relation to the idea of a continuum, and the difficulty in properly separating relationships into categories. She reads texts featuring women's relationships which may be considered ambiguously erotic because they depict women who are close, including *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and *The Accused* (1988), and novels *Passing*, by Nella Larsen (1929), and *Sula*, by Toni Morrison (1973), to 'read explicitly as a lesbian' by theoretically catching herself in the act (Johnson 141). Johnson argues that two texts, *Passing* and *The Accused*, are potentially erotic because the women look significantly at each other and instinctively return to each other. Johnson's work is uniquely curious as to differences—or not—between textual constructions of women's non/sexual relationships. She provides an example of analysis conducted through a lesbian lens (where this thesis takes up a friendship focus) and valuably demonstrates the fluidity of sexual and non-sexual desire. 'Lesbian Spectacles' also engages with the power structures within which the relationships occur, arguing that the same heteronormative, patriarchal power structures facilitate libidinal investment at the same time as they are politically unappealing. Her work also offers a valuable template of a way to read for women's investments in each other, while accounting for structures of power without making that power the focus (Johnson 143). As outlined further shortly, this thesis also examines friendships which involve multiple desires (especially in the chapters on Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*).

Much more recently, Sharon Marcus' *Between women: Friendship, desire, and marriage in Victorian England* (2007) is a work that widely reads Victorian texts from both a hetero- and homosexual perspective. Marcus provides an in-depth historical and literary engagement with women's friendship. Like Cosslett, Marcus is engaged with how friendship intersects with romance and marriage. Marcus' argument is that friendship between women was central to marriage, family and femininity in the period between 1830 and 1880 (11). Specifically, in relation to literary representations of women's friendship, Marcus argues that friendship is of 'paradigmatic importance' to the courtship narratives and that sensuality between women helped unite sexual women with beloved husbands (12; 23). For example, Marcus reads Charlotte Brontë's 1849 *Shirley* to argue that women's friendship and heterosexual courtship in the novel are mutually reinforcing: 'Just as the male beloved becomes a pretext for binding

two friends more closely, friendship becomes a mechanism for uniting a friend with her male beloved—a union that can be realized only when it, too, comes to be governed by the principle of reciprocity’ (Marcus 91-2). Other novels Marcus reads include *Middlemarch* (1871), *Villette* (1853), *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) to argue that the ideal friendship as depicted by novelists was akin to John Stuart Mill’s vision of subjectivity as dialogue, in which connection was defined by ‘altruism, generosity, mutual indebtedness, and a perfect balance of power’ (Marcus 14). Marcus’ project comes out of a desire to fulfil the implicit challenge raised by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men* to produce a book that explores ‘Sedgwick’s wise insight that homo- and hetero- are inherently interrelated’, an overall position which Marcus suggests Victorians shared in relation to women’s friendship and romantic affection, although the underlying ideology differed (Marcus 19; 21). Marcus’ work makes a significant contribution to the field of women’s friendship studies by presenting a theory of Victorian women’s textual friendships informed by modern queer theory, one that provides original knowledge on the connection between marriage and (interrelated) hetero- and homosexual friendships. This thesis, however, purposefully moves away from approaches like Cosslett’s and Marcus’, approaches that focus on friendship in relation to the love plot, to read friendships as their own independent connections that interact with sexual relationships but are not defined by them. In part, this is a luxury more easily afforded to scholars of twentieth century literature, where friendship as the primary relationship of the novel becomes much less uncommon.

American work on women’s friendship examines the relationship as a connection in its own right, a tradition this thesis seeks to join. These contributions are from literary scholars, although they do not focus on novels exclusively or specifically. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg begins this line of enquiry early in 1975, with one of the first investigations into women’s friendship in American texts. Smith-Rosenberg reads the letters and diaries of 35 middle-class American families between the 1760s and 1880s to argue that women’s friendship was an institutionalised and socially accepted relationship in that time and place. These relationships were passionate, yet still sat easily alongside the rigid gender-roles encouraged of women, and the masculinist culture that existed then (Smith-Rosenberg 9). Friendship was part of an integrated network, rather than between two isolated women, with women’s supportive

networks woven into the social conventions and rituals that accompanied women's lives, from childhood and youth, to marriage and old age (Smith-Rosenberg 11). For Smith-Rosenberg, the tendency at the time she was writing (a tendency which continues) to make essential the question of genital contact and to define women's relationships as exclusively heterosexual or homosexual has limited use, especially when considering how women's friendships have been represented in letters and diaries from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rather, she argues, 'emotionally and cognitively, their heterosocial and homosocial worlds were complementary' (Smith-Rosenberg 8). Smith-Rosenberg's work provides an insightful and progressive engagement with women's friendship as it is depicted in letters and diaries, her chosen texts. Since she explores letters and diaries from an earlier period, Carol Smith-Rosenberg's work differs in scope and focus to my own. However, I partially share the methodology of Smith-Rosenberg's work in that I, too, seek to contribute a close reading which investigates women's friendships with an eye to the structures that affect them without prioritising these structures in my readings.

Like Smith-Rosenberg, Judith Taylor's 2013 work on friendship in a plethora of feminist texts turns away from the poles of straight and lesbian, but unlike most others, she focuses on the wrongs of friendship in a wide range of women's largely non-fiction texts. Taylor draws on Rich's framework of the continuum of women's relationships to take up Rich's idea in relation to women's continuous bonds, rather than the fact of their potential connection to lesbianism. She reads a compilation of American and Canadian texts that 'meditate on the cruelty with which women engage one another' which include an 'expository essay, historical narrative, blog, poem, photograph, painting, fiction, song lyrics, traditional autobiography, journalism, literary reportage, and social research' (Taylor 94-5). Taylor suggests the texts are antiheteronormative and often queer, arguing that they resist the sentimental and idealised notion that women's friendships are sweet, uncomplicated or safe refuges. Rather, Taylor argues these texts demonstrate the work required to begin and maintain friendship, as well as the painful but theatrical aggression and victimhood that often occurs when friendship breaks down (110). Taylor's archive understands friendships as 'intense, dramatic, full of requited and unrequited desire, painful, heroic, violent' (110). Her work provides an interesting perspective which can be drawn upon to consider texts she does not discuss (that

is, fictional novels) within which conflict is a normalised part of women's friendship. What is valuable about Taylor's approach is that she does not see harmony as essential to women's friendly connections with each other, but rather just one manifestation of these bonds.

Race and racism impact all parts of American society, including and especially women's friendship. As bell hooks notes, American culture and society has long devalued Black women and womanhood, which Black women, especially writers, work to resist (*Sisters* ix). Racism and sexism make Black women's friendships both more necessary and more fraught. Understandings of these friendships in the twentieth century tended to be political in nature; discussion of Black women's feminist and antiracist sisterhood and political solidarity has been prominent, including in the works of key twentieth century Black feminist writers like hooks, Audre Lorde and Hazel Carby. This trend is contradictory of the psychoanalytical or sexually structured understandings that more often shape theorisations of 'non-raced' (that is, silently white raced) women's friendship. Studies of twentieth century Black women's friendship in literature usually focus on specific novels and the work of Black women writers, like Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor and Alice Walker, which, although tightly focused, provide important theorisations of the topic. For example, according to Mae Henderson, privileging the other in the self is a foundational characteristic of much Black women's writing, including that of Toni Morrison. For Henderson, this is a political project arising out of a particular position that Black women hold as belonging to two identity groups simultaneously. To be Black and a woman means to embody a multi-positionality, entering into a testimonial dialogue with Black and white, women and men:

As such, black women writers enter into testimonial discourse with black men as blacks, with white women as women, and with black women as black women. At the same time, they enter into a competitive discourse with black men as women, with white women as blacks, and with white men as black women. (Henderson 351)

According to Henderson, this positioning produces a capacity to privilege, rather than repress, the other in the self. The Black woman writer speaks both familiarly and in contest with the other (Henderson 351). For Henderson, there is another layer of merging between self and other that occurs for Black women, and the Black women writers who enter into this

testimonial discourse. Henderson's original and insightful argument has particular implications for my own exploration of Black women's friendships in the chapters on Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*. Henderson's work presents a challenge, calling for literary scholars to consider the particular subjectivity and interrelated subject position of Black women's specificity. Her work also offers interesting ramifications for my theoretical framework as it also considers a play of distance and closeness, and a (non-merging) integration of self and other. I consider this in more detail in Chapter Five on Toni Morrison's *Sula*, in which the other in the self is central not just to the friendship between Sula and Nel, but to the community in which they live and the novel itself.

A small group of scholars have studied cross-racial friendship between Black and white women in literature. Sharon Monteith's book *Advancing sisterhood?: Interracial friendships in contemporary southern fiction* (2000) closely reads novels by white women writers to argue that white women's texts 'buy into' friendship as a way to make firm community political bonds (Monteith 4). Monteith argues this contradicts Black women's depictions of interracial friendship, which are 'often more direct in their confrontations with racism and their explication of anger and resentment in interracial friendships and encounters' (4). Another, slightly earlier work by Marita Golden (1996) similarly argues that while Black women's fictional writing tends toward bitterness when considering the role of white women in Black women's lives, white writers tend to examine how their lives have been improved by their relationships with, and fantasies about, Black women (Golden 4). Both Monteith and Golden demonstrate the importance of attentiveness to differences in Black and white women's experiences of friendship, an especially significant consideration for my work, especially in Chapter Three on Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* in which I argue that white women's friendship is built upon Black women's emotional and physical labour.

This thesis examines texts from across the twentieth century and, in so doing, situates the representation of women's friendship in the specific socio-political context from which it merges and to which it contributes. I draw on the work of Lauren Berlant on women's bonds and bonding apparatus in *The Female Complaint* (2008) to furnish my understanding of women's writing in America in the twentieth century. Berlant's work differs in scope from the work I have been discussing so far, in that her focus is not women's friendship, but rather the

structure of sentiment she argues has permeated American culture over the last two centuries. She closely reads novels, poetry, film and events to illustrate and investigate her argument. Berlant focuses on what she calls US 'women's culture' which is what she terms an 'intimate public'. An intimate public develops when 'a market opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people's particular core interests and desires' (*Female Complaint* 5). Berlant argues that women's culture critically and sentimentally expresses the female complaint, the cultural understanding that 'women live for love, and love is the gift that keeps on taking' (*Female Complaint* 1). The female complaint is a love of conventionality, and the work of love, in Berlant's understanding, is the everyday, affective bargaining that women undertake (and then depict and circulate) to stay proximate to normative femininity (16). Women undertake this work because to stay close to normativity is to retain the possibility of the good life, to be 'somebody in a world where the default is being nobody or, worse, being presumptively *all wrong*' (*Female Complaint* 3, emphasis in original). That is, to align oneself with conventionality is to negotiate one's own belonging, to paradoxically accept the homogenisation of one's self in exchange for affectively experiencing, and legibly expressing, a meaningful self (*Female Complaint* 3). The affective experience of women's culture is based upon disappointment and an ambivalence that is experienced as failure, and the opposite of happiness, which is enveloped into the experience of normative femininity itself. The female complaint is a relation of utopian bargaining which 'observes struggle and registers the failure of the desired world without wanting to break with the conditions of that struggle' (*Female Complaint* 19). Despite its conflation of normativity and belonging, women's culture feels like an ethical space because it focuses on the wellbeing of ordinary women and legitimates those women through feelings. While women's culture rejects associations with the political, and this itself is a political stance, in fact it supports a 'white universalist paternalism' where white fantasies of 'what black and working-class interiority based on suffering must feel like in order to find a language for their own more privileged suffering at the hands of other women, men, and callous institutions' (*Female Complaint* 5). Although not directed toward friendship specifically, Berlant's work complicates the political drive to understand women's sociality—and by extension women's friendship—as an uncomplicated ethical good. While I draw on Berlant's work directly in some of the chapters of this thesis, her work facilitates a deeper engagement with US women's culture and

women's relationships with each other within that culture, one that acknowledges women's roles in both conservative and progressive sociality.

In examining women's friendship in literature, this thesis repeatedly engages with the intersection of friendship, desire and processes of women's identification, all of which are in part socially constructed and disallowed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's analysis of the link between desire, identification and power assists in this thesis' consideration of the role desire plays in scenes of women's friendship, among other modes of relating or identifying. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), Sedgwick works with René Girard's theory on the erotic triangle, whereby he argues that 'in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved' (*Between Men* 21). Sedgwick extends this theory to study the way male sociality triangulates with heterosexual desire. Like her (comparatively much shorter) exploration of a women's relationships gamut, Sedgwick excavates a potential continuum between male homosociality and homosexuality based on desire. Male homosexuality is less culturally acceptable, she argues, since social connections between men, that is, male homosociality, is 'obviously meant to be distinguished from "homosexual"' and often has as its basis homophobia (*Between Men* 2). Homophobia, against both men and women, is so deeply ingrained into the 'texture of family, gender, age, class, and race relations' that insufficient attention has been paid to the way desire intersects with all kinds of relations (*Between Men* 4). Sedgwick understands desire to be structural rather than only emotional or sexual (although it may include these aspects). Desire is 'the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship' and is greatly affected by, and affects, gendered power relations (*Between Men* 2). Sedgwick, therefore, theorises male sociality through the erotic triangle, arguing for its value 'for delineating relationships of power and meaning, and for making graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment' (*Between Men* 27). Sedgwick's work provides an invaluable account of the connection between desire and sociality. While Sedgwick's primary focus is relationships between men, her framework encourages close attention to the way that women's friendship may intersect and play with desire and identification. This thesis, like Sedgwick's work, traces

the way friendship in literature intersects with wider bonds, drives, needs and identifications as it is optimistically formed and often tragically deformed.

This thesis is indebted to Elizabeth Abel's '(E)Merging Identities: The Dynamics of Female Friendship in Contemporary Fiction by Women' (1981). Abel works with object relations theory to closely read a collection of 1960s and 1970s fiction written by women including Doris Lessing's *The Four-gated City* (1969) and *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Christa Wolf's *The Quest for Christa T* (1968) and Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973). She argues that female friendship is 'a vehicle of self-definition for women, clarifying identity through relation to the other who embodies and reflects an essential aspect of the self' (Abel 416). Abel closely ties women's friendship to the original maternal connection, finding that the dynamics of a woman's relationship with her mother are repeated in her future friendships. This is because, in Abel's understanding, the daughter is a narcissistic extension of the mother, and self-other identification is promoted over firm ego boundaries (417). Therefore, 'the primary sense of self [the daughter] develops and carries through her life is one of self-in-relationship' which, later in female friendships, manifests as a dynamic of 'fusion and differentiation' (Abel 417; 432). However, the balance between identification and difference is difficult to keep in equilibrium and friendships may become difficult to sustain when women require independence as well as connection (Abel 429). Regardless, for Abel, friendship is, at its best, a vehicle of self-knowledge for its participants, a 'mode of relational self-definition' (Abel 414). This thesis shares many similarities with Abel's work. Abel's attempt to understand what she refers to as the psychological underpinnings of women's friendship (414) has much in common with my own preoccupation, to reach the heart of the internal dynamics of women's friendships. Both Abel and I are particularly connected with how friendship is imagined in literature by women. Also, some of the works Abel studies are twentieth century American novels, one of which is closely read in this thesis (Toni Morrison's *Sula*). Abel's contribution greatly influenced my own work, and until I began to work with the matrixial theory, was particularly significant. However, this thesis seeks to move beyond Abel's article by providing a more comprehensive analysis of the internal processes of women's friendship that can account for the maternal role in women's (co-)subject formations while accounting for a wide

range of mother-daughter relationships. This thesis builds on Abel's contribution to offer a more recent and more in-depth understanding of women's friendship as co-becoming.

What is friendship to women in literature?

Women's friendship is understudied, yet the contributions by primarily feminist scholars to understand this integral part of most women's lives and its representation in literature have offered valuable insights. Often, women's friendship has been conceptualised in relation to other bonds, especially (homo and hetero)sexual or familial, or studies have focused on excavating the more-distant past. This thesis consolidates and expands upon previous scholarship to produce a theory of women's friendship that reveals the interlinked play of social and internal forces which produce this intangible but integral bond. My thesis is the first to draw on Bracha Ettinger's work on the matrixial to generate insight into the internal mechanisms of women's friendship in literature. Insightful work has been undertaken since the 1970s on what women's friendship is, but little adequately addresses the question of women's friendship in literature written by women, and none draws together this particular archive of novels by women, produced across the twentieth century.

In order to contribute a new, and much needed, understanding of women's friendship in women's writing in the more recent past, this thesis seeks to answer two questions. The first points to the overall approach of the thesis to the reading of the texts, and is the primary inquiry of this thesis. The sub-question relates to the specific scope of the thesis, which will be justified shortly. The questions are: *What is women's friendship to women in literature? How do novels written by women in the first 75 years of twentieth century America construct friendship between women?*

This thesis argues that friendship in literature is both an internal and external space through which friends co-create themselves and each other. Women's friendship is produced by psychic (re)encounter and requires a play of closeness and distance in a way that is particularly marked in women's friendship and differentiates it from women's other relationships. Women's friendship is a space that is separate from, but nevertheless influences and is influenced by, the racist, heterosexist and masculinist society in which it is experienced.

Friends are called to each other because they spark in each other a psychic re-emergence of the woman/fetus co-creation in the womb. Women's friendship is a space between two or more women that is co-created and constrained by its participants.

Co-becoming: A theoretical framework

The thesis' argument is produced through an engagement with the work of Bracha Ettinger on the matrixial. The matrixial is a feminist exploration of subjectivity, where the self and other is a relationship that can occur because it is a trace of being that begins with the first connection—that between fetus and mother—and repeats throughout a woman's life. Ettinger's primary engagement is with women and their art, most often painting, but her work has startling implications for women's friendships. Namely, Ettinger's theory of the matrixial can be used to understand women's friendship as a re-encounter with subjectivity first encountered in the womb.

Working as a psychoanalyst, theorist and painter, Ettinger's work crosses media and boundaries to produce a multidisciplinary and insightful body of work. Each aspect of Ettinger's practice and theory is an attempt to understand women: their inner life, their bonds, their art. She intervenes into the work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan to extend and correct the way in which the feminine has been ignored, cast aside and repressed from the origin. Ettinger argues that it is from the originary experience of the self/other in the womb that a subject comes to be. Most importantly, it is through this experience that the subject comes to *be with*. She writes, 'In the matrixial perspective, *becoming-together* precedes *being-one*' (Ettinger 72). For Ettinger, in adulthood the return to the womb occurs most often through artistic practice, especially painting (this thesis argues that another avenue to return for women is through friendship).

The matrixial sits alongside the Oedipal, rather than replacing it. Ettinger argues that Oedipal castration is only one path to the symbolic. Oedipal castration is 'that of the male viewpoint of the difference between the sexes' for both men and women (Ettinger 70). Matrixial engagement with the co-emergence of the I and non-I 'alternates and co-exists with the phallic awareness of being one' (Ettinger 70). Nor does the matrixial apply only to women.

After all, all subjects begin in the womb as a baby-to-be in co-emergence with a mother-to-be. Matrixial awareness is therefore not for women only, nor are men and women less equal in the symbolic Matrix, but, for Ettinger, 'they are not the *same*' (70).⁴ So, Ettinger's theorisation is a part a rectification of the male-dominated understanding of subject formation, the erasure of the woman:

'The woman is not the price of culture incarnate, nor is she an entirely phallic subject, nor is she absent to her-self. The woman is not subjected to the rules of "castration" that make of her either a subject or an object. Nor is she the *absent par excellence*.' (72)

Neither is the matrixial an attempt to falsely valorise the feminine path as 'some caricatural lost paradise' (Ettinger 70). Rather, Ettinger argues that there is another, borderline repression produced by the Freudian understanding of a difference that 'comes before...exists and leaves psychic traces before repression' (70). The repressed may reemerge as either phallic or matrixial, through *objet a* or through borderlink. Originary repression produces unconscious desire on different paths which depends on 'whether it is hidden behind the phallic "castration" and repression, or traced by and veiled behind a multifocal, diffuse, and shared metramorphosis' (Ettinger 70). Ettinger terms the matrixial path *metramorphosis*, which is the 'becoming-threshold of borderlines for both sexes, but as a feminine prerogative' (70).

After birth, when mother and baby—the two partial subjects—'undergo differentiation into distinctive yet still common experiences', traces of the matrixial object/*objet a* 'seeps into subjectivity' (Ettinger 71). This means that unlike in the phallic, the *objet a* and the subject can partially coexist; 'in the matrixial stratum, the *object a* appears and yet the subject does not completely fade away' (Ettinger 71). This is significant because it creates a space of co-becoming, co-existing after the womb. Unlike in the Oedipal framework, meaning for the subject is not created by the absence of the desired *objet a* but rather in play of togetherness and separation—as opposed to the more stringent presence and absence—that Ettinger refers to as *distance-in-proximity*.

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Ettinger theorises that the prenatal meeting between woman and fetus is the model for future subject/object relations. That is, the originary dynamic of matrixial encounter between the I, and the one who is not I but is not a stranger, returns throughout a woman's life. Unlike the masculinist Oedipal model of individuality, the matrixial accounts for the ongoing 'shareable dimension of subjectivity' in which the I and the non-I 'co-emerge and co-inhabit a joint space, without fusion and without rejection' (Ettinger 65). This is possible because in the womb, the 'becoming-mother' and the 'becoming subject' (mother-to-be and baby-to-be, respectively) 'engender an alliance and turn into partial-subjects...of the same matrixial time and space' (Ettinger 66). Even before the fetus has partial subjectivity 'the mother-to-be's phantasmatic and traumatic contact with it as a partial-object already is already transforming her unconscious subjectivity', and vice versa (Ettinger 82).

Fusion or repulsion are not matrixial. Rather, the matrixial produces co-emergence through difference. Ettinger provides two terms for this continuous process, 'relations-without-relating' and 'distance-in-proximity'. These terms represent a different kind of relation to the other than Oedipal castration allows. She writes, 'Relations-without-relating and distance-in-proximity preserve the co-emerging Other as both subject *and* object without turning the Other into an object only; and they preserve the matrixial woman as both subject *and* object, not as object or Other only' (Ettinger 72). In this understanding, reduction, assimilation and merging are rejected and a less extreme but just as powerful force is co-produced. Co-emergence through distance is essential to my understanding of women's friendship because it acknowledges friends as separate beings co-creating without merging. Later in life, often through artistic practice or consumption, but—as I argue—not only, the matrixial manifests through particular affects: awe, alertness, astonishment and compassion. This is a purposeful move away from the extreme effects of love and hate, which, like fusion and repulsion, are not matrixial.

Russian American feminist scholar Svetlana Boym's work on women's friendship as a choice for its own sake elegantly supports the use of Ettinger's matrixial framework in considering women's friendship. In 'Scenography of a Friendship' (2009-10), Boym considers the famous literary friendship between Mary McCarthy and Hannah Arendt as a way to theorise on the internal dynamics of friendship. Boym closely reads moments as told by McCarthy, including

her funeral oration written just after Arendt's death in 1975, alongside Arendt's writings, to study the 'intimate boundaries of friendship and tender paradoxes about taste and tact, love and knowledge'. Friendship for Boym is an open relationship that is worldly, involves co-creating through play, and expanding the 'dimensions of existence' through conversation with each friend's multiple voices and parts. Like Ettinger, Boym points to a familiar otherness as characteristic of friendship, which she argues is inherent to the Russian etymological definition of friendship itself: 'In Russian, the word for "friend," *drug*, is related to "the other," but not a foreign other, for which there is another word, *inoi* (Boym). For Boym, tact and tenderness are essential to navigate this otherness as a way of connection without violation. Similarly to Ettinger again, she suggests that navigating the space of friendship requires a play of closeness and distance which 'excludes possession and fusion'. Friendship, for Boym, is an ongoing choice to be part of a 'body that is not one', 'at once public and private, untimely and contemporary, foreign and intensely familiar'. Most significantly for this thesis and its engagement with the matrixial, Boym argues that tact—a play of closeness and distance—is productive for good friendship. She writes that friendship is about the in-between, that because it is 'neither brightly lit nor completely enlightened, [friendship] has a scenography of chiaroscuro, of the interplay of light and shadow' (Boym). Boym's work, while not explicitly linked to Ettinger or her matrixial framework, presents a kind of example of it. That is, Boym seemingly unintentionally interprets Mary McCarthy and Hannah Arendt's friendship in matrixial language and through matrixial concepts. This thesis draws upon Boym's work to consider the productive limits of friendship and as a valuable example of a way to study it.

My reading of the matrixial informs, complicates, and frames my understanding of the depiction of women's connection in my chosen novels. Most often, despite their depth and breadth, studies of women's friendship focus more on the external mechanisms that conjure connection between women (triangulation through a man, oppression under the patriarchy, for example). Of course, it is impossible to study connection outside the space which fosters it. However, many studies of women's friendship miss what Boym calls the 'precise alchemy', the kind of distinctive, seemingly unknowable energy that is essential to deep friendship. The feeling of a new friend, the spark of connection, is difficult to theorise into language, but is for

many women a prized and commonplace occurrence. The matrixial enables, even encourages, a productive theorisation.

Ettinger's psychoanalytic theory, directed in large part toward her primary interest and other area of practice, painting, is also useful for understanding people—especially women—and the psychic life between them. Through her psychoanalytical work Ettinger seeks to reframe women's connection to each other, and how this connection reemerges through art later in life. I draw on Ettinger's work to understand women's connections to each other and how these connections develop in friendship in literature in specific ways. I read matrixially to consider the play of closeness and distance between friends, and to be constructively critical of the extremes of merging or separation that are more Oedipal in nature. Drawing on the matrixial, I am attuned to repressed or passed knowings, which can be represented in literature through character's memories, childhood, race or the impacts of socialisation. The matrixial contributes language and a theoretical paradigm to certain aspects of friendship which are difficult to name. For example, I draw on the concept of co-becoming to theorise the mutual self and other building that is depicted in textual friendships between women, as friends form themselves through, with and against the friendly other. This co-becoming sometimes parallels a mother-daughter relationship, although in some novels (especially *The Awakening* and *The Haunting of Hill House*) the mother-daughter relationship is depicted as an overdetermined biological tie or inheritance, while the matrixial has more potential because, even while it has the character of mother/daughter relation, it migrates to the more experimental and flexible, artistic or literary bond of the matrixial. The matrixial helps understanding of the call that some women have to each other, the internal mechanics for each other or, to again use Boym's beautiful word, their alchemy. Reading these novels through the lens of Ettinger's theory also facilitates a new understanding of the way their formal properties mirror and support the oscillating movement of friends' co-becoming. Through the use of tight focalisation on one or more of the friends, including, to varying degrees, the use of psychonarration and free indirect discourse to enter deeply into the characters' interiority, the narrative structures of several texts prioritises that which moves

closer, and then distances itself, from the consciousness of one or both friends.⁵ Often, however, this closeness is relieved by distance, a shift to distant third person narration, an oscillation which mirrors the matrixial and supports the novels' depiction of women's friendship through its formal properties and embodies the difficulty of maintaining closeness between the self and the beloved, friendly other.

A matrixial framework offers a new way of theorising women's friendship. Each of the novels chosen in this thesis represents/depicts the matrixial in a variety of ways and to varying extents. Of course, the matrixial is not the only way to understand the inner mechanics of women's friendship in literature, and at times I work with other scholars, especially Berlant, Sedgwick and Boym, to further develop my understanding. By drawing on Ettinger's radical theory I am assisted to deeply consider women's friendship in all its complexity and in doing so, I extend the usefulness of Ettinger's work in this time and space.

How I read: Methodology

In order to better understand women's friendship in literature by answering my thesis questions, I closely read a set of novels written by women in the first 75 years of the twentieth century. Close reading, as I practise it, is a method of engagement with writing that pays particular attention to the text and its devices. Drawing on insights facilitated by close reading, as well as secondary research and my theoretical framework, I developed my understanding of the ways each text produced its meanings and, most importantly, its constructions of women's friendship.

While I have sought to prioritise the text's own generation of meaning and to understand it on its own terms, I have made two particular analytical choices which are important to note. Each choice relates to the relationship between women's friendships and their sexual bonds. The first was in relation to women's friendship and lesbianism. My approach to each of the novels has been to refrain from avoiding or searching for eroticism between the women of

⁵ Free indirect discourse represents a character's utterances or thoughts. It has the same grammatical traits as direct discourse, but introduces at least some of the character's enunciations, thereby mixing the narrator's and character's styles, languages, voices, etc. although this integration may only happen sporadically or occasionally and is contested (Prince 46).

the texts. I chose to consider novels from the positioning of 'What can this text tell us about how it understands friendship?' rather than the less open position of 'What kind of relationship (read: sexual or platonic) does this text depict?'. In doing so, I draw on Sedgwick's understanding (as outlined earlier) of the 'continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations' that links women's same-gender desire to other forms of woman-affection, including mother/daughterhood, friendship, networking and feminism (*Between Men* 2). There are multiple ways to read the nature of same-gender relations in my chosen texts but in this thesis I foreground the existence of friendship between two fictional characters of my chosen text, even when there are erotic relations at play.

My second reading choice is related to the focus I pay to a novel's male characters and heterosexual love plot. While each novel engages differently with heterosexual romance (*Gone with the Wind* deeply, *The Haunting of Hill House* only partially, for example), I approach each novel individually but similarly. I consider men, masculinity, and heterosexual love only as they impact on the women's friendships in each novel. I have chosen this approach not just because the male aspects of the novels tend to be the least interesting, although this was often true, but so I could explicitly focus on the friendship at hand. By reducing my focus on masculinism in my reading, I afford space to the friendships and read them on their own terms, while still remaining attentive to the ways male influence—most often through domesticity and structural gender-based domination—impact a textual friendship.

Both choices were influenced, as much of my scholarship has been, by my repeated reading of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 2002 essay 'Paranoid reading and reparative reading' in which she, rightly in my opinion, points out that literary critics tend to find what they look for. Following Sedgwick, then, I have sought instead to ask what knowledge about friendship and its relationship to other kinds of bonds each text tries to communicate. While acknowledging that as a reader I am an active participant in meaning making, I also know that searching for latent lesbianism or a defining male figure would only ensure I would often find both, and in the process potentially obscure the intricacies of women's friendships themselves.

What I read: Scope

The aim of this thesis was to examine the construction of friendship by American women writers in the first 75 years of the twentieth century. In order to achieve this aim, the thesis closely reads five novels: *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin (1899), *Passing* by Nella Larsen (1929), *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell (1936), *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson (1959) and *Sula* by Toni Morrison (1973). These novels were chosen according to the following criteria: they are a) written by prominent Black and white American women writers, b) written between the early twentieth century and the later years of second-wave feminism, c) depict a close relationship between at least two unrelated women but not more than three women, d) represent a range of genres (including literary, gothic, Black literary and romance epic), and e) depict women characters and their relationships seriously and extensively within the text. The criteria for inclusion was developed to ensure the study accounted for diverse depictions of women's friendship while also limiting the scope to a coherent set of texts within an identifiable space and time. In particular, I sought to include perspectives from both Black and white writers in order to include accounts of the role of racism, a primary social force in the twentieth century in America, from the view of both oppressed and oppressor, while acknowledging such roles overlap and are indistinct. The texts were limited to a specific timeframe between the turn of the century (Kate Chopin's 1899 novel *The Awakening*) and the mid-1970s (Toni Morrison's 1973 novel *Sula*). This was for several reasons. First, while use of 'waves' to categorise feminism and its movements is imprecise and contested, second-wave feminism is one way (and a way especially popular in America itself) to describe the period of immense shift that occurred in American society when women gained access to some reproductive choices and the women's movement successfully advocated for women's increased equality (Hewitt 659). Narrowing the scope of texts to exclude post-1975 novels offered the opportunity to focus specifically on a cohesive set of texts that construct women's friendship before and during the period of great change in which women experienced (relatively) more freedom. As I suggest in this thesis' conclusion, a study which includes texts from the aftermath of the women's movement, and the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, would be immensely valuable but diverges from this thesis' aims and achievements. Next, novels about groups were excluded on the basis that such friendship dynamics differ from

one-to-one relationships. A diversity of genres offers different and innovative ways to examine women's friendship in literature and to account for varying audiences. Finally, it is important to note that each text was also chosen because it spoke to me as a reader and as a researcher, evoking a strong sense of meaning.

Finally, while the matrixial, as a theory of human subjectivity, may be a valuable framework for theorising literary representations of friendships between people of any gender, the focus of this thesis is specifically on the exciting possibilities it offers for understanding women's friendships. The matrixial theory is particularly interesting for women's relationships because a woman has 'double access' to the matrixial sphere as both a past time (she is a subject originating from a womb) and future time (she has the future possibility of carrying a subject in her womb) (Ettinger 143). Ettinger writes, 'female subjects have a privileged access to the paradoxical time, the matrixial time, where the future traumatically meets the past, as well as to the paradoxical matrixial space where the outside meets the inside' (Ettinger 143). The matrixial may also be applied to male or non-binary subjects, who also move through life carrying traces of the originary womb from which they were born. However, while all genders have access to the past-side, the 'future-side is the female's only' (Ettinger 143). While noting the potential for wider application, in this work I draw on the theory to specifically consider connections between to further understanding of this understudied relationship and, following Ettinger's own matrixial project, to centre women's subjectivity, past and future, in my work.

Thesis structure

The chapters are loosely organised by (indistinct and overlapping) themes: Chapters One and Two consider women's friendship under masculinist structures of control while Chapter Four and Five consider the impact of race on Black women's friendships and Chapter Three exists between and within the two categories.

Chapter One closely reads Kate Chopin's 1899 *The Awakening* to examine the issue of the creative woman, questioning the value of motherhood to women while also celebrating friends-as-mothers. The story follows the protagonist, Edna, as she becomes increasingly at

odds with those around her as she seeks liberation from the constrained roles of being a wife and mother. Through her separate but connected friendships with two women, Adèle and Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna Pontellier is metaphorically and psychically mothered, drawing on their life-giving, life re-ordering capacities in order to symbolically give birth to herself. The matrixial is a way of understanding the ambivalent tendrils of maternity that work their way through many women's negotiation of creativity and creation, and the novel depicts a matrixial gestation. *The Awakening* tells a story of women's friendship and being, and the play of closeness and distance each allows and requires. It is this distance, as well as closeness, which allows Edna the freedom to create herself. A novel all about one woman's journey to total aloneness, total self-creation, *The Awakening* nevertheless knows that the mother/other is always within the self.

Chapter Two examines the unravelling of Eleanor in Shirley Jackson's 1959 *The Haunting of Hill House* and her maternally-inherited connection with the independent and glamorous Theodora. The novel is concerned with what women lose by being confined within the home, presenting a nuanced and pessimistic post-war mid-century engagement with the issue of domesticity. This chapter investigates the meaning of the matrixial on a larger scale—how it relates to maternity, patriarchy and normativity and presents a complicated link between motherhood and friendship, in which motherhood and matrixial connection between women is antithetical. What Theodora and Eleanor articulate is a kind of previous co-becoming, no less real because it is discursively rather than biologically constructed. It gestures to a previous place of knowing from where they both originate, a place both experienced (proximity), yet experienced slightly differently (distance). The friendship between them conjures matrixial moments of joy, laughter and possibility, bittersweet because these moments are not enough to save the protagonist from 'absolute reality' of women's violent subjugation. The chapter argues that Eleanor and Theodora's friendship is both built and strained by a shared traumatic and phantasmatic history and that their connection is enabled, but cut short, by the patriarchal, heterosexist house/society in which it exists.

Chapter Three examines Margaret Mitchell's 1937 romantic epic *Gone with the Wind* and the ambivalent and rivalrous friendship between the wild Scarlett O'Hara and her saintly opposite, Melanie Wilkes. *Gone with the Wind* is both product and producer, an artefact of Americanism

that is accidentally damning about the heritage of white women's friendship. While white women's relationships in the novel involve matrixial proximity in distance, its foundation rests on the useful subjection of the other, usually derived through violent control. At each turn affection and support between Scarlett and Melanie is supported by the othered women their friendship excludes, producing a connection that is mostly the result of enforced sameness through whiteness and femininity. *Gone with the Wind* is a novel so distracted by its own racism that it constructs but reduces the connection between its two most promising friends, Scarlett and Mammy, with their friendship's affection, chemistry and potential, in favour of reinforcing a narrative of Black inferiority and white woman supremacy through segregated togetherness. Chapter Three argues that, in *Gone with the Wind*, women's friendship is an act of co-becoming between white women at the violent expense of the Black women who are financially and socially forced to serve them.

Chapter Four investigates the claustrophobic, threatening and potentially erotic friendship between Irene and Clare in Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929). Women's friendship in *Passing* is a contested site, both desired and horror-filled, a relationship in which the other and her desires cannot be known or withstood. Matrixial theory offers a new way of considering *Passing's* negotiation of wanting and loathing. Although the tension between erotic yearning and racial identification generates anxiety (in Irene especially), the tension also produces desire and repulsion; a heady mix of matrixial closeness and distance that is both the foundation of their friendship and its downfall. The chapter both supports and challenges the argument of this thesis and its theoretical framework by depicting a relationship that is re-sparked by raced matrixial return but surpasses co-becoming in favour of a more murky and sinister connection. In *Passing*, women's friendship is a threatening relationship which merges the boundaries between self and other so that not only is connection impossible, but also life. Women's friendship, in the novel's schematisation, is based on matrixial, racial knowing and is cut short by the fear of future becoming.

Chapter Five analyses Toni Morrison's 1973 novel *Sula* which centres on the friendship of Sula Peace and Nel Wright, two Black women who grow up together and appear to grow apart in adulthood. *Sula's* primary concern is with Black women and their relationships with each other. This chapter argues that Morrison depicts friendship as not only co-becoming but as a

continuous fact of life, without beginning or end. In *Sula*, Sula and Nel's connection is a matrixial friendship, a suspended space of humanity founded in multi-layered connectedness. I move away from an adjudication on the success of the friendship, focusing on the productions of meaning that togetherness generates, even in distance. I argue that, in one of the most serious portrayals of women's friendships in American literature, *Sula* presents women's friendship as a connection that embodies a togetherness so full that it disrupts narration, the self, and the distances of betrayal and death. Sula and Nel's friendship, like the community in which it occurs, has meaning beyond its limits, so much meaning that it disintegrates the significance of those limits themselves.

Taken together, the chapters closely read twentieth century American woman-authored fiction while drawing on Ettinger's matrixial framework to argue that women's friendship is constructed as a relationship influenced by the heterosexist, racist and patriarchal society in which it exists, but is also a relationship for its own sake in characters' lives. It is a space between two women in which the co-creation of self and other in a play of closeness and distance occurs. This space is both sparked by, and returns women-friends to, the re-emergence of psychic traces first generated in the womb.

Chapter One:

Mother-friends and the birth of the self in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.

Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women', 1931

A woman writing thinks back through her mothers.

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929

Virginia Woolf highlights, between two works, the complicated position women-writers have in relation to themselves, and to other women, especially their mothers. Together, the quotations above illuminate the challenge creative women undertake as they draw on their own mothers, both biological and cultural, while seeking to kill the idealised mother-woman in themselves and in the world. Hélène Cixous argues, much later, in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976) that a woman writing herself returns 'to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display', calling to women that 'we must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing' (880). Barbara Johnson argues, later again, in 'My Monster/My Self' (1982), that since Mary Shelley, women writers have been metaphorically killing their mothers in order to write, or create, themselves. Like Woolf and Cixous, Johnson argues that women have a multitude of mothers from which to draw and upon which to enact violence. Each theorist shares a kind of formula:

woman-writer

mother/s

killing/thinking

writing/creating

Woolf, Cixous and Johnson each formalise a link for women between all kinds of creation and self-creation, production and reproduction. There is, in many women's writing, a deep, mysterious and sometimes troubling connection between being mothered, being a mother, being a possible/future mother and a drive for autonomous creativity and production. The matrixial is another way of understanding the ambivalent tendrils of maternity that work their way through many women's negotiation of creativity and creation. Woolf, Cixous and Johnson present slightly different but complementary positions on what Johnson refers to as 'the *gap* between angels of domesticity and an uncompleted monsteress', with both figures representing the woman writer as well as her (multiple) mothers (189). Published almost a century before Johnson's work, Kate Chopin's 1899 novel *The Awakening* can be read as an examination of the issue of the creative woman, one that questions the value of motherhood while also celebrating friends-as-mothers, and their own creative acts. The novel gives its protagonist the choice of shedding history, womanhood, the Angel, society and family. While Edna's death might be (and, indeed, has been) read as punishment for her transgressions—a convention of the time in which the book was written—my argument focuses on the artistic or creative freedom implied in this act. That is, I read Edna's 'death' as a rebirth, self-driven but also produced by friendship. *The Awakening* follows Edna Pontellier as she matrixially thinks through her mother-friends, metaphorically killing the Angel and monster in the house, in order to (re)create herself.

The novel charts the journey of 28-year-old Edna, a wealthy and married mother of two, on her summer holiday in Grand Isle and her return to her home in New Orleans, Louisiana. Having grown up in a Presbyterian family, Edna married into the French Creole community. *The Awakening* depicts how Edna becomes increasingly at odds with those around her as she seeks liberation from the normative, patriarchally constrained roles of wife and mother. Disenchanted with her husband, she falls in love with the charming Robert Lebrun and has a less significant affair with a third man, Alcée Arobin. She moves from her marital home to a house of her own, begins to paint and sell her art and, when Robert will not brave a life together without marriage and the continued societal privilege marriage represents, Edna seemingly drowns herself in the ocean.

Portraying the roles of wife and mother as defined and constrained by men, *The Awakening* constructs women's friendship as a generative space between women which creates the possibility of individual self-actualisation. In the text, Edna is psychically and metaphorically mothered—gestated and birthed—in the space between two friends, Adèle Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz (hereafter Mlle. Reisz). Adèle and Mlle. Reisz are not friends themselves, but nevertheless they together triangulate Edna, who is profoundly influenced by the two very different women. Edna's awakening is sparked by her entrance into a women's space for the first time and, following this, she unsuccessfully seeks to create herself individually through the action most culturally synonymous with women: reproduction. *The Awakening* establishes that friendship is essential to women by depicting Edna's journey to personal freedom (from domesticity and motherhood) as only possible through the direct intervention of other women. The novel demonstrates the value of distance as well as closeness in friendship, as Edna is given the tools and inspiration, but also the space, to create herself through connection with other women. If this is paradoxical, it is then a paradox of friendship; the distance allowed in friendship is just as much a gift as the closeness. The involvement of her friends sparks Edna's journey, but it is the space between that leaves room for her journey to emancipation.

