“THE KINSHIP OF HER PAIN”:
INTIMATE HEALING IN AMERICAN WOMEN’S FICTION

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By Brianna Thompson

May 2021

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Cornell University 2021

In *Women’s Fiction*, Nina Baym studies popular pre- and postbellum American fiction by women. She says “the many novels all tell…a single tale. It is the story of a young girl who is…faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world” (11). My dissertation tells the story of a different, but related, kind of “women’s fiction:” what we might call “feminine erotic pedagogical manifestation” or “American women on the transformative intimacy of spiritual instruction.” These tongue-in-cheek phrases acknowledge that, like the “single tale” uniting Baym’s women’s literature, in the novels of this dissertation a particular trope occurs time and again. Suffering women come together to comfort and instruct each other in religion; they cry, they touch, they develop intimate bonds that generate new relationships, and these bonds are either predicated on alternative kindship structures or they lead to them. In the novels I study, the erotic force of grief, instruction, and religion forges amongst women a mystic, unwavering love that transcends the choppiness of secular time and that dissolves heteronormative social proscriptions. In the narratives themselves as well as across literary time periods and genres, women open up to each other because they are opening up to god or a spiritual force. The intimate, recurring intentions behind those relations suggest that these female characters repeat their behaviors to continue being close to each other.

I use Aimee Rowe’s phrase “erotic pedagogy” to describe this process since her term articulates how the erotic “is not reducible to one thing, but works at the nexus of the body, desire, love, and the spiritual” (1032). Working with Audre Lorde’s classic “Uses of the Erotic,”

I suggest that erotic pedagogy operates as an analytic for tracing the persistence of love as new kinship and even new worlds through 19th and 20th century texts by white and black women. This dissertation is concerned with what the life force does in these works of fiction, and how eros is a power that is cathected through kinship as an erotic locus for creating something that makes an untenable situation livable.

I describe my approach to subjectivity in this dissertation as a "speculative promiscuous sobjectivity." This neologism's coincidental play on the emotive sob reflects an understanding of identity formation and relationality as a leaky, porous process that tumbles past the supposed subject-object divide. This term for articulating erotic pedagogy's methodological foundation is in conversation with Audre Lorde as well as other black feminist thinkers like Alexis Pauline Gumbs. In her *M Archive*, Gumbs theorizes modes of being for black people that move beyond racialized and gendered power structures. "Speculative promiscuous sobjectivity" also theorizes with Octavia Butler as a writer of stories about beings who are impossible to categorize as completely good or bad. Take, for example, Doro's increasing complexity in the Patternmaster series, both the Oankali and Lilith in the Xenogensis series, and Lauren in the Parable series; all these characters are deeply flawed, never entirely sympathetic, or downright villainous with increasingly redeeming qualities. Butler wrote about alternate, potentially utopian worlds while maintaining a pessimistic worldview. A pressing theme of her oeuvre is how to survive, rather than defeating your oppressor, which refuses the binary of domination and submission.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Brianna Beverlee Thompson received a B.A. in English from the University of Nevada-Reno in 2009, an M.A. from the University of Virginia in 2014, and a Ph.D. in English from Cornell University in 2021. She was born in Denver, Colorado and calls Nevada home.

DEDICATION

For anyone who has ever loved and for all those who are fighting to be recognized as human, worthy of love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation was born of so much support. I have all of my cohort at Cornell to thank, as well as my close friends and family. It often feels as though my partner and my father, mother, and sister got this degree with me, they were so much a part of the process. Justin, thank you for the beginning. Shirley, Kate, Cathy, Sharon; you have been generous and professional. Thank you for all your help along the way. I wish Carol Warrior was here to read the final project. I carry her in my thoughts alongside others who did not get to live to 2021: my maternal grandmother, my paternal grandmother, and my grandpa Marv. Grandma, when you asked me why I needed to go graduate school to learn English, this is what I was really up to. Thank you for your love and support. Finally, I acknowledge the year 2020 as a year of loss, challenge, and social unrest that played the soundtrack to the final revisions of this dissertation. To the black lives lost at the hands of white supremacy, to those who died nationally and globally due to the pandemic: may you rest in power.