Edna's friends are generally understood as textual strategies and friendship is not often seriously considered in studies on *The Awakening*. Adèle Ratignolle and Mlle. Reisz are most often considered (each other's) foils that are used for narrative purposes, as models of the kind of woman Edna may choose to be. On the surface, such a reading is supported by the text. However, without reading the women's dynamics with each other closely one risks reducing them to stereotypes in ways *The Awakening* itself does not. Readings of the role of Adèle and Mlle. Reisz in Edna's life, which scholars have conducted, vary from arguing they 'contribute' to, or 'influence' Edna's search for individuality (Tercan 682; Gilbert 50) to describing the 'finely wrought system' of connection between the women (Seyersted qtd in Stone 24). However, these studies do not take friendship as their main focus and each tends to see Edna's friendships as a literary device rather than the primary relationships of the novel. There has been an immense amount of writing on *The Awakening* since Chopin again garnered interest in the 1950s, especially work focused on Edna's proto-feminist journey, as well as the

depiction of Adèle as a mother (Streater; Rooks) and Mlle. Reisz as an artist (Hildebrand). However, scholarship treating the connections between the two women and Edna as serious constructions of friendship is scarce. This chapter contributes an original reading of *The Awakening* by closely reading it for women's friendship and considering these bonds in relation to the matrixial. In doing so, I bring a new interpretation to the field of Chopin studies, arguing that *The Awakening* makes women's friendship primary and constructs the friendships as healing, loving and nurturing of Edna's ultimate awakening at the conclusion of the novel. In these ways, I suggest, it is grounded in the matrixial.

The chapter begins by focusing on the locus of Edna's awakening; Grand Isle is a paradise for women and children during the working week, which—through distance from husbands who return to the city for work—allows space for women's sociality. Next, I argue that Adèle and Mlle. Reisz's attentions allow Edna to flourish in the space between the two women. In the following section, I argue that it is under their affectionate influence that Edna struggles to find her own way of being in the world. The final two sections of the chapter deal with the gifts of experience both friends give to Edna—through transcendental piano music and harrowing childbirth—which symbolically 'birth' Edna and facilitate her ability to finally create herself.

As a precursor, this chapter must address Edna's racial and class status, each of which position her as a character who can embark on a journey of self-actualisation. While I argue that the friendships in *The Awakening* are literary depictions of friendship, importance and interiority are only given to one group of people in the text. *The Awakening* does not present a homogenous group of people and includes French Creole (Adèle and Léonce), white Presbyterian (Edna) and likely Jewish (Mlle. Reisz) characters. Kate Chopin is known as a 'local color writer' who writes in the realist tradition about cultures of the South (Killeen 414), and in the case of *The Awakening*, 'New Orleans bourgeois Creole culture' (O'Rourke 168). However, as in many novels of women's complaint (see Berlant, *The Female Complaint*), the focus on and romanticisation of interiority is only extended to the upper- or middle-class woman. Edna is certainly of this kind: the daughter of a plantation owner and Colonel of the Confederate army, Edna is able to embark on her journey toward awakening because a

'quadroon nurse' takes care of her children (*Awakening* 172).⁶ So, while the uptight, Protestant Edna may not fit in with the more sexually and morally free Creoles, a category which is racially contested, this struggle pails in relation to the larger racial picture of turn of the century Louisiana. Romanticisation of interiority is usually only extended to women characters of a certain social standing, for which Edna's racial and class status positions allow.

Edna's complicity in the oppression of those who are not her friends or family, because of their race and class, raises questions in relation to the actual heterodoxy of her rebellion. Unlike in *Gone with the Wind*, which is examined later in this thesis, the Black women who support Edna and her friends' lifestyles, and indeed awakenings, are rendered entirely silent and nameless. For a novel that prominently and rightly depicts the damage silence does to women, its silence on the topic of race is very loud. Perhaps, as Berlant suggests of other texts, Edna's freedom is a part of the whole, a disturbance that strengthens rather than destabilises order. *The Awakening* relegates the non-white and non-wealthy to the wings. Originally titled 'A Solitary Soul'—interestingly, considering its focus on friendship—the novel's feminist principles are not intersectional by today's standards, and they are barely collective. In turning now to Edna and her friends, I take along the accompanying acknowledgment of the Black voices they continue to silence in the lifting up of their own.

Grand Isle: Edna's awakening begins

Edna's path toward awakening begins on Grand Isle, a place temporally separated from husbands and their influence. This section examines the novel's construction of Adèle, Mlle. Reisz and their relationships with Edna to explore the way that Edna's journey—which is one of self-realisation—begins in a collective place with other women.

⁶ Race has been a significant area of study in scholarship on *The Awakening*, in part because Chopin's most famous work, 'Désirée's Baby', a short story which explores the intersection between Blackness and French Creole whiteness, engages closely with race. In terms of *The Awakening* itself, scholars have been divided on whether the novel subverts racist stereotypes (including, but not limited to, Emily Toth, Anna Elfenbein) or appropriates black suffering (Michelle Birnbaum, Helen Taylor, Barbara Ewell). Close reading of the Black servants in *The Awakening* has illuminated the ways in which they and Edna are similarly unfree, 'to show us how pervasive the absence of freedom is in American society and how much restlessness lies just below our nation's surface' as well as the way the substantial material differences between Black and white characters' circumstances cannot be overlooked (Dyer 144).

A tension common in many women's friendships is growth and separation and while Adèle and Mlle. Reisz gestate Edna, tending to her growth and creation, Edna must ultimately leave them in order to birth herself as an individual entity. In *The Awakening*, women's friendship bears many of the characteristics that we commonly associate with motherhood. Edna is fed, nurtured and disciplined by two women who are not her mother, acts which facilitate her growth and eventual creation as an awakened woman. There is a clear paradox in this argument: if a woman is gestated through others, how can she be said to produce herself? In this challenge exists a tension central to many women's friendships, and especially to their depiction in *The Awakening*. Edna must ultimately abandon her friends, along with the rest of her life, to exist as entirely herself for a brief moment. Yet this could not be possible without the facilitation of (woman) others. Self and woman friend/s are always entangled and disentangled simultaneously in the space between them. The nurturing Edna receives from her friends incites a yearning for liberation, which she must fulfil herself.

Grand Isle, Louisiana, is the metaphorical womb in which Edna begins her new life's journey. In this place Edna becomes childlike again, returning to curiosity and open engagement with the women around her. The novel begins with the Pontelliers on holiday at Grand Isle, on the Gulf of Mexico. It is a 'summer place', one where women and children spend weeks at a time over the warm months, and their husbands and fathers join them on the weekends. This is 'both literally and figuratively a women's colony, a sort of parodic Lesbos' (Gilbert 49). Run by the formidable Madame Le Brun, Grand Isle is more communal, a place where norms are relaxed and the patriarchal presence of Léonce and other husbands is lessened. This increased relaxation is both interpersonal and physical; women are able to meet outside the parlour room and move their bodies, in water and around each other (Parmiter 9). The novel's narrator observes, 'That summer at Grand Isle she began to loosen a little the mantle of reserve that had always enveloped her' (*Awakening* 190). The physical distance from Léonce and physical space for movement creates a space within Edna's mind, creating a space for the voices of others. Grand Isle is a new beginning for Edna, a space that holds her until she is ready to grow in another direction.

Adèle, with whom Edna grows very close on Grand Isle, offers Edna the kind of motherly love she has never known. Adèle is the quintessential 'mother woman', a figure both parodied and celebrated by the text. The narrator gushes, parodying literary constructions of ideal(ised) femininity familiar from earlier novels:

Many of them were delicious in the role; one of them was the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm. If her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving of death by slow torture. Her name was Adèle Ratignolle. There are no words to describe her save the old ones that have served so often to picture the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams. There was nothing subtle or hidden about her charms; her beauty was all there, flaming and apparent: the spun-gold hair that comb nor confining pin could restrain; the blue eyes that were like nothing but sapphires; two lips that pouted, that were so red one could only think of cherries or some other delicious crimson fruit in looking at them. She was growing a little stout, but it did not seem to detract an iota from the grace of every step, pose, gesture. One would not have wanted her white neck a mite less full or her beautiful arms more slender. Never were hands more exquisite than hers, and it was a joy to look at them when she threaded her needle or adjusted her gold thimble to her taper middle finger as she sewed away on the little night-drawers or fashioned a bodice or a bib. (*Awakening* 182)

Adèle, performing her mother-woman duties, is 'constantly pregnant', including for the duration of *The Awakening*. Adèle is portrayed as the ideal wife and mother yet the narrator, in this proto-feminist text, refrains from demonising or (non-ironically) deifying her (and those women who would idealise this archetype). The text's descriptions of Adèle do regularly tip into irony or exaggeration, especially when she is described as 'the fair lady of our dreams...her beauty was all there, flaming and apparent: the spun-gold hair that comb nor confining pin could restrain; the blue eyes that were like nothing but sapphires; two lips that pouted, that were so red one could only think of cherries or some other delicious crimson fruit in looking at them' (*Awakening* 181). However, the narrator and, especially, Edna, value Adèle less for her ability to be the right kind of woman, and more for her kindness toward the struggling Edna. Adèle is profuse with praise for Edna and attentive to her moods, an exact opposite to what Edna's other intimate relationships provide. Adèle calls Edna 'ma chérie', my dear, and when they speak, often clasps Edna's hand 'firmly and warmly' (*Awakening* 195). Edna is at first unsure of Adèle's forthright affection, finding her actions 'a little confusing'

before she can accept it: 'She was not accustomed to an outward and spoken expression of affection, either in herself or in others' (*Awakening* 195). In conversation, Adèle encourages Edna to 'express thoughts and feelings she had kept hidden, even from herself' as they sit together by the ocean (Stone 25). Edna's friendship with Adèle sparks new warmth and potential which, in combination with Mlle. Reisz's demanding encouragement, will change Edna's life.

Mlle. Reisz, as Adèle's opposite, balances and enriches Edna's social—and later interior—life through engaged criticism. Mlle. Reisz is figured as Adèle's opposite, a 'disagreeable' older woman, likely Jewish (in comparison to Adèle, who is Catholic and Madonna-like). Mlle. Reisz is a consummate artist, having dedicated her life to music. She avoids society for the most part, but occasionally plays for the rich on Grand Isle. She is described as 'a homely woman, with a small weazened face and body and eyes that glowed. She had absolutely no taste in dress, and wore a batch of rusty black lace with a bunch of artificial violets pinned to the side of her hair' (*Awakening* 208). When Mlle. Reisz and Edna meet, it is because Mademoiselle demands Edna choose the song Mlle. Reisz will play on the piano, singling her out from the crowd: "'Ask Mrs. Pontellier what she would like to hear me play'" (*Awakening* 208). Edna is 'a trifle embarrassed at being thus signalled out for the imperious little woman's favor' but she is soon overcome when the piano sends 'a keen tremor down [her] spinal column' (*Awakening* 209). While Mlle. Reisz is gruff, and sometimes rude, this is very different from the cold apathy Edna experiences with her family and Léonce. Rather, it is a kind of abrupt and awkward engagement, one that will demand of Edna a drive toward a more self-directed life for herself. It becomes a distance, a difference, which invites closeness. Edna's growth is spurred on by being challenged by Mlle. Reisz and being warmly tended to by Adèle.

The connection between Edna and Adèle and Edna and Mlle. Reisz that gives way to Edna's growth is enabled by their time in a women's space where the demands of wifehood are diminished. It is a space that enables generation through connection between women and is the necessary spark that begins Edna's eventual awakening. Without the relaxed rules of Grand Isle, and the freedom afforded by the absence of husbands and the reduction of men, Edna would not have developed such closeness with either of her friends, nor, it must be said,

begun her affair with Robert LeBrun. Loosening a 'little the mantle of reserve that had always enveloped her' does not, in Edna's case, mean only relaxing (*Awakening* 190). Rather, it describes an opening up, an unfurling, to possibility and to change. When Léonce comes to visit Edna and their children he is baffled by an unnameable change in her, and new resistances. She refuses to come to bed one night because 'her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant' and cannot understand why 'she should have yielded' in the past and decides to no longer (*Awakening* 218). Edna grows in a space that is uniquely formed in women's friendship.

Friendship as loving co-creation

Friendship between women is unusually motherly in *The Awakening*. This section of the chapter explores how the motherly nature of the dynamic between Edna and her two (separate) friends creates connections which are not fully equal, but which are nevertheless meaningful, loving and enriching for each party. Mlle. Reisz and Adèle provide Edna with the often-challenging support that she did not receive from her own parents or partner, nurturing her into new possibilities which later manifest into her awakening.

Friendship in the space between Reisz and Adèle is generative for Edna. Although the two women socialise in the same circles, they are figured as complete opposites: one a mother-woman, the other the spinster artist. Their relation to society is also opposing; where Adèle is gracious and goddess-like, Mlle. Reisz is grumpy and reclusive. Somewhere between the two exists Edna, who, through her connection to these two women, and the ways those connections develop, grows in relation to both women 'conjointly but differently' (Ettinger 65). As discussed in this thesis' introduction, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick illuminates a social structure wherein male friendships are triangulated in relation to desire for a third party. For Sedgwick, men's love for each other is deflected onto the desired woman as a way of shoring up homosocial bonds while sidelining the possibility of homoeroticism between men. Women's friendship in *The Awakening* offers a glimpse not only of triangulation within women's friendship but also of what it looks like to be the triangulated party. Of course, Sedgwick's theory is not directly applicable to this novel, as Sedgwick observes and describes male structures of relationship-building, and *The Awakening* is primarily concerned with

women and their choices and constraints. In *The Awakening*, women are both the triangulators and the triangulated, which also aptly demonstrates the internal experience of friendship in which not all of one's friends know each other or even like each other. In fact, it is the distance between Adèle and Mlle. Reisz that is most generative to Edna, who exists between them. Adèle and Reisz's distance from each other is also central to Edna's growth. The two ideologically opposed women do not fight with each other but fight within Edna, creating a war of a woman. With Adèle, Edna is compliant, and, because she is 'quite at rest concerning the present material needs of her children', spends time with Adèle cutting patterns and reading to Adèle as she sews (*Awakening* 183). Edna enjoys being under Adèle's wing. Lounging, occasionally helping, and sitting at Adèle's feet chatting as Adèle performs her motherly work feels, to Edna, 'like wine, or the first breath of freedom' (*Awakening* 199). By contrast, spending time with Mlle. Reisz is altogether more combative, while also still being enlivening. The spiky older woman challenges Edna but her 'desire to see Mlle. Reisz [increases] tenfold since...unlooked-for obstacles [arise] to thwart it' (*Awakening* 262). She exists in the gap between loving mother and warm but antisocial artist, great beauty and the rejection of it, ideal and rebel. Existence in this gap is uncomfortable and filled with ambivalence. Yet it is also generative, a place of freedom and creativity, and a place that provides closeness and space to create through connection. Generation of Edna's self happens in the space between her two contrasting friends.

Adèle's and Mlle. Reisz's interiority is largely omitted from the novel, and from Edna, symbolising the trust between friends in the communication of thoughts and feelings that are not available outside of the mind of the beholder. *The Awakening's* omniscient, third person perspective narration is focalised through Edna which means that Adèle or Mlle. Reisz's actions are communicative because their thoughts are unknown. The novel's distance from Adèle's and Mlle. Reisz's interiority expresses the psychic distance inherent between two or more distinct people, even friends, and the fact that the self can only fully know her own interior life. Friendship requires finding closeness in distance. Like Edna herself, Adèle and Mlle. Reisz are not afforded many lines but are presences, women who—in those presences—'reach Edna's spirit and set it free' (*Awakening* 293). Rather, to be friends must be to trust in mutuality, to express affection and to share oneself. When Mlle. Reisz accuses Edna of lying,

“‘That is not your true reason, *ma belle*. There is no use in telling me lies. I don’t know your reason, but you have not told me the truth’”, it is to suggest to Edna that she should consider more critically whether she is making fulfilling or expected choices (*Awakening* 297). Women’s friendship challenges the limitations of what is proper and demands disclosure of the difficult but honest contemplations had by all to make way for a sense of knowing and being known, even without visibility of their interiority. Adèle’s and Mlle. Reisz’s interiority is not overtly visible to Edna so their friendship relies on honesty to find closeness in the distance, leaving open the question of reciprocity within these friendships.

Just as a child struggles to conceptualise their mother as an individual outside of their maternal role, the novel’s narrative perspective (which is distant from Adèle’s and Mlle. Reisz’s inner lives) frames Edna in a childlike role. As we know, Edna’s friends take on maternal roles, ranging from adoring to critical. For example, Adèle tells Edna, ‘In some way you seem to me like a child, Edna. You seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life’ (*Awakening* 320). With few exceptions (such as the birth of Adèle’s child, discussed below), when Adèle or Mlle. Reisz are demanding of Edna, it is for her own sake. This is contrasted in the text with what Edna’s male suitors, her husband included, demand of Edna for themselves (*Awakening* 173; 181; 292; 324). Present but not imposing, contributing without forcing, women’s friendship provides Edna with soothing verbal and non-verbal encouragement and sometimes disapproval among the demanding male cacophony. Like a newborn learns from her mother, Edna learns how to be from Adèle and Mlle. Reisz, modelling how to love from their touch. By allowing Edna to occupy the position of child within their relationship, both Adèle and Mlle. Reisz give Edna another chance at some aspects of childhood which were withheld from her, like creativity through play, supported independence and loving authority figures. Ettinger quotes Pierre Fédida’s description of play as ‘allowing absence to take place’ (70). It is absence which makes space for possibility, and Edna has the unusual chance to fill it in adulthood because her friends hold some of her burdens. Adèle and Mlle. Reisz do not demand reciprocity from Edna as she takes on a childlike role, the centre of their affections and the object of their nurturing.

The Awakening depicts the care Adèle and Mlle. Reisz feel toward Edna, which is depicted through the narrator's focalisation through Edna. What Adèle and Mlle. Reisz receive from Edna is never explicitly expressed. Occasionally, the narrator may distance from Edna to linger a moment after Edna has left one of her friends. For example, after Edna rushes away having read a letter from Robert at Mlle. Reisz's and the older woman has spoken kindly to the younger ("Be careful; the stairs and landings are dark; don't stumble"), the following moment occurs:

Mademoiselle reentered and lit a candle. Robert's letter was on the floor. She stooped and picked it up. It was crumpled and damp with tears. Mademoiselle smoothed the letter out, restored it to the envelope, and replaced it in the table drawer. (*Awakening* 271)

It is caretaking that Mademoiselle performs, however grumpily. Like the crumpled, damp envelope she smooths and restores, she soothes Edna and cares for the things that are important to her, such as Robert's letter (and even Robert himself). For Edna, her friends seem 'to echo the thought which was ever in Edna's mind; or, better, the feeling which constantly possessed her' (*Awakening* 241). While privy to their thoughts when they encourage or cajole Edna, the reader is held apart from Mlle. Reisz's and Adèle's inner feelings of Edna. Although little is said, scenes between them depict the obvious affection that Edna's friends hold for her, affection no less significant because it is quiet.

As a child is primarily concerned with her own needs above her mother's, *The Awakening* is primarily concerned with Edna's needs as she is nurtured by her (mother) friends, including physically. Between Edna, Adèle and Mlle. Reisz is a maternal connection, and, in some ways, a matrixial one. Touch is primary in friendship and is—to Edna's surprise—a way that both women connect to her. As previously mentioned, touch is an avenue to the matrixial, a bridging of the psychic borderline between people (Ettinger 67). In the novel, Edna's friends touch her regularly, whether it is an act of comforting, or walking arm in arm (*Awakening* 191; 241; 256). Alongside physicality, Adèle and Mlle. Reisz carry—through emotional and physical touch—Edna until she can support herself, metaphorically gestating her until her final birth/death.

Matrixial friendship depends upon a mutuality or co-becoming that is not fully developed in the friendships of *The Awakening*. This raises a question as to the extent to which Edna's friendships are matrixial. In one sense, they are matrixial because they involve a play of proximity in distance. It is the space between Edna and her friends (and the friends themselves) that develops Edna's being. However, the text does not depict co-becoming, or not of the kind argued by Ettinger. In *The Awakening* the 'co' of co-becoming does not mean shared becoming, as it does for other texts in this thesis. Rather, Edna co-becomes *between* Adèle and Mlle. Reisz but does not co-become *with* them. If Adèle and Mlle. Reisz co-become with Edna, the reader does not know about it as, although the narrator is separate from Edna (until the very end of the novel), the narrator follows her exclusively. *The Awakening* depicts mothering, even in friendship, as experienced as one-sided, rather than the co-becoming the matrixial suggests. In this circumstance, however, in which Edna is psychically gestated by Adèle and Mlle. Reisz, it perhaps makes sense. Following Ettinger, between the mother-to-be and baby-to-be, it is the future-infant who is concerned with herself first, who co-becomes without knowing. Only the mother knows that she is becoming a mother and the fetus becoming a baby. Reading Edna as the psychological child suggests co-becoming possibilities outside of Edna's consciousness and the narrator's words. I read this as a genuine and generous act of friendship. Adèle and Mlle. Reisz only occasionally demand of Edna for their own sake and this lack of demand opens up space for her to fulfil her creative potential and awaken. In Edna's time, especially, for a woman to be able to create without nurturing is rare. *The Awakening* shows, it cannot be achieved alone. In the same way as an infant is simply concerned with her own needs, the narrator's near exclusive focus on Edna highlights her placement as the psychological child of her friends whose place in the mother/child relationship is timelessly kept out of sight.

Contrary to many criticisms of the role of utility in friendship, the mothering Edna receives from her friends is of great benefit to her, and essential to her becoming. Common understandings of friendship deride friendships of utility, but *The Awakening* shows the power of such connections. Many philosophers, from Aristotle to Svetlana Boym, specifically criticise friendships of utility, in which connections are useful or beneficial to one or more of its participants (Aristotle 130; Boym 'Scenography'). This thesis often follows this line of thinking,

arguing that friendship is depicted and should be studied as an end in itself, an experience for its own sake. *The Awakening*, however, validates the value of friendship to women when that friendship is beneficial. This is a kind of rejection of the lofty ideals on friendship many proclaim, and an acknowledgement of its benefits to women. Women, *The Awakening* seems to suggest, cannot do without other women because they need help to manage the difficulty of their lives. Edna draws on Adèle and Mlle. Reisz to escape her material and psychological conditions, and the novel depicts it as excellent that she was able to do so. If we consider the ways in which Edna is metaphorically and psychically mothered by her two friends, the role of utility in women's friendship is shown to be part of the knowing/unknowing of the other. It is of great benefit to Edna to be the recipient of her friends' nurturing. *The Awakening* shows this as essential to her becoming.

In a novel about friends as mother-figures, Edna's own mother is markedly absent. The nurturing and care that leads to Edna's development is gained from Adèle, Mlle. Reisz and one other unnamed childhood friend but never from her family, man or woman, or her suitors. The novel explicitly links Edna's mother-less, cold childhood to her dissatisfied adulthood, and her propensity to develop certain kinds of women's friendship. Edna's earliest maternal familial relationships were marked by absence, coldness and conflict. Her mother died when she was very young, and her older sister 'having assumed matronly and housewifely responsibilities too early in life' was 'practical' rather than 'effusive' while Edna and her younger sister argued 'through force of unfortunate habit' (*Awakening* 195). With a dead mother and a sister who had assumed the maternal role without motherly affect, Edna's only parental influence aside from her friends is her father, a man to whom 'she was not very warmly or deeply attached' (*Awakening* 275). The text directly connects Edna's distant early familial relationships, as well as the death of a passionate suitor, with her acceptance of Léonce Pontellier's proposal, a man and subsequent marriage, also marked by distance, coldness and absence. The brightest connection in Edna's early life is, instead, her friend. Edna's childhood friendship represents a predecessor to Adèle and Mlle. Reisz. Edna's 'most intimate friend' at school is one with whom she would 'talk and glow' over the classics of literature (*Awakening* 196). Talking and glowing, that is, thinking and feeling, are the two activities which draw Edna to Mlle. Reisz and Adèle, respectively. The girl with whom Edna

connects most as a young person is self-contained and intellectual (like Mlle. Reisz) and affectively warm (like Adèle). The narrator notes that Edna herself believes her own character has 'much, perhaps everything, to do with' her first friend, and that this person's intellect was something 'Edna admired and strove to imitate' (*Awakening* 196). This sets up a future pattern; Edna, when feeling connected to friends, when admiring them, seeks to emulate them in some ways, and is developed through this process. Here, again, the tension between production and reproduction rises. At the same time as the narrator actively downplays the parenting Edna received from her mother and father, it emphasises the power other, unrelated women had/have over her development. Even more so than with Edna's adult friends, her unnamed childhood friend's thoughts, feelings and even words are kept from the reader. Other than the friendship with her childhood friend, Adèle and Mlle. Reisz, Edna does not receive the kind of nurturing that leads to growth throughout her life.

Edna's attempts at self-creation

Edna must move past reproduction, by way of her marriage and painting, to self-creation, in order to arrive at herself. This section follows the novel itself in examining the dual paths by which Edna initially attempts to find her way; first, relationships with men outside her marriage and secondly, painting, which her friends support, encourage and challenge. Neither path is successful because both rely on reproduction, a mode of operation different from creation, which is less tangible but, in the understanding of the novel, is Edna's true path.

Not culturally encouraged to look to friendship for revelation, Edna turns to affairs and artistry to seek out new but ineffective ways of expressing herself upon returning home to New Orleans after the summer. Edna's final moment of self-creation is preceded by various failed attempts at self-generation through reproduction. Reproduction is an act distinguished from production, just as creation must be understood as separate from recreation. In *The Awakening*, women practicing reproduction adhere to the masculinist framework of domestic ideology. In one sense, reproduction is literal, in that birthing children is a woman's role. In another sense, reproduction is for women a perpetuation of a specific way of being which adheres to masculinist domestic ideology. The novel establishes an alternate possibility for Edna: self-creation. Self-creation, although it relies on others, is specifically inward arising and

focused. It is of the moment, and, at its best, views choices, relationships and the self as productively isolated from societal demands. For this reason, the momentary nature of it is essential, and the novel must end barring the reader from discovering the consequences of living for oneself. *The Awakening* follows Edna's rocky journey from biological reproduction to self-creation for its own sake, but it cannot follow her—because she cannot go—any further. Reproduction, first of her marriage and then her artistry, fails to lead Edna to her becoming.

Edna's first attempt to find meaning comes through new romantic relationships. In the first instances, Edna follows the dictates of the logic of feminine complaint, looking for meaning and life in the love plot. Edna, who begins the novel married to Léonce Pontellier with two young children, starts and ends affairs with two other men through the duration of the novel. The first is Robert, whom Edna loves and who loves her in return. When Léonce must go away for business, the couple form a quasi-relationship in his absence which is then broken due to Robert's cowardice and eventually apparent heteronormative views (specifically, he wants Edna to marry him and replicate the life she has with Léonce, the only difference being the identity of the husband). Through close engagement with her friends, especially Mlle. Reisz, Edna comes to see that a new life with Robert would be another kind of reproduction, but this time reproduction of her marriage. Edna is also pursued and seems to have sex with another man, a cad whom she enjoys but for whom she has little feeling. This avenue fails because, in the understanding of this novel, self-creation cannot be achieved through reproduction. Rather, the path for Edna will later come through other women—her friends—and in herself, in her own body, she will have a moment of self-creation.

The early critical reception of *The Awakening* sharply focussed on Edna's sexuality, and reviews were so damning that Kate Chopin never published again (Treu 21). Sarah Corse summarises the reception in 1899:

It was denounced as "most unpleasant" (Boston Herald 1899), as "poison" (G.B. 1899), and as a book "that the author herself would probably like...to tear...to pieces by criticism if only some other person had written it" (St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat 1899). Chopin was described as a writer of "sex fiction" (Chicago Times-Herald) and as "another clever woman [who] has

put her cleverness to a very bad use" (Providence Sunday Journal 1899).
(139-49)

Contemporary scholarship is more open-minded in relation to the novel's treatment of women's sexuality. However, scholars have not tended to take the romances of the novel particularly seriously. While this chapter reads Edna's affairs as products of a culturally mandated love plot, others see them as an avoidant attempt at 'intoxication', a means 'the self devises...of dealing with the terror' of growing consciousness (Parvulescu 480). Edna's affairs are also considered to be about her own personal growth, rather than experiences of their own sake, because the men with whom she cavorts are 'insignificant' and 'helpless' (Killeen 419). This chapter agrees that these affairs are portrayed as mostly distracting and relatively insignificant but pushes further to suggest that significance lies instead with the women's friendships the novel constructs as central to Edna's journey.

Edna then turns to painting, her first futile endeavour to self-generate through reproduction. To refigure her place in the house, Edna attempts to move from her role as ornamental object to painter. Painting in the novel is at first more noun than verb, as Edna herself is one among many of Léonce's ornamental objects. Their house is 'painted a dazzling white' with green shutters, a 'scrupulously neat' garden filled with flowers. Indoors, 'perfect after the conventional type' are 'the softest carpets and rugs' and 'rich and tasteful draperies' (*Awakening* 247). And finally, 'there were paintings, selected with judgment and discrimination, upon the walls' (*Awakening* 247). Edna is part of the elegant milieu curated by her husband, a man she married 'by accident', because 'he fell in love' (*Awakening* 197, emphasis mine). Edna is an object pursued and then acquired by her husband in a marriage with 'no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth' which might threaten 'dissolution' (*Awakening* 198). Her painting is initially endorsed by Léonce as an accoutrement, as he understands her artistry as an ornament itself. However, he warns her, she mustn't let 'the family go to the devil' in the pursuit of painting, forgetting, perhaps, the 'quadroon' nurse raising the children (*Awakening* 259). Léonce, representing the keeper of the sanctity of the Angel of the House, also differentiates between reproduction and creation but, unlike Adèle and Mlle. Reisz, endorses only the former. Adèle and Mlle. Reisz each engage closely with Edna's painting in their own, opposing ways, and their different commitments to Edna's

development triangulate Edna into a space between. Where Adèle is characteristically uncritical and enthusiastic, Mlle. Reisz is judgmental and demanding. Edna seeks out Adèle when she wishes to 'put heart into her venture' (*Awakening* 256):

"Your talent is immense, dear!"

"Nonsense!" protested Edna, well pleased.

"Immense, I tell you," persisted Madame Ratignolle, surveying the sketches one by one, at close range, then holding them at arm's length, narrowing her eyes, and dropping her head on one side. (*Awakening* 257)

The narrator notes that Edna realises the 'true worth' of her friend's praise but seeks it anyway. It produces within her a 'feeling bordering on complacency' (*Awakening* 257). By comparison, Reisz's 'encouragement' is indirect and comes with judgement and a warning which explicitly leads Edna away from forced attempts. Instead, Mlle. Reisz points Edna towards what comes more naturally to her:

"Painting!" laughed Edna. "I am becoming an artist. Think of it!"

"Ah! an artist! You have pretensions, Madame...To be an artist includes much; one must possess many gifts—absolute gifts—which have not been acquired by one's own effort. And, moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul." (*Awakening* 269)

Adèle sees what is there, Reisz sees what is not, and both modes are productive. This balances Edna, keeps her on an even keel as she discovers what she herself must do. Always caught productively between, Edna gets what she needs through two mothers, the one who coddles and the disciplinarian, driving her toward a better future with a warm heart. One encourages and the other criticises in a way that forces the young woman to cement her own position, paradoxically leading Edna away from Adèle's and Mlle. Reisz's own ways of being. Distance and difference allow Edna to co-become through her connections. Edna becomes neither woman but is formed by both. As Edna moves from object to subject, viewed to viewer, within her sparks traces of the passions she does not find with Léonce. She is, for the first time in her life, with the exception perhaps of her readings with her childhood friend, deeply engaged with an activity with the support of friends. The voices surrounding Edna have much to say on

her artistry but she is only truly supported, and consequently influenced by, those of Adèle and Mlle. Reisz.

As she paints and improves, she begins to take herself more seriously, and when Léonce must travel extensively for work, she rents a 'pigeon house', a small cottage of her own, and a place which she hopes will become a 'spiritual and material room of her own' (Gilbert 43). This represents the continuation, first sparked at Grand Isle, of a journey toward self-creation. Edna's choice of subjects demonstrates her use of painting to attempt to gain control of the domestic sphere. She only paints or sketches certain people. She paints her father—'before her pencil he sat rigid and unflinching'— and, upon seeing Adèle's beauty at home, vows to paint her as well although never does (*Awakening* 276). Mostly, though, she paints her children and her servants, and for a time has 'the whole household enrolled in the service of her art' (*Awakening* 260). Edna is perhaps attempting to refigure the (upper-class) nuclear family: father, (surrogate) mother, children and servants. She seeks to reproduce, to own, to recreate, the family structure which has given her so much strife. Importantly, she is not pictured, is therefore an artist but not art. In her attempts to regain agency she objectifies others: the people she draws are those she can command. While not malicious, neither is it free artistic expression. An attempt at control, what Edna needs—and eventually allows herself—is a lack of control, a freedom for which, the text suggests, she is not yet ready.

Therefore, painting remains, like her affairs, an ambivalent and not entirely liberatory engagement. While painting does become an alternative in the process, and an attempt to gain control, she ultimately remains passive in her experience of it. Painting is to Edna both good and bad, inspiring and unsatisfying. *The Awakening* describes the dichotomy through Edna's different kinds of days:

There were days when she was very happy without knowing why. She was happy to be alive and breathing, when her whole being seemed to be one with the sunlight, the color, the odors, the luxuriant warmth of some perfect Southern day...

There were days when she was unhappy, she did not know why,—when it did not seem worth while to be glad or sorry, to be alive or dead; when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms

struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation. She could not work on such a day, nor weave fancies to stir her pulses and warm her blood. (*Awakening* 260-1)

Sometimes a space of freedom, warmth and security, and other times one of alienation and awareness of subjugation, painting is a source of both strength and discomfort for Edna. Her increased seriousness about her art is part of Edna's strengthening but in the end increases her dissatisfaction.

Edna's attempts at a new life are ultimately unsuccessful but prepare her for the intervention of Adèle and Reisz, which ultimately sparks meaningful change. While romance and artistry work, in different ways, for Adèle and Reisz, Edna's attempts to reproduce these ways of being demonstrate that it is reproduction itself that is ineffective. In the end, it is in seeing these forms of being at their most extreme and embodied/transcendental, that Edna realises she must find her own path.

Mademoiselle Reisz and Adèle birth Edna

When Edna walks into the sea at the end of *The Awakening*, both killing and rebirthing herself, it is because of the urge to create her own self that emerges after a period of gestation guided by Adèle and Mlle. Reisz. Adèle and Mlle. Reisz each offer different avenues to a creative life. Although neither avenue is right for Edna, in the sharing of self that both Adèle and Mlle. Reisz perform, they enable Edna to find her own way. In the end Edna rejects both biological reproduction and artistic creation and chooses to destroy and, in doing so, create, herself as, through, and for, herself. Considering the ways in which women's friends may mother each other into (re)new(ed) being, we can see how the text enacts both Johnson's and Woolf's understandings of the connection between mothers, killing, writing and self-creation through Edna's journey. Edna thinks through her mother-friends as Adèle and Reisz challenge and console her in significant ways. She then sheds their influence in a way only possible because of that influence. Thinking through her mothers, Edna 'kills' them psychically within herself to create herself. She births herself but can do so only because she has been co-created by Adèle and Mlle. Reisz. Edna's birth-death can only be understood through what precedes it: two occasions of embodied transcendence produced by Adèle and Mlle. Reisz which gestate Edna

into new life. For Edna, the occasions produce knowledge, created through proximity and distance, of the paths she cannot take, knowledge which pushes her toward her own path, and the creation of herself for herself.

Mlle. Reisz's life free from the constraints of marriage and children intrigues Edna and leads her to seek her own freedoms. As she still prioritises freedom through feminine love, Edna initially draws closer to Mlle. Reisz under the guise of furthering her romance with Robert. She begins to visit Mademoiselle's Reisz's apartment to read letters from Robert, her lover, but over time these visits become more about Mlle. Reisz and less about Robert. Reisz lives in a tiny apartment, vastly different from the homes of the upper-class Edna or Adèle. This difference, however, is part of what becomes a significant freedom for Edna, and later leads her to renting a small apartment herself. Reisz challenges Edna, both literally, through direct questioning, and figuratively, by demonstrating a life freed from the constraints of marriage and children. As Edna reads the letters from Robert, Mlle. Reisz plays the piano, usually something by Frédéric Chopin. The final time Edna goes to Mademoiselle's house, she experiences affective transcendence. Edna seeks out Mlle. Reisz to discuss her romantic connection with Robert, however, what she is really doing there is revelling in the world of her friend who lives more freely outside domestic constraints.

Through her excellence, Mlle. Reisz transforms the piano from an instrument of domesticity for women into a device of revelation and potential liberation. The Victorian piano, especially in the hands of a woman, 'not only indicated socio-economic status; it also represented acquiescence to domestic ideology and played a significant role in the material culture of Victorian family life' (Pflueger 469). However, in Reisz's expert hands the piano transforms from domestic to radically powerful, communicating of possibility and other lives and worlds with 'soulful and poignant longing' (*Awakening* 270). This also suggests something about artistic excellence, as Mlle. Reisz uses old tools to new ends. That is to say, in Reisz's hands, Chopin's works are reinterpreted into something directly relevant to Edna. Mlle. Reisz's mastery of the piano ignites transformative transcendence in Edna, and her demands inspire Edna to change her life. In Reisz's hands, and through Edna's ears, this instrument of

domesticity and occasion of secret heterosexual love becomes something else, something bordering on the transcendent:

The shadows deepened in the little room. The music grew strange and fantastic—turbulent, insistent, plaintive and soft with entreaty. The shadows grew deeper. The music filled the room. It floated out upon the night, over the housetops, the crescent of the river, losing itself in the silence of the upper air.

Edna was sobbing, just as she had wept one midnight at Grand Isle when strange, new voices awoke in her. She arose in some agitation to take her departure. "May I come again, Mademoiselle?" she asked at the threshold. (*Awakening* 270)

Reisz's playing increases a specific, generative tension within Edna, one that is momentary and moving precisely because it cannot be captured or resolved. This moment also promotes the break Edna feels with domesticity and heteronormativity. She cannot go back, she slowly realises during sessions with Reisz. The text underscores 'the separation from community and domestic responsibility that results when women pursue sublime experience' (Pflueger 473). This separation from community, however, also comes through community itself. The music 'provides communion and community for Edna' (Camastra 157). Through her creation of this generative space in Edna's psyche, Mlle. Reisz allows Edna to be free of connection, through connection. This separation, for Edna, comes in the paradoxical return to the place of complete community: Grand Isle.

The second occurrence that radically alters Edna's sense of self is her attendance at the birth of Adèle's latest child. Adèle demands Edna's presence, even though the narrator emphasises that Edna's attendance is superfluous as Adèle has everything she needs: 'The nurse had been with them at night for the past week...and Dr. Mandelet had been coming and going all the afternoon' (*Awakening* 341). It is clear, therefore, that what Adèle needs is not a doctor or a nurse, but a friend. Adèle's insistence creates for Edna a terrible and impactful situation and the purposefulness with which Adèle places Edna at the birth raises the possibility that Adèle intended for Edna to be thus impacted. Through the witnessing of Adèle's pain, her act of reproduction, Edna is traumatically returned to her own acts of reproduction and realises, with violence, what she cannot bear any longer. In Woolf's terms, the novel kills the 'Angel in

the House' within Edna as she looks with unshielded eyes at the reality behind the myth as embodied by Adèle.

Adèle has shed her previous gloriousness and transformed into a yelling, haggard version of herself, demonstrating to Edna the underbelly of feminine maternity. When Edna arrives at Adèle's she witnesses a transformed woman. Gone is Adèle's delightful and easy-going manner. She rants about how she has been 'abandoned' again by the men, Dr Mandelet and her husband (*Awakening* 342). Adèle is the picture of unfeminine power:

Her face was drawn and pinched, her sweet blue eyes haggard and unnatural. All her beautiful hair had been drawn back and plaited. It lay in a long braid on the sofa pillow, coiled like a golden serpent. (*Awakening* 341)

Adèle, with her serpent-like hair, is no longer Madonna but Medusa, the terrifying gorgon, both victim and terroriser of men. Gone is the woman who followed the Angel's dictates: 'be sympathetic, be tender; flatter; deceive...Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure' (Woolf qtd. in Showalter 208). Instead, Adèle is resplendent with fury. A nurse cajoles Adèle through lies to move from the public sitting room into her private bedroom while the returned doctor tries to convince Edna to entertain him in Adèle's sitting room. However, 'Madame Ratignolle would not consent that Edna should leave her for an instant' (*Awakening* 342). That it is Adèle, of all people, who would look such a way, and be acting without any of her usual charm or sociality, is especially unnerving to Edna. Edna is drawn back into her own birthing past, into her own body's buried pain. Within the birthing room Edna recalls a previous 'awakening':

Edna began to feel uneasy. She was seized with a vague dread. Her own like experiences seemed far away, unreal, and only half remembered. She recalled faintly an ecstasy of pain, the heavy odor of chloroform, a stupor which had deadened sensation, and an awakening to find a little new life to which she had given being, added to the great unnumbered multitude of souls that come and go. (*Awakening* 343)

Edna experiences 'an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature' as 'she [witnesses] the scene of torture' (*Awakening* 343). The pain around this

repressed memory is not the pain of childbirth, or not only. It is the pain of powerlessness, of smallness and of an insignificant future.

The scene is constructed so as to place Edna in the position of the birthed child. The text is precise; Adèle's biological baby is not mentioned. Rather, the narration is focalised through Edna. What is depicted instead is the following: a woman giving birth, a friend witnessing the pain and thinking back through her own labours, the friend leaving transformed, awakened to birth as a terrible but transformative life-creating act. As we will later see, this exact formulation is repeated in *Gone with the Wind*. Adèle, through her insistence on Edna's witnessing of her suffering, which is itself an insistence on her friendship, metaphorically 'births' Edna into her own person, nearly completing a transformation that has been dramatised through the whole of the novel.

Just as Edna, and indeed Adèle, is beginning to recover, Adèle seemingly senses the change in her friend, and offers her a confusing and contested plea. Grasping Edna's cheek after the baby is born Adèle whispers: "'Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!'" (343). Adèle's insistence that Edna 'think of the children' can be read as the supposedly more conservative woman's plea to Edna to remain within her role as wife and mother. To think of the children 'is ultimately to give oneself over to a natural process over which you have little control and which ultimately controls you' (Killeen 418). Adèle says 'think of the children' because she knows what Edna has seen in the room. She knows that her body has acted as a mirror to her friend, her own pain shone back at her in a way that cannot be unseen. Perhaps Adèle again represents Medusa, petrifying those who would look upon her. Medusa turns men to stone to protect herself, but for women she has a different function. She reflects back at them their own pain and warns them so they may protect themselves. This is a kind of attentiveness, of proximity in distance, as Adèle indicates that she is aware of what has transpired for Edna. Is Adèle trying to bring Edna back from the brink, reminding her of the joy of the child that follows the pain of the birth? Or is she bidding her farewell, with a warning of what (in)action holds? Or perhaps Adèle pleads with Edna to remember all that she has already suffered for her children. Adèle knows what witnessing both will give and cost Edna, but she has demanded, in her own way, that Edna see things.