Table of Contents

Conclusion, Consolata, Convent, Coven (*Paradise*'s Lap of Love)

Introduction

In Susan Warner's wildly successful 1850 novel *The Wide, Wide World*, two female characters develop a bond of intense spiritual and erotic intimacy through religious instruction. My dissertation analyzes other examples of this relationship, showing how this particular female bond is not limited to *The Wide, Wide World* or even to nineteenth century American literature. In novels like Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' 1863 *The Gates Ajar* and Octavia Butler's 1998 *Parable of the Talents*, the reader encounters female characters who are mourning lost loved ones or traumatized by violence. These suffering characters seek another woman who offers comforting religious instruction. In each novel, this process involves variations of a surprisingly similar procedure: holding the crying woman, teachings about God through intimacy, and offering a devotion to the teacher that involves alternative kinship structures. My project opens with the question: what about touch, feelings, and faith amongst American women and in the wake of devastation inspires different authors to configure these items in similar ways? Further, why does this fusion of eroticism and religious teaching often involve altering heteronormative kinship structures? Since the sisters Susan and Anna Warner hint at this relationship, let me give an example from their life that leads me to this genealogy of texts.

Susan Warner died in 1885. Anna lovingly wrote her sister's biography in 1909; she recalls that joining the Presbyterian church together marked the beginning of their closeness.

Anna says “my sister’s better knowledge of me, our real intimacy, begins there. For now we were on ground where neither years nor knowledge went for much” (204). She tenderly refers to her sister posthumously “I think then the bond was knit between us two which should outlast all time and change. For still I find myself questioning what she would have me do; still, unconsciously, I say ‘we’ and ‘ours’” (204). The Warner sisters were born into a prosperous New York family that, after losing everything in the financial crisis of 1837, led an often lonely life of material deprivation on Constitution Island. By the time Susan Warner was in her mid-thirties she and her sister were the breadwinners of the family. They sold periodicals, novels, hymns, and children’s books to make ends meet. Anna’s biography of her sister, replete with Susan’s journal entries, insists that in the face of social isolation and financial want they survived on spiritual sustenance and love of each other. In 1851, after hearing the news that her newly published, successful *The Wide, Wide World* would bring in desperately needed income, Susan records in her diary that she reads a hymn: “I had not read two verses of ‘We Would See Jesus’ when I thought of Anna. I sat by her [Anna] a little while with my head against her crying such delicious tears. It seemed to me that other people find pleasure on the earth, and as if A. and I go skimming through the air to get it- more refined and pure. Thank God for this” (Anna Warner, 342-343).

These quotations thrum with a deep female intimacy that includes joint religious pleasure. Anna and Susan were fused as “one” in Anna’s eyes not explicitly through their experiences surviving together but, according to Anna, because of their powerful religious convictions. These convictions collapse the sisters’ eight year age difference since they are predicated on “a ground” in which spiritual intimacy transcends worldly, material time and concerns. Of particular note is the way that Susan’s passage demonstrates what the sisters’

physical bodies and feeling hearts *do* in these distilled moments of spiritual concord. Susan's intense emotions make her turn to a hymn, which sparks the thought of her sister, compelling her to lay her head against Anna and cry in gratitude for god. As Anna and Susan skim the ether for spiritual pleasure, their bodies touch intimately; their hearts open to each other as much as they open to God. Although Susan's words "refined and pure" might seem to privilege the airy spirit more than the material body, those terms hinge on the verb "skimming," or an active seeking. This reinforces that Anna and Susan's quest for pleasure yields tiny bits of joy that become so meaningful, so refined, because the sisters crave them. Warner's comment brings to mind Audre Lorde's definition of the erotic connection as "sharing deeply any pursuit with another person" and "the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy" ("Uses of the Erotic," 56).[1] In her journal entry, Susan is claiming that she and her sister (a unit, according to Anna) are entitled to pleasure, no matter how long they must fly for meagre scraps of it. As she leans against her sister, Warner's tears are delicious because she and Anna have shared intimately the struggle to survive in poverty while gleaning pleasure together from their devotion to god.

Previous Scholarship

In *Women's Fiction*, Nina Baym famously studies popular pre- and postbellum American fiction by women. She says "the many novels all tell, with variation, a single tale. It is the story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she had rightly or wrongly depended on to sustain her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world" (11). My dissertation tells the story of a different, but related, kind of "women's fiction:" what we might call "feminine erotic pedagogical manifestation" or "American women on the transformative intimacy of spiritual instruction." These tongue-in-cheek phrases acknowledge

that, like the "single tale" uniting Baym's women's literature, in the novels of this dissertation a particular trope occurs time and again. Suffering women come together to comfort and instruct each other in religion; they cry, they touch, they develop intimate bonds that generate new relationships, and these bonds are either predicated on alternative kindship structures or they lead to them. In the novels of this dissertation, the erotic force of grief, instruction, and religion forges amongst women a mystic, unwavering love that transcends the choppiness of secular time and that dissolves heteronormative social proscriptions. In the narratives themselves as well as across literary time periods and genres, women open up to each other because they are opening up to god or a spiritual force. The intimate, recurring intentions behind those relations suggest that these female characters repeat their behaviors to continue being close to each other, such as the way *The Gates Ajar* ends with Mary's peaceful conviction that she will see her beloved dead aunt in heaven again as she was on earth.

The most striking behavior these women repeat is teaching and learning while intimately touching. I use Aimee Rowe's phrase "erotic pedagogy" to describe this process since her term articulates how the erotic "is not reducible to one thing, but works at the nexus of the body, desire, love, and the spiritual" (1032). Working with Audre Lorde's classic "Uses of the Erotic," Rowe aims to bring the transformative potential of the erotic into systems of contemporary classroom pedagogy. For her, "the erotic becomes a methodology…a way of thinking about power and one's relation to it for the purposes of reclaiming the erotic power that has been distorted so that we no longer recognize its gift of transformative power" (1036). She gives examples from her classroom in which she encourages her students to be vulnerable and mindful through exercises in which they practice the "exchange of energy and love" (1037). My use of erotic pedagogy to describe teaching practices between fictional female characters signals this

understanding of the erotic as a loving, transformative force. I also suggest that these women use vulnerable, intimate touch to cultivate a kind of love that cannot be reduced to either the sexual, the romantic, the spiritual, or the platonic. In Rowe's understanding, erotic pedagogy is a politically subversive tool that she hopes to bring into the public sphere. Where the transformative power of the erotic has been co-opted by the capitalist, heterosexual imagination for the purposes of reproducing labor in private, Rowe seeks to bring the power of the erotic into the public sphere by bringing it into the classroom. She laments the way that neoliberal capitalism has contained the transformative power of eros by limiting it to the home or private sphere, writing that "the erotic is individuated and mapped onto cults of family and domesticity that contain the transformative force of the erotic" (1041). For her, domestic spaces are problematically depoliticized by capitalist logic.

Rowe's term offers a useful analytic, but I use it for ends different than she. In this dissertation, while erotic pedagogy is bound up in an understanding of the private sphere as a place that often operates within the conservative logic of separate spheres, transformative female love does not work to reproduce labor or biological Christian families. What sets apart my use of erotic pedagogy from Rowe's is that I attend to instances in which the erotic in domestic spaces fails to do what corralled intimacy is "supposed" to do between heterosexual subjects in private settings: organize into dyads and procreate to reproduce labor. Rowe assumes that the public/private divide is problematic because the private sphere depoliticizes erotic intimacy. Yet in my work, while domestic intimacy is not necessarily politically subversive, it does not necessarily function to reproduce normative coupling, kinship, or labor relations. I insist on the transformative potential of eros in teaching moments because erotic power in the novels I discuss cannot be contained by the "cults of family and domesticity" that Rowe sees as restrictive. Even

in the face of conservative Christian forms of faith-based healing, erotic energy will not be confined. I show how erotic energy presses against and flows out of the structures that try to circumscribe it, in particular by restructuring normative kinship or by not recognizing secular systems of time.

Rowe defines her understanding of the erotic in erotic pedagogy, referring to "pedagogy" as "schooling relations" between student and teacher in the contemporary US education system (1033). Although the relationship between female characters in my dissertation is indeed one between a student and a teacher, I choose the word "pedagogy" to underscore the instructive, transformative nature of the relationship between the characters in the novels of my dissertation. bell hooks has usefully theorized this quality of instruction in *Teaching to Transgress*, writing that the "creative and generative forces of the erotic aren't limited to sexual but also to the transformation of consciousness" (194). Pedagogy in my work is synonymous with hooks' "transformation of consciousness" since it centers teaching in ways that alter how people relate to each other and to the world. The work of Shoshana Felman also helps me articulate pedagogy's transformative activity. Felman writes that pedagogy is constituted by crisis; for her, true learning takes place by exposing the student to shockingly new or difficult knowledge that changes student and teacher (53). However, where Felman's teaching imagines students and teachers learning by "reintegrat[ing] the crisis in a transformed state of meaning," the characters that I study are different in that they themselves and/or their kinship structures are the transformed meaning (54). Erotic pedagogy surpasses Felman's model of teaching as transformative crisis in that as they change, fictional women do not just operate in cognitive or psychic realms, but also make use of their bodies and hearts.