Adèle and Mlle. Reisz carried Edna, and now she must carry/create herself. Edna goes home in a daze and finds that Robert has left her. He leaves her a note with only the words “‘I love you, Good-by—because I love you’” (*Awakening* 346). Edna reaction is opaque:

Edna grew faint when she read the words. She went and sat on the sofa. Then she stretched herself out there, never uttering a sound. She did not sleep. She did not go to bed. The lamp spluttered and went out. She was still awake in the morning, when Celestine [Edna’s maid] unlocked the kitchen door and came in to light the fire. (*Awakening* 346)

Edna initially grows faint in the face of Robert’s rejection but this destabilising soon turns to quiet thoughtfulness. The next day she acts, thinking of Robert, ‘he did not know; he did not understand. He would never understand.’ (*Awakening* 351). She goes back to Grand Isle, the temporary place of women and children, to write, no longer through her mothers or the constraints that hold them back, but ‘through her body’ (Cixous 886). She returns to the seat of matriarchal power in the novel as the place where she will finally give birth to herself.

Edna’s return to the ocean, and herself

Like *The Awakening*, this chapter concludes with Edna’s unknowable, divisive and meaning-laden walk into the ocean. Carried and then finally pushed by Adèle and Mlle. Reisz, Edna goes out alone and finds something that that is depicted in fragments. Whatever it is that Edna does in that moment, she is herself and that, the novel demonstrates, is possible only through friendship and, finally, as a solo act of selfhood.

This chapter has focused more on the friendships that enabled it, yet Edna’s ‘death’ is the most critiqued—and criticised—part of *The Awakening*. Certainly, it is the most arresting. The grouping of opinions has been binarised as ‘1) Edna’s surrender, or 2) Edna’s liberty’ (Sedehi et al 14). Each of these positions assumes Edna’s act—whether tragic or joyous—is a deathly one; that Edna does, in fact, die by suicide (Tercan, Bai). However, with an eye to reparative reading, this chapter joins others who read Edna’s act as something between life and death, a suspension that is not definable in those terms. Edna reaches for the ‘unlimited’ (Parvulescu 486) which is somewhere between ‘Utopian promise and its eternally recurring unfulfillment’ (Castro 79). The text encourages the reader to suspend judgment in an attempt to sit more

comfortably with the questions *The Awakening* raises. In this we follow Edna as she relinquishes a need for resolution as she is suspended (or not) in water. Robert Treu writes:

Much as with swimming, too much critical effort can have a negative effect, while we might do better to suspend our impatience for narrative resolution and allow Edna to float awhile, held up by the medium that sustained her thus far. (23)

Others argue that Edna's ending represents a spiritual rebirth (Christ 35) although the extent to which this is positive is contested. Suzanne Wolkenfeld, for example, argues that Edna's rebirth is 'not directed toward new life, but backward to the womb' (Wolkenfeld 223). In the context of this chapter, Edna's swim may or may not be a death, may or may not end well, and may or may not result in ultimate freedom. While, like many readers, I am tempted into 'hoping for her liberation despite all odds' (Castro 79), what is of greatest concern here is the moment, and how it came to be. Edna's final moment cannot fully be understood because it can only be partially conveyed. Her moment is for herself, the text indicates, and therefore full knowing is purposefully—and symbolically—held back from the reader.

Edna's swim can be viewed as a claim for freedom, demonstrated as necessary by the preceding plot, but the freedom it claims is of a specific kind. Her final swim, in the concluding paragraphs of the novel, casts Edna's journey into relief. Having arrived in Grand Isle to escape the tumult in New Orleans, Edna goes to the beach and once there 'cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her' (*Awakening* 350). As Edna moves into the water, she experiences a freedom of self, even a freedom from self. She is able, even though it may be risky, even though it may only be temporary, to shed the human questions of self-creation and reproduction. Between life and death she finds pure being.

The novel's final lines have an opacity which demonstrates the murky temporal pause Edna experiences. As Edna becomes submerged by the water, the narration becomes looser and more associative, reflecting her newly claimed freedom in the final two lines of the novel:

She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air. (*Awakening* 351)

Edna is 'mythically' reborn, but this is not the stuff of fantasy. Rather, the text draws on mythical and somewhat fantastical symbolism to convey internal experience. The last lines convey Edna's terror which flares but then sinks, leaving in its wake experience without affect. This moment is key to understanding *The Awakening* and defines all that proceeds it. Edna's experience becomes one of loosely associated images, of specific times and places in her life but then freed from time and place too. Gilbert likens Edna to the Greek goddess Aphrodite and her Roman counterpart Venus, who were created from and born in the foam of the sea. For Gilbert, *The Awakening* transitions from 'Eliotian or Flaubertian' realism into a different text, one that 'not only uses and comments upon fantasy but actually becomes one' (*Awakening* 52; 45). In this fantasy Edna is immersed in an element of 'otherness...in whose baptismal embrace she is mystically and mythically revitalized, renewed, reborn' (Gilbert 51). Although transcendent, this 'fantasy' is more mundane than godlike. Writing about another novel, Lauren Berlant describes a similar moment as the 'urgency not to take the present for granted as a rest stop between the enduring past and the momentous future', producing 'neither ringing optimism nor disappointment' (*Cruel Optimism* 157). The indefinable but specific musky odour of pinks evoke an unknowable but nevertheless happening moment of unmediated existence. This is a moment of suspended subjectivity, a place in which history and biography are temporarily stilled.

Edna at once embodies and removes herself from the women from whom she comes. This is an act of killing, of rejecting the 'fact' of the mother in the creation of oneself. It is also a thanks through the gifts and pains gifted by other, loved women. Through the (re)creation of her own (re)birth Edna erases her biography, the history of women, while simultaneously creating a new life, one chosen, self-born but built on, 'thought through' her mothers.

The Awakening tells a story of women's friendship and being, and the play of closeness and distance each allows and requires. The text depicts connection between women as a space of

generation in which the socially encouraged drive to reproduce is transformed into the potential of creation. Through her separate but connected friendships with Adèle and Mlle. Reisz, Edna Pontellier is able to draw on their life-giving, life re-ordering capacities in order to symbolically give birth to herself. *The Awakening* is Edna's journey, and, unlike in later novels examined in this thesis in which friends may become merged or collapsed together, Edna and her two women friends maintain distance and difference from one another. It is this distance, as well as closeness, which allows Edna freedom. This is the freedom of an individual woman created through connection with other women. To say that in order to create (herself or anything else) a woman kills her mothers, or that she thinks through them, is really to say the same thing. A novel all about one woman's—the 'solitary soul' of the novel's original title—journey to total aloneness, total self-creation, *The Awakening* nevertheless knows that the mother/other is always within the self.

This thesis now turns to Shirley Jackson's 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House*, a text with a dramatically different genre and depiction of women's friendship. Although a much later text, Jackson's protagonist faces the same constraints as Edna—manifested differently—as, like *The Awakening*, *The Haunting of Hill House* is deeply concerned with the promises and terrors of motherhood and being mothered, and what it means to be a free woman in relation to domestic ideology. Unlike *The Awakening*, *The Haunting of Hill House* is less optimistic about women's ability to escape, and the strength of friendship under gendered duress. *The Haunting of Hill House* is, in many ways, a daughter to *The Awakening*, one which presents a new generation of friends still struggling against the still dominant Angel/monster within.

Chapter Two:

Haunted daughters and the impossibility of friendship in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*

No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone.

The Haunting of Hill House 3

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The Haunting of Hill House 246

The narrative structure of many novels is circular but few end, as Shirley Jackson's 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House* does, almost exactly the way it begins. With near identical first and last paragraphs emphasising institutionalised, oppressive continuity, *The Haunting of Hill House* (hereafter *Hill House*) depicts the drive for, and eventual impossibility of, women's friendship under patriarchy within a culture that both necessitates and destroys connection between women. The house is so significant to the story that how it is interpreted dictates the reader's understanding of the rest of the text. In my reading, the house represents the patriarchal, violent, heteronormative 'house' within which all women live.⁷ Hill House, while

⁷ The term patriarchy has been legitimately criticised for being 'ahistorical, homogenising and unable to account for gendered experiences that intersected with other structural oppressions' (Hill and Allen 166).

not quite eternal, is continuous enough to have lasted longer than living memory. This chapter takes its cue from the first line of the novel, and the only major difference between the first and last paragraphs:

No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream.
(*Hill House* 3)

'Hill House, not sane' is, according to the narrator, a place of reality without dreams (*Hill House* 3). This prepares the reader for a house as a living organism in which a haunting takes place that is more real than any other. In this context, the 'not sane' is the most real; madness is to look at reality. Like the novel itself, the women within are ultimately barred from meaningful change, although they dream of it. Within the 'absolute reality' of the house, and the patriarchal, heteronormative society it symbolises, grows an affective and loving connection between women, bittersweet because it is unrealised and fleeting. This woman-connection, ultimately prevented by the inheritance in the novel's present of the patriarchal past, as the first and final paragraphs of the novel show, dictates the future. *Hill House* demonstrates the value of women's friendship within masculinist contexts, and the concomitant risk that women's sociality presents patriarchy. My new reading of *Hill House* in light of a matrixial framework challenges past readings that tend to focus on the protagonist as an individual. Rather, through a lens of women's friendship, we see women's ways of relating through the matrixial are disallowed under patriarchy at the same time as they are made more essential for women's wellbeing. No relationship exists without the world around it, a truism particularly applicable to women's friendship. In America and in the twentieth century especially, friendship always takes place in a society which enacts violence toward women. *Hill House* is so challenging because it depicts what is (patriarchal heteronormativity), what could be (women's homosociality and desire) and then returns to what is and, by implication,

However, I use the term deliberately as the best description of the masculinist force which oppresses the women of *The Haunting of Hill House*. This is because the novel returns us to the etymological basis of the word, from the Greek 'patriarkhia' meaning 'ruling father' (Groves 26). In the novel, the terrible rule of the father is represented through the haunted house which in turn represents the male-dominating social structure which the contested, feminist term 'patriarchy' imperfectly represents. I also draw on bell hooks' definition of the term in relation to the social structure: 'Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence' (hooks, *The Will to Change* 18).

what will always be (again, patriarchal heteronormativity). Like the novel's beginning and end, *Hill House's* tragedy is its unchanging 'absolute reality' (*Hill House* 3).

Into Hill House go three strangers at the invitation of Dr Montague, a quasi-scientific ghost hunter. Eleanor Vance, 32 years old, previously primary caregiver to her difficult mother who is now dead, is invited to the house because of supernatural events in her childhood. Alongside Eleanor is the glamorous, likely lesbian, Theodora, invited for her rumoured ability of telepathy. Also invited is Luke Sanderson, the nephew of the current owner of Hill House. The group becomes close as they experience an escalating series of terrifying supernatural events, forming a kind of symbolic nuclear family of father, dead mother, and three children. The house is haunted and Eleanor is the most vulnerable to the house's toxic charms, eventually symbolically succumbing to it. The novel concludes as she drives into a tree on the grounds of the house, ensuring Eleanor will remain within the confines of the house forever.

This chapter argues that Eleanor and Theodora's friendship is both built and strained by a shared traumatic and phantasmatic history. The novel connects Eleanor and Theodora under the roof of Hill House, a haunted monument to American mid-century society; built by men to entrap women into the terrifying, destined and sometimes desired fate of wife- and motherhood. Under this regime, women are trained to become their own mothers in order to uphold the heteronormative, patriarchal system. Terror draws Theodora and Eleanor together while driving them apart, as they both need and resent each other in the poisoned house. In the novel, women's friendship is both moulded by, and disruptive of, the larger patriarchal structure within which it exists. Eleanor and Theodora each enact different coping strategies which produce different, and ultimately incompatible, modes of friendship; merging (Eleanor) and matrixial closeness in distance (Theodora). It is Eleanor and Theodora's shared experiences of phantasmatic trauma that simultaneously connects and diverges them.

Eleanor and Theodora's respective maternal relationships provide a consistent basis for how they each relate to the other. The novel depicts daughterhood and friendship as, respectively, negative and positive manifestations of the same kind of relationship. As this chapter demonstrates, Eleanor's claustrophobic relationship with her mother has shaped all that she

believes about herself and the world, forming the basis for all other relationships. In her understanding, love is suffocating closeness which desires (or threatens or demands) merging with the other, and closeness is the drive to become forever closer and closer. Theodora, by contrast, is a woman for whom connection is more matrixial, that is, based in proximity with distance, which comes through freedom and choice, space and closeness. For Eleanor, friendship with Theodora is a connection based on the original maternal relationship but with a thrilling difference; Theodora offers closeness with the freedom, and freedom's risks and rewards, that the mother-child relationship disallows. While the mother-child relationship is based in overdetermined biological ties and inheritances, the matrixial friendship between Eleanor and Theodora is, at its best, more positive because, even while it has its basis in the originary mother/daughter relation, it returns to a more experimental and flexible aspect of that bond. Thrilling though that offering is, the house, symbolising the imprisoned mother and her imprisoning creator, does not allow Eleanor to escape her old relational patterns. The friends' different-to-each-other's patterns of connection hold firm under extreme gender-based duress, despite the demonstrated wish of both women, because these patterns were self-protectively formed to endure a lifetime of such duress. At the conclusion of *Hill House* friendship is a site of potential cut short by its heteronormative and patriarchally normative ending in which Eleanor dies by suicide, seemingly becoming part of the house. The friendship of Theodora and Eleanor is enabled by their phantasmatic shared feminine history, all the while doomed by their opposing reactions to it.

Hill House is concerned with what women lose by being confined within the home, presenting nuanced and pessimistic post-war mid-century engagement with the issue of domesticity. *The Awakening's* Edna strives for, and ultimately achieves, independence by moving away from heterosexual romance and domestic normativity. In *Hill House*, Eleanor's desire for connection is so strong, and the conditions which pull her are so powerful, that she relinquishes her future to symbolically join the nuclear family and, in doing so, sacrifices meaningful connection with another woman. *Hill House* also presents a more complicated link between motherhood and friendship, in which motherhood and matrixial connection between women is antithetical. Whereas in *The Awakening*, mother-friends open spaces for matrixial connection and personal development, *Hill House* constructs a demonic,

patriarchally-constructed mother against which Eleanor and Theodora bond. In the end, *Hill House* has Eleanor succumb to the terrors of normativity, depicting a doomed women's friendship in which change is a shining possibility just out of reach. While this chapter aligns with the current scholarship, in that it also reads Jackson's novel as highly critical of the everyday experiences of women under patriarchy, the research to date has tended to focus almost entirely on Eleanor. In contrast, I find it significant that *Hill House's* terrors are experienced by Eleanor and Theodora together. That is, the novel is not only concerned with the pains of patriarchy and the nuclear family for women, but, importantly, it depicts this pain as a force that draws women together and also holds them apart.

This chapter first discusses, and then moves beyond, the three gothic pillars around which scholarship on *Hill House* is organised: the house itself, the representation and role of mothers and fathers, and the lesbianism that 'haunts' Eleanor and Theodora in the house. My (interrelated) conceptualisations of the novel's gothic pillars are as follows. *Hill House's* hauntings symbolise the 'reality' of patriarchal heteronormativity and *Hill House* was built by the metaphorical patriarchal father. Eleanor's dead mother haunts her through the house and this haunting, along with the historical deathly fates of other women tied to the mansion, represent the maternal/feminine inheritance of subjugation under patriarchy and women's complex desire for, and struggle against, patriarchal control. *Hill House* is particularly engaged with Eleanor and Theodora's connection, whether it is erotic or otherwise, and the way that each of the other forces (the mother, the father, the house) draw Eleanor and Theodora together as mutual victims and force them apart by disallowing possibility outside of the house's (and all it represents) control. This chapter then moves beyond these conceptualisations to critically analyse friendship in *Hill House* as a relationship tense with disparate ways of (matrixial and non-matrixial) connection. Thus, after a discussion of the gothic nature of *Hill House*, I closely read Eleanor and her patriarchally inherited way of relating, comparing Theodora's matrixial-relational style, and, finally, considering Eleanor and Theodora together, to argue that theirs is a connection enabled, but cut short, by the patriarchal, heterosexist house/society in which it exists. By moving beyond *Hill House's* three gothic pillars, the context of Eleanor and Theodora's friendship is acknowledged and, in turn, the context leads to a closely focused analysis of how friendship is constructed in the text.

The central tension in *Hill House*—that Eleanor is desperate for, and held back from, love and acceptance—is classically gothic. Eleanor's life, from before she arrives at Hill House until she dies there, revolves around a search for any kind of love. Her engagement with herself is both torturously loathing and entitled; her own name, spoken with affection, is something for which she has been waiting: the 'call she had been listening for her whole life' (*Hill House* 215). Eleanor's desire for closeness with another person is also characteristically gothic, where the self occupies the specific and special position of being blocked from what one not only desires, but to which one should normally have access. This expected access to what is desired is an important distinction because it makes Eleanor's circumstance, and ultimate failure, both more frightening and more tragic. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that the three components which create tension in gothic fiction are what is inside (the self), what is outside (what is desired, needed and out of reach) and what separates them (the house, the society, another person) (*Coherence of Gothic* 12). The self and what is outside of it—in this case Eleanor and love—'have a proper, natural, necessary connection to each other, but one that the self is suddenly incapable of making' (*Coherence of Gothic* 12). As I will shortly discuss, *Hill House* utilises the gothic trope of the double, in which the inability of the self to integrate what is desired and needed creates 'a doubleness where singleness should be' (*Coherence of Gothic* 13). For Eleanor and her mother, and, later, for Eleanor and Theodora, there is a painful tension between what could be and their inability to get/have it. *Hill House* is a different, although not unique, kind of gothic because it looks at women together. Eleanor's story is unusual because it intersects with Theodora's and this is what the novel explores. The novel dramatises friendship and its intersection with heteronormative patriarchy. *Hill House's* gothic genre impacts its depiction of friendship and Eleanor and Theodora's friendship shapes the novel's engagement with the gothic.

It is a widely held understanding in scholarship of the novel that what plagues Eleanor is the structural challenge of being a woman in mid-century America. This chapter draws from and extends an argument made across much of *Hill House* critical analysis, that the novel portrays the uncomfortable fit of female identity within the mid-century American nuclear family (Downey 296). *Hill House's* genre has been described as 'quotidian gothic' because of the way Jackson illuminates the terror of the ordinary (Ashton). Many critics argue that everyday

feminine terror is a major preoccupation of Jackson's oeuvre; Jackson is, in both her fiction and non-fiction, almost singular in her depiction of the impossibility of a coherent experience of womanhood in a man's world (Savoy 30; Junker 8; Shotwell 122). With *Hill House* especially, Jackson 'touches on the terror of her entire culture' when she depicts the 'absolute reality' of life within the dictates of heteronormative, domestic ideology in which families kill rather than nurture their young (Lootens 151). The novel explicitly explores 'this alienation from the domestic ideology of mid-century American culture' (Roberts 75). Further, some argue, within a space 'characterized by crushing conformity, a normality that insisted so loudly that bourgeois suburban life was the unquestionable ideal that it became an oppressive force', Jackson depicts not only the horror of the claustrophobia experienced, but the misunderstanding and inability for connection for women under such a regime, as well as, paradoxically, the toxic allure of normality (Downey 292), depicting 'in pathological terms the position of many women in the 1950s' (Hague 74). This is a space 'generally bereft of the ameliorating power of love and forgiveness' (Parks 15). I draw from and extend the argument that Eleanor is plagued by the structural challenge of being a woman in mid-century America by arguing that this experience is depicted by two women, Eleanor and Theodora, in ways that draw the two friends together and then drives them apart.

Hill House is an excessive but emblematic symbol of the heteronormative, patriarchal society under which Eleanor and Theodora, like all American mid-century women, already live. Most scholarship on the novel deals with its evils, finding the Victorian house makes *Hill House* Jackson's 'most gothic novel' (Hattenhauer 155) in which the house 'threaten[s] reason and balance (Newman 125) in a way 'reconfigured for a new age' (Murphy 114). Gothic is the genre which seeks to name the unnameable. In *Hill House*, the unspoken, unnamed force is what restricts women, which I refer to as patriarchal heteronormativity, but which the novel dramatises through Hill House and its inhabitants' gendered interactions with it and each other. This is not uncommon among Gothic novels, in which the house is patriarchal, representing the rule of the father, and embodying women's entrapment within the oppressive power of the Victorian family and state (Palmer 126). In a study of both gothic and neo-gothic texts, Susanna Becker argues that both genres present feminine and feminist criticisms of domestic ideology through exposure. She writes, 'Gothic horror is domestic

horror, family horror, and addresses precisely these obviously 'gendered' problems of everyday life' (4). The gothic exposes the domestic horror of women's place in the home through excessive depiction (Becker 10). According to Becker's framework, *Hill House* can be categorised as feminist (as opposed to romantic) gothic because it defamiliarises the everyday in order to depict the violence and oppression of domestic ideology. It does so through excess, from the construction of the house, which is designed to unnerve; to its always-shutting internal and external doors; its womb-like internal spaces and paradoxical coldness; and the figures glimpsed by Eleanor and Theodora. Each of these circumstances inducts the characters, and with them, the reader, into a space of heightened affect. Later, the house reveals itself through found artefacts, paranormal messages, dreams and unseen but catastrophically loud and shaking visitations. Most significantly, most pointedly and most excessively are the repeated missives the group receives, written on the walls of the mansion at two key moments:

"HELP ELEANOR COME HOME" (*Hill House* 146; 155)

This repeated message which, it is implied, is written in menstrual blood on its second appearance, is the most decipherable (literally) indication of the 'absolute reality' of the house (3). The domestic house summons the next generation to be subsumed in a strategy which is tragically effective. The novel is an example of what Becker refers to as, 'the (haunted) house as narrative structure...constructing the gender of the subject' (10). Therefore, *Hill House* exposes not just the terrible confining pain of life for women within patriarchal heteronormativity but, much more terribly, it also dramatises the construction of women. These women are complicit within their confinement, choosing to normatively belong rather than risk a life outside the societal structure which has always produced meaning and offers belonging in exchange for compliance. The novel's gothic genre conveys the evil force behind the societal structure that confines—but also benefits—Eleanor and Theodora as women in mid-century America.

In *Hill House*, the roles women are pressured to occupy, such as mother, daughter, wife and woman, are fixed subject sites, not complex, fluid ways of being and relating. In the novel the mother is an 'emptied subject position' and a 'site' (Evans 111). While for Killeen, 'gothic is a

mode of writing riven with ambivalence, articulating both disgust and desire' (10), I suggest that in *Hill House*, the articulation of disgust and desire is integrative in multiple ways, none more so than in Eleanor's relationship to her mother. Gothic is not so much riven by an uncomfortable articulation of two seemingly disparate affects as characterised by its ability to depict these two supposed polarities as inextricably bound, especially in relation to the mother and the patriarchally produced domestic ideology which constructs the horrifying version of her. Eleanor's desire for her mother's love and approval is coupled with intense repulsion toward her, an ambivalent engagement which has been repetitively reworked through female gothic novels. Claire Kahane and Roberta Rubenstein both (individually) argue that the central theme of female gothic novels is a preoedipal struggle: the narrative follows a daughter's search for and fear of "'the spectral presence of a dead-undead mother, archaic and all-encompassing, a ghost signifying the problematics of femininity which the heroine must confront' (Kahane 336). For Rubenstein, gothic novels written by and about women feature 'the central character's troubled identification with her good/bad/dead/mad mother, whom she ambivalently seeks to kill/merge with; and her imprisonment in a house that, mirroring her disturbed imaginings, expresses her ambivalent experience of entrapment and longing for protection' (312). The house is haunted by a repeated and constructed maternal figure who both is, and is not, Eleanor's mother. Eleanor's mother has produced within Eleanor an ideal of love as pressuring, and society has itself pressured Eleanor (like all women, the text suggests) into desiring containment in a family unit, connecting love and belonging with the continued adherence to normativity.

Eleanor yearns for haunted, containing love and so her arrival at Hill House is particularly dangerous; Eleanor will have a role in this house, but the price to pay will be losing herself by becoming one of the house's duplications. *Hill House* conceives of womanhood as repetition, and the women themselves as variable but nevertheless duplicated pairs. Doubling is a classic technique of female gothic fiction and the novel depicts both the pairs but also the overall structure which creates and supports them (Fleenor 5). The (potentially incomplete) list of doubles is as follows: Eleanor and Theo, Eleanor and her sister, Eleanor and her mother. Theodora and Theodora's (girl)friend. The Crain sisters (daughters of Hugh Crain), the Crain sisters and their mother, Hugh Crain's two other wives. Mrs Montague (Dr Montague's wife)

and Mrs Dudley (the housekeeper of Hill House). Eleanor repeats the refrain, 'Journeys end in lover's meeting' fourteen times in the novel and it comes to represent her search for love and acceptance. It is what she thinks when she first stands on the steps of Hill House and she gets the 'vivid feeling that it was waiting for her, evil, but patient' (*Hill House* 36). Remembering her comforting phrase, Eleanor puts 'her feet down firmly' and enters the house, already connecting it with her vision (*Hill House* 36). She does not yet know, however, that belonging to such a place will erase her self entirely.

Just because Eleanor may desire—and be willing to sacrifice for—any kind of love, does not mean that the merging of other women and self is not experienced as terrifying, nor that she would not rather connect with Theodora alone. The significance of this doubling is elucidated by a scene between Eleanor and Theo, as they try to sleep in the terrifying darkness of Hill House. Eleanor, who seems to fall asleep or at the very least changes consciousness, in a brightly lit room 'holding with both hands to Theodora's hand, holding so tight she could feel the fine bones of Theodora's fingers' hears a child crying and, in almost her only act of resistance against the house in the entire novel, thinks:

I am scared, but more than that, I am a person, I am human, I am a walking reasoning humorous human being and I will take a lot from this lunatic filthy house but I will not go along with hurting a child, no, I will not; I will by God get my mouth to open right now and I will yell I will I will yell "STOP IT," she shouted, and the lights were on the way they had left them and Theodora was sitting up in bed, startled and disheveled.

"What?" Theodora was saying. "What, Nell? What?"

"God God," Eleanor said, flinging herself out of bed and across the room to stand shuddering in a corner, "God God—whose hand was I holding?" (*Hill House* 163)

The house has shown Eleanor part of its reality and has connected her to the myriad other women contained within it. It is worth emphasising the shocking nature of the reveal in this scene. The reader jumps (at least this reader did), having been lulled by the removed pain of the child and Eleanor's temporarily gratifying and long-awaited resistance. The shock comes because the danger is misplaced and the scene of comfort is shown to be, in reality, one of terror. This scene conveys Eleanor's fracturing connection to Theodora and how, within this

connection, is a connection with countless other women. For Sedgwick, the dream in gothic texts is itself a doubling of reality (*Gothic Conventions* 28). For Eleanor, this occurs as she moves closer to the house as she simultaneously attempts to move closer to Theodora. The dream presents a moment for the novel to be 'drained by something more threatening and interesting: a dangerously insoluble uncertainty about where to place the perimeters of the self' (Sedgwick, *Gothic Conventions* 30). Referring to such dreams as a 'draining' helpfully captures something difficult to name but which *Hill House* constantly drives to make visible; the moment in which Eleanor is not clutching Theodora's hand despite what she believes is, paradoxically, a moment in which dreaming is suspended and 'absolute reality', as warned in the prologue of the novel, is revealed. In this space, women's connection is a negative image of the matrix, where connection between women is founded not in co-becoming but co-constraint. The parameters of the self are murky, and the novel doubles Eleanor (and Theodora, although to a lesser extent) to depict other women as patriarchal constructions who themselves mirror the strictures of patriarchy and therefore represent a terrible and engrossing threat.

Hill House is terrifying because it makes present the past, converging history and today. The house is much more than just a toxic embodiment of Eleanor's overmothered/motherless psyche. Rather, it 'incarnates and caricatures' the figure of the idealised, domesticated, heteronormative mother (Pascal 470). Who is the child Eleanor hears crying as she does and doesn't clutch Theo? It is herself and the young Crain girls, and maybe the young companion of the eldest Crain. It could be Theodora as a baby or Eleanor's sister's young girl. Maybe it is Eleanor's future baby, or her own futurity, the always-already-poisoned future mourning the always-present-past. It is impossible to know, to differentiate or decide and that is, of course, the most frightening thing of all. The line between self and other, past and present is barely distinguishable and hardly relevant.

Hill House constructs and then repeats the subject position of the oppressive and oppressed mother who is complicit with, and who stands in for, the patriarchal order. In the novel, motherhood and the patriarchy painfully intertwine so that women's experiences of maternity and daughterhood are poisoned and poisonous. The novel depicts the distortions

of self that come about when women comply with patriarchy. It dramatises the process that Adrienne Rich separately describes: '...it is the mother through whom patriarchy early teaches the small female her proper expectations' (246). Scholars take various positions on the true menace of Hill House: While Bernice Murphy frames Hugh Crain's paternal influence as 'more dangerous than that of any ghosts', Lynne Evans argues that it is the 'monstrous maternal presence that proves the most difficult challenge' (Murphy 135; Evans 106). The novel presents these forces as intricately connected, the mother a kind of foot soldier to the all-powerful father. In the doorway to the nursery at Hill House is a supernaturally 'cold spot', unexplained by draft or weather and over the doorway hang two maniacally grinning heads whose 'separate stares, captured forever in distorted laughter, met and locked at the point of the hall where the vicious cold centered' (*Hill House* 120). The family home is the site of patriarchal dominance with the mother as the most faithful servant (or creation) of the patriarch.

While in many ways all the participants in Dr Montague's study are both victims and perpetrators of the particular social order conjured by the house, experience is in large part dictated by gender and the men's experience of the house—and the larger social order—is comparatively easy as the house does not target them. Present with Eleanor and Theodora are Dr Montague and Luke, the stand-in 'father' and 'son'. Haunting them all is Hugh Crain, metaphorical forefather and the original owner and designer of the house in the 1880s. From its origins, the house has been a place where wives and daughters suffered; Crain's first wife died when her carriage overturned in the driveway as she came to live in the house, his second died of a supposedly-accidental fall, and his third of consumption (*Hill House* 76). Dr Montague, however, centres Crain and his suffering in these women's deaths when he describes Crain as 'unlucky in his wives' (*Hill House* 76). After the death of his wives, Crain had stayed in Europe, abandoning his two daughters to the house and a cousin of their mother's, guided by a treatise written by himself. The text is religious instruction, but also gendered instruction. Crain encourages chastity and an attempt to ensure his daughter's ascent into heaven. The book is filled with passages like:

"Daughter, could you but hear for a moment the agony, the screaming, the dreadful crying out and repentance, of those poor souls condemned to

everlasting flame! Could thine eyes be seared, but for an instant, with the red glare of wasteland burning always! Alas, wretched beings, in undying pain! Daughter, your father has this minute touched the corner of his page to his candle, and seen the frail paper shrivel and curl in the flame; consider, Daughter, that the heat of this candle is to the everlasting fires of Hell as a grain of sand to the reaching desert, and, as this paper burns in its slight flame so shall your soul burn forever, in fire a thousandfold more keen." (*Hill House* 169)

The power of the father is terrible, precisely because of its lasciviousness, its absurd, grasping domination: 'Here, far from being the basis of psyche ascension, the Oedipal model is an alibi for male self-indulgence, and a legitimation of patriarchal tyranny' (Newman 131). Some have suggested this reflects the time Jackson was writing, when dominance of the patriarch was being culturally reinforced in the 1950s but also at its most vulnerable in the aftermath of World War II as women capably stepped into roles men traditionally occupied when those men left for war (Pascal 466; Evans 107). While it is likely Jackson wrote for her cultural moment, the novel is also making a larger claim about the long arm of patriarchal control, in that it depicts it as continuing without meaningful change across generations. This is because the line of knowledge, and the uses of such knowledge, is symbolically passed, regardless of actual relation, from patriarch (Hugh Crain) to father (Dr Montague) and now to future father/patriarch (Luke). There is a particular formation of bodies and subject positions in the room as the group explores Hugh Crain's book, which depicts men dictating to ambivalent women. While the group begin gathered around the table, the women move away, no longer able or willing to see Crain's garish pictures, but the men continue to read aloud to them. Luke calls the book a 'scrapbook' compiled of glued in pictures from 'fine old books', several of which he recognises (*Hill House* 168). Luke recognises the old books because he is repeatedly figured as the inheritor of the 'family' line, his lineage so undiluted that he tells Eleanor he 'never had a mother' (*Hill House* 167). Just as the house remains the same from beginning to end, so does the ideology it symbolises because men, even 'nice' ones, remain gatekeepers and promoters of the system that creates and then enforces their supremacy.

Terry Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian* (1993) argues that the lesbian has been made invisible as a Western, patriarchal response to her power to disrupt male supremacy. Lesbian figures are frequently 'derealized', that is, made spectral, as male authority has been threatened (34).

Traditionally, it is the lesbian who has been made ghostly, but in this text, that is not the case. In *Hill House* it is the figure of the mother who is so invisibly pervasive but this is not disruption to normativity, it is itself normativity. In contrast to Eleanor, who has more allegiance to the haunted and haunting role of mother/wife, Theodora, who is possibly a lesbian, lives the more functional existence. However, as the final section of this chapter demonstrates, *Hill House* retaliates against Eleanor when she displays burgeoning homosexual desires. In doing so, the text plays with many ideological positions at once. It constructs lesbianism as not only an acceptable alternative to heterosexuality but as the identity with the most access to wellbeing and happiness, while depicting motherhood under patriarchy as grotesque, both unembodied and over-embodied, a fate that is to be feared because it is guaranteed. However, it reserves its greatest punishment for those who attempt to cross spheres. When Eleanor attempts to remove herself from the grasp of the patriarchal house and her dictated future, by desiring Theodora for a single moment, the house supernaturally and metaphorically (as read within the gothic conventions of the text) turns on her and Theodora, punishing them through terror and foreclosing any queer future. In this way, like its other symbolic representations of the house and the father and mother figures, the novel challenges traditional power structures through exposure and excess (Becker 10). As Castle points out, there is an irony to lesbian erasure; by turning the lesbian into a ghost-like figure, writers have ensured her haunting, repeated returns and re-embodiment and her power to continue to disrupt. Castle writes, 'embedded in the ghostly figure...[is] inevitably the notion of re-embodiment: of uncanny return to the flesh' (63). The novel, then, is misleading when it threatens that what walks there 'walks alone' (*Hill House* 3; 246). Rather, the mother and the lesbian haunt the house, its (living) inhabitants, and the society they depict, both unimaginably powerful and powerless. In the novel, the possibility of lesbianism becomes a potential, and potentially desired, which is then punished by the house.

Eleanor: Friendship as merging subjectivity

Hill House begins and ends with Eleanor, her hopes and fears, and her inflexible positionality within the world. Therefore, this thesis begins its analysis of friendship in the novel with Eleanor. This section argues that, due to her childhood caring for her sickly and overbearing mother, Eleanor seeks connection with others through intense closeness and sameness, a way

of relating opposite to the matrixial. For much of the novel Eleanor is held back from meaningful connection with Theodora because of her overidentification with her still-psychically present mother.

Eleanor Vance has been brought up by her mother to believe that meaningful connection must be consuming and suffocating. This love is future-oriented, and the future toward which it drives is a merged one; Eleanor believes that if she can make herself acceptable enough, Theodora will take her in like a 'stray cat' (*Hill House* 208). The death of Eleanor's mother is an event in name only as the matriarch cannot properly die so long as she lives in Eleanor. Eleanor is introduced into the novel thus: 'Eleanor Vance was thirty-two years old when she came to Hill House. The only person in the world she genuinely hated, now that her mother was dead, was her sister' (*Hill House* 4). Eleanor and her hated, dead mother are repeatedly and antagonistically connected. The narrator outlines Eleanor's laborious eleven years of caring duties for her 'invalid mother' which 'had been built up devotedly around small guilts and small reproaches, constant weariness, and unending despair', meaning that Eleanor could 'not remember ever being truly happy in her adult life' (*Hill House* 5; 4). Eleanor is both desperate for change and struggles to break from old patterns. Caught in a bind, she is desperate to escape her mother's model of claustrophobic closeness yet, as this chapter demonstrates, is unable to connect with Theodora in a new way.

Eleanor cannot escape her mother because she brings her, and all that she represents, wherever she goes. Three months after her mother's death, Eleanor steals the car she shares with her sister and runs away to Hill House with the belief that 'something would [finally] happen' (*Hill House* 5). Despite her optimism about a new future, in Eleanor's mind, her mother continues to haunt her. She regularly marks time in relation to how long it has been 'since Mother died' and, indeed, it seems that her mother owns Eleanor's time itself (*Hill House* 96): one of the few things she has kept of her mother's is her watch. Eleanor is, as gothic women often are, psychologically trapped in the Imaginary stage of development (Modleski 45). This is a time when the child is not yet developed and so the mother seems superhuman in her perfection, although Eleanor's is anything but perfect and while Eleanor is aware of her flaws, this does not substantially mitigate her mother's power. Further, the mother's

appearance is unpredictable, 'a situation which, as Freud documented, results in an intolerable feeling of helplessness on the part of the child' (Modleski 45). Patrycja Antoszek argues similarly about all of Jackson's childless women, finding that, 'Jackson's women seem to occupy a space in between the semiotic and symbolic, that is between the maternal body with their instinctual impulses and affects and the Law of the Father with its insistence on language and signification' (856). Jackson's protagonists 'remain bound to the somatic/semiotic realm and, therefore, unable to enter the sphere of language and culture' (Antoszek 856). This assessment sharply applies to Eleanor, whose mother is seemingly even less escapable in death. Her mother constantly occupies Eleanor's mind, even before the hauntings begin in earnest. Several times she starts a sentence with "'My mother-'" which ends with a dash signifying the ongoing yet unexplainable maternal presence (*Hill House* 45, 62, 71). It is not always clear if Eleanor is referring to her mother in conversation or if she is seeing her in her mind. What is clear is that, even before Eleanor enters Hill House and the more traditional, gothic haunting begins, Eleanor is already haunted by her mother. Not only has Eleanor's mother bonded to Eleanor's psyche but patterns formed with her mother dictate how Eleanor is able to relate to other women.

Eleanor most often acts on the basis of what her mother may think, and this inhibits her ability to connect with Theodora. "I don't know what my mother would say, though" she thinks about one thing, or "but my mother would never let me" about another (*Hill House* 74; 74). In particular, Eleanor polices signs of rebellion or ostentatiousness in herself on behalf of her mother. About a pair of pants she has brought hidden at the bottom of her suitcase, she thinks 'Mother would be furious' and, in response to her absent mother's fury, decides that she 'need not take them out, need never let anyone know she had them' (*Hill House* 26). When Theodora paints Eleanor's toenails during a moment of relaxation, she panics when she sees they are red, and she perceives her feet now as dirty:

"It's horrible," she said to Theodora, "it's wicked," wanting to cry. Then, helplessly, she began to laugh at the look on Theodora's face. "I'll go and wash my feet," she said.

"Anyway," Eleanor said, "I hate having things done to me."

"You're about as crazy as anyone I ever saw," Theodora said cheerfully.

"I don't like to feel helpless," Eleanor said. "My mother-" (*Hill House* 71)

The presence of Eleanor's mother is so strong, and Eleanor is so reliant on the psychic connection to her mother, she is held back from connecting with Theodora. She is constantly called to return to the womb, and her tortured over-identification makes her more vulnerable. In some ways, this suits Eleanor as she is finally wanted by her mother, or her projection of her mother. Eleanor's eventual choice to succumb to the patriarchally-produced mother/house may be read as one made in power, but I do not read it as an actual decision. Any choice Eleanor makes in relation to her mother is under societally supported coercion and mental distress. The house is relentless in its pursuit of Eleanor. As noted, the words 'HELP ELEANOR COME HOME' are written on the walls more than once, first in paint and then in (possibly menstrual) blood. The house is labyrinthine, and supernaturally shuts doors, both external and internal, keeping its occupants both inside and often separated from each other in its depths. It calls to Eleanor specifically and repeatedly because of her already-haunted maternal connection while others cannot see its terrors.

Beginning with her relationship with her mother, but reinforced in myriad ways, Eleanor's relationship with herself, other people, and 'reality' is fluid, although this makes her more able to see the 'truth' of the house. The novel depicts Eleanor's point of view, moving closer and further away at various moments. The novel's 'radically unreliable narrative point of view' comes by 'focalizing through a delusional character' (Hattenhauer 155). In moments of great stress Eleanor's interiority takes precedence and the narrator falls away, replaced with 'a variety of narrative devices, from verb tenses to punctuation and formatting choices to quotation from other texts' (Ashton 269). At other times Eleanor's and the narrator's voices seem to merge into free indirect discourse, where her bare thoughts are presented (Ashton 279). While there is a narrator 'speaker', their identity is hidden in its dual possibility. In *Hill House*, therefore, the space between objective and subjective reality and experience is blurred, raising a significant question about how to most productively read the text. The text is a place of 'confusion and conflation' in which the reader is 'left more or less in the dark' (Schneider 63). This is a classic female gothic trait, where both reader and heroine are

rendered equally powerless (Modleski 53). This raises a conundrum: how to read the hauntings and, most significantly for this analysis, Eleanor's relationships? As Dale Bailey notes, 'Most critics assume that at least some of the supernatural manifestations at Hill House are produced by Eleanor's latent psychic powers, subconsciously activated...in moments of extreme emotional duress' (40). Similarly, for Ruth Franklin, 'What Eleanor Vance will face inside is not a haunting from another world, but a confrontation with the reality of her psyche—the world of her own secrets and fears' (410). The events of *Hill House* occur from Eleanor's perspective. The narrator does not deviate from Eleanor's point of view, although the narrative voice is usually separate from her, only occasionally moving into free indirect discourse so that narrator and character seem to merge completely. This becomes significant later in my discussion of how Eleanor understands Theodora and Theodora's psychic abilities and the complicated extent to which both women are haunted, literally (in the Gothic logic of the text) and symbolically. Eleanor, as the protagonist through which events are depicted, is untethered from one reality but entirely cognisant of another.

The fluidity of perspective and personhood has both a sense of possibility and of dysfunctional, paranoid inevitability. Eleanor attempts to model her relationships on merging because this is all she knows. In this understanding, there are troubling implications to Eleanor's attempts to merge, to be ever closer to Theodora. Without knowing it, Eleanor seeks to replicate the mother/daughter relationship she has experienced with Theodora without Theodora's consent. The traumatised subject seeks to overcome her own trauma through traumatising another. Eleanor's leaky boundaries can be read as a kind of transsubjectivity. Jodey Castricano reads the novel in this way and, importantly, as a text that refuses to produce origin, conclusion or a singular place in which subjectivity 'really' exists. *Hill House* asks, but will not answer, what Castricano describes as the 'phenomenological question of alterity par excellence': "'Whose thoughts are these inhabiting my inner world?'" (87). On the other hand, Tony M. Vinci understands Eleanor as a traumatised subject and *Hill House* as an ethical account of when this subject encounters a world that refuses to understand subjective fluidity as anything but madness. The novel explores the difficult and oppressive interactions that occur when this traumatised subject exists in relation to a wider environment and ideology that defers, packages and expunges lived experience in an 'effort to retain the hegemony of

the human' (55). Castricano and Vinci offer alternative readings which, I suggest, valuably acknowledge Eleanor's agency, perhaps paradoxically, within her own fluidity, merging or unravelling (however one wishes to interpret the novel's events). What is so frightening about *Hill House* is Eleanor's complicity in her own destruction, the way her desire for belonging, for love that has been withheld from her in all its forms, means that she will undo herself. And, not only that, but that she is always already undoing, that—like the haunting ghost—she has never been a stable being, that becoming was always, for her, a rebecoming in the name of someone else's love.