In addition to building on Audre Lorde's scholarship, my sense of "erotic" is a development of Carla Kaplan's use of the word in her 1997 *The Erotics of Talk*. Her work seeks to revitalize the feminist critical practice of literary recuperation by mapping the desire for an ideal listener in classic feminist texts. Just as Kaplan sees the erotic as "a communicative medium" because desire "might allow us to listen to each other….without assuming…that we already know what the other is saying," intimate teaching in the texts I consider allows women to transform together by being open to each other (16, 40). Where Kaplan addresses vulnerability through listening, I note scenes of vulnerable reflexivity that often begin with physical touch. Painful feelings of loss, trauma, and loneliness compel the women in my texts to seek out comfort that often calls for holding, clinging, caressing, and kissing. Mourning often functions in these novels as an intense desire to be relieved of pain that is satisfied and then altered by other women's teachings. Erotic pedagogy in my project, then, is the way female characters feel a depth of emotion with other women as comforter/comforted or student/teacher and through the satisfying, reflexive intimacy of comfort, solidarity, and lessons about religion.

Additionally, this dissertation is in conversation with a recent text that also takes as its keystone Audre Lorde's erotics. Elizabeth Freeman's 2019 *Beside You in Time: Sense Methods and Queer Sociabilities in the American 19th Century* mobilizes the erotic to address temporality's organization of embodiment in the long nineteenth century. In her study, Freeman suggests that "the sense of time is instrumental to becoming social in an expansive mode I call queer hypersociality and that time itself is a mode of engroupment for both dominant and subordinated human energies" (17). Queer hypersociality issues from a Foucauldian framework, as, Freeman argues, "the body was understood as being fully penetrable by time before it was understood as being fully penetrable by desire" (6). Where Freeman's Foucauldian background

considers the construction and organization of subjects, I come from a less institutionally traditional understanding of subjectivity: black feminist theory.

Methodology

I describe my approach to subjectivity in this dissertation as a "speculative promiscuous sobjectivity." This neologism's coincidental play on the emotive sob reflects an understanding of identity formation and relationality as a leaky, porous process that tumbles past the supposed subject-object divide. This term for articulating erotic pedagogy's methodological foundation is in conversation with Audre Lorde as well as other black feminist thinkers like Alexis Pauline Gumbs. In her *M Archive: After the End of the World*, Gumbs theorizes modes of being for black people "after the end of the world" (xi). Moving beyond racialized and gendered power structures takes the shape of a speculative documentary, one that blends genres of poetry, prose, academic scholarship, and public-facing activism all while footnoting black feminist ancestors like Hortense Spillers and M. Jacqui Alexander. Writing with, not about, thinkers like Audre Lorde, Octavia Butler, Alice Coltrane, and Rihanna, Gumbs proposes a radical black woman's agency: "it wasn't time that would make the difference, nor the specific mass of land, it was the act of choosing. of choosing each other. again" (102).

"Speculative promiscuous sobjectivity" also theorizes with Octavia Butler as a writer of stories about beings who are impossible to categorize as completely good or bad. Take, for example, Doro's increasing complexity in the Patternmaster series, both the Oankali and Lilith in the Xenogensis series, and Lauren in the Parable series; all these characters are deeply flawed, never entirely sympathetic, or downright villainous with increasingly redeeming qualities. Butler

wrote about alternate, potentially utopian worlds while maintaining a pessimistic worldview.[2] A pressing theme of her oeuvre is how to survive, rather than defeating your oppressor, which refuses the binary of domination and submission. Likewise, erotic pedagogy's methodology is predicated on the both/and subjectivity that the Atlantic Slave Trade and ensuing African diaspora necessitated for enslaved people to survive. We see this operating in Toni Morrison's *Paradise* through the Catholic nun Consolata's decision to embrace her Afro-Brazilian Candomblé heritage. As a creolized, New World mix of African divinities and Catholicism, Candomblé is a lived experience in which two seemingly separate spiritual realities depend upon each other. One scholar writes that most Candomblé adherents "see themselves as both Candomblé followers and good Catholics. They attend both the Sunday mass and Candomblé ceremonies, and do not see any contradiction at all in the way they view their orixas, and in many Candomblé terrieros 'baptism into the Catholic faith is a pre-requisite of initiation into Candomblé'" (Marouan, 101).

Thus, erotic pedagogy operates as an analytic for tracing the persistence of love as new kinship and even new worlds through 19th and 20th century texts by white and black women. This dissertation is more concerned with what the life force does in these works of fiction, and how eros is a power that is cathected through kinship as an erotic locus for creating something that makes an untenable situation livable. Sometimes, this untenable situation is the direct result of patriarchal power structures. Other times, they are more implicitly related to masculinist domination as it takes shape in expressions of nationalism, war, and the loss of life that this structure necessitates. For example, in *The Gates Ajar*, Winifred and Mary challenge patriarchal power structures by strategizing a way to cope with and live beyond the wreckage of the Civil War, an event linked not just to racial capitalism through slavery but also to patriarchal

nationalism. Winifred and Mary make their worlds livable again in spite of their suffering by, through intimate healing together, finding an agency that allows them to escape the confines of secular time (one might say the time of suffering). *Parable of the Talents*, on the other hand, is more overt in its use of erotic pedagogy as a means of refusing the demands of patriarchy to create a better world. While these chapters are less concerned with the kind of subjectivity erotic pedagogy makes for, I want to be clear about where my methodology comes from and to which theorists I owe a debt. I hope my scholarship can help galvanize the energies of academic and public institutions to recognize black feminist thinking as one of the keys to a sustainable future.

The Stakes of Erotic Pedagogy

A dissertation that bridges the nineteenth and twentieth century must clarify the stakes of yoking together two drastically different time periods. I maintain that the importance of erotic pedagogy, or feminine identified people in moments of devastation who create futures that are sustained by erotic ties is contemporary insofar as it models survival in a time of accelerated threats to life such as climate change, increasing political divisiveness, 2020's race riots and protests against police brutality,[3] the staggering number of Covid19 deaths, as well as the poverty and isolation that the pandemic has wrought. Key to framing the significance of my analytic is that futurity in this dissertation is not only linked to new or alternative worlds (like Earthseed in *Parable of the Talents*, a Christian heaven in *The Gates Ajar*, or the spiritual plane in *Paradise*). Futurity is the persistent erotic tie, the survival of love. But erotic pedagogy's relevance also extends past our current moment, into the nineteenth century.

Why read *The Gates Ajar* and *The Wide, Wide World* as novels of erotics, desire taboos, and even as texts that brush up against queer theory? Doing so builds on recent scholarly efforts to expand queer theory's purview by bringing women's writing from the eighteenth and nineteenth century into conversation with contemporary queer thought, a field that often overlooks its beginnings in feminism and writing by women that privilege embodiment.[4] This dissertation suggests that queer theory, and, in particular, certain strands of reproductive futurity, become crucially indebted to white women's sentimental fiction. In *The Gates Ajar*, this takes the shape of Phelps' choice to use a nonnormative relationship (an incestual one) to set Mary up for the most intense mourning; in Warner's *The Wide, Wide, World*, promiscuous kinship is defined by affectively intense yet interchangeable family roles, and characterized by an incest that refuses order, that is open, and that politely declines the religio-political mandate to regulate desire. Scholars have traced queer theory's investment in affect back to sentimental literature,[5] but I explicitly show how the embodied passions of grief, intense love, and open attachment common to sentimental fiction are erotically charged relations. My methodological approach recasts Smith-Rosenberg's articulation of female intimacy as a bond that was also ripe with the potential for spiritual passion in order to draw attention to the transformative erotic qualities of religion and affective intensity (mourning or extreme love) as processed through female desire. With this approach, I signal the importance of Audre Lorde as a progenitor for modern queer thought. I hope to add Phelps' and Warner's sentimental novels to the archive of queer theory while also acknowledging that celebrating Smith-Rosenberg's theorization of romantic friendship as "queer before queer studies was invented" omits black feminism's imperative contributions to queer theory (Lutzen, 37).

White queer theory's unacknowledged debt to both sentimental fiction and black feminist theory, both Audre Lorde and June Jordan in particular, emerges in *Parable of the Talents* as a return to embodied religion. Butler queers religion by envisioning an institutionalized worship of Change through physical and emotional intimacy, located in the knowledge of the body; in other words, Butler takes what seems like Womanist Theology but intentionally establishes it as an institutionalized (egalitarian) religion rather than spiritual practice. In Butler's novel, religion is Lauren's gateway to inspiring her community to create a more sustainable, loving future for themselves. Thus, queer theory's debt to black feminist writing is also a debt to spirituality and religion as crucial vectors for the energies of futurity provided by kinship, families, and affect. We could say that queer theory names a practice Afrofuturism has been engaged in since the 1970's along with black feminism, since Butler's novel continues a mode of thinking critically about how socially just, equitable futures might be built in the works of artists like Sun Ra, George Clinton, Wangechi Mutu, Grace Jones, and Janelle Monae.