As a result of her earliest bonding experiences, distance, space and boundaries symbolise rejection for Eleanor. She thinks of love—romantic, filial and friendly—as unrelenting closeness, as merging. She cannot read Theodora's acts of friendly love because she never psychically left her mother, and all acts recreate the dual force of hate and love. As Kahane describes it, 'Jackson's portrayal of their relation recreates the terms of Eleanor's relation with her mother, making overt the hidden force of her longing and her hatred' (Kahane 341). When she encounters a woman for whom the originary maternal bond is a trace (the matrixial) rather than a constantly repeating present, she desires her in multiple ways but cannot connect to her without pushing her away by insisting on increasing closeness.

Theodora: Friendship as closeness in distance

Theodora's difference from Eleanor is the locus of Eleanor's attraction to, and fear of, her friend. This section argues that Theodora's way of relating is matrixial through closeness in distance and represents an engagement with multiple parts of the self and other. While Eleanor understands herself and Theodora to be opposites, as another young woman within the house Theodora must also cope with gender-based oppression. However, Theodora is able to separate her interior life from Eleanor and the house—both of which seek to impose upon her—in order to protect herself and connect on her own terms.

Theodora is everything Eleanor desires to be and Eleanor experiences herself as lacking in comparison. A glamorous, funny and light-hearted woman, 'Theodora's world was one of delight and soft colors': and where 'duty and conscience were...attributes which belonged

properly to Girl Scouts' (*Hill House* 6). Although she admires her looks and her life, for Eleanor it is Theodora's ease with life that most appeals. Theodora is established as uniquely herself, sharply differentiated from the less stable Eleanor. Theo, the narrator describes, is her own person entirely:

Theodora—that was as much name as she used; her sketches were signed “Theo” and on her apartment door and the window of her shop and her telephone listing and her pale stationery and the bottom of the lovely photograph of her which stood on the mantel, the name was always only Theodora—Theodora was not at all like Eleanor. (*Hill House* 8)

For the most part, this does not manifest as jealousy but rather as personal shame in Eleanor. In Theodora's light Eleanor feels illuminated and draws close to be warmed by Theodora's acceptance, while at the same time experiencing deep self-loathing when she perceives her exclusion or incorrectness. Sitting with the group, Theodora smiles at Eleanor and Eleanor thinks, “I am the fourth person in this room; I am one of them; I belong’ and then, only two paragraphs later, ‘[I am] Eleanor, she told herself triumphantly, who belongs’ (*Hill House* 60). Later, when she perceives, with little evidence, that Theodora has pulled away from her, Eleanor (spitefully) thinks of Theodora as ‘spiteful’, the narrator repeating the words across a paragraph: ‘She is being spiteful, Eleanor thought remotely...Theo is being spiteful [and Luke] is ashamed of Theo for being spiteful’ (*Hill House* 223). Eleanor desires sameness and complete attention from Theodora, and is warmed when she receives it and angry when she does not.

Theodora represents a desired but destabilising challenge to Eleanor's way of relating. To the conservative Eleanor, Theodora is subversive in a gendered and sexual way, a perception both desirable and frightening. Although Eleanor at first reads her as girlish and lovely, she is in fact moody, flirty, and at turns, coquettish and authoritative. Her seeming lesbianism places her most firmly outside the norms of gender and sexuality, as does her occupation of both the public sphere (her shop) and her occupation of the private sphere (her small apartment with her ‘friend’), neither to which Eleanor has easy access. Theodora is a relatively emancipated woman, especially in comparison to Eleanor, and she functions in the novel as an alternative

to normative femininity, 'restoring to women at least conceptually the breadth of human potential' (Kahane 350). Theodora represents opportunity, change and difference.

Theodora offers Eleanor the opportunity to affectively experience life anew and Eleanor is ambivalent about what Theodora represents. For Ettinger, the matrixial affects exist between the more polarised affects of hate and love, which for Eleanor are embodied in her relationship with her mother. Eleanor grew up in an environment where hate and love are the only two possibilities, challengingly intertwined with one another. At varying moments Theodora creates space in which the matrixial affects of awe, awareness and compassion are created for and experienced by Eleanor. Eleanor (as the I) encounters Theodora (as the non-I), through her actions, her words and her presence. These encounters produce within Eleanor the matrixial affects above, possibilities for a new kind of life. For example,

"All the time I'm here I'm going to be terrified," Theodora said, "thinking one of those hills will fall on us."

"They don't fall on you. They just slide down, silently and secretly, rolling over you while you try to run away."

"Thank you," Theodora said in a small voice. "What Mrs Dudley has started you have completed nicely. I shall pack and go home at once."

Believing her for a minute, Eleanor turned and stared, and then saw the amusement on her face and thought, She's much braver than I am. Unexpectedly-although it was later to become a familiar note, a recognizable attribute of what was to mean "Theodora" in Eleanor's mind-Theodora caught at Eleanor's thought, and answered her. "Don't be so afraid all the time," she said and reached out to touch Eleanor's cheek with one finger.' (*Hill House* 32)

In the above scene Theodora and Eleanor have just met. They sit in an idyllic setting and they plan a future picnic together. What this scene shows is that for Eleanor, Theodora sparks (for the first time ever) the matrixial affects: compassion, awe, astonishment and alertness. Theodora engages Eleanor's senses in regards to each of these. In this space together, Theodora is compassionate, knowing—and seemingly experiencing—what Eleanor is thinking, feeling and seeing. In turn, Theodora inspires within Eleanor alertness, astonishment and awe. At first, Eleanor is constantly alert to changes in Theodora's tone, and body. She is astonished

and 'embarrassed' when she jokes, and later when she shows that she likes Eleanor (*Hill House* 44). Under Theodora's gaze, and because of their association, Eleanor thinks more hopefully of herself. When Theodora turns 'with a quick smile and touched her shoulder gently, reassuringly' Eleanor smiles back and thinks 'she is charming...not at all the sort of person who belongs in this dreary, dark place, but then, probably, I don't belong here either; I am not the sort of person for Hill House but I can't think of anybody who would be' (*Hill House* 43). Eleanor remains alert to the possibility of abandonment and disconnection, following Theodora when she spends time alone with Luke and watching her closely in group settings. Eleanor is in awe of this glamorous, different woman and is vigilant for signs of connection and disconnection.

While Eleanor experiences Theodora's attention as exciting and is hopeful, these interactions always take place under duress. The above scene demonstrates the complexity of women's sociality under patriarchy; Eleanor and Theodora's connection exists always in relation to oppression and fear. As Eleanor says, 'all the time I'm here I'm going to be terrified' (*Hill House* 32). Both women, because they are women, experience Hill House (and the societal metaphor it conveys) as power that creeps, one that is a form of 'non-punctual trauma', that is, forms of experience 'that are more mundanely catastrophic . . . such traumas are also so chronic and cumulative, so woven into the fabric of our societies, that they cannot count as 'shocks'' (Vinci 57). The hills have always been rolling in on Eleanor and Theodora, 'silently and secretly' more dangerous because of their omnipresence (*Hill House* 32). The scene also connects to what Sedgwick argues is a key trope of the gothic, which is the amalgamation of the inside and outside. While for Sedgwick the self is held back from the desired object to which it should have access, this tension exists within the context of another conflict between inside and out. Sedgwick writes, 'the space of submergence is not formally or topographically differentiated from its surroundings; instead, one of its functions is finally to undermine the sense of inside and outside, the centeredness of the "self"' and that it is 'that insidious, infectious atmosphere that alone marks the inside as inside' (*Gothic Conventions* 27). So, in the above scene, Eleanor is trying to navigate a dual tension. She is trying to connect with Theodora (reducing the boundaries between self and other) while the 'outside' and 'inside' of the house merge and terror converges on her. Hill House's name conveys its most honest truth; the terror, 'hill', is

already always inside the house. There is no self and other without the society around, just as there is no Eleanor and Theodora without the hills that threaten.

The insidious patriarchal context makes Theodora's touch all the more necessary and impactful for Eleanor. Unlike the Oedipal traces which, as Ettinger describes, exist in the scopic field, the matrixial often presents through touch. Theo, who reaches out 'to touch Eleanor's cheek with one finger' does so in a way that is thoughtful and connective. This is the first time Eleanor has been touched in the novel and, while seemingly mundane, Theodora's act of reaching out is meaningful and generative. As Antoszek notes, 'affects are embodied feelings' and it is through the body and feeling that Theodora is able to get through to Eleanor (852). Especially through touch, although also through the maternal affects, Theodora reaches the prelanguage Eleanor, connecting with her on non-Oedipal terms for the first time in Eleanor's life.

Theodora's model of same-gender bonding is matrixial in nature and closely adheres to Svetlana Boym's structure of friendship. As outlined in this thesis' introduction, Boym's understanding of women's friendship has similarities to the matrixial, in that she also understands women's friendship as a space of co-creation within, and through, distance. Like Edna and her friends in *The Awakening*, Eleanor and Theodora's relationship is, in some ways, unequal. Eleanor is obsessed with Theodora and fears her judgment. Theodora displays no signs of feeling similarly. For Boym, this is no issue. She writes that 'friendly love, which is based on asymmetrical reciprocity, demands the recognition of the foreignness at the core of intimacy'. This strongly parallels Theodora's approach to connection with Eleanor. Foreignness and intimacy, often thought of as prohibitively opposing things, are core components of both Boym's and Theodora's concept of friendship. This is a marked departure from the love that Eleanor has been taught by her mother to expect; where Eleanor and her mother's relationship is suffocating, her relationship with Theodora is respectful. In the schema of this thesis, the connection Theodora seeks with Eleanor is matrixial-like. Where the maternal figure always hovers threateningly, Theodora promotes boundaries. However, that is not to say Theodora is distanced, cold or unfriendly, although sometimes she can be these things, and there are multiple times when she seeks closeness with Eleanor, traversing

physical and psychic boundaries between the two. The distinction, then, is one of choice, and this choice—meaning the ability to say yes *and* no—is what creates a sense of spaciousness within their closeness. Distance in proximity derives from the matrixial. Unlike Eleanor and her projection of her mother, Theodora seeks co-becoming based in trace memories of the womb without trying to repeat or re-enact it. In this novel, and at large, this is the distinction between merging, consumption and friendship. It is also a movement *away* from love and its intertwined opposite, hate, into something more difficult to understand but no less decisive. Especially in the case of Theodora, moderation does not diminish meaningful connection but enables it. Theodora enacts matrixial, sometimes asymmetrical friendship toward Eleanor.

Theodora cannot really see inside Eleanor's mind, despite what Eleanor believes, although she does engage with Eleanor's multiple selves. Boym offers us a way of understanding Theodora's psychic powers differently: less as literal and more symbolically or psychoanalytically. Drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt, Boym considers daimons, from the Greek myths, depicting a model of connection through the multiple:

With friends, one can take part in multiple dialogues and share solitudes. Arendt wrote that solitude is different from loneliness because in solitude we are in dialogue with ourselves and with the world, while loneliness makes us isolated and tongue-tied. When experiencing solitude, we are playing on our internal stage with what the Greeks called "daimons" (not to be confused with demons; daimons are not to be exorcized since they are the voices of our invisible selves.) When you speak with a true friend, she sees the daimons speaking over our shoulders, or perhaps our daimons confront each other in friendly recognition. With a single good friend, we are in good and diverse company. In such a deep friendship, we multiply, create, and discover our actual and potential selves, not fall back stubbornly into the claustrophobia of our supposedly "true self." Friendships are extensions of ourselves into the realm of liminal adventure. (Boym)

Like Boym's description here, Theodora's powers represent an ability to see Eleanor's daimons, to see past her external self into some other part of her. Boym continues: 'In such a deep friendship, we multiply, create, and discover our actual and potential selves, not fall back stubbornly into the claustrophobia of our supposedly "true self." Friendships are extensions of ourselves into the realm of liminal adventure.' (Boym). Boym's argument accounts for the dance that Theodora undertakes with Eleanor. Theodora knows Eleanor well and sees

something beyond what is immediately presented or what is known. Boym notes that our daimons can confront each other in friendly recognition, but we know that Eleanor, while loving Theodora immediately and closely, is held back from reaching out for what she needs by thoughts of her mother: “I don’t like to feel helpless,” Eleanor said. “My mother-” (*Hill House* 71). Again, we are returned to Boym’s asymmetry. It also serves Eleanor herself, even though she cannot give Theodora what Theodora gives her. For if we are in ‘diverse company’ among friends, we are not only with our friend and her daimon, but with ourselves as well. While Theodora is not close enough for Eleanor—she is not Eleanor—she is close in another, more moderate way, and this is a vigilant closeness.

Like their approach to friendship, Eleanor and Theodora’s experiences of ghostly company are different. Eleanor and Theodora’s friendship takes place against a claustrophobic backdrop of other women, connected through the shared pain of the oppressed. For Theodora, however, the experience of others and otherness is not threatening. Both Theodora and Eleanor hear other voices, but Theodora hears the voices of the friend, while Eleanor hears the voices of the ‘true’ self—femininity—and the self’s construction by society. Theodora’s sense of self is not so imposed upon, and she does not experience the tense jostling for personhood with which Eleanor lives. Theodora’s boundaries are protective, allowing her to engage with other voices without significant threat to selfhood. The clearest way to see the difference between the women’s experience is through their communication; when Theodora ‘hears’ something, she says something. For example, when Theodora finds ‘HELP ELEANOR COME HOME’ written above her bed she has an explosive reaction, separating interior self from the event; she accuses Eleanor of the vandalism, demands everyone’s attention and then begins ‘sobbing wildly in her room and kicking at the wardrobe door’ in what Eleanor describes as a ‘tantrum’ (*Hill House* 155). This dramatic, communicative approach directly contrasts with Eleanor’s and rejects personal shame. For Eleanor, it is intensely appealing to be in Theodora’s calming and controlled presence. However, as we now turn fully to Eleanor and Theodora together, we will see that Eleanor’s attempts to move beyond Theodora’s boundaries threaten Theodora.

Eleanor and Theodora: Haunted pull and matrixial push

The novel concludes with Eleanor's deathly integration into the house and Theodora's pulling away. This section tracks the final days at Hill House as Eleanor attempts to move closer—with Theodora reciprocating—through sisterhood and then desire. The house responds violently, symbolising the way mid-twentieth century American dominant culture demands women's romantic and sexual compliance. Theodora is driven away from Eleanor and as a consequence, Eleanor accepts the house as the only love she will have, and, driving into a tree on the grounds, seems to become another in the line of ghosts that already haunt the house.

Eleanor seeks closeness with Theodora and, when reciprocated, the two discursively and creatively co-become. First, she does so through an attempt at sisterhood, deriving closeness from imagined origins. Theodora responds to this well and the women connect through joking games of shared uncles and childhood exploits, and this is a nod toward a matrixial history both have. For example, the women discover their shared phantasmatic familial 'history':

Eleanor tossed a pebble into the brook and watched it sink clearly to the bottom. "Did you have a lot of uncles?"

"Thousands. Do you?"

After a minute Eleanor said, "Oh, yes. Big ones and little ones and fat ones and thin ones—"

"Do you have an Aunt Edna?"

"Aunt Muriel."

"Kind of thin? Rimless glasses?"

"A garnet brooch," Eleanor said.

"Does she wear a kind of dark red dress to family parties?"

"Lace cuffs—"

"Then I think we must really be related," Theodora said. "Did you use to have braces on your teeth?"

"No. Freckles."

"I went to that private school where they made me learn to curtsy."

"I always had colds all winter long. My mother made me wear woollen stockings."

"My mother made my brother take me to dances, and I used to curtsy like mad. My brother still hates me."

"I fell down during the graduation procession."

"I forgot my lines in the operetta."

"I used to write poetry."

"Yes," Theodora said, "I'm positive we're cousins." (*Hill House* 53)

What Theodora and Eleanor articulate is a kind of previous co-becoming, no less real because it is discursively rather than biologically constructed. As in *The Awakening*, creative interaction between friends—whether through music or imaginative discourse through play—sparks an alternative to a biologically-reproduced future. It gestures to a previous place of knowing from which they both originate, a place both experienced (proximity), yet experienced slightly differently (distance). Interpolating themselves as (matrixial) cousins, Theodora and Eleanor playfully mark their similarities and differences—and their differences as similarities—in a seemingly ‘indissoluble relationship’ (Newman 125). This then, in turn, generates a connection that is discursive, literary and imaginary yet anchored to their life. This co-creation with Theodora produces, for Eleanor, a way of understanding the self as something new that exists apart from the doomed mothers/line of biological inheritances that haunt her psyche and the house.

Later, Eleanor perceives Theodora as excluding her, turning against her, and this challenges Theodora’s boundaries. Proximity through distance is found/created in remembered or returned traces, shared with an other. But when Theodora finds fluid connection with Luke, Eleanor cannot manage, even though she is also included in word games and adventures around the estate. Despite Eleanor’s jealousy, Theodora insists, sharply at times, that she and Eleanor occupy a space of closeness and distance, admonishing Eleanor when she clings:

"'Nellie, leave me alone.'" (*Hill House* 210). She maintains an easy friendship with Luke and on occasion includes him in group activities. On the few occasions that Theodora and Luke are alone together, Eleanor stalks and spies on them, suspecting that they are discussing her. Theodora will not succumb to Eleanor's drive for exclusivity, for the bound affects of love and hate.

Theodora, both pulling Eleanor closer and pushing her away, teases her for supposedly flirting with Luke, in a sexually charged event which precipitates Eleanor's downfall. Eleanor, who seeks affection wherever she can find it, runs from the argument and into the night, something inadvisable in the haunted house. Theodora follows and, despite the danger, and because of their anger at each other and themselves, they brave the grounds of Hill House at night: 'Each was so bent upon her own despair that escape into darkness was vital, and, containing themselves in that tight, vulnerable, impossible cloak which is fury, they stamped along together, each achingly aware of the other, each determined to be the last to speak' (*Hill House* 173). Next, for the first and only time in the novel, the narrator makes explicit Theodora and Eleanor's possibility of lesbian connection:

Nothing irrevocable had yet been spoken, but there was only the barest margin of safety left them; each of them moving delicately along the outskirts of an open question, and, once spoken, such a question—as "Do you love me?"—could never be answered or forgotten. They walked slowly, meditating, wondering, and the path sloped down from their feet and they followed, walking side by side in the most extreme intimacy of expectation; their feinting and hesitation done with, they could only await passively for resolution. (*Hill House* 174)

This dance of repressed lesbian sexuality, reflective of the time and place of the novel, remains relevant today. These questions hanging in the air—Are you? Do you? And me?—are essential but impossible, unable to be 'answered or forgotten' (*Hill House* 174). On the one hand, this lack of consummation is the miserable result of societal oppression and psychological repression. As Barbara Johnson, among others, has explained, there is a wealth of American textual evidence that lesbian women are confined to yearning in fiction ('Lesbian Spectacles'). Queerness has a long history in the gothic and is a way for writers to explore what their protagonists both desire and are repulsed by. On the other hand, I read the scene, rather than

as a true example of lesbianism, as another example of Eleanor's grappling attempts for closeness with Theodora. This moment, 'the most extreme intimacy of expectation', is important regardless of outcome, especially in a novel of female suffering (*Hill House* 174). In fact, it is the drive to resolution that most pains the protagonist and her friend, as both internalised external forces and Eleanor's excessive desires propel them toward a terrible ending.

Returning to the scene, Eleanor believes she has been rejected by Theodora, but what Theodora actually does is reaffirm their distance, which she does for a very specific reason. After the erotically charged moment they experience a moment of synchronicity, taking, for a time at least, the blackening, unknowable path together:

Each knew, almost within a breath, what the other was thinking and wanting to say; each of them almost wept for the other. They perceived at the same moment the change in the path and each knew then the other's knowledge of it; Theodora took Eleanor's arm and, afraid to stop, they moved on slowly, close together, and ahead of them the path widened and blackened and curved. (*Hill House* 175)

Then, Theodora sees something that frightens her unspeakably and she cannot recover from it. There is a very clear order of events: Eleanor and Theodora move toward a closer intimacy, to a new sexual basis for their connection, and, while unspoken, they begin to walk a 'dark path' together. The house, and the patriarchal, heteronormative ideology it represents, responds. The path leads them suddenly to the 'destined end', an oversaturated, colourful and bright scene of countryside domestic bliss, a picnic party which blinds their eyes with its brightness and density of colour:

They could hear the laughter of the 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. (*Hill House* 176-7)

The scene lasts only a moment before it turns:

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!" (*Hill House* 177)

The reader does not know what Theodora sees, only that she protects Eleanor from it. All we know is that Theodora saw something more, she looked back and saw the 'absolute reality' behind the perfect familial picnic scene, from which she then shielded Eleanor (*Hill House* 3). This is both an act of intense friendship and an act of closure. For Theodora, what may have come next—a greater erotic connection—can not be. She has been punished by Hill House and so retreats in part to protect herself but also to continue her protection of Eleanor in refusing the lesbian love that will condemn her. As Theodora is more shielded from the effects of the matrixial, she is better able to withstand the House's terrors, but she is not immune to them. Theodora's lesbianism and her lack of lineage can save her but the house makes clear through its picnic apparition that a non-normative connection to Eleanor will destroy them both.

In the immediate aftermath of the terror, Eleanor and Theodora run, significantly, into the kitchen and, under Dr Montague's and Luke's shocked gaze, look after each other, Eleanor holding Theodora. As with the scene where the group reads Hugh Crain's book, there is a particular formation of bodies in the kitchen, Eleanor and Theodora clutching each other as the two men stand above:

"Eleanor." Theodora turned wildly and put her head against Eleanor.
"Eleanor," she said. "Eleanor."

And, holding Theodora, Eleanor looked up at Luke and the doctor, and felt the room rock madly, and time, as she had always known time, stop. (*Hill House* 178)

The frightening scene, with its ability to stop time in its aftermath, represents the house's reaction to Eleanor and Theodora approaching the threshold between lesbianism and friendship. Liminal moments such as 'active violence' and 'active magic' appear in the gothic convention when the heroine is 'moving out of or moving into the dungeon' (Sedgwick, *Gothic Conventions* 22). Heteronormativity is the dungeon, and Eleanor and Theodora cling to each other for the last time before they take opposing strategies to survive.

Terrified, Theodora begins to pull away. Unable to see Theodora except through her own desires, Eleanor makes a risky play for Theodora, and for the matrixial future she represents. 'I could help her in her shop, Eleanor thought; she loves beautiful things and I would go with her to find them. We could go anywhere we pleased, to the edge of the world if we liked, and come back when we wanted to' (*Hill House* 214). But she is rebuffed by Theodora, kept at a distance:

"I'm coming with you," Eleanor said.

"Coming where with me?"

"Back with you, back home. I"—and Eleanor smiled wryly—"am going to follow you home."

Theodora stared. "Why?" she asked blankly.

"I never had anyone to care about," Eleanor said, wondering where she had heard someone say something like this before. "I want to be someplace where I belong."

...

"Nellie, Nellie." Theodora laughed again. "Look," she said. "This is just a summer, just a few weeks' visit to a lovely old summer resort in the country. You have your life back home, I have my life. When the summer is over, we go back. We'll write each other, of course, and maybe visit, but Hill House is not forever, you know." (*Hill House* 208-9)

It is significant that Theodora is a second-hand shop keeper; she too plays with time, bringing things from the past into the future. She is an independent, business woman. The qualities Theodora has, which Eleanor does not, are transience and metered attachment. She will not let Eleanor cross this boundary. Emily Banks reads Theodora's reaction as a dismissal of 'Eleanor's visions of a queer domestic life' (ch. 10). It is possible to understand Theodora's rejection as cruel, and certainly Eleanor perceives it as such. It can also be read as a point of freedom, and even as a trusting act emblematic of a common friendship encounter. For while Theodora will not become closer to Eleanor, strictly maintaining her boundaries, and while she is many times unkind in Eleanor's maddening mind, Theodora does not abandon her friend as a reaction to her bizarre request, nor does she judge her. In fact, she is the only character

who does not corral Eleanor, nor judge her for what she is going through. Theodora's link to the matrixial allows her to understand connection as a play between distance and closeness. However, the house's evilness and Eleanor's insistence on closeness frighten Theodora, who pulls back from both.

Eleanor remains legible to Theodora during her first thwarted attempt to die by suicide. In the first, she herself becomes the haunting spectre, knocking on the others' doors one night, dancing up and down the halls. Theodora discovers Eleanor is missing and raises the alarm. That Theodora discovers Eleanor is significant and unsurprising, as they not only share a room but a consciousness of the house, and similar subject position within the house's patriarchal model. It seems as though the house, and through it, Eleanor, has forgotten about Theodora and this represents the increased distance as Eleanor moves from Theodora further and further into the house. However, something much more interesting happens. When Eleanor/the house hears Theodora call out that Eleanor is missing, through the narrator Eleanor thinks as herself and then think as the house, 'Poor house, Eleanor thought, *I had forgotten Eleanor*' (*Hill House* 229, emphasis mine). Eleanor has forgotten about herself in her integration into the house. A symbol of patriarchy, the house does not value women's bonds, and has already begun to consume Eleanor as a part of its whole, but Theodora is tied to Eleanor individually. Eleanor ducks into the library, a place of male learning and female death since the second Mrs Crain's "accidental" fall, to escape the search party. There she climbs the tower like the second Mrs Crain. The others find her and she is 'rescued' by the furious group but Theodora is compassionate, frightened but not angry. Up on the tower, the floor breaking beneath her feet, and the others commanding her down, Eleanor sees Theodora:

I can't get away, she thought, and looked down; she saw one face clearly, and the name came into her mind. "Theodora," she said. (*Hill House* 234)

As always, Theodora is connected to Eleanor's experience, and empathises:

The doctor was displeased, and Eleanor looked away, looked at Theodora, and Theodora said, "I suppose you had to do it, Nell?" (*Hill House* 237)

Theodora knows Eleanor, although perhaps not in the way Eleanor wishes to be known. Despite that, this is a small moment of great compassion and connection. Eleanor looks for

Theodora's connection in this moment and she receives it. Although their paths are now irreconcilably diverged, Theodora and Eleanor hold space for each other.

The next morning Eleanor's make-shift family insists she leave the house and return home but on the way out she drives herself into a tree, ensuring she'll be tied to Hill House forever, in ways known and unknown. Before she goes, she asks Theodora a final question, "'Theo?'" (*Hill House* 243). This is the fifth time Eleanor has used Theodora's name as a question, and now, as with each other time, she demands closeness, an integration of self's and other's positioning. In short, Eleanor wants Theodora's support, for the two to act as one. However, Theodora cannot give Eleanor what she needs, although she tries:

"Nellie," Theodora said timidly, and put out a hand to touch Eleanor's cheek, "listen—maybe someday we can meet here again? And have our picnic by the brook? We never had our picnic," she told the doctor, and he shook his head, looking at Eleanor. (*Hill House* 244)

In the end, when Eleanor hits the tree, it is not clear who is behind the wheel:

I am really doing it, she thought, turning the wheel to send the car directly at the great tree at the curve of the driveway, I am really doing it, I am doing this all by myself, now, at last; this is me, I am really really really doing it by myself.

In the unending, crashing second before the car hurled into the tree she thought clearly, Why am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Why don't they stop me? (*Hill House* 245-6)

Eleanor is duped into thinking it is ultimate freedom she finds in the moments before she hits the tree, but at the final second she realises; it is not her hands on the wheel, but someone else's. The moment she is least in control is the moment 'she thinks she is herself'; she must believe, as Eugenie Lemoine-Luccioni puts it, 'she is herself' (qtd. in Modleski 47): 'Neither hero nor heroine (not to mention spectator) must become aware that in presenting herself the woman does nothing but re-present another woman, the mother' (Modleski 46). Why don't they stop me? Eleanor thinks, referring, presumably, to her makeshift family watching in horror. But they cannot, *Hill House* suggests, because they are part of the same mechanism, each with their part to play in the symbolic nuclear family, and although they have different

roles and relations to power within the structure, they can only move in certain ways because they, too, cannot know she is not herself.

Eleanor thinks she is in control, but she is not; she must join or die. This is Jackson's most radical statement and most radical story (among others) for this reason: it is a dramatisation of women's lives under patriarchy, the impossibility of freedom, of unmitigated desire, and the poison that unequal ideology spreads. The novel utilises many of the tropes of gothic literature to depict a woman maddening specifically in relation to the patriarchal, heteronormative space in which she struggles. Eleanor dies by suicide on the tree of life, the tree of Jesse. It is the symbol of lineage, the original family tree. She goes toward this tree in the ultimate symbol of American progress, the car. When she thinks, 'Why don't they stop me?' is she referring to Luke, Dr Montague and Theodora or her ancestors who guide her hands? All returns to the family, Jackson seems to be suggesting. No matter the potential, an individual is powerless against the family.

Eleanor Vance goes into Hill House unhappy and, because of patriarchally-constructed maternal malevolence, reduces herself to an eternal spectre because of her desire to have a home, and her acquiescence to the only way 1950s American culture knows how to make that possible: domestic family life. As such, Eleanor cannot be a friend to Theodora. She seeks to replicate her only previous womanly bonding, and this is at odds with Theodora's understanding of friendship as (what Ettinger calls) matrixial. It is tempting—even quite easy—to overstate the power of women's friendship in oppressive situations, its ability for radical resistance, for creating change and growth. However, that is not the novel's characterisation. Eleanor cannot join Theodora in what she perceives as the other woman's queer future, nor is she invited to do so. However, there is generosity in their relationship and just as this should not be overstated, nor should it be downplayed. The friendship between Eleanor and Theodora conjures matrixial moments of joy, laughter and possibility, bittersweet because they are not enough to save the protagonist from 'absolute reality'.

This thesis now turns to Margaret Mitchell's historical romance epic *Gone with the Wind* to continue to examine the way friendship and femininity are painfully intertwined. The next chapter marks a shift in the thematic concerns of the thesis's examination of women's

friendship as it turns to racism and how the structural forces of gender and race keep women together and apart.

Chapter Three:

The wrong friendship in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*

And Mammy would be there. Suddenly she wanted Mammy desperately, as she had wanted her when she was a little girl, wanted the broad bosom on which to lay her head, the gnarled black hand on her hair. Mammy, the last link with the old days.

With the spirit of her people who would not know defeat, even when it stared them in the face, she raised her chin. She could get Rhett back. She knew she could. There had never been a man she couldn't get, once she set her mind upon him. "I'll think of it all tomorrow, at Tara. I can stand it then. Tomorrow, I'll think of some way to get him back. After all, tomorrow is another day."

Gone with the Wind 820-1

Margaret Mitchell's 1936 romantic epic *Gone with the Wind*, pulled between racist conservatism and feminist liberalism, cannot help but produce a fascinating picture of female friendship. Its views of women's relationships with each other, of Blackness and of history are intertwined. Depicting Black people as subhuman, loving and complacent to justify their violent oppression allows *Gone with the Wind* to rework the horror of the slave system upon which the Old South built its wealth, culture and legacy. While perhaps *Gone with the Wind*'s racism should consign the novel to the history it adores, its overwhelming popularity and acclaim makes it important to study, especially in relation to its engagement with race, the defining trauma of American history. The novel is arguably one of the most significant American texts of the twentieth century.⁸ When it focuses on white characters, the novel

⁸ *Gone with the Wind* has been both critically and commercially popular, winning the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1937 and, excepting the Bible, is the best-selling book in American history (Andriani). The film was also commercially popular and critically celebrated; adjusted for inflation the film is the highest grossing of all time

remains resonant, offering readers an engaging portrayal of an uprooted privileged class, the terrors of war for women, and the duelling desires for the security of the old and the thrilling terror of the new. On Blackness, however, *Gone with the Wind* is stereotypical and normative, depicting Black characters through unquestioned racist stereotypes, promoting white supremacy through literature. This chapter studies the famous friendship between the daring Scarlett O'Hara and the genteel Melanie Wilkes but argues, unusually, for its wrongness; the novel's glorification of white women and their affections (toward each other or to white men) is not only facilitated by oppressed Black women through triangulation, but that this connection overshadows the more interesting and radical friendliness that is curtailed, but nevertheless exists, between Scarlett and Mammy, an enslaved woman. As the final paragraphs of the novel show, *Gone with the Wind's* central relationship is between Scarlett and Mammy, although the novel undermines the strength of their bond. Scarlett and Mammy's relationship is rooted in a particular racist understanding of race, personhood and possibility.

Gone with the Wind is an historical romance epic which follows the fortunes of Scarlett O'Hara, the wild and headstrong daughter of an Irish plantation owner and his wife, Ellen, an idealised aristocratic Southern lady. The 1936 novel, and the 1939 film which shares its name, follow Scarlett from the beginning of the American Civil War in 1861 and continue through the Reconstruction Era, ending in 1873. Scarlett's three marriages—most famously to the dashing Rhett Butler—and her constant lust for married man Ashley Wilkes play out against the excitement, violence and poverty of the Civil War. Of greatest importance to this chapter, and in many ways the text itself, are the women in Scarlett's life: her idealised mother Ellen O'Hara, her friend and romantic rival (and Ashley's wife) Melanie Wilkes, and Mammy, Scarlett's (and Ellen's) primary caregiver and Black enslaved woman. Although less significant to the text, Prissy, a young enslaved woman, is also important in Scarlett's story. The novel is intensely readable, fast paced and unusually long, presenting the fall of the old South and the birth of the new through one woman's story.

and is the winner of eight Oscars, including Best Supporting Actress for Hattie MacDonald as Mammy, the first African American to win an Oscar ("*Gone with the Wind*").

This chapter argues that in *Gone with the Wind* white women's friendship is both structurally and interpersonally reliant upon the violent subjection of Black women. Across the course of the novel, the 'official' friendship develops between the temperamentally different Scarlett and Melanie, a connection in which each woman co-becomes with the other as they survive the Civil War and its aftermath. However, if between Scarlett and Melanie develops mutual growth and respect, the opposite is true for Scarlett's relationships with the two Black women in her orbit, Mammy and Prissy. While there are significant moments of affection (especially between Scarlett and Mammy) within these relationships, Mammy and Prissy are not only excluded from character growth, but have their intellect, emotions and bodies degraded. In *Gone with the Wind*, Black women are depicted as animal-like, simple-minded, either fully loyal or traitorous and with little complex internal process or character development. The result of this racist construction of Black women is two-fold; first, white women's friendship is prominent, and generates through a sentimentalised hatred toward Black women and an assumption of their inferiority. Secondly, between white and Black women, co-becoming is impossible (as Black women are not allowed development) thereby disabling the possibility of friendship or meaningful connection between them. While white women's relationships in the novel can involve matrixial proximity in distance, its foundation rests on the utilitarian subjection of the other, usually derived through violent control. As this chapter shows, at each turn affection and support between Scarlett and Melanie is facilitated by the othered women their friendship excludes, producing a connection that is mostly the result of enforced sameness through whiteness and femininity. *Gone with the Wind* depicts but reduces the connection between its two most promising friends, Scarlett and Mammy, with their friendship's affection, chemistry and potential, in favour of reinforcing a narrative of Black inferiority and white female supremacy through segregated togetherness.

The ideological power of *Gone with the Wind*, strengthened by the novel's immense popularity and its importance to American cultural life, an influence significantly bolstered by the film, has been widely noted. Scholars argue that the texts influenced public understanding of the Civil War, reconstruction, gender, race relations and womanhood. What is heard, valued and acted upon in terms of history has also been affected: '...despite their lack of academic credentials, Mitchell and David O. Selznick [the film's producer] have played the role of public historians, with their interpretations of this period of American history having an

impact on a scale well beyond that of scholars in the field' (Dickey 12), interpretations which continue to affect the contested 'civil landscape' of the South (Brundage 7). Celebrated and popular texts such as *Gone with the Wind* are significant for their influence, informing modern readers on the particular interpretations of the past that have been, and still are, considered valuable. They are a conflated national product, working together, purposefully or not, to inform the nation of its past (Williams). While there was significant backlash from Black consumers and writers—both scholars and creatives—against the novel's racist depiction of Black people, Black criticism was 'drowned out among the din of critical approval' (Stevens 366). Therefore it remains, as Drew Gilpin Faust notes, that 'more Americans learn about the Civil War from Margaret Mitchell than from any other single author', an impact only strengthened by the popularity of the film (6). This seems clear in relation to race, especially as it pertains to revisionism around white slaveholder's relationships with the enslaved (an issue which is discussed below), but this renowned and controversial novel can also inform the ways in which friendship and race intersect in American literature of the twentieth century.

Gone with the Wind draws on the national mood in the mid-1930s as Scarlett, torn between two men, is identified with and seeks to construct the reading public itself, torn between the old and new. Still reeling from the Great Depression and watching conflict in Europe begin to reignite only twenty years after the end of the First World War, many woman readers saw themselves in Scarlett and her plight. The text's preoccupation with survival in destabilised economic circumstances, and its nostalgic but complex remembrance of an agrarian way of life spoke to Depression-era readers. *Gone with the Wind* also reflects 'an intense concern for the devastating consequences of these conditions upon self-reliant individualism and family unity, two of America's most cherished beliefs...' and the troubling rise of money as the only kind of power that matters at a time when most Americans had very little of it (Pauly 205; 214). Linda Williams writes, '*Gone with the Wind* thus universalized for all white Americans the romance of southern history as the American story of nation-making at the same time that it constructed an entirely new kind of American hero in self-headstrong-greedy Scarlett' (Williams 194). Scarlett's lovers, and her desire for them, also symbolise the pull between old and new South. Throughout Scarlett's three marriages, the war, Reconstruction, the death of

her parents and favourite child, Scarlett is committed to the gentle, soporific Ashley, her 'perfect knight', and Melanie's husband (*Gone* 211). However, as Amanda Adams argues, 'this is Scarlett's perception, not Mitchell's, and it is an ideal she holds onto the longest in a novel full of disillusionment', as *Gone with the Wind* demonstrates Scarlett's blindness in relation to Ashley (Adams 66). Ashley represents nostalgic 'Lost Cause' Southerners who are so focused on the past that they cannot function in the present. Conversely, Rhett Butler's vital masculinity is praised and supported in the text and 'throws into relief the emasculation of the other male characters' (Sheley 10). Where the text mocks Scarlett's attraction to Ashley, it valorises Rhett and portrays Scarlett's lack of affection for him as the locus of its melodrama; Scarlett does not understand that she has loved Rhett all along until it is too late (Williams). Where Ashley represents the old world, Rhett is the new, although Rhett also comes from old money, which he has rejected. Scarlett's ambivalence about Ashley and Rhett is not just for dramatic and romantic plot purposes, but represents the (white, Southern) reading public's duelling desires for tradition and modernity. Connecting the 'losses of sovereignty' of Southern pre-war landowners to those economically suffering in the aftermath of the Depression, and to the lack of sovereignty experienced by women in both eras (Sheley 1), *Gone with the Wind* is a historical romance. By containing the suffering of the present in the past and using its stories to offer a better future: '...the "dreams" the audience is said to have demanded, those for which they spent the little extra money they had, were not mere illusions or abstractions, but exciting, imaginative articulations of their greatest hopes and fears, their deepest doubts and beliefs' (Pauly 204). Depression-era readers saw their own precariousness and poverty not only portrayed on screen but valorised and ennobled. The intense, and in many ways unusual, identification with the novel by its readers makes its construction of friendship not only worthy of study but has also reflected and influenced its readers' perceptions of what friendship between women may be (and who it may be between). Emphasising white friendship and disallowing Black development is, therefore, a literary choice but also a social and political statement.

In the novel, whiteness cannot exist without Blackness, and it is at this site that the text is its most political and most conservative. The first thing of note about the representation of Black people in *Gone with the Wind* is their scarcity, all the more significant because 'Margaret Mitchell was born into a social universe that was obsessed with blackness, and yet she wrote

a novel that seemed so totally white' (Williamson 87). 'When she deals with [Black people] at all' Mitchell portrays them 'as faithful mammies, stupid servants or masterless, violent aggressors' (Roberts 171). Where the text pushes the boundaries of gendered embodiment and even racial lines for white people—in that it depicts so-called masculine qualities within women and Black qualities in white people—the Black characters of *Gone with the Wind* are portrayed in a much more straightforward, simple and condescending manner. Enslaved people in the text are either only vaguely referred to (such as field slaves) or else are so close to their family that they become "'members of the family," "pets," and thereby hardly slaves at all' (Roberts 175). In this respect the text uncreatively reproduces plantation-era narratives about enslaved Black people for its 1930s readership. The novel perpetuates the ideology of benevolent masters and loving, grateful slaves, using sentimentality to mask oppression for capitalist gain. Texts such as *Gone with the Wind* portray slavery—an economic system—through a familial lens, in which both parties participated 'based on a set of mutual obligations and responsibilities as well as affection' (McElya 5). The 'faithful slave narrative', which *Gone with the Wind* draws upon and reinforces, depicted the enslaved as 'faithful and caring not because they had to be or were violently compelled to be, but because their fidelity was heartfelt and indicative of their love for, and dependence on, their owners' (McElya 6). The text spends little time on the characterisations of Mammy and Prissy (as well as Pork and Dilcey, other 'house slaves'), which undermines their potential to be fully-rounded or three-dimensional characters. Rather, the relationship between the wealthy whites and Black characters is one of utility; Black characters 'keep the white world in good running order' (Williamson 97). Faithful slave narratives do not depict the lived experience of the enslaved but centre on the goodness of whites and the acceptability of the system which gives them power. In *Gone with the Wind* slavery is a benign institution: 'no slave has ever been sold from Tara and only one whipped—and that for neglecting a horse, mistreating a creature even more subordinate than he' (Gilpin Faust 13). Further, the representation of enslaved characters is—even for the time—so extreme as to be vitriolic as the novel seeks to justify its world view through racist archetypes of Black people. *Gone with the Wind* 'vindicates the white aristocracy's recovery of their lost wealth by virtually any means necessary while it demonizes newly freed blacks and poor whites for resorting to similarly opportunist or criminal measures to survive' (Talley 224). By the end of the war an ideological transition is complete; white

supremacy, rather than slavery, becomes the institution by which white people retain economic, person and political control over Black people (Talley 224). Previous scholarship has reflected the novel's infamous racism and this chapter seeks to add to understandings of how Blackness is constructed within the text through its specific focus on the racial and racist construction of women's friendship.

Gone with the Wind extols the qualities associated with Blackness, so long as those qualities are in a white body. Scarlett takes on characteristics typically attributed to enslaved people in order to capably confront hardship: she becomes a woman who works the fields, delivers babies, kills intruders, and most indicatively, is sold for financial gain. Similarly, as Joel Williamson has noted, Rhett is also regularly cast as a dark or Black figure, which, in his white body, communicates vitality and vigour. Scarlett's and Rhett's 'Blackness', paradoxically, bestows both modernity and continuity with the past. Scarlett becomes 'a representative American', overcoming impossible obstacles, 'by posing as black' (Williams 213). She finds feminist liberation through the labour performed by the enslaved, and derives power, always white, through her ability to choose to perform that labour in order to escape economic servitude. In *Gone with the Wind* the same mechanisms of Blackness are represented as shameful when embodied by Black bodies but as emancipatory in white bodies, displaying the text's paradoxical engagement with race.

To date, interpretations of Scarlett and Melanie's relationship have tended to be limited in scope and depth. Usually, scholars study the friends to make larger points about the novel in relation to other themes and concerns, such as racism or nostalgia. Very often, Scarlett and Melanie are simply understood as opposites (Hall 46; Gilpin Faust 9; Barkley 63; Gómez-Galisteo 25). When Scarlett and Melanie are more closely read, opinions largely converge on the idea that the two women have a friendship, although few, if any, make the study of that friendship a priority. Margaret D. Bauer refers to Scarlett and Melanie's 'cooperative—even friendly—atmosphere' which is a 'source of empowerment and security', noting that Melanie's presence is just as important in Scarlett's life as the more glorified romances (Bauer 37; 39). Some scholars argue that the novel depicts love between Scarlett and Melanie: 'The evolution of the two women's relationship, the drama of Melanie's affection and Scarlett's resistance, constitutes a love story every bit as intense in its own way as Scarlett's and Rhett's'

(Haskell 181). As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese writes, Scarlett only ever loves two women, Ellen and Melanie, but that, tellingly, 'Scarlett omits Mammy from this company despite compelling claims' (Fox-Genovese 402). Each of these scholars, although providing valuable interpretations, do not take as their priority female friendship in *Gone with the Wind* and so do not seek to interrogate the inner workings of Scarlett and Melanie's relationship (or, indeed, the impact of Black women on this relationship).

This chapter seeks to contribute to current understandings of race and femininity in the novel by closely reading Scarlett and Melanie's friendship alongside Scarlett's (non-friendship, but sometimes friendly) engagement with Prissy and Mammy to argue that Scarlett and Melanie are friends forced together through whiteness and by the drive to exclude Black women. Arguing for the racist quality of Scarlett and Melanie's friendship, this chapter opens by contending that white ladyhood is the central concern of the novel and, in order to protect the sanctity of ladyhood, others are triangulated against Scarlett and Melanie.⁹ Then, in the following two sections, this chapter closely reads scenes between Prissy, Scarlett and Melanie, and Mammy, Scarlett and Melanie to demonstrate that friendly love between white women is built upon hatred of Blackness and Black women. White women's friendship is prioritised to the extent that all other possibilities are diminished and, with Mammy especially true friendship is forsaken because it does not comply with racial boundaries.

Scarlett and Melanie: Ladies united

Scarlett and Melanie bond through a strong mutual allegiance to white ladyhood. They have little in common aside from this intense identification with, and commitment to, embodying the ideal of the white lady and the ideal's defence. However, in order to define what a lady is, let alone identify with her, white women triangulate against simplified others, including Black men, Yankees and working-class white people, but most especially against Black enslaved women. Alongside the American Civil War and Scarlett's romances, it is Scarlett and Melanie's

⁹ My use of the term white ladyhood (rather than, for example, femaleness or womanhood) here is deliberate; as this chapter will show, Southern ladyhood has a specific set of characteristics, is the standard against which each woman in the text is measured and is omnipresent as a factor in the women's relationships with each other.

friendship that is the novel's core.¹⁰ The novel charts Scarlett's affections and their move from antagonistic to loving. This journey is foundational. As Molly Haskell describes, 'the evolution of the two women's relationship, the drama of Melanie's affection and Scarlett's resistance, constitutes a love story every bit as intense in its own way as Scarlett's and Rhett's' (181). This section examines Scarlett and Melanie's friendship journey, then closely reads a scene between Scarlett, Melanie and a predatory Yankee soldier to demonstrate the way in which the novel utilises triangulation to bring Scarlett and Melanie together.

Scarlett and Melanie engage in their friendship in characteristically disparate ways: Scarlett through jealous comparison and Melanie through consistent affection. Melanie is brought into Scarlett's life as her beloved Ashley's fiancée, and so Scarlett often thinks of Melanie, and largely thinks of her negatively: 'Scarlett recalled with contempt Melanie's thin childish figure, her serious heart-shaped face that was plain almost to homeliness' (*Gone* 16). She is competitive and ricochets between judgement of Melanie's looks, as in the previous quote, and worrying about her own beauty, peering 'anxiously in the mirror at her sixteen year-old face as if expecting to see wrinkles and sagging chin muscles. It would never do to appear sedate and elderly before Melanie's sweet youthfulness' (*Gone* 58). Unlike Scarlett, Melanie is both kind and consistent, praising Scarlett, inviting Scarlett to stay in Atlanta, and approving of Scarlett and Ashley's friendship. As the narrator describes, 'The difference between the two girls lay in the fact that Melanie spoke kind and flattering words from a desire to make people happy, if only temporarily, and Scarlett never did it except to further her own aims' (*Gone* 123). The difference between the two is known and not appreciated by Scarlett, at least initially, as more than once she feels a 'surge of dislike' for the more lady-like and gentle-hearted Melanie (*Gone* 118). Two very different women, the text insistently pushes them together because they are white ladies.

¹⁰ The frequency with which the characters are named in the text provides an interesting, although not exhaustive, metric of significance; following Scarlett, whose name is written 2,776 times in the novel, Melanie's appears the second most often, with 1020 mentions of Melanie and 317 of her nickname, Melly. By contrast, Ashley and Rhett, the two love interests, are respectively referred to by name 985 and 941 times, and Mammy only 446. While name repetition has limited use as a way of understanding character importance, it is nevertheless notable how comparatively present both Scarlett and Melanie are in the text. It is also worth noting that because the narration of *Gone with the Wind* is focalised through Scarlett, each of the mentions of Melanie occurs because Scarlett is in some way interacting with her, either directly or in thought.

It is the war that develops Scarlett's relationship with Melanie and which cements Melanie's affections for Scarlett. The two women display immense, although differing, bravery during the war. These acts, and their reliance on each other's reliability, facilitate a mutual co-becoming as the young women traumatically transition from carefree youth to the sharp reality of wartime adulthood. Scarlett offers physical competence and an intense and uncompromising drive for survival. When Ashley goes to war, Scarlett promises him she will look after Melanie and their son and 'now they belonged to her, even as Wade and Prissy [Scarlett's son and slave] belonged to her, and she must struggle and fight for them as long as she had strength or breath' (*Gone* 311). She does so, and not only earns Melanie's everlasting affection, but draws out Melanie's own bravery. When Scarlett, Melanie, their children and enslaved people have fled back to 'Tara', Scarlett's beloved family plantation, because Atlanta has fallen to the Yankees, Melanie's resilience is an irritation, a surprise and a support for Scarlett:

Only Melanie did not complain, Melanie whose face grew thinner and whiter and twitched with pain even in her sleep. "I'm not hungry, Scarlett. Give my share of the milk to Dilcey. She needs it to nurse the babies. Sick people are never hungry." It was her gentle hardihood which irritated Scarlett more than the nagging whining voices of the others. She could—and did—shout them down with bitter sarcasm but before Melanie's unselfishness she was helpless, helpless and resentful. Gerald, the negroes and Wade clung to Melanie now, because even in her weakness she was kind and sympathetic, and these days Scarlett was neither. (*Gone* 334)

Scarlett's and Melanie's individual strength regenerates in each other and it is during this time that the two become properly allied. This is partly because the novel characterises them, alongside Rhett, as the most competent in a group of people weak because of age (the children), dreaminess and high morals (Ashley) and race (the Black people enslaved by Scarlett, her friends and family).

Post-war, Melanie protects Scarlett as Scarlett alienates society with the accumulation of wealth, and Scarlett finally rests her ambivalence about Melanie to view her as a friend and integral part of her life. Scarlett leans on Melanie in large and small ways, knowing that 'in Melanie's devoted heart she had an ally' and Melanie is unwaveringly loyal to Scarlett (*Gone* 574). It is when Scarlett and Ashley are caught 'fondling' behind Melanie's back that her

support is strongest and most needed (*Gone* 734). Melanie sides against most of her friends and family in defence of Scarlett, demanding, “‘I want it understood,” she said, “that any of you who do not call on Scarlett need never, never call on me”” (*Gone* 684). Melanie’s firm belief in Scarlett’s goodness forces Scarlett to grow, in her understanding of the failures of her own behaviour and her understanding of Melanie: ‘Oh, she could stand the cuts, the slights, the covert smiles, anything the town might say, if she had to stand them—but not Melanie! Oh, not Melanie!’ (*Gone* 734). When Melanie dies—from the sacrifice of carrying another child against her doctor’s recommendation, a symbolically fitting death for a maternal lady—Scarlett is not only bereft but finally sees who Melanie is:

Why, oh, why, had she not realized before this how much she loved and needed Melanie? But who would have thought of small plain Melanie as a tower of strength? Melanie who was shy to tears before strangers, timid about raising her voice in an opinion of her own, fearful of the disapproval of old ladies, Melanie who lacked the courage to say Boo to a goose? And yet... as Scarlett looked sadly back, she realized that Melanie had always been there beside her with a sword in her hand, unobtrusive as her own shadow, loving her, fighting for her with blind passionate loyalty, fighting Yankees, fire, hunger, poverty, public opinion and even her beloved blood kin. Scarlett felt her courage and self-confidence ooze from her as she realized that the sword which had flashed between her and the world was sheathed forever. (*Gone* 801)

It is this final realisation which crystalises Scarlett’s growth and which prompts her recognition of her love for Rhett (who then memorably rebuffs her with the dismissal “‘My dear, I don’t give a damn”” [*Gone* 1010])). Melanie, Scarlett’s sword and shield, has protected Scarlett not only from the dangers of the patriarchal world and herself, but has forced growth in Scarlett, just as Scarlett has forced growth in Melanie in a relationship of mutual co-becoming.

Scarlett and Melanie develop into friends slowly through the duration of *Gone with the Wind*, but this is founded on the othering of difference. Despite this sentimental—and at times, genuinely affecting—portrayal of female solidarity, Scarlett and Melanie are not easily configured as friends. Rather, as this chapter argues, their togetherness is not only facilitated but entirely reliant upon the racist othering of those culturally lesser powerful than themselves. Scarlett and Melanie’s friendship journey rests at every point on the violent oppression of Black women and their representatives. Just as defence of the South was the

supposed defence of 'Southern traditions', *Gone with the Wind* suggests Scarlett and Melanie work together to defend themselves from attacks on their ladyhood, a sacred identity in the schema of the novel. What is excluded from the novel's ideological narrative, however, is that ladyhood upholds structures of racial control at the same time as it subjugates the women within it. I now turn to a scene wherein Scarlett and Melanie bond for one of the first times when they work together to defend Tara, Scarlett's beloved family home and slave plantation, from a Yankee soldier. While this scene does not involve any Black characters, it aptly demonstrates the mechanisms of othering that the novel undertakes. In place of sentimentalised Black characters is a more threatening figure: the white advocate for Black freedom, a figure that must be both constructed and then reinforced as other. It also illustrates how white lady friendship is positioned as a good against the encroaching threat of Black freedom, itself culturally tied to sexual violence, which the Yankee soldier represents. Mitchell 'repeatedly associates' the possibility of Black freedom (no matter how distant or curtailed) with 'a threat to white feminine virtue', which is also linked to the loss of physical land and objects (Sheley 11). In the novel, this scene is highly symbolic. It occurs immediately following Scarlett's realisation that her beloved mother and the angelic lady archetype of the text, Ellen, has died. It is the symbol of the lady which Scarlett and Melanie unite to defend and, through that defence, define.

Scarlett shoots a Yankee in the face and, moments later, experiences her first genuine respect for, and affection toward, Melanie as the two women co-become in the face of an invading other. She and Melanie, along with Prissy, a house slave, have returned to 'Tara' upon the invasion of the Yankee army into Georgia, having been abandoned by Rhett who has finally decided to join the war. Having discovered the place in ruins after her mother's death and her father's breakdown, Scarlett becomes determined to prevent Tara's fall and her family's starvation. One morning, with the men away from the plantation attempting to catch a sow to eat, Scarlett is alone 'with three sick girls and the babies' when a Yankee with 'beady little eyes' rides up the driveway on a horse and comes into the house (*Gone* 429). Scarlett is frightened and wants to hide in her wardrobe until 'the thought of the Yankee eating their meagre meal' makes her shake with anger. She takes her first (dead) husband's war pistol out on the landing, and, when he leers "'All alone, little lady?'" , shoots the Yankee, point blank:

Like lightning, she shoved her weapon over the banisters and into the startled bearded face. Before he could even fumble at his belt, she pulled the trigger. The back kick of the pistol made her reel, as the roar of the explosion filled her ears and the acrid smoke stung her nostrils. The man crashed backwards to the floor, sprawling into the dining room with a violence that shook the furniture. (*Gone* 430)

Suddenly Melanie, always sickly but now especially weak from recent childbirth and travel, arrives at the top of the stairs in her nightgown, dragging a sword. The two women's eyes meet and Melanie looks at Scarlett with 'grim pride', 'approbation and a fierce joy in her smile' and Scarlett experiences a moment of connection and comradeship: "'Why—why—she's like me! She understands how I feel!...She'd have done the same thing!'"

With a thrill she looked up at the frail swaying girl for whom she had never had any feelings but of dislike and contempt. Now, struggling against hatred for Ashley's wife, there surged a feeling of admiration and comradeship. She saw in a flash of clarity untouched by any petty emotion that beneath the gentle voice and the dovelike eyes of Melanie there was a thin flashing blade of unbreakable steel, felt too that there were banners and bugles of courage in Melanie's quiet blood. (*Gone* 431)

Scarlett is impressed with Melanie, her lack of squeamishness, and her womanly patriotism. Of course, Melanie's 'banners and bugles' of courage are notable for their encasement in her 'quiet blood' (*Gone* 431). The 'flashing blade of unbreakable steel' lives within the soft body of a woman with a 'gentle voice' and 'dovelike eyes' (*Gone* 431). The passage serves two purposes. First, it emphasises that although the rougher Scarlett and gentler Melanie are different, they are united in their purpose of self and home (both conflated, and gendered and raced) defence. Secondly, it emphasises the value of patriotic, violent strength within a certain kind of woman. It is not the (more) renegade Scarlett who is praised in the scene. The narrator does not demonstrate that Scarlett is proud of herself but, rather, admiration is transferred to the soft, gentle Melanie. Violence from women, the novel seems to suggest, can be tolerated, even exalted, when the woman's body/home is under attack *and* when the woman aggressor embodies a subservient affect and inhabits a white body. Melanie 'gives depth of meaning to the word "lady"' (Haskell 180). The contrast embedded in the steely softness of Melanie is valorised by Scarlett and *Gone with the Wind*, meaning that the lady makes violence more palatable just as violence makes the lady more substantial. There is a tension, therefore, between the value of appropriate violence and its perpetrator. Scarlett is

deeply impressed by Melanie as the two are 'joined in a mad, sisterly triumph, the exultation of women overcoming mortal danger without the help of men' (Haskell 180). No longer fully alone, Scarlett begins to understand that Melanie is a strength rather than a burden. Joined together against the presence of an othered intruder, the women co-become together.

Once Melanie and Scarlett discover what the Yankee stole, the significance of their defence and the mechanisms of their bonding are fully illuminated. Melanie suggests they go through the dead Yankee's pockets and backpack, and they find treasure: a 'bulging wallet' filled with a mass of 'greenbacks', Confederate money, and \$20 in gold pieces, representing the lost wealth of the slave owning class (*Gone* 434). They then discover:

a miniature of a little girl in a gold frame set with seed pearls, a garnet brooch, two broad gold bracelets with tiny dangling gold chains, a gold thimble, a small silver baby's cup, gold embroidery scissors, a diamond solitaire ring and a pair of earrings with pendant pear-shaped diamonds, which even their unpractised eyes could tell were well over a carat each.
(*Gone* 434)

Stolen artefacts of womanhood, the ideal Southern, upper class and domestic kind, are emptied from the Yankee's pockets. Melanie, with 'gentle eyes hard', tells Scarlett, "'I'm glad you killed him...Now hurry, darling, and get him out of here'" (*Gone* 346). The Yankee is not only a home intruder but one who steals ladies' domestic possessions—those pertaining to wealth, beauty and children—now shot and disposed of by Scarlett and Melanie. He is the invading man against whom the bond of female friendship is asserted and protected. The Yankee's invasion (and the Yankees' invasion) produces a female togetherness that resists one kind of masculinist oppression in the defence of another. The invading Northern man is killed in defence of female purity for the Southern man, and the Southern man's home defended. The novel makes the Yankee lascivious in order to make the otherness he represents disreputable and indefensible. This also justifies Scarlett and Melanie's actions and, by implication, way of being. The scene with the Yankee is demonstrative in its extremeness; Scarlett and Melanie are white/lady/friends because they murder a Black-defending/non-gentleman/other. This dynamic is repeated throughout the text. Scarlett and Melanie engage in mutual co-becoming in defence of gender, class and race stratification. They are

white/lady/friends because they, much more insidiously, enact violent and sentimentalised control over Black women and their bodies.

Through Scarlett, *Gone with the Wind* focalises the complicated and ambivalent relationship Southern women had with the figure of the Southern lady, and the journey from Southern belle to established, fixed lady.¹¹ As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, there are multiple kinds of lady/woman in *Gone with the Wind*, produced through slight variations or engagements with ideals of the lady and embodiments of the woman. As distance from the ideal—that is, being a true lady—increases, so does the extent to which an individual is painfully determined by her relation to ladyhood. Melanie, for example, embodies both womanhood and ladyhood perfectly, and so is exalted by the text. Scarlett represents the most complex and perhaps threatening relationship with the lady as she is a deviant who can hide (mostly successfully) behind the sign of the lady (Sedgwick 9). By having the narrator so closely aligned with Scarlett, the reader encounters femininity *through* Scarlett's ambivalence. Although Scarlett always looks to Ellen as the ideal, she is held back from achieving that level of ladyhood (or even really wanting to achieve it) because she is, according to the text, her father's daughter and is repeatedly tied to the 'new' city of Atlanta (Goodwyn Jones 373). Like the city, Scarlett succeeds post war where other, finer, older Southerners cannot: 'Traits that Ellen and Mammy

¹¹ The ideal Southern lady was a mythical figure ideologically constructed and hardly based on 'real' Southern women (Westling 16). Similar in many ways to a later, English figure of ideal womanhood as conceptualised by Barbara Welter's 'Cult of True Womanhood' (1966), the southern lady was both infantilised and held above, embodying all that was feminine, beautiful and gentle as articulated by Thomas Nelson Page in 1897:

What she was only her husband divined, and even he stood before her in dumb, half-amazed admiration, as he might before the inscrutable vision of a superior being. What she really was known only to God. Her life was one long act of devotion to her husband, devotion to her children, devotion to her servants, to the poor, to humanity. Nothing happened within the range of her knowledge that her sympathy did not reach and her charity and wisdom did not ameliorate. (qtd. in Bartlett and Cambor 9)

Unsurprisingly, Nelson Page's description of a 'typical plantation mistress' found little basis in reality (Bartlett and Cambor 9). It was, rather, a constructed ideology, manufactured to control white women by simultaneously idolising and infantilising them. The value of the myth of the Southern lady to white landowning men was in its placating capacity; white women were kept in place by both moral norms and their perceived domestic and maternal abilities. As studies of other Southern woman writers of the same period as Mitchell have shown, many were more critically engaged in dialogue with the Southern Lady as the ideal for women (for example, see Sarah Gleeson-White's 2003 work on Carlen McCullers and Louise Westing's 2008 study of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor). *Gone with the Wind* is comparatively extreme in its anachronism, and, while sometimes critical, nevertheless fondly looks back to a society which oppressed through categorisation (lady, gentleman, slave, poor white, etc.).

have struggled to repress now become the basis for Scarlett's survival—and for the salvation of those around her' (Gilpin Faust 10). So, while to some degree Mitchell 'sought to resist the sentimental nostalgia of the "Lost Cause", she nevertheless depicts a social shift in ways indebted to 'the memory banks of the elite white South' (Talley 213). Ladyhood is regularly parodied as it is exalted: 'the anonymous narrator...is the site of Mitchell's often ironic consciousness and commentary' (Goodwyn Jones 35). Scarlett's contradictory performance of, wish for and distaste of femininity in herself and others means that the text's position on that femininity is not straightforward. While it is often idolised, it also demonstrates the pain caused by the societal control of white women.

Gone with the Wind reaches back into the past to speak on women's roles in a changing society. Mitchell's engagement with 'the lady', as well as her heroine's immense capacity, coupled with her sense of trouble constantly grating against gender roles spoke to the 'New Woman' of 1930s America. Linda Williams entertainingly describes Scarlett:

...In the course of the novel Scarlett O'Hara Hamilton Kennedy Butler marries three times, gives birth to three children [one fathered by each of her husbands all the while she is in love with another man], delivers Melanie's baby alone, buries her mother, father, daughter, and two husbands, "sells" herself in marriage to pay debts, and presides as head of the house over former slaves and family members. (196)

Most importantly, notes Williams, is that 'despite her losses she grows strong and endures' (196). Scarlett can be understood as a 1930s Jazz Age flapper-type in the disguise of a Southern belle. She embodied a type made popular in 1930s literature and film, a woman who 'appeared alive...conveyed a sense of competence. This was the sort of girl who might be able to go out and get a job, help shoulder the family responsibilities when her father's or husband's income stopped' (Frederick Lewis Allen qtd. in Smyth 67). Margaret Mitchell herself was emblematic of the changing woman; although she presented herself as a bored housewife who wrote *Gone with the Wind* to entertain herself after breaking her leg, she was 'a former newspaper woman and Jazz Age flapper whose mother had been a suffragette' (Williams 192). Mitchell 'harnessed the plantation myth' to tell a story for 'young white women who wanted to "have it all"...but who still felt torn between Melanie's ladylike self-sacrifice and Scarlett's self-absorption' (Hall 45). A changing society was incompatible with the ideals of the lady,

while also making them all the more appealing, cementing Scarlett and Melanie as characters who reflected contemporary concerns about how a woman should be.

However, despite the text's ambivalence, its constant deification of Ellen (and later Melanie) as a true lady shapes much of the text's ideological underpinnings. Until the war comes to affect Scarlett, and forces her into new ways of relating to/understanding herself and others, Scarlett idolises Ellen and loathes Melanie, despite the fact that each woman is a mirror of the other. Each has the same story, with slight variations. Ellen was to marry a cousin, the dashing Pierre who died. Having been robbed, at age fifteen, of the love of her life, Ellen resigns herself to rural Georgia, a marriage to the rough Irishman Gerald O'Hara 28 years her senior and uses her feminine gifts to turn the ramshackle plantation house 'Tara' into a stately estate. Her husband, fiery but largely harmless, is, in this relationship, the placated one as Ellen runs the plantation without his realising:

It had never occurred to him that only one voice was obeyed on the plantation — the soft voice of his wife Ellen. It was a secret he would never learn, for everyone from Ellen down to the stupidest field hand was in a tacit and kindly conspiracy to keep him believing that his word was law. (*Gone* 32)

Seventeen years Ellen's junior, Melanie lives Ellen's lost life. She marries her gentleman cousin, the effete Ashley Wilkes, of whom she takes care, while hiding this fact. Both are 'great ladies' within the logic of the text, likened to the Virgin Mary or to angels (*Gone* 830; 62). They are also characterised similarly; both are essential (emotionally, physically and economically) to the running of their households. Just as Scarlett and Melanie are two aspects of *Gone with the Wind's* engagement with femininity, we can see that Ellen and Melanie, and Scarlett's reactions to them, are both emblematic of the southern lady, two sides of the same coin, two manifestations of the same woman (Rubin 94). Neither perfect Ellen nor perfect Melanie can survive in a 'material, sexual, racialized world', yet their deaths prompt great interior growth for Scarlett (Goodwyn Jones 35). Ellen's death, which occurs without Scarlett or the narrator's presence, 'affects a change in Scarlett's relationship to Melanie, the woman who most resembles Ellen. Scarlett 'begins to call upon Melanie at those times she might have called upon Ellen, and Melanie answers, until she, like Ellen, deserts her children' (Miner 27). Despite Scarlett's devastation, Ellen's death demonstrates Scarlett's own capability and strength, and

this strength is aided by Melanie in Ellen's place. Melanie's death, at the end of the novel, brings about another moment of strength for Scarlett, and an opposite realisation: how much Scarlett needed Melanie, and how wrong Scarlett has been: '...Scarlett sees that this woman who dies has been a tower of strength for her, that this woman's love has sheltered her in numerous unacknowledged ways' (Miner 29). And both, most damningly for a mother-woman, abandon their children when they die. For Scarlett, both deaths trigger major moments of introspection and personal growth.

The text exalts the type of womanhood embodied by Ellen and Melanie but it also acknowledges its limitations. While they are the moral, righteous core and *Gone with the Wind* makes a political claim of their value, they are not the heroes of the text. Ellen's and Melanie's deaths display Scarlett's own aliveness. Scarlett is so startlingly alive, so spirited and forceful, that it is she who readers connect with, rather than her opposing 'lifeless saints' (Miner 214). For Anne Goodwyn Jones, this produces an ambivalent text: 'Mitchell as author is stuck with a characterization that is split into two conflicting characters, and a narrator who is vulnerable to the charms of both...Instead of giving us an easy moral binary...Mitchell gave us a novel whose own ambivalences are neither repressed nor fully understood, whose ironies can therefore seem more cloudy than cutting' (40). However, rather than this reducing *Gone with the Wind's* literary significance, as Goodwyn Jones implies, the ideological murkiness is precisely the point. The text is ambivalent about femininity and the structures which give some women power because this system is ambivalently, murkily encountered as help and hindrance.

Gone with the Wind was, and to some degree remains, so successful because it speaks to the market of women's complaint culture (Berlant); its primary focus is the way Scarlett, and to a lesser extent, Melanie, suffer through the social and political conditions within which they must operate. Born into mid-nineteenth century Georgia, Scarlett and Melanie are simultaneously oppressed and hold immense privilege. For Scarlett, her rebellious nature is depicted both as charming and shameful. Yet any freedom she has, she has claimed through her beauty, wealth and whiteness. Similarly, Melanie's status as an ideal Southern lady affords her certain freedoms, and *Gone with the Wind* provides one of the clearest demonstrations

of a kind of ambivalence common to texts of female complaint, in that the thing that contains Scarlett and Melanie—white, patriarchal hegemony—is also that which gives these rich, white, beautiful and (in Melanie's case) dutiful women power and security. This articulation of women's suffering does not subvert conventional femininity but reinforces it. According to the female complaint framework, the utopian dream of the good life, a life of being somebody, requires that women stay allegiant to normativity (Berlant, *Female Complaint* 213). This struggle in *Gone with the Wind* is managed by Scarlett and Melanie through small (in a structural sense) acts of rebellion and affective compassion toward individuals. *Gone with the Wind* therefore draws upon and contributes to a cultural narrative which allows some kinds of transgressions from some kinds of people, critiquing the 'system' only so far as it harms white women, and only when it harms them in certain ways. So, while *Gone with the Wind*, like any novel in Berlant's 'female complaint' schema, offers affective relief from white universalist and classist paternalism, it draws its power from its (light) criticism of that system, and so stays close to it. The novel's popularity hinges on its engagement with a national women's culture, one that universalises a specific, extreme story affectively, and telling women, not just of 1930s US, but of Vietnam (Stewart) and Germany (Oliver)—the 'acceptable' ways to be a rebellious woman.

Prissy's failure and Scarlett's success

Before Scarlett and Melanie overpower the Yankee, they first bond their friendship against a scapegoated Prissy. Due to Melanie's late stage pregnancy, Scarlett, her son Wade, and Prissy become, along with Melanie, almost the last civilian Southerners left as the Yankees invade Atlanta. Caught without assistance, Scarlett must midwife for Melanie as she gives birth in the July heat. Within *Gone with the Wind*, a dramatic and sentimental text, the scene of Melanie birthing is among the most affecting, a seemingly simple portrayal of one woman helping another in an impossible situation. The women, disparate in so many ways, are without help, isolated and unable to escape. There is a sense of time standing still, a space apart from the normal functioning of the world. This pivotal moment depends on Prissy's humiliation, her inability to be useful, which enables Scarlett's competence. Subjugating Prissy is 'the foundational act of Scarlett's agency' (Vials 241). Prissy is essential to Scarlett's development but held back from her own and is made weak so that Scarlett may be strong for Melanie.

The scene depicts not only the birth of Melanie's baby but the birth of Scarlett's affection, although she does not realise it, toward Melanie and the reinforcing of Melanie's love for Scarlett. The scene is intense; Scarlett, Melanie and Prissy are alone in a space where everything is wet and smells in the 'dim room [swimming] with heat and pain and droning flies', time 'dragging' its 'feet' (*Gone* 360). Both Melanie and Scarlett are 'raw', be it their lips from biting or nerves from screaming. Melanie's body is constantly 'twisting' on the sodden bed and grips Scarlett so painfully that Scarlett 'knotted two long towels together and tied them to the foot of the bed and put the knotted end in Melanie's hands. Melanie hung onto it as though it were a life line, straining, pulling it taut, slackening it, tearing it' (*Gone* 360). From this putrid, oppressive scene Melanie emerges with a new baby, and Scarlett a new perspective:

Scarlett came down the dark stairs slowly, like an old woman, feeling her way, clinging to the banisters lest she fall...It was all over...Her mind was a vacuum; the world was a vacuum; there had been no life before this endless day and there would be none hereafter — only a heavily hot night, only the sound of her hoarse tired breathing, only the sweat trickling coldly from armpit to waist, from hip to knee, clammy, sticky, chilling. (*Gone* 362)

This is the aftermath of an immense moment of co-becoming for Scarlett and Melanie. Having been 'partial subjects of the same matrixial time and space', they are now first-time mother (Melanie) and first-time friend (Scarlett), both changed by their mutual encounter (Ettinger 66). Both women are stripped of the trappings of ladyhood, and not required to charm, perform or manipulate. Rather, Scarlett has shared a primal connection with Melanie, a strange and overwhelming intimacy. The intimate co-becoming produced by this scene closely resembles that of the scene which follows Scarlett's shooting of the Yankee. Unlike many of the other emotional parts of *Gone with the Wind*, the scene between Melanie and Scarlett and Scarlett's period of introspection do not feel overly constructed or saccharine but instead provides a moment of genuine connection and meaning. However, what precedes this scene of female bonding is more enlightening than the event itself.

Two interactions between Prissy and Scarlett frame the way white women's friendship is not only triangulated by a scapegoated other but reliant upon it. Despite the fact that all medical expertise is consumed by the thousands of dying soldiers, Scarlett decides not to risk the

journey to rural Georgia largely because Prissy assures Scarlett that she is a competent and experienced midwife:

“Miss Scarlett, effen we kain git de doctah w’en Miss Melly’s time come, doan you bodder. Ah kin manage. Ah knows all ‘bout birthin’. Ain’ mah ma a midwife? Ain’ she raise me ter be a midwife, too? Jes’ you leave it ter me.”
(*Gone* 321)

However, once Melanie’s labour begins, the young Black woman becomes overwhelmed and admits she has been lying about her midwifery experience: “Ah’s lyin’, Miss Scarlett! Ah doan know huccome Ah tell sech a lie. Ah jes’ see one baby birthed, an’ Maw she lak ter wo’ me out fer watchin’” (*Gone* 358). Scarlett, enraged at Prissy’s deception, slaps Prissy violently: ‘She had never struck a slave in all her life, but now she slapped the black cheek with all the force in her tired arm. Prissy screamed at the top of her voice, more from fright than pain, and began to dance up and down, writhing to break Scarlett’s grip’ (*Gone* 358). The text justifies Scarlett’s violence toward the enslaved woman by making Prissy incompetent at a moment that requires bravery and strength. The contrast of Scarlett’s stoic attitude and Prissy’s excessive and irritating demeanour discourages readerly compassion for Prissy.

Prissy’s incompetence is of structural value in *Gone with the Wind*. First, it keeps Scarlett in Atlanta (almost) alone with Melanie. It produces, in a narrative sense, an almost ideal scene of forced emotional bonding. Repeated attempts by Prissy and then Scarlett reveal that anyone able to assist in the birth of Melanie’s baby has fled or is helping wounded soldiers. Melanie, deemed as lesser than the dying men, is without medical support or interference. When Scarlett runs to get the doctor, after Prissy has been unsuccessful, the usually kindly doctor ‘thunder[s]’, “‘Are you crazy? I can’t leave these men. They are dying, hundreds of them. I can’t leave them for a damned baby. Get some woman to help you. Get my wife’” (*Gone* 354). This is one of the moments in which white female complaint is most evoked and justified by *Gone with the Wind*. It is difficult to think of a better example of ‘flawed men and bad ideologies’ than a male doctor who chooses dying men over a woman creating life, and the disruption of the domestic sphere by war and its display of masculine power (Berlant, *Female Complaint* 2). White women such as Scarlett and Melanie have power in the domestic, and also the sentimental power to uphold the domestic as sacred. The enslaved woman, in

this case Prissy, is violently governed and dominated in both spheres but, most importantly, creates the conditions for female complaint and the valuing of domestic truths and affects.

Prissy's incompetence also functions on a character level by increasing Scarlett's own competence. Forced into action, Scarlett pragmatically rises to the occasion and commands the whimpering and terrified Prissy to collect supplies. The Black enslaved woman, written as stupid, ignorantly malicious and cowardly, perfectly contrasts her mistress' growing competence and (although begrudging, nevertheless demonstrated) goodness. Further, Scarlett is empowered through violence; in slapping Prissy Scarlett takes on the position of the white, classed (like a doctor) masculine authority, a position which endows her with strength. The usually silly and selfish Scarlett is forced to assist Melanie, and any irritation Scarlett feels toward the feeble Melanie is overshadowed by Prissy's hysteria. Prissy's and Scarlett's diverging reactions have a political consequence. When Scarlett and Prissy—two silly, manipulative young women—are tested, it is Scarlett, the white lady, who rises to the occasion, an ascent made more impressive when directly compared to Prissy's weakness.

The scene of Scarlett and Melanie's visceral bonding cannot be understood separately from the text's (through Scarlett's) simultaneous degradation of Prissy. While of course a text's ideological inferences should be separated from those held by its characters, Scarlett's violence and fury toward Prissy is endorsed as reasonable and appropriate by the narrator. This is conveyed through the complete absence of interiority, capacity to think or suffer on the part of Prissy. Neither Scarlett nor the text have empathy for a young, enslaved woman stuck in a burning city without friends or family. She is directed constantly by, and in the service of, two white women who do not care about her, one of whom physically and verbally abuses her. The novel frames Prissy's lie about her midwifery skills as a product of dangerous stupidity—and, subsequently, the danger of relying on 'lesser' slaves—but Prissy's lie is produced by a system in which Black refusal is unacceptable. Throughout the text, Prissy is always held in places against her will, not least in Melanie's, a woman she hardly knows, birthing room: 'Prissy was crouched in a corner, sweating too, and smelled so abominably Scarlett would have sent her from the room had she not feared the girl would take to her heels if once out of sight' (*Gone* 359). Prissy's cowering, controlled body is emblematic of a

novel and a society that 'refuses to think what it knows about race' (Yaeger 26). As Prissy is not a fully human character, the novel's prioritised women can easily perform rituals of female bonding without worrying about the captive in the corner.

Mammy and Scarlett

The final part of this chapter turns to Mammy, the most important character in *Gone with the Wind* and the most influential figure within Scarlett and Melanie's friendship. This section returns to the idea of the lady, and Mammy's simultaneously complicit support of this type, and simultaneously complete annihilation by it. Just as Mammy protects Scarlett, who uses her, Mammy protects the system that inhibits her freedom. The character of Mammy is a racist, white-supremacist ideal of Black womanhood, one which is the result of an attempt to keep the other upon which white ladyhood is built in place. However, Mammy is the foundation of Scarlett's life and her chemistry with Scarlett seeps through the cracks of the racist novel, suggesting another possible friendship. Rather than the matrixial closeness in distance, Black and white women's friendships in the text can be understood as distance in closeness. Where the matrixial acknowledges the connection that may be found in difference, *Gone with the Wind* depicts the lack of connection that occurs under forced closeness, where difference is mandated and enforced. The novel is obsessed with its own character, and, like Scarlett and Melanie, draws on Mammy when convenient and degrades her when not.

Scarlett and Mammy have a particular connection—which bounces from antagonistic to loving—that is both celebrated and repressed by *Gone with the Wind*. The novel is ambivalent as it both pushes its heroine and the woman she enslaves together and seeks to undermine their connection. It shines through, despite the text's seemingly best attempts at repressing Mammy's influence. What is acceptable to the novel's ideals is that Mammy would have a function in Scarlett's life, and it benefits the novel's patriarchal worldview to see Mammy as exerting some wisdom. It is acceptable for Mammy to love Scarlett (as she clearly does) and it is acceptable for Scarlett to love Mammy (within bounds), although Scarlett's emotional immaturity prevents her knowing who she loves, or why. Crucially, the relationship can be sentimental but must always be hierarchised. Scarlett cannot be friends with her mother, because her mother is a saint, and she cannot be friends with Mammy, because Mammy—for

all her (alternately mocked and celebrated) airs—has the original sin of being Black. However, the text, in some ways, pushes against its own boundaries, to communicate how much Scarlett and Mammy like each other. In fact, aside from Ashley, Mammy is really the only person Scarlett does like. Herein lies the bizarre tension of the novel: *Gone with the Wind* is either unable to, or chooses not to, properly conceptualise the very relationship it itself constructs. In order to reconcile the racist ideology with the tension produced through Scarlett and Mammy's sparring, the novel works hard to deny, repress and subvert the only real friendship in it. The novel creates two characters with (non-sexual) chemistry yet spends many of its words explaining why they couldn't feel so. It does so by denying Mammy a name, a history, an interiority except for her relation to whiteness. However, similarly to gothic's lesbian ghost in *The Haunting of Hill House*, Mammy's personal importance (differentiated from her usefulness) seeps again and again into the novel which created her and denies her wholeness.

Gone with the Wind communicates that Mammy cares about Scarlett and the system which (disparately) oppresses them both. Mammy's love toward Scarlett mimics her love toward Scarlett's mother, Ellen, and this love is depicted as fierce and critical: 'Whom Mammy loved, she chastened. And, as her love for Scarlett and her pride in her were enormous, the chastening process was practically continuous' (*Gone* 17). As Sedgwick notes, Mammy 'is the template, the support, the enforcement, of Scarlett's "lady" role to the degree that her personal femaleness loses any meaning whatever that is not in relation to Scarlett's role' (*Between Men* 9). Mammy is a surrogate mother supplementing the ethereal Ellen's (lack of) presence in Scarlett's life and attempting to teach Scarlett the tools and tricks of ladyhood, preparing and assisting her as she marries her three husbands. However, the two women's approach to parenting is sharply differentiated, 'Ellen, by soft-voiced admonition, and Mammy, by constant carping' communicate their wishes for Scarlett (*Gone* 46). Unlike Ellen, Mammy is, to use Svetlana Boym's phrase, a vigilant presence, 'Mammy's eyes were sharper than Ellen's, and Scarlett could never recall in all her life having fooled Mammy for long' (*Gone* 46). Mammy is at turns comforting and tough, kind and sharp, and always closely engaged with Scarlett's wellbeing.

Scarlett relies upon Mammy. While the affection between the two is not symmetrical, it is reciprocal. Where Mammy has an intense investment in Scarlett's wellbeing, Scarlett has her own investment in Mammy, one that both reaches out to and rejects the other woman's influence. Scarlett repeatedly leans on Mammy, such as when Mammy helps Scarlett make a dress out of curtains, and disapprovingly accompanies her to Atlanta—providing both physical and reputational protection—so that Scarlett may 'sell' herself to a new husband to pay the taxes on Tara. Mammy supports, too, when Mammy, Prissy and Pork unquestioningly move their lives from Tara to Atlanta to set up Scarlett's new home upon her marriage to Rhett, 'looking for all the world like a black nuclear family' and bestowing stability and continuity between Scarlett's old and new life (Williams 194). She raises Scarlett and then Scarlett's three children. Finally, she shapes Scarlett's thoughts, especially in relation to Melanie, manipulating Scarlett into being more lady-like so that Melanie will not judge her (*Gone* 60). Without Mammy, Scarlett would not only be a significantly less free character, but her narrative plot would be impossible.

Gone with the Wind strategically undermines Mammy's power. Mammy is not allocated the consistency (or even complex inconsistency) afforded to white characters in the novel. Rather, she performs the duties that the text requires and embodies the most convenient personality traits and reactions; Mammy is weak when Scarlett must be strong, and strong when Scarlett's strength is more harmful than helpful. However, Mammy's value is frequently undercut as she is parodied in a clear attempt to obfuscate her necessity. Descriptions of Mammy, which are always racialised, work on an ideological level to degrade not only Mammy but the Black selfhood she represents. This occurs in two key ways, both of which are profoundly racist: first, the novel displaces Mammy from any history, heritage and name of her own to superimpose the archetype of the mammy and secondly, it repeatedly, viciously degrades Mammy's body, her Blackness and size.

Gone with the Wind is a novel about history, and Mammy is not only the single primary character without a history of her own, but she is the figure upon which white supremacist history is most forced. Mammy has no personal name, and is the only character, enslaved or otherwise, who is known exclusively by her title. In fact, Mammy's name is emblematic of the novel's treatment of its character; it is a white construction imposed on a Black woman. The

representation of Mammy replicates one of the most well-known and pervasive stereotypes of enslaved women. The figure of the Mammy was created for the ideological purpose of upholding and justifying the morality of a racist and violently oppressive system:

The image of the grandmotherly mammy, described as a beloved cook and a loving caretaker, was offered in response to abolitionists' charges that the institution of slavery was wracked with sexual depravity and the rape and concubinage of black women by white men. In this way, southern proslavery writers sought to legitimise relations between black women and white men as maternal and nurturing... (McElya 8)

Mammy of *Gone with the Wind* adheres entirely to the stereotypical Mammy genre and perpetuates the notion of the subhuman (animal-like, childish and stupid) Black woman who loves her white family and while technically enslaved, would wish to be so anyway. Created to answer critics of slavery and modelled on the nationalised trademark of Aunt Jemima, Mammy embodied the nostalgia and warmth of the old days. She is biologically motherless and daughterless, denied her own genealogy, created by a white woman for white women's pleasure. Further, Mammy is held back from development throughout the novel. The picture of Mammy constructed on the first few pages remains the same throughout the roughly 1000-page epic. Early in the novel she is described through bodily criticisms and her sense of pride ('Mammy was black, but her code of conduct and her sense of pride were as high as or higher than those of her owners' [*Gone* 17]) and that characterisation remains the same at the end of the novel when she is referred to as being like 'a savage and a child' (*Gone* 470). While white characters develop, fail and grow, Mammy, like all enslaved people in the novel, is excluded from character development and interiority. White history is pushed upon Mammy, but a personal, Black history of her own is refused.