Erotic pedagogy serves as a useful framework for analyzing twentieth century texts like Octavia Butler's 1998 *Parable of the Talents* because, as a revision of sentimental fiction's tendency toward racism, it corrects Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous injunction (to white people) to "feel right" about the immorality of slavery. Afrofuturist fictions like *Parable of the Talents* are a radical, socially conscious answer to sentimental fiction, since it uses institutional religion to stoke feelings in its characters that, in turn, catalyze action; but *Parable of the Talents*' religion is predicated on the radical equity of all humans. It stokes erotically conscious feelings as enriching expressions available to everyone. Where Stowe wants (white) readers to feel that the enslavement of simple-minded black people is immoral, her novel mobilizes affect in the service of slavery's abolition because enslavement is a crime against Christianity, not because

she sees those who are enslaved as human.[6] Erotic pedagogy in *Parable of the Talents* revises sentimental fiction's use of affect to instantiate change by mobilizing an institutional religion that is invented by a black woman who lives in a post-apocalyptic world where almost everyone is suffering and in need of a comforting moral force.

Lacunae in Religious Scholarship

This dissertation builds on important work in theology, notably Mark Jordan's text *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*. Jordan's text explores how "sodomite" crystalizes into "sodomy" as a description of same-sex desire in medieval theology. Crucial for my argument is Jordan's point that "erotic disorder is caught up in a system of causes with opulence, which is itself viewed as feminizing, and with arrogance, which is the root of all spiritual disorder" (17). The disruptive energies of desiring human bodies end up reinforcing "the nascent theological project of moral categorization" (17). Jordan's work illuminates how carnality in Judeo-Christian culture has been historically associated with femininity. As a cultural synecdoche for female desire, in traditions of early modern Catholicism eros was such a taboo, uncontrollable force that it helped define moral hierarchies. Erotic pedagogy, then, traces stories of how women and feminized subjects seized eros within a religious context in ways that *reorder* power, aligning it with their desires. Although he does not articulate it as such, Jordan's work builds on earlier scholarship on witchcraft. This dissertation tells the story women who use intimate, instruction love within the purview of religion to live in contradictory, ambivalent places that have historically been associated with witchcraft. By redirecting their love toward other women, they reorder the locus of divine power as something associated with femininity. The religious female characters in the novels I study exude pagan goddess energy, since

"Christianity traditionally found it difficult to accept the principle of ambivalence in the deity: the Christian God was wholly god and wholly masculine, excluding both the feminine principle and the principle of evil" (Russell 94).

My chapters also address notable lacunae in early modern literary studies of religion, where scholars have paid less attention to Protestant erotics than they do to Catholicism alongside eroticism. In scholarship on Christianity and the erotic, critics like Richard Rambuss have shown that there was a sensual, physical quality common to some early modern Catholicism and sects of the Reformed Christian Church. [7] Rambuss' provocation frames a fascinating aspect of my own argument, namely, that the erotic was feature of early modern Catholic writers like Richard Crashaw or John Donne, or a feature of seventeenth-century reformed Christianity, but eroticism in the history of American Protestant practices, and within nineteenth century contexts, is discussed far less frequently. In fact, eroticism has a long history of being submerged within, rejected by, or disassociated from Protestantism due to anti-Catholicism. Anti-Catholic sentiments of the nineteenth century often led white Protestants to implicitly code Catholicism as "a strategically confused language of spiritual desire" through which they could project repressed eroticism (Franchot, xxii). Scholars have noted the radical approaches to sexuality taken by offshoots of Protestantism that occurred during the Second Great Awakening; for example, Mormonism and John Humphrey Noyes' Oneida Community both practiced non normative modes of sexuality and kinship. But critics often treat these movements, and especially the Oneida Community, as exceptions to or offshoots of mainstream Protestantism that were inspired by the spiritual fervor of the Second Great Awakening. Eroticism as a constituent component fails to be considered as part of American Protestantism. With the concept of erotic pedagogy, I am suggesting that the erotic has a crucial place in

seemingly patriarchal, apparently normative yet feminized, sentimentalized Protestant accounts of religious experience.

Within the Black church, which has historically been majority Protestant denominations, and especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, scholars have pointed to "the uneasy presence of sexuality and the erotic within the context" of African American religious life (Hopkins and Pinn, 1). Although the monolithic black church problematically collapses ecumenical diversity into one type, I use the phrase to signal African Americans who are joined in church community through worship and socio-economic oppression, a group of people who are historically different from white Protestants (Harper). Critics have suggested that the 20th century black church often valued the soul over the body because "black flesh was doubly damned, or at least more deeply stained," and especially in order to avoid "myths of super black sexuality" embraced theologies that privileged the soul over incarnate flesh (Pinn, 5, 301). While much work has been done on African American spirituality and erotics, not to mention the existence of movements like Black Liberation Theology or Womanism, when it comes to black Protestantism, there remains a sense that the erotic has no place in institutional religion.[8]