While *Gone with the Wind* excludes Mammy by simultaneously reducing and imposing a history, the text is flagrant in the racist way it depicts her body. The depiction of Mammy's body is particularly notable in comparison to the ways that the 'enticing' Scarlett, the 'sweet' Melanie and the 'breath-taking' Ellen are characterised (*Gone* 59; 58; 30). In contrast, Mammy's weight is repeatedly emphasised. She is described as 'a huge old woman', with 'fat old arms', being 'hauled to her feet by the combined efforts' of two other slaves (*Gone* 24; 112; 56). Mammy's Blackness and intelligence are related to animality to reduce her power.

The novel describes her as having 'the small, shrewd eyes of an elephant' and a 'kind black face sad with the uncomprehending sadness of a monkey's face' (*Gone* 24; 324). The derogatory descriptions of Mammy often correspond with moments of perceptiveness from the character. When Mammy is unexpectedly supportive of one of Scarlett's less ethical schemes (stealing, and then marrying, her sister's beau), Scarlett realises that she has 'found a realist more uncompromising than herself' and the narrator says that 'mottled wise old eyes saw deeply, saw clearly' but, unable to praise without shaming, clarifies that Mammy sees 'with the directness of the savage and the child' (*Gone* 470). On an earlier occasion, when Scarlett is attempting to deceive Mammy, Mammy is again referred to as an 'elephant' with 'a dim feeling she was being got around' (*Gone* 426). Mammy is repeatedly reduced to racist and discriminatory descriptions of her body for the clear purpose of emphasising her inequality with the novel's white women characters.

Mammy's lack of character history and development cuts her off from an interior life, and access to the matrixial. She is a character constructed without a first or last name of her own, she has no family, no plot development, no history and no future aside from that aligned with, and dictated by, the Robillard-O'Hara family. The character is constructed so that the two origins of the matrixial usually available to women—the maternal womb and childbirth—are removed. This is notable because each other main woman character has a relationship either with her mother or her own motherhood. Mammy mothers Scarlett, as she has Ellen, but is withheld from the physical connection and authority the role usually entails. Instead, Mammy's authority is parodied as the novel uses her always-raced body to control her, and police her relationship with Scarlett. This is antithetical to the matrixial which is precipitated on a kind of before-ness. Mammy has no before-ness. Mammy is always the same mother-child, a false figure designed to facilitate white wellbeing. Mammy cannot co-become, with Scarlett or anyone else, because she cannot, and has never, become in the first instance. Mammy is paradoxically over-embodied and rendered bodiless.

Gone with the Wind's emphasis on the supposed naturalness of the inequality between Mammy and Scarlett, and its constant promotion of Melanie as Scarlett's companion, eliminates any possible matrixial (or otherwise) friendship between Mammy and Scarlett. Instead, the novel supplants Melanie into Scarlett's sphere as the idealised lady-woman-

mother figure who comes to shelter and grow (with) Scarlett. There are multiple scenes in which Mammy is taking care of Scarlett, but Melanie's role is emphasised. For example, when Scarlett miscarries a child during her marriage to Rhett, she has Mammy tirelessly attending to her but calls for Melanie, a woman she has thus far largely disliked, instead: 'Once she said "Melly?" and Mammy's voice said: "S'me, chile," and put a cold rag on her forehead and she cried fretfully: "Melly– Melanie" over and over' (*Gone* 762). The most illuminating example of this dynamic occurs shortly after the scene of the miscarriage, when Mammy is utilised in the production and maintenance of Scarlett and Melanie's friendship. This is crystalised by an often-overlooked scene that takes place after the death of Scarlett and Rhett's beloved daughter, Bonnie. Jumping over small hurdles on her pony to the delight of her parents, four-year-old Bonnie is thrown off her horse and dies. In the text Bonnie's death is immediately and abruptly linked to Mammy first, and then Melanie's role is prioritised. Even in a novel notorious for its pace this manoeuvre is notable:

Even as [Scarlett] leaned from the window there was a fearful sound of splintering wood, a hoarse cry from Rhett, a melee of blue velvet and flying hooves on the ground. Then [the pony] scrambled to his feet and trotted off with an empty saddle.

On the third night after Bonnie's death, Mammy waddled slowly up the kitchen steps of Melanie's house. (*Gone* 967)

Mammy climbs the stairs to Melanie's house and, interrupting dinner time, explains to Melanie that Rhett is refusing to bury Bonnie's body because of Bonnie's fear of the dark. Melanie protests at both having to hear such terrible details about the O'Hara-Butler's home life and Mammy's requests that Melanie intrude on their privacy. Despite Melanie's complaints, Mammy insists on completing her story and convincing Melanie to intervene. However, the text makes clear it is not Mammy who persuades Melanie but a sentimental vision of her own son and the thought of his absence: 'For a moment she stood irresolute and through the closed door came the sound of her boy's treble laughter. Like a cold knife in her heart came the thought of him dead' (*Gone* 973). Having thus realised the essentialness of her assistance, Melanie takes over, rushing out so fast that Mammy can't keep up. Melanie gains entry to Rhett's room, where he drunkenly sits with Bonnie, a whiskey bottle and a blaze of candles and shuts Mammy out, who is relegated to sitting and waiting outside. Sometime later

Melanie opens the door a crack, demands coffee and sandwiches, and that Mammy tell Scarlett that Rhett has agreed the funeral can take place the next day. Mammy walks away thinking: 'How Miss Melley done it beyon' me. De angels fight on her side, Ah specs' (*Gone* 975).

Within this scene we have a microcosm of the treatment and perceived value of Mammy that flows throughout the entirety of the novel. There are three levels of meaning illuminated by Mammy's meeting with Melanie: the denigrating way Mammy's wisdom is textually constructed, the way Mammy's power and kindness is displaced onto Melanie, and the way Mammy acts as a cipher for Scarlett and Scarlett's needs that Scarlett herself cannot fulfil. Aesthetically, Mammy's Black body is degraded, caricatured, and mocked. From the first sentences of the passage, and through *Gone with the Wind* generally, Mammy is described as grotesque and animalistic. She is at once very old and childish, 'waddling slowly' and wiping 'her nose on the back of her hand' (*Gone* 967; 968). As Mammy narrates her story to Melanie, she wipes her eyes on her dress, an action she later repeats outside Rhett's room. Mammy is dressed in 'huge men's shoes, slashed to permit freedom for her toes' and her face is described as 'puckered in the sad bewilderment of an old ape' (*Gone* 967). Seated opposite the angelic lady Melanie, the difference between the two is distinct. Before action takes place, and the dynamics of relationships can play out, Mammy's authority is undercut by her own body. As the scene continues, and Melanie decides to act, ostensibly based on her own vision and good heart, Mammy loses authority as Melanie gains it. Not only is Mammy depicted as running behind Melanie like a child, when they arrive at Rhett's room she becomes a spectator, interested less in assisting Melanie than being part of the action, out of 'curiosity to get into Rhett's room...but her hope turned to disappointment' (*Gone* 974). As quickly as the narrative will allow, she is relegated back to the silly, eavesdropping house slave, mocked for her body and her (now denied) involvement. The ideological message is clearly communicated; Black sentiment and subjectivity is good and valuable when it facilitates white wellness and white correctness. It is not constructed as integral but is a last resort, appropriate only in times of great crisis. It is Mammy's position as an outsider—to whiteness, ladyhood, citizenship—that makes her so important to Scarlett and the mechanics of the text. Her position is also what hides that same importance, makes it dismissible and insignificant. The scene I have been discussing is one of the very few times in the novel that the narrator focus

shifts away from Scarlett. Mammy, in this scene, acts as a conduit for Scarlett, enacting her desires in a way that Scarlett herself cannot. Scarlett cannot partly due to her profound grief—she has been locked in her room for days—but also because Mammy is able to move through spaces Scarlett cannot or will not. Mammy is the only figure able to be unimportant enough to hear what Scarlett and Rhett have been saying to each other, to gain entry to both of their bedrooms to see what has been going on. Conversely, she is one of the few characters important enough to gain entry to Melanie's house and her attention at dinnertime. As Mammy ensures Scarlett's wellbeing and facilitates Melanie's continued involvement in Scarlett's life (and therefore their friendship), she is simultaneously vital and excluded. Demonstrating how *Gone with the Wind* understands the political role of Black women, the text clearly depicts the way white women not only violently triangulate against Black women but actively deny this fact through a denigration of the Black woman's body. If Black women are the most over-embodied of America's citizens (Berlant, *Female Complaint*), *Gone with the Wind*'s Mammy is the poster woman for how power relations are textually cemented.

At the end of the epic, the narrative returns Scarlett to its important, white characters: Melanie, Rhett and Ashley. It concludes with Melanie's death and the resulting fallout and revelations. Melanie melodramatically dies trying to provide Ashley with a second child despite the risk to her feeble body. Rushing from Melanie's deathbed Scarlett has a dual epiphany: that Melanie was a true friend and that the man Scarlett really loves is Rhett, not Ashley: 'Behind that door, Melanie was going and, with her, the strength upon which she had relied unknowingly for so many years. Why, oh, why, had she not realized before this how much she loved and needed Melanie?' (*Gone* 994). Rushing home to Rhett, Scarlett pronounces her newfound love to her husband and is famously rebuffed: "'My dear, I don't give a damn'" (*Gone* 1010). The death of Melanie utilises the sentimental device in which the weak beloved dies so that the flawed protagonist can grow, taking the pure spirit of the beloved with her.¹² Melanie, too pure, cannot survive in the new South, and so must die,

¹² The death of an angelic, childlike figure is a trope of nineteenth century American and British sentimental literature. Literary precursors to Melanie's death include Little Nell's death in Charles Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840), Little Eva's death in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Beth's death in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868). The trope enacts a political and religious philosophy in which the 'the pure and powerless die to save the powerful and corrupt, and thereby show themselves more powerful than those they save' (Thompkins 127). Mitchell updates this trope for her twentieth century novel by making her angel a

having been preserved in the memory of Scarlett, who is the one more able to move forward. As Mammy says of Scarlett, 'Whut dat chile got ter stan', de good Lawd give her strent ter stan' (*Gone* 59). This sentimental trope not only separates Scarlett from Melanie but clears her romantic and (romanticised) ties with each figure of the old South. Ashley, Rhett, and the family and friends that Melanie protected Scarlett from are gone but, for the first time, Melanie gives Scarlett herself. In this complex novel that exalts Melanie's perfection and punishes Scarlett's assertiveness, the novel reserves its greatest criticism for men and male power. Melanie, the glorified past, is sacrificed because her sacrifice is essential to Scarlett's survival. By portraying a society which loves the lady more than the women who embody her archetype, it gives the protagonist what a woman could not have: freedom.

In the final moments of *Gone with the Wind*, there are Black people all around Scarlett, just as there always has been, but the novel focuses on the sentimental power of white female friendship and the thrilling disappointments of white love, as it does throughout. As we know, it is Mammy to whom Scarlett vows to return after Rhett's rejection, 'Mammy, the last link with the old days' (*Gone* 1011). Just as significantly, it is Prissy who has been 'left at the hotel' with two of Scarlett's children so that she could attend Melanie's bedside. *Gone with the Wind* rests its protagonist's emotional and physical journey on the institution of the mammy and other women slaves (Williams 203). As Anne Goodwyn Jones describes, 'it is the very institution of the southern mammy that has made possible the mobility and agency of the new life Scarlett lives' (31). The novel has designated the roles; Prissy's is to mind the children and Mammy's is to mind the house, while Scarlett's and Melanie's to enact the rewarding labours of female friendship and love. The latter cannot exist, on a structural or character level, without the former.

Gone with the Wind demonstrates, from its first page to its last, the way in which white interiority and self-development is not only prioritised over Black labour, physical and affective, but that it relies upon it. Scarlett cannot be a rebel, Melanie cannot be a lady, masters cannot be white except in contradistinction to the enslavement and denigration of Mammy, Prissy and other Black enslaved people. Most significantly, Scarlett and Melanie

grown woman but largely conforms as Melanie's death enacts the sentimental vision of power in which it is feeling and suffering that produces change.

cannot co-become without the forced help of Black women and, Black women, having been excluded from meaningful textual development, cannot co-become at all. *Gone with the Wind's* ambivalent depiction is both product and producer, an artefact of American that damningly depicts the heritage of white women's friendship.

This chapter is a transition point between the two major political concerns which differently and unequally impacted American women, as represented in literature, in the twentieth century: the impact of heterosexist domestic ideology and the insidiousness of racism. Therefore, this thesis moves from *Gone with the Wind's* racist but captivating engagement with Black and white women's connections, into a discussion of Nella Larsen's *Passing*, a 1929 short novel which depicts the vicious effect that racism, and domestic ideals, has on Black women's friendships with each other.

Chapter Four:

The other/self and the call to return in Nella Larsen's *Passing*

It is now ironically unoriginal, although once it was not, to begin or conclude a piece of writing on Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) by noting that the author was accused in 1930 of passing another writer's story off as her own. The effects of the accusation were immense in Larsen's literary life as she experienced a kind of professional death, retreating from public life and never publishing again. This is a tantalising mirroring of Clare Kendry, one of the protagonists in *Passing*, who plunges—perhaps due to murder, perhaps suicide—to her death at a society soiree after she appears to begin to emulate her friend, Irene Redfield. Just as Larsen was accused of imitating the writing of another, her second and final novel depicts a complex friendship in which one friend stands as gatekeeper over categories of being upon which another woman appears to encroach through imitation, before paying for this indiscretion with her life. Female friendship in *Passing* is a contested site, both desired and horror-filled, a relationship in which the other and her desires can neither be known nor withstood. To pass has many meanings, related to mortality and to race but this chapter is especially focussed, as Larsen's last novel also is, on what it means for women to pass through each other's lives.

Passing begins with Irene, a model Black American woman, a person who, the reader comes to learn, prioritises security above all else. 'Security' here means social security, which for Irene, as a Black woman living in 1920s New York, involves racial and sexual respectability. Into her life returns Clare, her childhood friend, a woman who has Black heritage and who now 'passes' for white. Clare's re-entry into Irene's life prompts feelings of vulnerability in Irene, as Clare destabilises the categories of self/other (Black/white, straight/lesbian, safety/freedom) upon which Irene has based her own identity and her understanding of the world around her. Irene encounters Clare as both alluring and dangerous, and is irritated at her own lack of control over both herself and Clare. As the novel progresses, Clare seems to move ever closer to Irene, with the text using haunting imagery to convey the threat Irene feels, and her sense that Clare is going to take over her life. Rather than identifying with Irene,

Clare appears to be emulating her, threatening Irene's sense of American oneness, demonstrating her to be imitable and therefore non-unique. However, Irene is unreliable and, in reality, poses the true threat to Clare. At the end of the novel, Irene seems to orchestrate Clare's fatal fall from a window.

Irene—and most likely also Clare—encounter a simultaneously desired and destabilising return of the repressed matrixial. While many have argued that Irene and Clare's magnetic pull toward each other is sexual, I read it as matrixial, a psychic re-return of the originary psychic experience of togetherness. In *Passing*, the matrixial is bound to Blackness, as past/passed co-becoming through the role race plays in growth returns into both women's adult lives. For Clare, a return means a desired re-engagement with Blackness and for Irene the idea of the repression and return of history and race is destabilising of, and threatening to, the identity categories upon which she has built herself. In different ways, each friend's Black femaleness is so impactful—the value of their lives precarious because of who they are—that matrixial psychic return is experienced, for Irene, in the negative. Irene is paranoid because she is frightened of losing bourgeois protection as an educated and middle-class Black woman in 1920s America. As this thesis has argued in relation to *The Haunting of Hill House*, one friend embraces future, and possibly unending, co-becoming while the other resists it. *Passing* uses free indirect discourse to a greater degree than *The Haunting of Hill House* (or *The Awakening*) keeping the reader close to its protagonist and enhancing the novel's suffocating effect. *Passing* differs from *The Haunting of Hill House* in that it focalises its narration through the resistant party, portraying a woman being pressed in upon, one who sustains her ego by insisting, despite her own desires, that it is her life—and not that of her more glamorous friend—that is the one worth protecting and sustaining. Through the character of Irene, *Passing* explores the way in which friendship cannot escape the anxious limitations of the self. Close reading of the novel offers a particular answer to this thesis' central question—what is female friendship to women in literature?—by examining a friendship in which the friends are forcibly separated by one of the female friend's (that is, Irene's) inability to see a world beyond the masculinist, racist one she inhabits. As is the case for each of the other novels studied in this thesis, *Passing* considers the connection between

women to be a site of possibility but, uniquely, this novel has its protagonist foreclose her own freedom and, potentially, violently end the life of her friend.

Friendship, for Irene, destabilises coherent identity and ultimately must be destroyed. This chapter argues that Clare destabilises Irene's attempt to stabilise her life according to a domestic, bourgeois idyll. In so doing, Clare effectively returns Irene to (a symbolic) matrixial origin. In the end, Irene produces the instability she most fears when she seems to push Clare to her death. Rather than ridding herself of the other, however, this decisive action instead symbolically fuses the two women together. While Irene has again become one, it is through the death of the other, and in a way that ensures Clare's everlasting continuity through Irene herself. What Irene has most feared—a merging with Clare—has symbolically come to pass.

Matrixial theory presents a new way of understanding *Passing's* negotiation of wanting and loathing. *Passing* remains an immensely important text written by one of the most significant writers of the Harlem Renaissance. This chapter's argument draws on—and differentiates itself from—previous work on *Passing*, which tends to see Irene and Clare's relationship as either erotic or based on racially antagonistic identification, or sometimes both, by arguing that Irene and Clare's connection derives from the return of the pre-Oedipal matrixial space. As this is the origin of the connection, it remains its basis, meaning that subsequent layers developed in adulthood (sexual, identification) co-exist within their relationship. Irene and Clare's connection is usually understood as something other than friendship because the novel constructs a connection between women that troubles each of the categories it passes through: friendship, lesbianism, and Black sisterhood. *Passing* is famously difficult to pin down but it is clear in its depiction of the damage the white-defended boundaries of race (and racism) do to Black women and the way they encounter their world and each other. Although the tension between erotic yearning and racial identification generates anxiety (in Irene especially), the tension also produces desire and repulsion; a heady mix of matrixial closeness and distance that is both the foundation of their friendship and its downfall.

This new reading of *Passing*, drawing on the matrixial, begins by exploring critical examinations of the novel which pay particular attention to the text's unknowability, its latent lesbianism and its engagement with race. Next, Clare's matrixial, racial call to Irene is

discussed, as I argue that the two women psychically know each other because neither belong. The middle two sections explore Irene's militant drive for bourgeois security and Clare's destabilisation of Irene's life and self to demonstrate the cost of friendship, and Irene's ambivalence about paying that price. Finally, by violently acting against Clare to finally separate herself from her own wants and fears, Irene fulfils her greatest desire and terror by symbolically psychically merging with Clare and losing her own essential sense of oneness.

A reading into any part of *Passing*, especially friendship, immediately encounters the text's notorious obliqueness. On the surface the novel appears simply constructed; it is a short novel containing four sections of roughly equal length and features a small set of characters. In terms of both plot and structure, it is relatively simple and straightforward. Yet, as Gabrielle McIntire observes, '...Larsen offers a book that seems to "pass" for a readable document and yet ceaselessly withholds resolution on multiple levels at once' (779). Larsen destabilises both form (novel and narrative) and content (the matter of raced and sexual identity) while appearing to trouble neither. Through Irene, an unreliable, unravelling and sometimes illogical protagonist, to whom the narrator is attached but not limited by, *Passing* thwarts attempts to understand what the text is 'really' about. Further, the cryptic, dream-like conclusion and the structure of the text—with its meetings and returns, its vague timelines—destabilise readers' sense of fact and fiction. This is reflected in the novel's creation of friendship, which absorbs and contributes to *Passing*'s moody and uncertain affect. Unknowability is inherent in *Passing*, as the text evades easy answers and conjures intrigue and frustration.

Passing's lack of certainty generates a variety of interpretations as scholars take a position on the novel's engagement with psychological, sexual and political issues. While '*Passing* can be read to produce very particular (often hierarchized) answers about the relative importance of its homoerotic, racial, and psychological concerns' (McIntire 778), and dogmatic readings might occur, interpretations of *Passing* are valuable for their variance and specificity. Even seemingly unlikely analyses are usefully able to discover the novel's multiple layers of potential meaning. The novel has been examined in relation to space theory (Gillespie), sexual masochism (Basu) and it has been convincingly argued that the novel is a reworking of Edith Wharton's *Twilight Sleep* (Orlando) or F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (Moynihan).

While some interpretations seem more successful than others, *Passing* permits them all. The wide variety of critical approaches to *Passing* makes the lack of critical attention paid to female friendship in the novel surprising, an exemption that is even more unexpected considering that each meaning passes within an 'outer' story of two women friends. Racial passing is what facilitates Irene and Clare's friendship, yet the women's differing modes of embodiment of their race creates tension and judgement, especially from Irene.

As *Passing* portrays Irene and Clare's connection, it depicts the problems and promises of race that both unite and separate them. One of the themes of the novel to which the title refers is the act of passing, which can refer to any assumption of the identity of 'another gender, race or class of person' but most commonly means a black person's successful attempt to present themselves as white (Gillespie 280; Toth 57): This was a practice which caused cultural anxiety among white people at the time of Larsen's writing (Gillespie 280). The term itself 'is believed to be derived from the written pass given to slaves so that they might travel without being taken for runaways' (Moynihan 5). Irene and Clare are shaped according to the racist climate of 1920s America and this, in turn, impacts their relationship with each other. The effect is amplified by their conflicting ways of coping with the racist atmosphere which pervades the novel. Racism is intrinsic to the women's relationships and to their own selves: 'these once intimate childhood friends are simultaneously separated and tethered together, so to speak, by the divergent strategies they have adopted as adults to cope with their racial identities and their options to "pass" racially' (Blackmer 52). *Passing* follows and subverts a tradition of narratives in which a biracial person experiences deep sorrow due to their inability to fit within Black or white worlds although several have noted that understandings of *Passing* as a 'tragic mulatto' novel are generally considered to be inadequate (Tate 597) or incorrect (Blackmer 52) and that instead of emphasising the 'pathos' of passing, 'Larsen stresses its attractive veneer' along with the 'high cost of rebellion' (Wall 124; 131).

Set against the segregated, racist backdrop of early twentieth century New York and Chicago, Clare's racial passing is connected in the text to class, sexuality and by extension, morality. *Passing*, while refusing to condemn its protagonists' transgression, depicts the act as one that makes its participants vulnerable to the intrusion of others. Neither Clare, who passes with confidence, nor Irene, who passes when convenient, experience much shame over their

practice. Rather than demonstrating the inferiority of a Black character passing for white, the novel depicts the simple-mindedness of white people who insist on racial categories and segregation but cannot tell when such categories have been crossed. Clare's trouble comes only when trying to pass back to her so-called true race and, the novel suggests, she may have succeeded if not for Irene's paranoia and violence.

The tragedy in *Passing* is the arbitrariness of the restrictions placed on Black women, and that 'the worlds these characters inhabit offer them no possibility of autonomy or fulfillment' (Wall 131). The boundaries of race are not only dictated by people but are policed irrationally and cruelly. *Passing* further highlights race as a policed sphere when it makes Irene the cause of Clare's downfall and the gatekeeper of racial boundaries in the novel. For Clare, whiteness is not only a racial category but a status marker, a zone of privilege and a pleasingly risky trick. When Clare crosses racial lines she is also able to cross class lines, and attains access to an economic and social category from which she would have otherwise been barred (Basu 384). Irene's attraction to Clare is an 'aesthetic attraction to whiteness' and all that whiteness can provide (Davis qtd. in Sullivan 374). Irene appears to desire Clare's economic and racial whiteness, but this desire is complicated by Irene's own racial pride. Irene is emblematic of the Black elite who represent the 'best' of Black culture and intellect and are fiercely protective of their status. W. E. B. Du Bois, among other contemporary critics of Larsen, viewed Irene as superior to Clare for having remained allegiant to her race, seemingly ignoring or missing the ambiguity Larsen insists on in relation to Irene's goodness (qtd. in Gillespie 283). Larsen uses Irene's exceptionalism and the way she covets Clare's privilege to examine a Black bourgeois idealisation of whiteness and its adherence to white standards. Irene's resentment of Clare's privilege, and her inability for self-reflection, mean that Clare's racial transgression is bound with a moral transgression and a thematic convergence is established between 'erotic or domestic indiscretion and racial disloyalty' (Jenkins 133). Irene, as a representative of the Black bourgeois, cannot tolerate Clare's exceptionalism and seems to destroy her for it (Jenkins 150). Therefore, 'though their relationship is complicated by issues of gender and sexuality, the dynamics of white racism and the demands of assimilation dictate the lives of the two women' (Sullivan 374). However, in *Passing* race and sexuality cannot be fully separated. In Irene and Clare's lives, identity and desire are intermeshed. Race and desire, and

the tension between the two, draw Irene and Clare together while complicating their connection.

While this chapter reads Irene and Clare's connection through a matrixial lens, there is a long and important tradition of lesbian interpretations of *Passing*. In Deborah McDowell's landmark introduction to the 1986 edition of *Passing* and Nella Larsen's first novel *Quicksand*, McDowell influentially argues that latent homosexuality defines Clare and Irene's relationship (ix–xxxv). A significant body of criticism followed McDowell's essay where scholars have taken up, expanded and challenged her interpretation. While engagement with *Passing*'s lesbian undertones may have been in part a result of prevailing 'interest of the...time' of the text's rediscovery (Blackmer 54), multiple interpretive possibilities are a function of *Passing* itself. For example, rather than understanding Irene's possible murder of Clare as her repression of the destabilising raced figure, Irene may kill Clare because she cannot or will not escape the confines of heterosexuality and the safety, however imperfect, of middle-class marriage. For some, this means that issues of sexuality are 'passed' as those of race (Blackmer 54) or that race is a 'peripheral' issue in the text (Tate 143). Irene's husband Brian's own sexuality is also questioned as Corrine E. Blackmer argues that *Passing* is saturated by homosexuality as Irene potentially projects her own attraction to Clare onto Brian (52). Barbara Johnson argues that *Passing* has the potential for eroticism because it portrays Clare and Irene creating a structure of desire that addresses lesbian libidinal investment: significant looking between the two women, and repeated involuntary return to togetherness ('Lesbian Spectacles' 141). Despite the supposed unknowability of *Passing*, Johnson offers a valuable example of how the novel can be interpreted (or even, from another perspective, 'misinterpreted') convincingly (Johnson 141). For the purposes of this thesis, with its focus of friendship which is itself tangled with desire but separate to (although compatible with) lesbianism, I draw on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition of desire as 'the affective or social force...that shapes an important relationship' to incorporate the possibility of lesbian desire between Irene and Clare without foreclosing other readings (*Between Men* 2). That is, by viewing desire as a force rather than a category, this chapter seeks to read *Passing* for friendship, and to explore the ways in which desire and the matrixial intersect, excluding neither.

Irene and Clare's friendship is so entangled with the racial and sexual concerns of both women, and the ways they negotiate their identities, that the text becomes enigmatic. Barbara Smith notes that sex and race are 'crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers', including Nella Larsen (qtd. in Sullivan 373). Just as *Passing's* racial narrative is not a pretext for other issues (Sullivan) or something to by-pass on the way to uncovering '*Passing's* "double burial"' (Carr 288), nor can the sexual atmosphere of Clare and Irene's connection be overlooked to make Clare and Irene fit a friendship mould. Having acknowledged that, we know that multiple readings, and even, as some suggest, misreadings, are facilitated by *Passing's* complexity. There are two (in)distinct friends, two (in)distinct races and two (in)distinct moral codes. There are a multitude of desires. Such indistinction troubles the text to the extent that it becomes unknowable:

...*Passing* takes us to the largely inarticulable limits of both race and desire—how they mean, and how they function together—by performatively embedding confusions about the legibilities of race and desire within a commensurately riddled narration where none of its plot-lines or dominant preoccupations (with the ethics and allures of passing, with anxieties about an extramarital affair, or with the lesbian-erotic subtext) submit to a definitive reading. (McIntire 778)

While a part of *Passing* is unknowable, obliqueness is not a barrier to understanding Clare and Irene's friendship but the key to it. For some, both a lack of separation and a desire for distinction are parts of friendship. This is particularly true for Clare and Irene, who blur together and grate against each other, engaging with race and desire. As this thesis argues, proximity and distance and desire in the space between, is a distinctly matrixial dynamic. Clare and Irene engage in the space between, blurred and yet separate, one and yet unknown to each other and to us.

Clare's laughing bell and the call to Irene

Passing charts the re-emergence of the matrixial, the return of previous co-becoming, in Irene's life which is prompted by the return of Clare after 12 years apart. In the section that follows, I argue that Irene is invited to return to the past when she and Clare were co-becoming (in childhood) through an experience of proximity in distance. Irene is placed in a situation in which she and a strange woman are, for a reason she cannot decipher, known to

each other. This is because they are two Black women in a white space but, I argue, this connection, though explored explicitly in terms of Black identity and community, is not about race only; the return of Blackness is entwined with a return of the matrixial. This is an experience tinged with fear but ripe with potential. This section concludes by demonstrating how, as she begins to hear Clare's laughing call to Irene, Irene begins to compare her previously cherished life to the one Clare exemplifies and, despite her own egotism, makes awkward attempts at emulation of Clare herself.

Passing, and Irene and Clare's (re)entanglement, begins with a letter, an invitation which psychically draws Irene into the matrixial past. Irene receives a strangely 'furtive' yet 'flaunting' envelope that she recognises immediately, one sent by an old friend whom she remembers as 'stepping always on the edge of danger' (*Passing* 4):

It was the last letter in Irene Redfield's little pile of morning mail. After her other ordinary and clearly directed letters the long envelope of thin Italian paper with its almost illegible scrawl seemed out of place and alien. And there was, too, something mysterious and slightly furtive about it...Furtive, but yet in some peculiar, determined way a little flaunting. Purple ink. Foreign paper of an extraordinary size. (*Passing* 3)

Irene experiences a mingling of 'humiliation, resentment, and rage' (*Passing* 8) reading the 'sheets upon thin sheets' of 'an extravagantly phrased wish to see [Irene] again' (*Passing* 7). The narrator describes how Irene is plunged back into memories of Clare in a 'swift moment', as she remembers the trauma of Clare's father's death and how she and Clare met for the first time as adults, beginning the story of their friendship and the novel. While Irene and Clare first connect through identification, that *Passing* begins with an invitation—literally the first step to an event—demonstrates early the role Clare will come to play in Irene's life; someone who demands presence and action, someone who draws Irene to herself, someone who is both desired and repulsive. Clare is someone who turns Irene's safe, fantasy-driven world into something real and dangerous. This letter marks the beginning of *Passing*, and Irene's troubled relationship with Clare.

For Irene, the letter conjures the memory of being dangerously, and uncomfortably, aligned with Clare in a white-only space. It returns Irene's mind to six months earlier and her shock meeting with Clare as an adult when both women are dangerously passing. When the two

women meet for the first time since childhood on the rooftop of the Drayton Hotel in Chicago, they identify with one another, enacting a traditional process of friendship (as described in Abel 415). Irene is racially passing in order to gain access to the white-only hotel to escape the 'brutal, staring' August sun when she finds herself being stared at again, this time by another woman (*Passing* 9). She becomes anxious under the stranger's unrelenting gaze, checking her hat, her face, her dress for flaws. Then she experiences 'a small inner disturbance, odious and hatefully familiar': 'Did that woman, could that woman, somehow know that here before her very eyes on the roof of the Drayton sat a Negro?' (*Passing* 16). While experiencing being known while displaced, Irene also experiences displaced knowing. Irene does not yet know this woman is Clare, but she recognises her nonetheless:

For about the woman was some quality, an intangible something, too vague to define, too remote to seize, but which was, to Irene Redfield, very familiar. And that voice. (*Passing* 19)

Irene is cautious because she encounters this woman at a moment when she is displaced from where she supposedly ought to be. The intimacy of being looked at, of being known through being seen, is experienced as perilous. Irene is being re-embodied as Black, a serious danger in the white-only space but also a personal humiliation at being caught passing as anything but Black. As Lauren Berlant argues, when the two women meet 'the gaze of one woman virtually embodies the other, calling her back from her absence-to-her-body, an absence politically inscribed by the legal necessity to be nonblack while drinking iced tea at the Drayton Hotel in Chicago in 1927' (*Female Complaint* 107). The threatening and mysterious woman approaches and insists to an oblivious Irene that they know each other, using Irene's childhood moniker, "Rene". It is not until the woman laughs that Irene can identify her as Clare:

The woman laughed, a lovely laugh, a small sequence of notes that was like a trill and also like the ringing of a delicate bell fashioned of a precious metal, a tinkling. Irene drew a quick sharp breath. "Clare!" she exclaimed, "not really Clare Kendry?" (*Passing* 19)

A bell, Clare's laugh, identifies Clare to Irene, initiating Irene into a web of identification, based on shared racial displacement on the roof of the Drayton and the memories of a childhood

spent together. She had been there when Clare's father 'had been brought home dead, killed in a silly saloon-fight' (*Passing* 5) and recalls the vicious rumours that swirled about Clare after she left the neighbourhood, 'glamorous' rumours of 'driving in Lincoln Park with a man, unmistakably white, and evidently rich' (*Passing* 21). Irene recalls their childhood in the Black neighbourhood of Harlem, New York. The two women have already co-become as Irene has witnessed parts of Clare's life and knows the kinds of things that only a childhood friend can know.

Together, the two separate women become a pair, friends in unfriendly space, reluctantly for Irene and enthusiastically for Clare. The space between Clare and Irene becomes a 'borderspace shared with an intimate stranger' (Ettinger 70). Irene is both fascinated and extremely wary, avoiding Clare's immediate insistence on another meeting before Irene leaves Chicago to return to her home in New York. Yet, despite her rebuff of further connection with Clare, she experiences herself as inexplicably bound. This unexplained, ambivalent attachment is produced by desire, but not entirely. While desire is evident between Clare and Irene, the intimacy between them, however defined, is made stronger because they identify together while being in a physical space in which they are both displaced and at risk. Their reconnection is the result of double identification, identification of shared racial difference and of shared childhoods. Self and other are distinguished by commonality and history within a space ignorant of their shared identifications, one which would turn hostile should the 'truth' be made known. Their Blackness exists within an unfriendly space and this commonality heightens Irene and Clare's connection to each other but also the sense of risk each threatens, to each other, themselves and the society around them.

Irene resists being recognised by Clare; she is both thrilled and frightened by the feeling of being known by her childhood friend. Clare summons Irene back to childhood, in part, but she also summons Irene back to Blackness. This is their 'true' racial identity which both have precariously shed in order to be on the roof of the Drayton, temporarily escaping the heat of the summer sun but also the 'heat' of being Black in a white supremacist society. When Irene recognises her old friend, Clare's tinkling, outward-projected, joyful noise is contrasted with Irene's sharp intake of breath, the opposite of a laugh. Irene, trying perhaps to regain the upper hand after being unexpectedly identified and identified with, begins to stand only to be

‘commanded’ by Clare to sit back down (*Passing* 19). So, while identifying together, Irene does not sit with this experience easily. She is always slightly resistant to oneness with Clare while at the same time feeling its pull because, although allegiant to her race, she sees herself as an individual.

Irene positions Clare as the object to protect her own subjecthood, she is lured by Clare but resistant to the power Clare begins to have over her. Clare’s laugh, and by extension Clare herself, represents her summoning of Irene. Bells are ripe with symbolism: church bells ring as a call to service, in celebration of a wedding or as a mournful funeral peal. Bells summon and can evoke both joy and grief. They are also a marker of place and their sound can bring the subject back in time. Bells are markers of ‘spacio-temporal boundaries’, with the sound of lost bells creating a sense of nostalgia. This bridges between the lost and the now in literature, especially at times of great change (Boutin 267). Irene’s reaction to Clare’s bells is wary and intrigued. ‘Clare’, she says, marking her as a known friend but also as other and, significantly, as not quite exact. ‘*Not really* Clare Kendry?’ she then asks (emphasis mine, *Passing* 19). Irene asks a question, one arising from the unlikelihood of meeting, but her question disguises a statement. ‘Not really Clare Kendry’, Clare is already the object to Irene’s subject, already an other created by the self, to create and define the self. Having co-become, the two women are always entangled. Irene’s question-statement prefigures the central tension of *Passing*; Clare is always Irene’s Clare, indistinguishable from how Irene understands her, enabling her to contain Clare while intrinsically linking Irene to herself.

Alongside the matrixial pull, desire and identification are the dual forces which, despite her friend’s best efforts to resist her, draw Irene to Clare. While Irene and Clare connect in part through an identification of shared (raced) history, their identification with each other produces a connection that is ‘constantly figured’, open to change and always in flux (Butler 105). This becomes important when considering the role desire plays in triangulating Clare and Irene. The tension between desire and identification, and the blurriness between these two structures of connection, is one particularly pertinent to women’s relationships. Scott Paulin helpfully notes the movement possible between multiple kinds of desire:

Perhaps identification and desire are "not to be confused" in that they cannot occupy the same moment in time, but surely an oscillation between the terms is possible, just as a film spectator can be encouraged to oscillate between identification and desire for a character, regardless of gender. (*Passing* 58)

In particular, the text explores the space between what Irene desires and what she identifies with desiring. For example, at one stage in the novel Irene makes a plan that if she sees Clare again, '[Irene] had only to turn away her eyes, refuse [Clare] recognition' (*Passing* 68). The irony in this scheme is clear; Irene is always already seeing Clare. Planning around another's potential presence is not an individualist existence. Much scholarship has explored *Passing* in relation to lesbian desire but also racial and class desire—for connection, uplift, the other—each interpretation not quite accounting for the slippage between desires and the possibility of shifting, sometimes coexisting, often conflicting, allegiances and wants. Through Irene, *Passing* depicts these tensions as the psychic difficulty which occurs when desire, identification and the drive for independence are sparked.

As she permanently passes, Clare has what Irene must disavow in order not to want: the privileges of whiteness. Clare's desire to 'return' to Blackness confuses Irene as in her mind, and in terms of the racist social hierarchy of the time and place of *Passing*, Irene's status as a respected part of the upper echelons of the Black community still makes her lesser than Clare. Although both are able to pass, Clare and Irene have been given different opportunities and used these possibilities in different ways. Irene, after growing up in Harlem with stable parents who display concern for Clare, marries and seeks to maintain stability at all costs. She is both curious about and judgmental of Clare, whose circumstances have sharply differed: after her alcoholic father dies, Clare goes to live with her white aunts who treat her, because of her 'Negro blood', as a cursed daughter of Ham who needed 'hard work' (*Passing* 33). Clare's singlemindedness, beauty and charm mean she marries the wealthy and white John Bellew, with her white aunts' existence, alongside Clare's pale skin, testifying to Clare's 'purity'. While permanent passing places Clare in a privileged position, it also isolates her and the novel charts her desire to return to the Black community, away from people who can't 'forgive the tar-brush' (*Passing* 34). Irene has structured her life in the way that she believed would afford her stability, and Clare's surprising trajectory makes Irene question her own position, testing her connection to her Blackness.

Despite herself, Irene desires to embody Clare's lack of public body, her ability to be unraced (according to white supremacist ideology) by passing for white. Irene and Clare each embody a different, classed femininity; Irene is sedate and tasteful, Clare flaunting, exotic and privileged. Each are modes of negotiation, ways of deflecting from the 'racializing scrutiny of white culture' (Berlant, *Female Complaint* 109). According to Berlant, the tension between Irene and Clare is based on desire for the space occupied by the body of the other. For Clare, 'it is a relief to leave the specular erotics of the white female body under the gaze of a similarly racialized friend', but for Irene, being seen by Clare, interpolated by her, is the opposite of what is desired: 'the embodiment resulting from their encounter thwarts [Irene's] desire—which is not to pass as a white person, but to move unconsciously and unobstructed through the public sphere' (Berlant, *Female Complaint* 109). Irene diffuses her own potential judgement of herself into judgement of Clare, deciding that the more 'successful' woman is acting: 'It roused again that old suspicion that Clare was acting, not consciously, perhaps—that is, not too consciously—but, none the less, acting' (*Passing* 75). On the rooftop on the Drayton and more widely, both women are acting: they are adopting the roles of either white identity or the right kind of Blackness, and are presenting as women, as American, and as heterosexual. Only Clare, however, acknowledges that much of life is a performance while Irene identifies it in others and denies it in herself. Authenticity and conformity are complementary in Irene's schematisation, which is difficult to reconcile when Clare appears to successfully traverse public life closely adhering to neither.

Later, when Irene and Clare 'reencounter' each other at Clare's insistence, laughter returns but rather than identification, it indicates awkward emulation. Irene's return to Clare is again prompted by a sound which follows the original letter which Irene has refused to answer, the unrelenting telephone, which Irene attempts to ignore but is eventually overcome by: 'The telephone. For hours it had rung like something possessed. Since nine o'clock she had been hearing its insistent jangle' (*Passing* 42). Despite Irene's attempts to escape meeting Clare, just as she has attempted to avoid the telephone, Irene is eventually cajoled into afternoon tea at Clare's lavish apartment with Clare and another old school friend and Black woman, Gertrude, who is married to a white man aware of her race. Just as Irene makes to leave, Clare's (white) husband John Bellew comes home and refers to his wife affectionately as 'Nig'.