Chapter Summaries

My chapters on the nineteenth century novels *The Gates Ajar* and *The Wide, Wide World* demonstrate that in the thick of culturally normalized anti-Catholicism that disavowed the erotic qualities of the body, some sentimental texts still claimed those qualities as crucial aspects of Protestant faith, if not as a generative component of Protestant theology. My chapter on *Parable of the Talents*, Octavia Butler's 1998 novel, illuminates the way that the protagonist's move

away from patriarchal Christianity uses erotic intimacy to establish a new religious community of her own invention. In each dissertation chapter, I show how the vitality of erotic pedagogy functions between a female student and teacher in unexpected, remarkable ways. This dynamism allows for both a mystic and a physical relationship between women that seems to transcend time as the arc of my project moves from texts set in the mid nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth. Each chapter seeks to understand why grieving women come together to touch, feel intimately, and cultivate faith together in such similar ways, despite of their vastly different cultures and time periods.

Chapter one, "'*cling with both hands*': Erotic Pedagogy in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' *The Gates Ajar*" has three sections. The first and longest section shows that religious teaching and mourning enabled desire taboos in 19th century America because religious instruction as it bleeds into surviving grief is a transformative experience that I describe as erotic pedagogy. I show how protagonist Mary pivots from a sister desiring her brother to same-sex desire for her aunt Winifred, establishing with Winifred a radical new intimacy that exceeds traditional categories of love while continuing Mary's ability to live in a queer family that sets her apart from the rest of the world. I argue that that taboo desires matter in *The Gates Ajar* because they are part of Phelps' consolation strategy; she comforts readers by creating a unique relationship that makes for the most uniquely devastating mourning. Mary's different love for Roy allows for a more exemplary grief for bereaved postbellum readers. The chapter's next section returns to some of the earliest scholarly critiques of *The Gates Ajar* as intellectually weak in order to counter those readings by claiming that *Gates* combines erotically embodied power with an intellectually engaged "theology of feelings," as I call it. Erotic pedagogy between Mary and Winifred illuminates Phelps' engagement in the theological debates around reason and feeling that

energized Andover, the seminary in Phelps' hometown, from the 1840's through the 1860's. In the concluding section, I examine eroticism as a function of domestic space and how that space is related to atmosphere.

In chapter two, "Erotic Pedagogy in *Parable of the Talents*," I trace the way that Lauren's religion Earthseed is her solution to devastating post-apocalyptic conditions. The chapter's first section explores how Lauren's invented religion departs from her father's Christian ministry. Through readings of the biblical parable of the talents, I show that Lauren rejects Christianity's masculinist hierarchical authority by finding religion's might in the vulnerability of physical and emotional intimacy. The second section analyzes instances of erotic pedagogy between Lauren and her followers. I argue that Lauren's acts of holding through erotic pedagogy evidence the importance of materiality and thus the value of bodily closeness as a component of Earthseed's community. The third and final section of this chapter suggests that Lauren's commitment to Earthseed necessitates mothering of a religious movement often at the expense of her biological child, or a radical motherhood that enables Lauren to form alternative kinship structures predicated on spiritual kinship. I claim that Lauren's eventual sacrificing of her own biological daughter Larkin for the sake of her religious movement demonstrates how Earthseed's spiritual kinship must flatten the primacy of biological relations in order to lift all Earthseed community members up to the level of family.

My third chapter, "The Promiscuity of Erotic Pedagogy in *The Wide, Wide World*" analyzes Ellen's and Alice's erotically charged teaching relationship as "promiscuous intimacy," or a particular iteration of erotic pedagogy. This chapter traces how erotic pedagogy is Ellen's means of cultivating a heart of flesh, or a heart that is responsive to Christ's call, by being intimate with other women's flesh. I show how Alice and Ellen's intermingling flesh and

feelings model on the individual level an intense merging that does not always discern between social categories of separation. Alice and Ellen's mixing bodies reflect "promiscuous" kinship in which family roles are both intensely intimate and replaceable.