Seeing Gertrude and Irene's shocked faces, he explains, "'When we were first married, she was white as—as—well as white as a lily. But I declare she's getting' darker and darker. I tell her if she don't look out, she'll wake up one of these days and find she's turned into a n----r'" (*Passing* 55). The group begins to laugh, reacting to Bellew's 'joke' in slightly different ways:

He roared with laughter. Clare's ringing bell-like laugh joined his. Gertrude after another uneasy shift in her seat added her shrill one. Irene, who had been sitting with lips tightly compressed, cried out: "That's good!" and gave way to gales of laughter. She laughed and laughed and laughed. Tears ran down her cheeks. Her sides ached. Her throat hurt. (*Passing* 55)

In part Irene laughs at the irony of Bellew's situation. He jokes about his wife's Blackness under the assumption that he speaks to and of his fellow white people. Unlike Clare and Gertrude, whose polite laughter acknowledges and acquiesces to Bellew's power, Irene's over-reaction undercuts the humour of his utterance and makes her performance the more notable one. However, Irene does not begin to laugh until Clare does. Her reaction is prompted, in part, by the return of Clare's bell. Laughter involves the performance of recognition. First, the recognition of the funny thing and second, the recognition of the fellow laughers. Clare's 'ringing bell-like laugh' again summons Irene's identification, returning the two to each other. Uncanniness, recognition, a matrixial summons, calling back; whatever we name it, for Irene it hurts. While she 'laughed and laughed and laughed' she has tears, aching sides, a sore throat. Laughing and in pain, Irene is hysterical, out of control, the boundaries blurred. Just as when Clare 'commands' Irene to sit at the Drayton, her 'ringing bell-like' laugh commands Irene's laugh. And again, both Clare and Irene (and Gertrude as well this time) are acting, pretending Bellew has just said an entertaining, and not terrifying, thing. Attempting to emulate Clare's ease in the situation, her occupation of whiteness, Irene cannot do it correctly. Clare's laughter commands Irene to join her, returning the two to each other even as it pains Irene to do so.

Irene fails to obey Clare's command appropriately and her excess points to the uneasy imitation which makes up part of Irene and Clare's connection, which foreshadows Clare's threatening emulation of Irene. In this scene, Irene demonstrates the link between identification and emulation. Her process seems to be as follows; Clare (and Gertrude) is like me and is laughing, I will laugh too. Clare, following Bellew, is followed by Gertrude and then

Irene. What is significant is not necessarily that a group of friends is laughing in this scene, although it does demonstrate the identification to emulation process, but rather that Irene's excessive laughter shows the scene for what it is: a performance. Just as in Judith Butler's early work, which highlighted that the heightened performance of gender norms demonstrates that gender is itself a performance, Irene's excessive mimicry of Clare's laugh, that which first identified Clare, identifies not only the scene as performance but Irene and Clare as performers themselves. Sianne Ngai, drawing on Freud's theories of identification, writes that to embody femininity is to be an '*unusually exemplary* example—an entity inducing imitation in others while at the same time appearing "after the fashion" of a previously established model' (Ngai 149). In this scene Clare is an exemplary example, inducing imitation in Gertrude and Irene while following a previously established model, embodied by the bullying, patriarchal, white Bellew. Irene has difficulty shifting from the idealised world in herself to the 'real' world, preferring to withdraw or avoid if possible. She later says to Brian that she will not see Clare or Bellew again. Yet when she cannot withdraw in the moment she is confronted with the other, she chooses emulation. The thing she will later fear in Clare, she has already in herself.

Irene's American oneness

For Irene, the conflict between the strength of Clare's call and the maintenance of Irene's manicured life is thrilling and troubling. The nature of these boundaries, and the impact of others on them, is discussed in the following section. Irene defines herself according to a particular category of bourgeois Blackness, and she defends this identity in the name of security. In Irene's mind, it is Clare, rather than her idealised America, who threatens Irene's dull but safe idyll.

Irene Redfield is a married Black American woman and the maintenance of these markers of her identity is of utmost concern. When *Passing* begins, Irene is married to Brian Redfield, a successful Black doctor, and they share two boys. The narrator, focalised through but distant from Irene, describes Brian as calm and clever but patronising, a personality which contrasts sharply with the often flurried and upset Irene. He is described as 'noiseless', 'supercilious' and often looks down on Irene with an 'amused smile' (*Passing* 76). A society doctor, Brian

brings prestige and security to Irene and their children's lives. However, Irene and Brian constantly bicker, arguing over Irene's tardiness or whether the children should be sheltered (Irene) or told the facts of life as Black children in America (Brian). Brian's antagonism and their differences of opinion are easily managed by Irene, however, and the two get on. However, Brian has a desire which does not fit within Irene's image of her life, something which she seeks constantly to repress in him. Brian loathes being a doctor, is prone to outbursts of dissatisfaction: "'Lord! how I hate sick people, and their stupid, meddling families, and the smelly, dirty rooms, and climbing filthy steps in dark hallways'" (*Passing* 83). He has a solution to his dissatisfaction: a move to Brazil. Brian's desire is a constant source of tension in their relationship, between Brian's extreme dislike of monotony, the threat of his throwing 'everything aside and [rushing] off to that remote place of his heart's desire' and her determination to keep him in place (*Passing* 90). Irene is resistant to any threat to her Black bourgeois identity.

For Irene, her family's place in the Black community is of the utmost importance and, although she occasionally passes when convenient, Irene is committed to, and defines herself by, her race. As a woman committed to 'uplift ideology', a mode of gaining rights and freedom through respectability, she works for the 'Negro Welfare League', organising fundraising events and she mixes with a distinguished group of Black friends, attending bridge parties, cocktail receptions, benefit dances (Gaines 16). However, she experiences her commitment to 'uplifting the brother' (*Passing* 89) ambivalently, especially when what she desires brings her into conflict with supporting her race: 'She was caught between two allegiances, different, yet the same. Herself. Her race. Race! The thing that bound and suffocated her' (*Passing* 152). Further, she finds that the conflict between race and herself (and later, race, herself and Clare), ensures that she can never 'win', 'whatever steps she took, or if she took none at all, something would be crushed' (*Passing* 153). It is Clare who presents the greatest challenge to Irene's allegiances, shaking her confidence in her own identity and what she wants:

Sitting alone in the quiet living-room in the pleasant firelight, Irene Redfield wished, for the first time in her life, that she had not been born a Negro. For the first time she suffered and rebelled because she was unable to disregard the burden of race. It was, she cried silently, enough to suffer as a woman, an individual, on one's own account, without having to suffer for the race as

well. It was a brutality, and undeserved. Surely, no other people so cursed as Ham's dark children. (*Passing* 152)

Just as she identifies, increasingly ambivalently, as a Black woman, Irene is a Black American and is accepting of a particular kind of ideological citizenship that accompanies such identification. Brian chafes against Irene's rigid and uncompromising commitment to the bourgeois family, and the role of men and women in it. Irene's commitment to the security that she sees is offered by the bourgeois family, and is indeed indistinguishable from it, means that she will subdue Brian's dreams at all costs, certain that she is doing the best for both him, their children and herself (although she denies this last point):

It was only that she wanted him to be happy, resenting, however, his inability to be so with things as they were, and never acknowledging that though she did want him to be happy, it was only in her own way and by some plan of hers that she truly desired him to be so. Nor did she admit that all other plans, all other ways, she regarded as menaces, more or less indirect, to that security of place and substance that she insisted upon for her sons and in a lesser degree herself. (*Passing* 90)

In reaction to Brian's always looming threat of leaving for Brazil, Irene thinks: 'She belonged to this land of rising towers. She was an American. She grew from this soil, and she would not be uprooted' (*Passing* 169). Irene's America is a place where the individual can adhere to norms in the service of rising to the top. Irene believes that playing by the rules reaps certain rewards, that the promise of a good life can be fulfilled through hard work and normativity. Irene seeks to claim a particular kind of American-ness, one that seeks to uplift Black people through respectability, capitalist achievement and keeps the heteronormative marriage at its heart (Jenkins 135). America, in Irene's mind, is not so much the land of opportunity but of security, in which she knows the rules and is content to follow them in exchange for a nice, low-risk life. Irene is exemplary of America itself; unmoving, conservative, and allegiant to the racist, masculinist powers that give her distinction while oppressing her. She is experiencing cruel optimism, Berlant's term for 'when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing' (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 1). Irene is married to the 'constellation of pain' of being a Black woman in America, pain made stronger by her entrenched identification with this pain:

This ideal model of bodily abstraction is understood, by Irene, to be nationally endorsed: despite suffering as a twice biologized and delegitimated public subject—a “woman,” a “Negro”—she displaces her surplus body onto the metaphorical logics of American citizenship, which become the “truth” of her body, her “person.” (Berlant, *Female Complaint* 109)

Irene has allegiances to these things, even as they contain her and close off potential experience and connection because she is wholeheartedly committed to security. ‘Security’ is mentioned only seven times in the 180-page novel, but, with the exception of one time in speech, is accompanied by a short passage on its importance to Irene. Even when, as the narrator acknowledges, her commitment to security impedes her ability to experience joy or love or happiness, it remains the most important thing. For example, the narration slips into psychonarration as Irene thinks,

Security. Was it just a word? If not, then was it only by the sacrifice of other things, happiness, love, or some wild ecstasy that she had never known, that it could be obtained? And did too much striving, too much faith in safety and permanence, unfit one for these other things? (*Passing* 169)

Control, the ability to contain excitement, the unknown and other people, is Irene’s only recourse to contentment. This commitment to control is occasionally challenged by Brian’s unwieldy desires but is undone by Clare’s increasing presence in her life:

Yet all the while, in spite of her searchings and feeling of frustration, she was aware that, to her, security was the most important and desired thing in life. Not for any of the others, or for all of them, would she exchange it. She wanted only to be tranquil. Only, unmolested, to be allowed to direct for their own best good the lives of her sons and husband. (*Passing* 169)

What matters to Irene is the maintenance of boundaries, both literal and psychological, between who she is, what she has, and rejecting, yet desiring, all that threatens that stability.

Unlike her more compelling relationship with Clare, Irene is confident of her ability to contain Brian within the binds of their marriage. She is irritated but not worried about the havoc his defection to Brazil could wreak on her ideal life: ‘This thing, this discontent which had exploded into words, would surely die, flicker out at last...But it *would* die. Of that she was certain’ (*Passing* 85). Irene believes she can control Brian’s desires because Irene is held within

a strong commitment to marriage and its ideological underpinnings. She assumes that despite his objections, Brian is held in the same way, that he also would not risk the loss of normality by tearing 'himself and his possessions loose from their proper setting' (*Passing* 94). Brian's desire for defection would be more destabilising to Irene than anything Clare could do but between Clare and Brian there is a significant difference. Irene requires Brian, he is a central part of her identity construction. Later, Clare is what Irene cements her identity against while Brian (and his prestige/importance as doctor and the father of her sons) is what she builds her identity upon. While Clare, the desired and feared disruption is to be rejected (yet desired), Brian is to be contained, neither rejected nor desired. Unlike her undefined relationship with Clare, Irene is satisfied with what she has with Brian because she knows the convention of their relationship as a marriage and knows her place within it.

Clare: Irene's abjected other

Clare is the other against which safe, married, American Irene is defined. Clare—whose name means 'luminous'—is the beautiful, interesting counterpart to Irene's more conservative character. This section first argues that Clare is falsely perceived by Irene to be Irene's opposite as Irene works to contain the woman she hates to see as her superior. Then, the section draws on Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject to demonstrate how Irene is able to categorise and contain Clare: by relating to her as an abjected other. In this process, she rejects matrixial connection with Clare. While Irene's intense connection with Clare comes from the return of previous knowing, previous co-becoming, this is shed by Irene when she rejects future co-becoming by insisting Clare be the abjected object to Irene's subject.

On the surface, Clare is figured as Irene's opposite in personality, but they are more alike than Irene can admit. She is beautiful and charming, attending parties she is not invited to with ease. She refuses containment, moving from Black to white and back again confidently, making friends and receiving admiring glances in each circumstance. She has gone from poor to rich and appears to be happy to return to the former. Clare is in one sense entirely non-normative because she plays with and moves beyond boundaries, yet in another successfully embodies Irene's ideal woman, blurring the boundaries even between homosexual and

heterosexual, masculine and feminine. Irene is aware of Clare's gifts, although tries to avoid acknowledgement. During a conversation with Clare she thinks,

Into [Irene's] mind had come a thought, strange and irrelevant, a suspicion, that had surprised and shocked her and driven her to her feet. It was that in spite of her determined selfishness the woman before her was yet capable of heights and depths of feeling that she, Irene Redfield, had never known. Indeed, never cared to know. The thought, the suspicion was gone as quickly as it had come. (*Passing* 98)

Irene sees Clare as selfish because, unlike Brian, Clare will not be controlled. Although presented as opposites, both women have what Irene describes in Clare: 'About her there was some quality, hard and persistent, with the strength and endurance of rock, that would not be beaten or ignored' (*Passing* 110). Clare is very persistent, chasing as Irene retreats, calling and writing when Irene won't reply. In person, she politely but firmly asks, "'Rene, please tell me quite frankly why you didn't answer my letter'" (*Passing* 97). Clare later tells Irene "'Why, to get the things I want badly enough, I'd do anything, hurt anybody, throw anything away'", including, to Irene's disbelief, her own family (*Passing* 125). Irene is both shocked and drawn to Clare as she represents what Irene convinces herself she could never be.

Clare's insistent presence and personality destabilise the rules that govern Irene's curated life. While Irene's is a life free of the messiness of desire, Clare seems to be Irene's opposite, flouting the rules of race, class and motherhood, doing exactly as she wishes. In seeking to reconnect with the Black community, Clare offends Irene sensibilities two-fold: she disregards the markers of her 'superior' place in the world and she demonstrates that categories of identity are flexible, that boundaries may be crossed easily with little consequences. To Irene, it seems that Clare holds no allegiance to the rules that govern Irene's life, rules Irene believes should govern everyone. Clare, who, in Irene's eyes has reached impressive if precarious heights of respectability, seems to have little regard for those privileges. This is clear because she is casual about losing them: visiting Irene and her friends every time her husband is away, letting Bellew call her 'Nig', staying in her home and marriage only for her daughter Margery, who in the end is not enough to hold her in place. The status, wealth and security Irene longs for is disregarded by Clare in favour of her own people. Yet, despite her supposed indifference to her supposed white heteronormative privilege, Clare embodies a nearly perfect version of

it. She is stunningly beautiful, an excellent conversationalist, a good guest, an acquiescent wife. She is so pleasing that Irene is able to transfer her own multilayered attraction to Clare onto Brian, deciding that her friend and her husband are having an affair. Irene's awe of Clare is so intense yet denied. She becomes convinced that Brian must be having an affair with Clare because Clare is Irene's—and so she assumes everyone's—ideal woman.

Irene feels her identity threatened by the contrast of Clare's nature to her own. Herein lies the central tension of Irene and Clare's relationship; Irene, a woman predisposed to uncertainty and over-cautiousness meets, that is encounters and repeatedly reencounters, Clare, a woman for whom security is a straitjacket rather than the promised land. That Irene sees Clare as a potential disturbance to her perfectly created but hard to maintain life is not surprising. What is notable, however, is the strength with which Clare's presence in Irene's life is seen as threatening by Irene. Irene cannot believe the two can coexist: 'Whatever steps she took, or if she took none at all, something would be crushed. A person or the race. Clare, herself, or the race. Or, it might be, all three. Nothing, she imagined, was ever more completely sardonic' (*Passing* 152). Irene is so threatened because she perceives, despite the lack of evidence, that Clare's is attempting to mimic and to literally take over Irene's life, body and place in the family. This sexual, domestic and ideological threat means that identification is not the basis of connection any longer, but that mimicry, a sense of convergence, is this basis. Many have noted that Irene projects her own sexual attraction to Clare onto Brian, claiming that it is he, rather than herself, who desires Clare. And she uses this suspicion to turn finally against Clare. Clare's divergence from all Irene knows as right threatens the stability Irene has worked so hard for.

Irene becomes paranoid that Brian and Clare—neither of whom indicate an interest in such a relationship—are romantically involved in order to deflect her own loss of self. Irene attaches Clare to Brian, so that she can remain an individual, tying them together in her mind. Having decided on the betraying, Irene is both relieved and terrified. She herself becomes a rising tower, one for whom change is the enemy. There is no evidence for Brian's affair with Clare aside from what seems to be Clare's extreme beauty and polite conversation between the two accused. As Irene herself admits, 'Nothing. She had seen nothing, heard nothing. She had no

facts or proofs' (*Passing* 149). Yet, Irene, while acknowledging the lack of proof, holds onto this fantasy very closely. Irene's co-becoming with Clare is so impossible to comprehend that constructing a connection between Clare and Brian is all she can do to deflect.

In seeking to displace herself from the white world she inhabits, Clare catalyses Irene's state of flux, challenging Irene's understanding of race, marriage and desire. Although she seems to indicate otherwise, it is not passing from Black to white which offends Irene but passing back, from white to Black. Similarly, it is not Clare's strained marriage built on a lie but the abandonment of the nuclear family which Irene finds untenable. Irene does not experience Clare's upheaval as merely offensive but as personally invasive. Although this temperamental difference between them threatens Irene, it also intrigues her, and she finds herself unable to entirely let Clare go when confronted with the other: 'the waiter came with Clare's change. Irene reminded herself that she ought immediately to go. But she didn't move' (*Passing* 30). Despite Irene's strong aversion to Clare's claim to freedom, she is nevertheless drawn to her because of it. For Irene, with her standards and allegiance to the right way of being, Clare is a terrifying disruption but also an intriguing and beguiling other. Irene's attraction to Clare is manifold; she desires her for her beauty, her whiteness, her class status. Irene often compares herself less favourably to her luminous friend, often feeling 'dowdy and commonplace' (*Passing* 107). Irene's desire for Clare and all that Clare has questions the very foundations upon which Irene has built her life.

In *Passing* Irene makes Clare the uncanny, an abjected figure who begins to haunt Irene, at once the self and other, future and past. The matrixial, being pre-Oedipal, exists comfortably alongside other psychoanalytical theories but it cannot manifest when the subject is opposed to the object (Ettinger 71). For Irene, connection based on previous or future co-becoming is experienced as destabilising mix of fascination and repulsion but is one that, ultimately, cannot be tolerated. In *The Powers of Horror* (1982) Julia Kristeva describes abjection as the process of disgust or horror which a person experiences when confronted or threatened by a breakdown between subject and object, self and other. This reaction is a repetition stemming from the 'phantom' or 'somatic' memory of an infant's first separation of self from the mother (Hogle 15). The infant is a pre-subject separating itself for the pre-Oedipal mother and thereby creating a boundary:

Nausea, distaste, horror: these are the signs of a radical revulsion (or *expulsion*) which serves to situate the 'I', or more accurately to *create* a first, fragile sense of 'I' in a space where before there was only emptiness. The object does not fill the void of the 'pre-subject', it simply throws up a fragile boundary wall around it. (Moi 238)

Abjection is an experience of uncanniness which, although once familiar, is now experienced as 'radically separate, loathsome' (Kristeva 2), yet still something which produces reaction, something one defines oneself against. There is therefore a cost to self-differentiation, to rejecting the other in order to define the subject's boundaries. As Kelly Hurley notes,

Clearing out a space upon which it will construct an 'I', the proto-subject attempts to identify what is 'not-I' and then repudiate and expel it as 'other'. However, since 'I' and 'not-I' have not been (and as yet cannot be) counter-distinguished, this is also an agonising and convulsive moment of self-repudiation, self-expulsion. (Hurley 144)

Abjection is, above all, a process of ambiguity, of self and other, desire and repulsion, boundaries and blurring:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. (Kristeva 1)

Abjection involves *jouissance*, violent and painful. It is the assimilation between the self and other through the rejection of the other. 'It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us' (Kristeva 4). The orderly and lawful is repulsed by the perverse, misleading or corruptive other, but as Kristeva notes, the orderly self is only 'arbitrary' (16). Now always causing chaos in Irene's orderly thoughts, coming from herself and yet her self's other, Clare threatens constantly to consume Irene in Irene's mind (if less so in reality). For Irene, barriers threaten to come down, social and sexual mores to collapse. In *Passing*, although presented as cosmically linked opposites—two sides of the same coin—Irene and Clare become so close as to devour each other. Friendship of the

intensity of Irene and Clare's both cannot be borne and yet is ultimately fulfilled as two symbolically become one.

Clare stirs conflicted feelings in Irene; Irene is both fearful and revitalised, disrupted and awakened. At several moments in the text Irene is overcome with peculiar sensations related to Clare. For example, in the first chapter, when Irene receives a letter from Clare, Clare, her behaviour or objects associated with Clare are described using the following terms: 'mysterious and slightly furtive', 'perplexity', 'frightening', 'menace', 'vanished', 'fury', 'grief', 'cat-like', 'soft malice', 'scratching', 'ferocity and impetuosity', 'savagely clawed' and 'deliberately'. The term 'danger' is used three times in the six-page chapter. Later in the novel, Irene finds herself haunted by a particular look of Clare's after meeting with her for the second time:

And all the while, on the rushing ride out to her father's house, Irene Redfield was trying to understand the look on Clare's face as she had said good-bye. Partly mocking, it had seemed, and partly menacing. And something else for which she could find no name. For an instant a recrudescence of that sensation of fear which she had had while looking into Clare's eyes that afternoon touched her. (*Passing* 64-5)

In this passage Irene's experience of Clare is condensed. First, the experience begins with remembering and trying to understand Clare or something she has done. Often, as on this occasion, the source of discomfort and incomprehension is a look. Irene categorises it as mocking and menacing, an action which demonstrates her need to classify and therefore control. Yet, as she notes, Clare's look (and Clare herself) produces something beyond recognition and classification, something ambivalent. Something other than mocking, which can produce shame, and menace, which can produce fear. Shame, and an unknown recrudescence of fear, bubbles up when Irene recalls Clare's look. 'Recrudescence' is a significant word here, and its conjuring of the return of rawness, in both the negative and positive, speaks to Irene's experiences of Clare's multiple re-entries into her life as disruptive and both negative yet generative. Irene sees herself as the victim of Clare's existence as a passing woman, her marriage to John Bellew and the way this colours their interactions exposing Irene to 'such humiliation, such downright insult' (*Passing* 64). Yet, recrudescence

also describes the revival of something good and, as disinclined as she is to admit it, Irene is stimulated by the reappearance of Clare and enjoys basking in the glow of her light.

Passing emphasises the unreal in Irene's thoughts of Clare. These are peppered throughout *Passing*, producing a sense of the supernatural and psychic within Clare and Irene's connection:

A slight shiver ran over her.

"It's nothing," she told herself. "Just somebody walking over my grave, as the children say." She tried a tiny laugh and was annoyed to find that she was close to tears. (*Passing* 65)

A shiver *runs over* Irene, just as she fears Clare will run over her life in pursuit of something Irene finds difficult to define. A new life re-passing as Black, perhaps? A new love with Brian? Further, likening the sensation to the old saying of someone walking over one's grave, Irene foreshadows her own murder of Clare, and her willingness to bury her friend for what she perceives as ultimate security. Overall, this creates a sense of the omnipresence of Clare in Irene's life, that she is a ghost or spectre always just outside Irene's focus, even when right in front of her. Irene feels haunted by Clare even before she dies, as the latter infuses herself through all elements of Irene's precarious calm.

The death of the other, the death of the self

Through a passive choice and later a violent act, Irene and Clare are psychically joined despite Irene's avowed intention. Irene fights to retain hold, not of her marriage, but of how close she allows herself to be to Clare. Even before she appears to push Clare, Irene is more subtly culpable when she manipulates Clare and Bellew's relationship. Irene has already been 'wishing fervently' for Bellew to discover 'not that his wife had a touch of the tar-brush—Irene didn't want that—but that she was spending all the time that he was out of the city in black Harlem' and that that would be enough 'to rid her forever of Clare Kendry' (*Passing* 155). In the end, Irene does inadvertently reveal Clare's 'true' race to John Bellew, but she makes the active choice to fail to warn Clare about the impending danger. In fact, Irene is quietly pleased, 'conscious of a feeling of relieved thankfulness at the thought that she was probably rid of

Clare, and without having lifted a finger or uttered one word' (*Passing* 157). Pretending everything is normal, Irene attends a party with Brian and Clare at the appropriately named Freelanders' sixth floor apartment. Although the text leaves the cause of Clare's death ambiguous, *Passing* foreshadows Irene's role in a scene where Irene and Clare had a conversation which fills Irene with a 'primitive paralysing dread' making her hands 'numb, her feet like ice, her heart like a stone weight' (*Passing* 166):

"Clare...have you ever seriously thought what it would mean if [Bellew] should find you out?"

...

"I'd do what I want to do more than anything else right now. I'd come up here to live. Harlem, I mean. Then I'd be able to do as I please, when I please." (*Passing* 166-7)

Quickly, Irene steels her mind and resolves to keep the knowledge she has about Bellew from Clare in order to supposedly keep Brian with her and away from Clare. It is not Brian that Irene is attempting to retain hold of, and not Clare either, but herself. As Clare gains power through increasing freedom, Irene understands her own freedom and power to be slipping and threatening to merge with Clare's. Friendship cannot contain Clare and Irene's connection as Clare appears to move ever closer to Irene, into her world and mind.

Unwittingly, in causing Clare's demise, Irene psychically reinforces their connection as the novel suggests that the two symbolically become one. Irene kills Clare because Clare desires an intimacy which cannot be borne by Irene. For Irene, Clare's desire for change is experienced as a consumption of Irene, her own life and carefully maintained boundaries grotesquely eaten up by Clare. The dramatic scene takes place at the climax of the novel: Bellew arrives at the Freelanders' apartment, bursts in, and confronts Clare as all the guests gather to view the scene. Clare stands up as Bellew advances toward her, with her back to the window and completely composed, '...as if everyone were not staring at her in curiosity and wonder, as if the whole structure of her life were not lying in fragments before her. She seemed unaware of any danger or uncaring. There was even a faint smile on her full, red lips, and in her shining eyes' (*Passing* 176). Such a reaction is unimaginable to Irene, for whom societal good opinion

is essential to self-esteem. Seeing Clare, with 'a faint smile', Irene rushes at her, most likely pushing her out the window to her death:

What happened next, Irene Redfield never afterwards allowed herself to remember. Never clearly.

One moment Clare had been there, a vital glowing thing, like a flame of red and gold. The next she was gone. (*Passing* 176)

Bellew screams 'like a beast in agony' (*Passing* 176) and everyone except Irene runs downstairs to Clare's lifeless body. Irene has now tried to kill Clare twice, the first time when she neglects to tell Clare that Bellew knows her secret, and the second, more successfully and literally when Irene's actions untether Clare from what binds her in place. There is disagreement between scholars about whether Irene is culpable for Clare's death, and some, such as Judith Butler, Claudia Tate and Gabrielle McIntire argue that, not only is clarity impossible, but unreasonable. However, this chapter argues that Irene causes Clare's death to preserve her own sexual and racial boundaries. Of course, the text uses its close focalisation of events through Irene to promote ambiguity. It makes sense for Irene to kill Clare because the text has foreshadowed this moment repeatedly; Irene is aroused into anxious action by Clare and has, by revealing Clare's 'truth' to Bellew, sealed her fate before pushing her (or not). Irene pushes Clare to preserve herself (and the raced and gendered identity she claims) but, instead of preserving herself by ridding her life of Clare, she unintentionally brings her closer as the two women become tied by Irene's act.

Irene's self is inherently connected to Clare due to her own internalisation and obsession. While for Kristeva abjection has its roots in the pre-Oedipal formation of self, the sensation is not confined to infancy. Kristeva's primary example of an object which may elicit abjection in adulthood is the corpse, which the subject must be revolted by in order to differentiate herself as alive.

No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. (Kristeva 3)

The object, Clare, is desired and is repulsive for the same reasons. In the object fear and fascination mix to entrance and repulse the subject who is formed in her rejection of what the object represents *and* in her attraction to it. In that rejection, however, she rejects herself, the owner (constructor) of those desires and revulsions. Irene invents her version of the object and, when destroying the object, destroys herself.

Throughout *Passing* Irene falsely believes that it is Clare who is known for her decisiveness, her ability to get whatever she wants, regardless of the cost to herself or others and her crossing of boundaries. Pushing Clare out of a window, just as Clare may achieve the life she craves, is the ultimate act of boundary crossing: that between life and death. Irene is not mournful, but thinks of Clare's loveliness, thoughts punctuated by satisfied exclamations of 'gone!':

Gone! The soft white face, the bright hair, the disturbing scarlet mouth, the dreaming eyes, the caressing smile, the whole torturing loveliness that had been Clare Kendry. That beauty that had torn at Irene's placid life. Gone! The mocking daring, the gallantry of her pose, the ringing bells of her laughter. (*Passing* 177)

Irene silences the object bells, affirming, finally, her sense of self. No longer pushed or pulled by an other who does not respect boundaries, Irene's other is gone. While Clare is alive, what a good life means is in question. With Clare dead, each uncertainty is resolved, every question silenced. With the personal resolve she believes is only held by Clare, she abandons all boundaries to restabilise her own reality.

Irene sees she has won, but as Kristeva describes, every life is lost in the end. So, the other who Irene has sought to reject cannot be destroyed. The woman Irene kills is Clare Kendry, but the other is 'not really Clare Kendry' (*Passing* 19). The real Clare Kendry has unluckily been taken along with Irene's projection of Clare. Haunted, blurred and then consumed through her own consumption, Irene looks at Clare's lifeless body and faints, returning to her uncomplicated racial position: 'everything was dark' (*Passing* 182). Irene trades Clare's life of recklessness for her own more sedate one, but to do so commits the ultimate reckless act. Women's friendship, then, is a threat to stability for Irene, a threat that cannot be tolerated but nevertheless consumes the self, despite one's best efforts.

Passing depicts the ways in which women's friendship, especially friendship infused with racial and sexual crossings and desires, destabilises individual identity. Clare's matrixial re-entry into Irene's closely managed life destabilises the categories of self and other upon which Irene has based her own identity. Irene encounters Clare as both alluring and dangerous, as Clare appears to be emulating Irene, threatening Irene's sense of American oneness. Irene's oneness is the self-enclosed individual identity associated with the American ideal of the good life (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*). At the end of the novel, it is Irene who destroys Clare as she seems to push her friend to her death. Rather than ridding herself of the other, however, this decisive action instead psychically re-joins the two women. Irene again becomes one through the death of the other, but in a way that ensures Clare's everlasting continuity through Irene herself. Friendship in *Passing* is a violently contested site, a relationship in which the other and her desires cannot be known, and is, therefore, both exhilarating and a challenge risk to the cruelly optimistic good life that Irene associates with Black middle-class social security. Closely reading *Passing* assists in answering this thesis's central question because the novel produces a friendship that, for the novel's protagonist, is unbearably close, so close as to nearly consume the self. Women's friendship, in the novel's schematisation, is based on matrixial, racial knowing and is cut short by the fear of future becoming.

In the chapter that follows, I closely read Toni Morrison's *Sula*, a text Judith Butler argues 'fulfils the promise of connection unrealised in *Passing*' (*Bodies that Matter* 183). Morrison's novel presents a friendship so connected, so complete, that it dissolves the boundaries between self and other that, in *Passing*, Irene is so intent to maintain.

Chapter Five:

Circles of friendship, without beginning or end, in Toni Morrison's *Sula*

So when they met, first in those chocolate [school] halls and next through the ropes of the swing, they felt the comfort of old friends. Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be. Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on. Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers (Sula's because he was dead; Nel's because he wasn't), they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for.

Sula 52

In *Sula* (1973), Sula Peace and Nel Wright's connection is a matrixial friendship, a suspended space of humanity founded in multi-layered connectedness. Theirs is a friendship through which the Americanised notion of individuality is rejected, as the two women bond in a space of mutually formative becoming and self/other creation. Theirs is an intangible connection that exists regardless of whether the friends are together or apart, physically or emotionally connected. I argue that friendship and connection between women is an end in itself in *Sula*, a space of full togetherness. Sula and Nel, together and apart, are for each other a vigilant presence, 'someone as interested as she herself' (*Sula* 51). The two are called to each other because of the positive and negative influence of their (grand)mothers; the girls learn about woman-centred togetherness but are also called to each other to fill the psychic void left by distant (Sula's) or suffocating (Nel's) maternal figures. The end of their relationship, when it seems to finally arrive, is only superficially conclusive. Just as the novel documents a Black town no longer in existence, a town that was never what it was named, the novel also documents a friendship that is seemingly over just as quickly as it began. In doing so the text makes a claim of worth, a claim unrelated to longevity, or accuracy, goodness or pleasantness. Rather, Sula and Nel's friendship, like the community in which it develops, has meaning

beyond its limits, so much meaning that it disintegrates the significance of those limits themselves. *Sula* constructs a radical level of self and other engagement so rare as to be unique in literature on women's friendship.

The novel suggests the two girls have always known each other, have always been in the other's psyche, with their connection emerging in their dreams. When Sula Peace and Nel Wright first meet in 1922 they are twelve years old, 'wishbone thin and easy-assed' (*Sula* 52). They greet each other for the first time at Garfield Primary School and face each other 'through the ropes of the one vacant swing': "'Go on.'" "No. You go." (*Sula* 51). But they are not really meeting for the first time, or, at least, only their physical forms are being introduced. Nel, who grows up with the neatness of her mother 'pointing at her back', would often sit on the 'steps of her back porch surrounded by the high silence of her mother's incredibly orderly house' and

[...Fall] easily into a picture of herself lying on a flowered bed, tangled in her own hair, waiting for some fiery prince. He approached but never quite arrived. But always, watching the dream along with her, were some smiling sympathetic eyes. Someone as interested as she herself in the flow of her imagined hair, the thickness of the mattress of flowers, the voile sleeves that closed below her elbows in gold-threaded cuffs. (*Sula* 51)

While Nel's prince never arrives (the man who arrives in adulthood is not so princely), the smiling, sympathetic eyes of an interested party remain. It is of central importance that this is 'someone as interested as she herself', interested not in the prince, but in Nel and her experiences, her hair, the mattress of flowers, her splendid dress (*Sula* 51). Nel's dream narrates an ideal picture of invested connection at its most intense and at its most together. Sula is also an only child but is, unlike Nel, 'wedged into a household of throbbing disorder constantly awry with things, people, voices and the slamming of doors' (*Sula* 51). When she hides, spending 'hours in the attic behind a roll of linoleum galloping through her own mind on a gray-and-white horse tasting sugar and smiling roses', it is always in 'full view of a someone who shared both the taste and the speed' (*Sula* 52). For Sula, Nel is an other who is not the self, but who can see the self and shares the self's experience.

Toni Morrison's *Sula* is a short novel, spanning 1919 to 1965, situated almost entirely in a Black neighbourhood, called the Bottom, in the fictional Ohio town of Medallion. The story follows the fates of the matriarchal Peace and Wright families as the daughters of those two families (Sula and Nel) become friends, living intertwined lives from childhood. The novel is filled with violence as a fact of life: Sula's grandmother Eva kills her son in a fire; then, as if in some kind of divine balancing act (or non-act), Eva is unable to save her daughter Hannah (Sula's mother) when Hannah's dress catches fire and she burns to death while Sula stands watching; Sula cuts the end of her finger to prove her grit to neighbourhood boys; Sula and Nel spin and fling a young boy and let go of his hands, catapulting him into the river where he drowns; toward the end of the novel the townspeople, who have been kept from building jobs because of race discrimination, go to the tunnel to destroy it and end up dying when it collapses under the weight of their protest and defeated rage. Against this background, Sula and Nel grow together—becoming inseparable in childhood and youth—apart from when Nel marries a local boy, Jude, and Sula leaves town for ten years. When Sula returns, so do many other things, including Nel's spiritedness, their connection, and the community's disapproval of Sula's independence. Sula's and Nel's connection is seeming lost when Nel catches Sula and Jude having sex. It is not until Sula dies (and the town falls apart as the townspeople celebrate Sula's absence) that Nel, visiting Sula's grandmother, realises that the full connection between the two girls, Sula and Nel, remains, even after betrayal and death.

In response to Morrison's aesthetic and ethical literary output, scholarship often focuses on the intersection of race and gender in her novels and responses to *Sula* are no exception. Like most texts in Morrison's oeuvre, *Sula* is a literary engagement with an ethics that prioritises Blackness and femaleness. As I will shortly explore, a large swathe of *Sula* studies even deprioritises the central relationship in favour of other concerns, namely race and gender politics. Of the scholars who do engage with the relationship on its own terms, many discuss the early success of the friendship, then focus on the discord that occurs between the two women in later life. This has the curious effect of limiting the amount of scholarship about the central relationship between Sula and Nel. This chapter diverges from much previous scholarship to argue that *Sula*, a political Black feminist text, is itself notably unconcerned with the functionality of its protagonists' relationship.

Sula is explicitly engaged with what it means to be Black in America in the twentieth century, and this is a major focus in scholarship on the novel and in Morrison's work more generally. The events of the novel, which occur between 1919 and 1965, provide historical context for understanding Sula and Nel's both raced and gendered struggle. Published during the 'height of the Civil Rights Movement and sexual revolution for women in America', *Sula* explicitly dramatises the racial and gender oppression being resisted by activists, including Morrison herself (Schreiner 46).¹³ Over time, Morrison's almost singular focus on the poetic exploration of Blackness, its gifts and trials, has become identified as her literary project. In some ways, *Sula* represents the beginning of this project, as 'the first novel to begin to carry out Morrison's determination to imagine her way into the heart of racial trauma—into it, through it, and beyond it' (Weinstein 9). The novel itself is a form of protest, a textual highlighting of the oppression of Black people, especially Black women, in twentieth century America (Schreiner 47). The novel's intense and largely exclusive focus on Blackness in America is productive, since to depict Black friendship, especially between women, in the early 1970s is not only a political literary act but one that creates a space between Black characters in the absence of white people, if not white oppression, which is more difficult to escape.

Sula's primary concern is with Black women's relationships with each other, how these relationships play out against their negotiation of the past, present and the future. Almost all action, thought or word, is either driven by the Black women of the Bottom, or else it is concerned with how others' behaviours have affected them. *Sula* is specifically concerned with women, and its engagement with feminist themes is critical. Cassandra Feters believes that the novel deals with the failures of feminism. The 'early erasures of differences and insistence on sameness and later over-identifications and idealizations', is a valuable reading of Morrison in relation to feminism, but one that is not closely attuned to the push-and-pull of women's friendship in fiction (Feters 41). Other theorists argue the novel's publication at

¹³ Melissa Walker argues that *Sula* is best read in the context of the great social events that occurred around its writing and publication: 'In 1973, it would have been virtually impossible for readers of a novel like *Sula* to be oblivious to the public history of years that saw the passing of the Voting Rights Act; the escalation of the Vietnam War, with its disproportionate number of African-American casualties; Lyndon Johnson's announcement that he would not seek re-election; the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr; increasing outbreaks of urban riots; the election and re-election of Richard Nixon; and the systematic attack on the advocates of black power. With all this came the rapid retrenchment from public policies intended to combat racism' (Walker qtd. in Baillie 74).

a major moment for feminist activism in the United States allows *Sula* to be understood as a 'response' (Eaton 88) which 'reflects' the women's liberation movement (Fetters 29). *Sula's* almost complete exclusion of white characters 'forces a recognition of difference within race', differences that build constructive and empathetic encounters for her Black characters (Galehouse 339). In the context of the events taking place in the early 1970s, the women of *Sula* represent a 'move forward' for the representation of Black women (Baillie 72). Alongside white people, Black men are largely, but not as thoroughly, excluded in *Sula*. They are primarily a flattering comparative point for the novel's women, as unlike the men who escape or implode, Black women 'hurl themselves with misdirected but courageous abandon' into the 'traditional and nontraditional female roles as mothers, wives, and "easy" women' (Anderson and Fallon 4).

Sula's focus on Black women creates a textual spaciousness. The novel does not shy away from the terrible impacts of racism and misogyny on its Black women characters' lives but does make room for the exploration of selfhood—individual and shared—alongside these conditions. Within the context of *Sula's* deep engagement with the intersection of Blackness and femaleness, the friendship between Sula and Nel is usually understood as a merging, one which pushes (and for some, breaks) the boundaries of friendship. This chapter draws on and extends current scholarship to present women's friendship in *Sula* as a connection that embodies a togetherness so full that it disrupts narration, the self, and the distances of betrayal and death so often found in narratives of women's friendship, including those studied in the previous chapters of this thesis. I move away from an adjudication of the success or not of the friendship, focusing on the productions of meaning that togetherness generates, even in distance. The idea that the friendship represents a merging of two individuals is too simplistic a view of Sula and Nel's bond. In fact, the connection between them exists in the space between fusion and rejection, a place of intense togetherness that can withstand separation. The matrixial framework, evoked alongside the concept of the gesture, enables a different perspective on *Sula*.

Critics disagree about friendship in *Sula*. Some celebrate Sula and Nel's connection as revolutionary, feminist and respectful of women's friendship on its own terms, while others argue that Sula and Nel's friendship is not friendship at all. For example, Diane Gillespie and

Missy Dehn Kubitschek refer to Sula and Nel's 'marvelous' friendship, while both Karen Stein and Alisha Coleman separately describe each girl as completing the other (Gillespie and Kubitschek 41; Stein 148; Coleman 145). Sula and Nel are so valuable to each other that Stein describes them as 'combined, [making] a complete picture of a hero' (Stein 149). Such conclusions are similar to my own but do not always adequately explain Sula and Nel's interior dynamic, making a closely read and matrixially informed study helpful. Other critics do not even define Sula and Nel's connection as friendship. Barbara Smith famously argues that *Sula* 'works as a lesbian novel not only because of the passionate friendship between Sula and Nel but because of Morrison's consistently critical stance toward the heterosexual institutions of male-female relationships, marriage and the family' (Smith 165). Others disagree, arguing that the lack of eroticism between Sula and Nel precludes lesbianism (Johnson 142), that the two are actually too merged to be friends (Fetters 41) or that Sula is a character too self-involved, too 'individual' to sustain the requirements of friendship (Galehouse 350). While such interpretations are contributory, I argue that not only does a matrixial approach facilitate a reading of Sula and Nel's connection as friendship, accounting for its negative aspects, but that the novel itself disregards common understandings of individual self/other upon which these interpretations are based.

Of the scholars who closely read Sula and Nel's relationship as friendship, most argue that the two friends merge, in some form, into one being in childhood, a line of reasoning this chapter modifies and extends through a matrixial lens. Sula and Nel are described as 'interchangeable' (Schreiner 42), 'one complete identity' (Coleman 153), and partaking in 'girlhood fusion' (Fetters 40). Both Kevin Quashie and Trinh T. Minh-ha consider the girlhood connection unstable and unknowable. Minh-ha argues that Sula and Nel's identities are an 'ongoing unsettling process' (40), which Kevin Quashie extends, writing, 'the boundaries of self, metaphorically but also literally, are disrupted, severed, transcended; the self and its girlfriend become contiguous and sometimes indistinct subjects' (188). For Monika Hoffarth-Zelloe, the fluidity between Sula and Nel becomes threatening. She argues that 'Morrison elaborates the notion of a double/split self...which depict[s] the uncertain and contradictory' (114). Other critics, for example, Quashie and Alisha Coleman, separately understand Sula and Nel's merging and then divergence as best informed by Lacan's theory of the mirror stage of

childhood development, where the two girls identify and create each other. Such approaches provide a valuable base upon which a matrixial framework of friendship in literature can extend; this chapter finds that Sula and Nel's friendship is not based entirely in merging. Although it has many of the characteristics of fusion, it resonates a matrixial always-togetherness.

Sula and Nel together

Sula presents a connection between the women that is one of inseparable but non-merged self-other co-being. Sula and Nel's relationship is textually produced to be close, challenging and mystical; their friendship is anti-individualistic, rejecting traditional notions of the self and other. In order to represent a connection of this kind, the novel draws on many storytelling traditions, producing and revealing its events through particular textual structure and omniscient narration. The otherworldly elements, circular textuality, and the story of Sula and Nel's maternal and community origins (discussed in the following section) work in combination to create the impression of a slipperiness between self and other that animates the novel, and which informs my reading of their friendship as one of perpetual closeness.

Sula's friendship, a space of co-creation, suspends outside and inside bodies, space and time. This is matrixial co-becoming, as Sula and Nel partake in a play of closeness and distance in their friendship that is underpinned by a maternal inheritance. Following Boym, we see how the two girls, then the two women, are a vigilant presence for each other, both when near and from afar. This is a connection represented for its own sake, one which finality may complicate but not invalidate. The novel depicts friendship in decay as well as in formation. However, it endures specifically because between Sula and Nel is a space, sometimes psychic, sometimes physical, and sometimes unnameable, but always present. This space is first introduced through dreams, a common way to understand psychic space in our culture. Then the space is depicted through shared actions, in shared/transferred pain, in laughter, in anger, in death. It is a space of endurance. *Sula* makes visible the process of friendship. Not only this, the novel depicts this process as embedded in, but nevertheless slightly immune from, the process of life; poverty, race, gender, love, sex and even death.

Sula and Nel's always-togetherness begins before they meet as children in their dreams and once they do meet, their always-togetherness is physically and psychically cemented. From their first meeting the two are inseparable, a term colloquially overused when referring to young women friends but becomes literal in the friendship of Sula and Nel. An early game in childhood reveals a dynamic of relating that continues throughout their friendship:

Sula lifted her head and joined Nel in the grass play. In concert, without ever meeting each other's eyes, they stroked the blades up and down, up and down. Nel found a thick twig and, with her thumbnail, pulled away its bark until it was stripped to a smooth, creamy innocence. Sula looked about and found one too. When both twigs were undressed Nel moved easily to the next stage and began tearing up rooted grass to make a bare spot of earth. When a generous clearing was made, Sula traced intricate patterns in it with her twig. At first Nel was content to do the same. But soon she grew impatient and poked her twig rhythmically and intensely into the earth, making a small neat hole that grew deeper and wider with the least manipulation of her twig. Sula copied her, and soon each had a hole the size of a cup... Carefully they replaced the soil and covered the entire grave with uprooted grass. Neither one had spoken a word. (*Sula* 58-9)

Sula and Nel play together, in childhood and after, performing variations on each other's actions, always with an eye to what the other is doing. This happens, as the passage notes, without 'ever meeting each other's eyes' and without speaking (*Sula* 58-9). While this makes their relationship less textually tangible (and makes the text more difficult to summarise and quote), it also speaks to the pervasiveness of their mutual integration. The scene represents Sula and Nel's particular way of being together. The girls, and later off-and-on as women, partake in the tasks of life next to each other, co-becoming always in relation to each other, but with little drama over this arrangement.

Interconnected Black woman-ness is at the heart of Sula and Nel's maternally inherited co-becoming. The hyper awareness between Sula and Nel is cemented when the two are mutually formed by a traumatic moment in childhood in which the two create themselves by disappearing another. The ripples of this event are never forgotten by either; one does and the other feels. The two girls play with a young boy, Chicken Little, by the river and Sula, protecting him from Nel's teasing, spins him around and accidentally lets go so the water 'darkened and closed quickly over the place Chicken Little sank' (*Sula* 60). Chicken Little's

death is understood by some as a moment in which Sula is 'let dangerously free from any context, any community' (Mayberry 526). The narrator claims that the incident teaches Sula that there is 'no other that you can count on...no self to count on either' (*Sula* 119). This may be what Sula learns, but it is not what the text suggests. Instead, what the reader learns is the extent of the integration, the co-formation and co-destruction of all things in the Bottom, including Sula, Nel and Chicken Little, and the effects that come with 'spectacular black suffering': 'absurdity, senselessness, tragedy, and numbing shock' (Ioanes 120). Neither girl says anything, and so it is days before Chicken Little's body is found, and longer until his funeral. Nel blames Sula, Sula blames herself, and this creates, for the first time, a small amount of space between them:

'Nel and Sula did not touch hands or look at each other during the funeral. There was a space, a separateness, between them.' (*Sula* 64)

Nel with legs 'turned to granite' and Sula who 'let the tears roll into her mouth and slide down her chin to dot the front of her dress' experience a brief separation that only serves to strengthen the connection that follows (*Sula* 64; 65). As the community gathers by Chicken Little's new grave, it is clear that the two have found connection foremost in each other, and no one else:

Nel and Sula stood some distance away from the grave, the space that had sat between them in the pews had dissolved. They held hands...At first, as they stood there, their hands were clenched together. They relaxed slowly until during the walk back home were laced in as gentle a clasp as that of any two young girlfriends trotting up the road on a summer day wondering what happened to butterflies in the winter. (*Sula* 66).

Chicken Little's death dramatises a co-becoming through traumatic, shameful experience. Sula and Nel experience closeness in distance. Their closeness, on this occasion, means distance from the moralities and mores of their community. According to Mae Henderson, privileging the other in the self is a foundational characteristic of much Black women's writing, including that of Toni Morrison. For Henderson, this is a political project which arises out of a particular position that Black women hold as belonging to two identity groups simultaneously. To be Black and a woman means to embody a multi-positionality, entering into a testimonial dialogue with Black and white, women and men:

As such, black women writers enter into testimonial discourse with black men as blacks, with white women as women, and with black women as black women. At the same time, they enter into a competitive discourse with black men as women, with white women as blacks, and with white men as black women. (Henderson 351)

What this particular positioning produces is a capacity, according to Henderson, to privilege, rather than repress, the other in the self. The Black woman writer speaks both familiarly and in contest with the other (Henderson 351). For Henderson there is another layer of merging between self and other that occurs for Black women, and the Black women writers who enter into this testimonial discourse. With *Sula*, Henderson argues, Morrison draws upon the heritage of Black women's self/otherness to write a novel that literalises for the reader this self-otherness. In essence, Henderson argues that *Sula* is not only a literary project but a vocalisation—and focalisation—of a complex, misunderstood subjectivity position, one in which self and other are always already together in the self.

Through its dual protagonists, Sula and Nel, *Sula* deconstructs the concept of the individual. *Sula* presents a woman who is not autonomous, not self-sufficient, and is certainly not unified. She is, however, independent. *Sula* produces a paradox in which the (lone) titular character is a) an intensely independent woman, and b) entirely reliant on another woman for her sense of self. The novel both does and does not construct a dual subject, a self that both is, and is not, an other. Sula may be selfish (literally self-ish, interested in the self) but the self which guides Sula's actions always, even during betrayal, is the Sula-and-Nel self. The text repeatedly encourages this interpretation, as Sula and Nel do not exist narratively without the other, and because they are explicitly set up as having been produced together. Sula is variously described as 'experimental' (Novak), 'less a character than a principle of abruption' (Cohen 12), and one who can only have 'love for her own, pure, naked self' (Alfaqir 70). However, in my understanding, Morrison uses a key tool for the construction and expression of individuality—the novel—to deconstruct the idea of the separate, independent subject. The narrator is omniscient and wide ranging, focalising through, at different times, various townspeople including Shadrach, Eva, Helene, Hannah and, most especially, Sula and Nel. The narrator's omniscience involves predicting the future, foreshadowing and moving through minds at will (Nissen 271). This is accomplished through a mix of standard third person

narration, psychonarration (in which narrative voice and character move closer as the character's thoughts are taken on by the narrator, but there is less of the character's inflection [Gennette 58]), and free indirect discourse, where they move closer still, such that the narrator's voice, in taking on the character's idiom, merges briefly with that of the character. This has the effect of emphasising Sula and Nel's interconnectedness with each other, but also the interconnectedness of all characters and challenges the idea of the single, stable individual self. In this way, the narrative structure, by oscillating closer to and further away from a range of characters, supports scholars' reading of the novel as denouncing the 'definition of the "self" offered by the Enlightenment discourse' (Farshid 14-5) and that through this denunciation, *Sula* challenges the liberal, humanist self who is 'autonomous, self-sufficient and unified' (Peach 54). I join these scholars to argue that *Sula* troubles traditional notions of the individual by shortening the distance between self and other. The novel's particular understanding of the nature of being creates, of course, a particular version of friendship, one of intense—although not total—interconnectivity. I suggest the alternative to the self/other dichotomy offered by *Sula* has strong parallels with the matrixial. Both the matrixial and *Sula* understand the I and the non-I (to use Ettinger's terms for self and other) as occupying the same space, intermingling without fusion.

Sula and Nel's interconnected togetherness arises from the neighbourhood in which it occurs. The novel takes place almost entirely in the Bottom, a mistreated and misnamed Black neighbourhood of the fictional town of Medallion, Ohio. The Bottom is a place in which life and death, the past, present and future, and 'good' and 'evil' are all collapsed into their supposed opposites. Even the name of the place is both accurately descriptive and connotes its opposite. The narrator explains that a white farmer tricked an enslaved man, to whom he had promised land, into accepting land in the hills, where the 'planting was backbreaking, where the soil slid down and washed away the seeds, and where the wind lingered all through the winter' while the white people kept the rich and easy land for themselves (*Sula* 5). The joke was, though, that the farmer told the ex-slave that the hills were called the Bottom because when "God looks down, it's the bottom. That's why we call it so. It's the bottom of heaven—best land there is" (*Sula* 5). Misnaming, a technique that occurs repeatedly throughout the novel, is most pernicious and racist in this case. The misnaming of the Bottom is a white 'joke' that the Black neighbourhood must live out, where the people of the Bottom

'exist in a world defined by its blackness and by the surrounding white society that both violates and denies it' (Schreiner 42). Further, the Bottom is a place which comes into being as it is already being eradicated. The first lines of the novel introduce the Bottom with a description of its destruction. It is destroyed, the narrator says, to make way for a golf course, a project more well-funded than the community ever was: 'Generous funds have been allotted to level the stripped and faded buildings that clutter the road from Medallion [the town] up to the golf course' (*Sula* 4). The novel ends with Nel's painful, and long-needed cry, in which there is 'no top and *no bottom*, just circles and circles of sorrow' (emphasis mine, 174). By starting at the end 'in that place' that is no longer, *Sula* renders all its characters merely ghosts, ones who are always already haunting (*Sula* 3). Everything created by the text is already gone (Novak 188). That interconnectivity is built into the structure of the text itself, as Morrison creates a looping narrative out of the town's life cycle to create a space in which life and death, joy and pain, are so intertwined as to be unrecognisably similar.

The story of the neighbourhood is told through the integration of influences from multiple storytelling traditions. First, *Sula* invokes a range of Christian, African and pagan symbols and traditions.¹⁴ Secondly, Morrison's story draws on inspiration from 'the Odyssey, the Iliad, Sita in the Ramayana, Draupadi in the Mahabharata, and even Ester in the Bible' (Idol 50). Early in the novel the narrator introduces Shadrack, a local man traumatised and displaced by the first world war. His name refers to the Biblical figure Shadrach who survives Nebuchadnezzar II's furnace because of his commitment to God, and who represents a living ancestor, a person who has been shattered by life and now lives on the river frightening the townspeople, reminding them what a lack of control can produce. Shadrack appears to Sula and Nel at an auspicious moment. After Chicken Little dies, Shadrack appears to Sula and Nel:

...smiling, a great smile, heavy with lust and time to come. He nodded his head as though answering a question, and said, in a pleasant conversational tone, a tone of cooled butter, "Always." (*Sula* 62)

¹⁴ While outside the scope of this chapter, and distinct from this thesis' concerns, Hinton convincingly argues to Morrison's engagement with West African myth. See also Lewis, 'African Tradition in Toni Morrison's *Sula*.' and Christopher N. Okonkwo 'A Critical Divination: Reading *Sula* as Ogbanje-Abiku.'

Sula and Nel's friendship imbued with a strange, pervading sense of bodily otherworldliness, with looping narration and mixed imagery drawing on multiple storytelling traditions. *Sula* suggests that life and death are intertwined, and that the very story itself, as well as the act of writing, the act of reading, the act of being written, suspend separation. That separation itself is just an illusion, and togetherness—both fleshly and ghostly—is the stuff of life.

What *Sula* presents, therefore, is an integrated friendship in a ghostly neighbourhood, both of which both are, and are not, as they appear. Before they know each other, before they co-become together, they are joined as members of a specific community, one in which what is, and is not, co-exist and co-develop.

Togetherness through inherited selves

Their mothers are different, but Sula and Nel both have psychic space left for someone else. Sula's mother Hannah raises Sula with the same distant style of loving Hannah receives from Eva. Nel's mother, Helene, attempts to process her own traumatic life by trying to control her daughter's. This leaves psychic space for a deep formative connection in both Sula and Nel, which is the undercurrent of their unique matrixial bond.

What *Sula* is presenting is a particular vision of women's identity that is built on mutuality that is entirely separate from, but nevertheless informs, its vision of women's friendship. *Sula* first presents the other grand/mothers within Sula and Nel and, secondly, Sula and Nel within each other, but these are differentiated. In *Sula*, Sula and Nel are who they are because of their maternal lines. Men, in the form of fathers and grandfathers, have died or have left, disappointing or angering but not surprising the women they left. Inheritance, the stuff of which a person—a woman—is made is made up mostly of other women. Just as the matrixial understands women as co-becoming into being, *Sula* is insistent on the fluidity of selfhood that moves down the generations through to Sula and Nel. However, unlike in the matrixial framework, this movement goes predominantly one way. There is nothing 'co' about Sula's grandmother's or Nel's mother's influence on their grand/children. It is only between themselves that Sula and Nel experience reciprocity through co-creation.

Sula's lineage is through Eva, her grandmother, the formidable matriarch of the community. Hannah, Sula's mother, is a lovely but weaker figure than her mother or daughter, more interested in the men of the community than parenting Sula. Sula's relationship with her mother is seriously fractured when she overhears her mother telling a friend, "You love her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference" (*Sula* 57). Rather than to Hannah, Sula is directly and repeatedly linked to her grandmother, inheriting (but, according to Eva, distorting) most of the older woman's traits. Eva, like Sula, operates 'on a private scheme of preference and prejudice' (*Sula* 38). Like Eva, Sula is headstrong, decisive and has little interest in other people's moral codes or social mores. Eva's house is disordered but her rules are absolute. From Eva Sula learns persuasiveness, quick justice and the importance of survival at all costs. Just as Eva has stood over life and death—killing her own son, renaming the children who come into her house—Sula will come to preside over good and evil in the town. Later in the novel, after Hannah's death and Nel's marriage, Sula goes away for ten years, just as Eva went away many years before, looking for money to feed her starving children. The novel specifies a difference between the older and younger Peace woman: Eva leaves Medallion for her children, but when Sula is scolded for leaving without marrying or having children, she tells Eva "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (*Sula* 92). However, even though Sula leaves for herself, she returns to support Nel. Although the women are repeatedly dis/connected, it is Nel to whom Sula feels closest, and to whom she maintains allegiance.

Nel, although she dreams of being like her own grandmother, follows the dictates of her mother. Her mother Helene is Creole, 'an impressive woman, at least in Medallion' (*Sula* 18). Beautiful with 'heavy hair in a bun, dark eyes arched in a perpetual query at other people's manners. A woman who won all social battles with presence and a conviction of the legitimacy of her authority' (*Sula* 18). Helene 'rose grandly to the occasion of motherhood...[Nel] was more comfort and purpose than [Helene] had ever hoped to find in this life' (*Sula* 18). However, eager to raise a polite and obedient child, Helene stamps out any of her daughter's fervour and, in doing so, 'drove her daughter's imagination underground' (*Sula* 18). Nel is happy enough to follow her mother's missives until after she meets Sula and goes on a life changing journey with her mother to see her dying great grandmother. Helene and Nel arrive

too late but are in time to see Nel's grandmother, much to Helene's aggravation and Nel's interest. Nel has begun to detach from her mother, who has turned to 'custard' in Nel's eyes when Helene is racially and sexually harassed in front of her daughter. Nel's reaction is to join in the judgment of her mother but also to draw closer to her. At first, she experiences significant moments of separation from her mother. Following the incident, and following meeting her grandmother for the first time, Nel has a clear moment of individuality looking in the mirror:

There was her face, plain brown eyes, three braids and the nose her mother hated. She looked for a long time and suddenly a shiver ran through her.

"I'm me," she whispered. "Me."

Nel didn't know quite what she meant, but on the other hand she knew exactly what she meant.

"I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me."

Each time she said the word me there was a gathering in her like power, like joy, like fear. Back in bed with her discovery, she stared out the window at the dark leaves of the horse chestnut. (*Sula* 28)

Nel's discovery of her individual power is notable partly because it occurs only once in the novel. Where Sula is a character regularly separated from others as different or individual, Nel has just one moment that stands her apart from her family and her community. The visit is 'the last as well as the first time she was ever to leave Medallion' although the text does not explain why (*Sula* 29). It may be in part to avoid becoming custard and, like her mother, retaining the dignity of self that becomes impossible when Black people live among racist whites. Regardless, Nel's attempts to move away from her mother's dignified but insular way of life are rendered ineffective, and it is only with Sula that Nel retains some of the ability to be herself.

Eva and Helene, as Sula and Nel's strongest influences, have what is best described as similar differences. As Patricia McKee perceptively argues, 'both women seem primarily occupied, then, with controlling, or even patrolling, boundaries in order to control the definition of their own selves' (7). Eva controls her entire household for although it seems ramshackle, it is ruled with her iron fist. Helene patrols her own department and that of her daughter, keeping them

in the fastidious and godly home. Both women repeatedly aim to extend their control to their grandchild/child. This opens up the possibility of Sula and Nel finding deep connection with each other, and the 'solitary little girls' are not so lonely together (*Sula* 51).

Sula and Nel's connection is produced through both negative and the positive maternal inheritances, although they only find matrixial co-becoming with each other. Sula and Nel need each other because of the deficiencies in their parenting from their mothers/grandmothers, and they are able to be together because within them they already have those older women. These are others like the self but not the self. The matrixial framework illuminates the prominence of repetition in Sula and Nel's relationship because it draws attention to the effect of their metaphorically shared maternal inheritance. However, it does not conflate the two, either; both Sula and Nel's maternal relationships encourage repetition and inherited becoming. It is only with—and because of—each other that Sula and Nel co-become, it is only with each other that they become themselves. As Nel thinks upon Sula's return,

It was like getting the use of an eye back, having a cataract removed. Her old friend had come home. Sula. Who made her laugh, who made her see old things with new eyes, in whose presence she felt clever, gentle and a little raunchy. Sula, whose past she had lived through and with whom the present was a constant sharing of perceptions. (*Sula* 95)

Togetherness in separation

This chapter's final section turns to the breakdown of Sula and Nel's friendship and their post-betrayal and post-death togetherness. Closely reading the climax of the novel, in which Nel discovers Sula and Jude having sex, I argue that it is during this time, when the friends are the most separated, that their togetherness is presented as strongest in *Sula*. Sula and Nel have an ongoing connectedness that their individual, and in Sula's case, selfish, decisions does not impact. Following Sula's misunderstanding and betrayal and Nel's abandonment of her friend, and Sula's death, Nel has a realisation of their otherworldly, everlasting togetherness.

Friendship in *Sula* is an end in itself. This chapter is largely unconcerned with the value, the healthiness, the functionality or the success of this friendship because the text itself explicitly rejects this preoccupation. *Sula* dramatises what was, even though it is no longer. A substantial challenge for a reader of *Sula* is that of theorising a 'failed' friendship. One strategy is to consider the reasons why Sula and Nel are unable to successfully hold their friendship together. The text itself suggests that Sula and Nel's connection is made impossible by the confines of the world in which it exists because of its participants' gender and race. However, the so-called failure of Sula and Nel is just as productive, interesting and enlightening—even more so—than a more harmonious friendship may be.

As adulthood approaches, Sula and Nel find that their merged self is hard to maintain in an unfriendly environment that does not understand them and does not seek to. Where Sula and Nel begin with a friendship 'at first uninfluenced by their social surroundings' this easy youth changes as the young women are encouraged to look outside their pairing for connection (Alfaqr 69). What begins with 'one and the same' changes into 'self and other' (Schreiner 43). For Elizabeth Abel, the key difference, more important than any betrayals or slights, is the differing expectations or definitions of friendship that Sula and Nel have as grown women: 'Friendship for Sula demands complete identification, which to her means a shared understanding of personal discovery. Nel's position is more traditional: friendship means loyalty' (Abel 429). This is certainly the case, and the rest of this chapter outlines, in part, the misunderstandings that lead to the discord between Sula and Nel. However, as this chapter also argues, in the end the novel affirms their togetherness and their separation/s as merely one aspect of their friendship.

In order to argue for *Sula's* portrayal of oneness or continuity, it is essential to account for a large part of their friendship and the novel that represents it. This is of course, the terrible, years-long break that occurs when Nel walks in on Sula and Jude 'down on all fours, naked, not touching except their lips' (*Sula* 105). Nel, taking over the narration for the scene, waits to feel a pain that does not properly come:

Hunched down in the small bright room Nel waited. Waited for the oldest cry. A scream not for others...but a deeply personal cry for one's own pain. A loud, strident: "Why me?" She waited. (*Sula* 108)

The scene at once follows a generic script of women's friendship and makes that script strange. On the one hand, the scene shows women's friendship as threatened by competition for a man (a device also used, to varying extents, in *Passing*, *Gone with the Wind* and *The Haunting of Hill House*). On the other hand, two highly symbolic things happen in the aftermath of Nel's discovery; she does not perceive Sula as naked even though the narrator has told the reader she is so, and Nel begins to be followed, for the rest of her life, by a light grey sphere that remains slightly out of view. The first occurs when the guilty couple realise they have been caught. Nel, merging with the narrator to speak to Jude in her mind, says, '[Sula] was sitting on the bed not even bothering to put on her clothes because actually she didn't need to because somehow she didn't look naked to me, only you did' (*Sula* 106). Sula's lack of nakedness to Nel symbolises their sameness, the integration of one with the other because one's nakedness, even during an act of betrayal that is seemingly wrenching them apart, still cannot produce shame. The next—an occasion of Morrison's 'strange stuff'—is the grey ball that materialises and follows Nel from the moment she disavows Sula and abandons their friendship:

She stood up frightened. There was something just to the right of her, in the air, just out of view. She could not see it, but she knew exactly what it looked like. A gray ball hovering just there. Just there. To the right. (*Sula* 109)

This grey ball is not Nel's trauma but the part of Sula that lives inside Nel. Due to her disavowal, Nel has pushed the Sula in herself outside, but because of their intrinsic connection, this process cannot be completed. Full rejection of Sula cannot occur because the other is in the self, to again use Henderson's term. History, the mother, the other/self: in Morrison's writings such things cannot be fully banished, only pushed down or aside. Such ways of managing have consequences, however, and Nel's is the grey ball and a cold, sad and proper future without the dynamism that Sula—the woman and the part of Nel—brings.

For her part, Sula cannot understand Nel's upset. Sula wants Nel to join her on her abnormal/unusual/radical way of being. Sula thinks that having Jude is nothing; because Nel has Jude so can Sula:

She had clung to Nel as the closest thing to both an other and a self, only to discover that she and Nel were not one and the same thing. She had no thought at all of causing Nel pain when she bedded down with Jude. They had always shared the affection of other people: compared how a boy kissed, what line he used with one and then the other. (*Sula* 119)

All actions and reactions, talking and doing and being are the same to Sula. In her mind, everything between herself and Nel is shared. However, Sula has fundamentally misunderstood something: that Nel may want something Sula does not. In a conventional sense Nel wants loyalty and ownership, in different ways, of both Sula and Jude. Jude having sex with another woman would no doubt have been terrible, but not as terrible. The problem is that Jude got Sula when she belonged to Nel.

Sula 'was ill prepared for the possessiveness of the one person she felt close to' (*Sula* 119). The break between the friends has little to do with sex or with Jude. Rather, it comes from not knowing the other who has been integrated into the self. It is also therefore not knowing the self, being surprised at the one who has been let in and therefore at the one who has done the letting in. Sula is upset that Nel wants her to be normal, to play along with the conventional script of the mistress and the betrayed wife. Nel is betrayed that Sula has betrayed her, that she didn't know her well enough to know that Sula couldn't have Jude. She is betrayed too, that Sula did not understand that Nel didn't want Jude to have Sula, that between Nel and Jude, Sula was to stay Nel's. When Nel reacts the way she does, refusing to acknowledge Sula and banishing Jude, Sula is shocked, having miscalculated Nel and their relationship:

Nel was the one person who had wanted nothing from her, who had accepted all aspects of her. Now she wanted everything, and all because of that. Nel was the first person who had been real to her, whose name she knew, who had seen as she had the slant of life that made it possible to stretch it to its limits. Now Nel was one of them. (*Sula* 119-120)

For Sula, wanting—from herself or an other—implies an insufficiency and this is a betrayal. In Sula's mind, Nel has taken their shared self and wrenched it apart, returning the two women to two parts each missing their whole. The world in which Sula is in Nel and Nel is in Sula is rejected by Nel. Nel has changed, seemingly disentangled herself from Sula and at least some of her allegiances lie with 'the town and all its ways' (*Sula* 120). Sula thought they were the same and different to everyone else, that what was Nel's was hers and vice versa. In part that

was because she grew up in Eva's house with 'women who thought all men available, and selected from among them with a care only for their taste' (*Sula* 119). Sula has learnt this unusual way of being in Eva's home. Togetherness is, for Sula, the same as living, as she spitefully thinks, '...alive is what...Nel did not want to be. Too dangerous' (*Sula* 120).

When Sula is dying, Nel finally makes a visit and their differences on the issue of Jude, and overall, are articulated. They have an awkward and fractious conversation:

[Nel] picked at the fringe on Sula's bedspread and said softly, "We were friends." "Oh, yes. Good friends," Sula said.

"And you didn't love me enough to leave him alone. To let him love me. You had to take him away."

"What you mean take him away? I didn't kill him, I just fucked him. If we were such good friends, how come you couldn't get over it?" (*Sula* 145)

Years later, in 1965, Nel, by now a middle-aged woman, goes to visit Eva in the aged care home into which Sula placed Eva years before (and, for the community, years too early). The old woman, refusing to be patronised by Nel, confronts her about Chicken Little's death. Eva says that even though it was not Nel who flung Chicken Little into the water, she was there and she enjoyed it: "'You. Sula. What's the difference? You was there. You watched, didn't you? Me, I never would've watched.'" (*Sula* 168). Nel denies this sameness, arguing that they were different, trying to convince herself, as she has for a long time, about the difference between them. Nel rushes out of the nursing home and on the side of the road, on the final pages of the novel and at Sula's final place, she has an epiphany:

"All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude.'" And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. "We was girls together," she said as though explaining something. "O Lord, Sula," she cried, "girl, girl, girlgirlgirl." (*Sula* 174)

'We was girls together', Nel now knows, 'girl, girl, girlgirlgirl'. In *Sula* girls are always together, and even when they are not (girl, girl), Sula suggests they shortly will be so ('girlgirlgirl').

Eva, the first woman of knowledge, has pushed Nel, forcing her to remember. At first, Nel refuses, but when she allows the past back in, she remembers watching. She remembers that

she watched as Sula swung Chicken Little around, then when Sula let go and he went into the river and didn't come out, Nel remembers being pleased, satisfied. Nel remembers Sula being terrified and panicked and regretful. The gift that Eva gives to Nel is the knowledge that even though Sula did the bad thing, it was Nel who wanted it. Through that wanting, she was a part of it, and because it didn't stop and start, that wanting, the being a part of it always remained. What Eva lets Nel see was that Nel and Sula were always together, were always the same. That no matter how much in her mind Nel tried to believe they were 'girl, girl', it was always 'girlgirlgirl'. The revelation produces mass relief. The ball that has followed Nel finally leaves her, confirming that it was representative of Sula and their haunting connection all along. The narrator says, 'a soft ball of fur broke and scattered like dandelion spores in the breeze' (*Sula* 174). The ball having broken, Nel is paradoxically freed through the reintegration of Sula into herself. Having been freed, and having reintegrated her essence of expression—Sula—Nel is able to express her sorrow and her reintegrated self:

It was a fine cry—loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top,
just circles and circles of sorrow. (*Sula* 174)

Toni Morrison's *Sula* is almost unparalleled in its serious exploration of women's friendship, especially of friendship between Black women. *Sula* portrays a friendship that is full of life; it is enriching, joyous and brutal. For Sula and Nel, co-becoming is a maternally inherited, continual matrixial process. Women's friendship between these two Black women is a space of full togetherness. Pain and betrayal are intermingled with laughter, joy and freedom. Even in death Sula reaches out for Nel, reflecting backward to Chicken Little's death. After she dies, the narrator follows her for a moment longer:

Sula felt her face smiling. "Well, I'll be damned," she thought, "it didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel" (*Sula* 149).

Conclusion:

Listen I love you

I aimed, in undertaking this thesis, to contribute to the small group of feminist researchers who have theorised women's friendship. My own work is literary and focused on women's friendship in the work of twentieth century American women writers. Although the specificities vary, I join a group that knows it is important to think about women, their relationships with each other and themselves, very deeply. In short, I attempted to credit a discredited relationship, to add my light to others who sought to illuminate an area that remains, about 100 years since Virginia Woolf's writing, too hidden.

Women's friendship in literature has thus far been understood as a relationship relative to other, more culturally respected, connections, and tied to sexuality and to familial bonds. Closely read texts of women's friendship most often are British and/or from the more distant past, and often relate friendship closely to either hetero- or homosexuality.¹⁵ I have sought to intervene in the current analytical trends by presenting a study with a rare scholarly scope and with a new psychoanalytical theory of women's friendship in literature. My aim was to understand this important relationship more deeply and to contribute to the field of twentieth century fiction by women. This is an important and worthy goal because, as the dearth of scholarly research shows, new voices, frameworks and literary readers are needed before we properly understand women's friendships and their construction in women's writing.

This thesis contributes new readings and a new theory of women's friendship in literature. I drew on Bracha Ettinger's work on the matrixial, an original and insightful theory of subjectivity and self-other connection. Not originally concerned with literature or women's friendship, Ettinger's work, attended closely and extended, has exciting, radical potential for

¹⁵ As outlined in this thesis' introduction, the most prominent studies of women's friendship in fiction have tended to focus on pre-Victorian (Janet Todd) and Victorian (Tess Cosslett, Sharon Marcus) British textual constructions. Readings of American women's friendships have also considered pre-twentieth century texts (Carroll Smith-Rosenberg), although significant interventions in this trend have included work on conflict in women's friendship (Judith Taylor), Black women's friendship (Mae Henderson) and Black and white women's friendship (Sharon Monteith, Marita Golden).

understandings of women's originary connections, and how these connections manifest in later life. This thesis' theoretical framework extends the use of the matrixial into the field of women's friendship and its textual construction for the first time. I used this theoretical framework alongside an established methodological approach of literary studies—close reading—to generate understandings on the ways my chosen texts produce meaning in relation to women's friendship. Using this method, I found that while not every friendship was matrixial in every way, the matrixial as a theoretical framework provided a valuable lens through which to seriously study the textual production of women's friendships and illuminate aspects of them, as constructed in twentieth century fiction, not previously understood.

My aim was to explore two interrelated questions: *What is women's friendship to women in literature?* And, the sub-question, *How do novels written by women in the first 75 years of twentieth century America construct friendship between women?* In investigating these questions I found that friendship is a means through which friends build the self. Self-building occurs through, with, and against the other's formation of her own self. In each novel studied, friends were figured as similar opposites; women (and girls) whose personalities, identities and circumstances were similar enough to allow mutual identification, legibility and connection but different enough to present a challenge to the self. In *The Awakening* this is most pronounced, as Edna sits between extreme opposites Adèle and Mademoiselle Reisz. In *The Haunting of Hill House* and *Passing* the protagonists feel their lack in the face of what they each perceive as their friend's glamour and worldliness. In *Gone with the Wind* it is the friend's goodness (Melanie) which challenges the protagonist's self and the reliance on an excluded party (Mammy) which supports the friendship and the friends' selves. The novel that most challenges this formula is *Sula*. Although Sula is the glamorous traveller, it is always Sula and Nel's similarities that are emphasised and material circumstances are less significant. It is the difference between women in friendship that develops the self and the friend. The texts construct differences in friendship as useful, practical, inspiring and destabilising. This is a kind of utility, a characteristic previously considered incompatible with true friendship. In the novels analysed here, useful friendships are not only common but are valuably self-building and necessary.

Harmonious friendship almost always involves a matrixial being-with the other, a play of closeness and distance. Destructive friendship is often produced by one or both friends insisting—or being perceived as insisting—on over-closeness. In functional friendships, the self and other may co-become in relation to each other but resist merging or fusion. When merging isn't resisted by one or both friends, the friendship collapses, as demonstrated by *The Haunting of Hill House* and *Passing*, or if unequal merging is assumed from the start, friendship cannot occur, as shown in *Gone with the Wind*. Again, *Sula* stands apart as a text which recognises merging, distance and coexisting in Sula and Nel's friendship. However, these resistances and collapses are not static in *Sula*. I found that women's friendship is the space between the psychically chosen other and the self, which although amorphous, continues to change, shift, strengthen and disintegrate, often stabilising and then repeating the shifting process again.

The twentieth century American novels considered here construct women's friendship as a relationship for its own sake, albeit one deeply affected by social forces. In particular, friendships between women are buffeted by race and gender politics, and the negative manifestations of these forces that seek to exclude and to enforce social hierarchy through racist anti-Blackness and heterosexist, masculinist misogyny. Friendships are affected by society as well as friends' desires and identities within their world. Despite, and sometimes because of, the societies in which they occur, texts often depict friendships not just as spaces of refuge or competition, but as meaningful personal investments on their own. In these novels, friendship is repeatedly prioritised as a relationship for its own sake, one that is meaningful, life-defining and important. When fictional friends harmonise, their commitment to their bonds manifests through support, joy, care, humour, tact and touch. When friendship is combative, commitment remains discordant and experienced painfully as betrayal, rejection or judgment. Texts construct friendship between women as significant, complicated and meaningful.

The novels depict an immense difficulty in maintaining closeness between the self and a beloved friendly other. The narrational structures of the texts reflect this difficulty. In each of the texts the narrator focalises closely on its protagonist/s, while also going through phases

of distance, writing which partially mimics the matrixial oscillation of closeness and distance. In *The Awakening*, *The Haunting of Hill House* and *Passing*, the narrators' focalisations become so close that they move—to varying degrees—into free indirect discourse and psychonarration, closing the difference and distinction between the narrator and character, encouraging consideration of the movement between merging and separation within the textual constructions of the texts themselves.

In the novels, to connect so closely with the non-I, the I who is not the self (to use Ettinger's terms) is depicted as liberating and life-giving, and as distinctly threatening. This leads to another of my findings on the ubiquity of death in the novel's studied. Unlikely as it may seem, when read together the novels' endings appear to generate a convention of women's friendship writing. In the novels I have closely read, each friendship has a death. Only two texts complicate this pattern and then only slightly. *Gone with the Wind* kills its saint, Melanie, but keeps Scarlett and Mammy together because the novel understands Mammy to be merely a part of Scarlett. Titular Sula dies but also lives on after death, as the text never fully separates its protagonist and friend. In *Passing* the protagonist likely has a hand in her friend's death. In *The Awakening* and *The Haunting of Hill House* the protagonist metaphorically and symbolically—if not actually—dies by suicide, for radically different reasons: self-creation and self-immolation, respectively. Why the women writers were unable to—or chose not to—imagine friendships that maintained closeness between the self and a beloved friendly other remains an open question. Of course, character death as dramatic plot point is not itself unusual in literature, although it is notable how ubiquitous it is in the novels I have studied. A possible explanation is that this recurring device points to both the radical potential of women's friendship, as well as the way this potential is repeatedly curtailed in the heterosexist, masculinist society in which women were writing in twentieth century America.

Another possible explanation is that these writers do not prioritise continuity as a significant aspect of friendship. Unlike Jacques Derrida, who links friendship and futurity, and Svetlana Boym, who regards friendship as an ongoing choice, the texts studied depict friendship between women as sometimes psychically ongoing but always corporally temporary. Perhaps this is a rejection of romantic love's cultural drive toward future-making (through marriage,

children and the continuation of the family). I am reminded of a short passage in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's article 'Paranoid and Reparative Reading' in which Sedgwick draws a distinction between two kinds of time: paranoid and reparative temporality. The former she describes as a kind of 'lockstep', an Oedipal way of being,

In which yesterday can't be allowed to have differed from today and tomorrow must be even more so, takes its shape from a generational narrative that's characterized by a distinctly Oedipal regularity and repetitiveness: it happened to my father's father, it happened to my father, it is happening to me, it will happen to my son, and it will happen to my son's son. ('Paranoid Reading' 147)

Contrasted with this kind of time is another, one which Sedgwick describes as queer but I suggest has parallels with the matrixial. Sedgwick refers to her own friendship group, made up of Sedgwick, aged 45 at the time of writing, two people in their thirties and one in her sixties. In theory, she explains, each life should follow the other according to age; the eldest should die first, next Sedgwick, and many years later her younger friends. However, due to cancer, environmental trauma and HIV, it is the woman in her 60s who, according to Sedgwick, 'is much the likeliest of us to be living fifteen years from now' (149). This results in increased intensity, a lack of time to waste. But it also changes identification:

On this scene, an older person doesn't love a younger as someone who will someday be where she now is, or vice versa. No one is, so to speak, passing on the family name; there's a sense in which our life narratives will barely overlap. There's another sense in which they slide up more intimately alongside one another than can any lives that are moving forward according to the regular schedule of the generations. There is one another immediately, one another as the present fullness of a becoming whose arc may extend no further, whom we must each learn best to apprehend, fulfill, and bear company. ('Paranoid Reading' 149)

Perhaps each of these texts enact the temporary, non-ongoing, but nevertheless 'present fullness' of Sedgwick's friendships. Women's friendship does not have the procreational, forward-facing charge of heterosexual love, even when the women who make up those friendships are in, or may desire to be in, heterosexual couplings with children. Whether normative or radical, the death of one friend and the survival of the other is a significant and sobering trend. In the novels studied, friendships were not fully ongoing.

Finally, I found that most often friendship occurs because friend characters spark in each other a particular previous knowing. This is the 'why' of friendship. This psyche-based connection may be explained in many ways (by using 'object relations' like Elizabeth Abel or 'libidinal desire' like Barbara Johnson, as two examples). I argue that the matrixial offers an alternative and useful lens through which to read. Drawing on the matrixial, to think through how women's originary experience in the womb is reinvested and returns in adult relationships, helps us to understand women's friendship in ways that can account for individuality and connectedness, as well as where connection comes from in the self and the other. This invention, reinvention and return manifests in different ways and to different extents in my chosen novels. In *Passing* it is a look which uncovers the past and beneath that, traces of original co-becoming. In *The Haunting of Hill House* it is represented by a possible future outside of merging. In *Sula* it is simply a fact of life, whereas in *Gone with the Wind* it is a knowing made impossible by racism. In *The Awakening* it is a source of power drawn on and then realised alone. In whichever way they enact it, all the texts play out women's friendship as a particular previous knowing.

The knowledge produced by this thesis about women's friendship in literature has two key implications for future scholarship. First, that texts may be read differently, with a closer eye to women's relationships with each other and especially those which are non-sexual and non-familial. By reading texts in such a way, this thesis demonstrates that new knowledge can be gleaned from older texts. The second implication of my work is recognition of the value and applicability of Ettinger's work outside of psychoanalysis and art studies. Drawing on the matrixial in two intertwined ways, I considered the theory in relation to women's friendship and to literature. My work suggests a wider application of the matrixial theory is not only possible, but necessary. Matrixial theory challenges researchers to prioritise women, to understand the specificities of their (inter-)subject formation, providing a paradigm of analysis outside pure individuality and fusion; to re-credit women's friendship.

The fields of women's friendship in literature and matrixial studies offer an abundance of avenues for further research, arising from both the large gaps in the field alongside the specificities of my own contribution. A wealth of opportunity exists for interesting and

important work to be undertaken in literary women's friendship. For example, extended analysis of post-second wave to contemporary feminist texts which focus on friendship would greatly increase our understanding of a wider range of texts, as well as the impact of feminism on women's friendship. Other work could be undertaken on friendship in literature in relation to diverse genders and sexualities, asking important questions about the effect of gender transition or non-binarism on women's and other genders' relationships with each other and themselves. Theorising male friendships of the American literary canon through a matrixial lens could be another interesting avenue for future scholarship. Texts such as Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) or Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1937) would offer the possibility for rich analysis, for example. While examining these texts comparatively with literatures from other geographical locations was not possible within the scope of this thesis, studies that focused on other places might illuminate the question of whether national context plays a significant role in shaping women's friendship and its textual representations.

The matrixial theory's great potential for further research, both inside and outside of literature and women's friendship is clear. Although figures such as Judith Butler, Griselda Pollock and Brian Massumi acknowledge the excellence of Ettinger's work, it remains surprisingly underused. A framework based on the matrixial would assist in developing knowledge in a diverse range of fields that consider women and their relationships including all aspects of women's writing, particularly life writing, archival work and poetry, as well as feminist philosophy, or work with a focus on theorising motherhood, daughterhood and sisterhood. Finally, the finding that particular narrative techniques, especially the use of psychonarration and free indirect discourse, can mimic the matrixial's oscillation between closeness and distance, and function to illustrate this movement between friends, opens up an interesting new avenue of research. The potential implications of the matrixial are multiple and exciting.

To conclude, I return to the poem with which I began this thesis, contemporary American poet Kim Addonizio's 'To the Woman Crying Uncontrollably in the Next Stall'. The poem, directed by the poet/speaker to another woman, reaches out through the stall walls to offer comfort for imagined life-giving sufferings. I chose this poem because it represents women's friendship

in literature to me. It centres on two women, the becoming-poet/speaker and the becoming-friend. The poet/speaker empathetically imagines the crying woman's pain. To do so, she implies that she knows these experiences, too. She engages with the crying woman not as self and other, but as I and non-I (Ettinger). She may be wrong in her assumptions, of course, although this is not what matters. The poet/speaker creates a space between the two women, textually represented by the stall door, one that is not fused or isolated, but is both together and apart, full of understanding and misunderstanding. The concluding lines flow from the poet/speaker's imaging's of the other woman into a joined space of compassionate, tactful connection. The poet/speaker demands—'listen'—and joins 'I' and 'you' with 'love'. Finally, she promises something a friend not only knows, but can help facilitate: joy.

because why not if you think nothing &

no one can / listen I love you joy is coming

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