In my conclusion, I address how twentieth century racialization in the United States recasts the location and emphasis of representations of erotic pedagogy by turning to Toni Morrison's 1997 novel *Paradise*, in which a group of traumatized women in 1970's Oklahoma stay at a Convent with a Catholic nun, Consolata for a healing ritual. I bring the novel's emphasis on communal, healing, female touch and embodiment into conversation with Toni Cade Bambara's *The Black Woman*, suggesting that erotic pedagogy in *Paradise* is part of the black feminist insistence on self-determination that responded to masculinist Black Nationalism. In particular, I analyze Consolata's turn away from Catholicism and embrace of her native Afro-Brazilian Candomblé to initiate a healing rite for the women. Consolata's religious reorientation demonstrates how a Christian erotic pedagogy does not serve black women (and one white woman). Black feminist erotic pedagogy calls for a non-institutional, non-dyadic approach to healing instruction, one that rejects patriarchy by turning to the women themselves. Morrison published her formally difficult, scholarly under-studied 1997 novel one year prior to Butler's *Parable of the Talents*. *Paradise*'s narrative is notoriously knotted, as the story is told out of chronological order and thus jumps backward and forward in time from the point of view of various characters. The novel's formal difficulty demonstrates that the present is an ever-unfolding conversation with the past and the future; stories are rarely linear since the present moment is as much about ancestry as it is our own moment.

Paradise's narrative structure informs my organization of this dissertation's chapters, as I approach my historical objects of study from the perspective of non-linear temporality. By first

analyzing Phelps' 1868 *The Gates Ajar*, leaping forward in time to Butler's 1998 *Parable of the Talents* in my second chapter, and then in my third returning to Warner's 1850 *The Wide, Wide World*, I take a cue from Morrison, arranging my chapters thematically and dialogically rather than chronologically. This formal gesture reflects my desire for stories that organize themselves relationally, in conversation, rather than predicating their affinities on a historical periodization that can translate to teleology. After all, speculative fiction works by envisioning the worlds and dialogues that could be, exploding past the confines of knowledge organized by the social laws of our world. By brushing against the grain of strict periodization, I insist that erotic pedagogy is the thematic thread knitting itself through these texts, looping them into relation, rather than years or chronological American history. Thus, I strive to position *The Gates Ajar* (1868) as both sentimental fiction and potential speculative fiction, while asking what *Parable of the Talents* has to offer us as Afrofuturist, postapocalyptic fiction that revises tropes of sentimentality. *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) is less interested in imagining futures, and thus I read it as a meticulous, intensely focused case study of the complex relationality that erotic pedagogy opens up. Finally, *Paradise* is the knot at the end of the thread, keeping the weave intact as an example of erotic pedagogy in its most communal, collective, non-institutionally religious expression.

Chapter One

"*cling with both hands*": Intimacy in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' *The Gates Ajar*

I. Introduction[9]

> "At that time, it will be remembered, our country was dark with sorrowing women… Towards the nameless mounts of Arlington, of Gettysburg, and the rest, the yearning of desolated homes went out in those waves of anguish which seem to choke the very air that the happier and most fortunate must breathe. Is there not an actual, occult force in the existence of a general grief?...It is like a material miasma. Into that great world of woe my little book stole forth."
>
> -Elizabeth Stuart Phelps[10]

> "But support will always have a special and vividly erotic set of image/meanings for me now, one of which is floating upon a sea within a ring of women like warm bubbles keeping me afloat."
>
> -Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*[11]

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps conceived of her first book *The Gates Ajar* in 1863-1865, the years immediately after the Civil War. With a death toll of over 623,000 American soldiers and an unknown number of civilian casualties, the only group of people that the war generated in surfeit were mourners. Phelps describes the years after the war as dark ones. She

> "wished to say something that would comfort some few…of the women whose misery crowded the land. I do not think I thought so much about the suffering of men…but the women-....to them I would have spoken. For it came to seem to me…that even the best and kindest forms of our prevailing beliefs had nothing to

say to an afflicted woman that could help her much. Creeds and commentaries and sermons were made by men" (*Chapters from a Life*, 97-98; hereafter *Chapters*).

The Gates Ajar, published in 1869 when Phelps was 24 years old, was written for the mourning and by a mourner. Phelps herself had lost not only her mother and brother when she was eight, but lost her good friend Samuel Hopkins Thompson in the 1862 Battle of Antietam. Her novel about a young woman's attempt to regain her faltering Christian faith in the face of losing her beloved brother to the Civil War was enormously well received, going through over fifty printings in the nineteenth century (Gutjahr 767). As one critic has written, "The popularity of a tale of finding faith in the face of a violently diminished family might stem directly from the similar situation of its audience. In the wake of the war, nearly every family in the newly reconstituted United States had been diminished by violence" (Samuels, 207). That Phelps remembers the effects of the Civil War as a choking darkness, a time of anguished glancing toward "nameless" burial mounds, makes clear that the war left surviving Americans, and especially low and middle-class women,[12] with a particular kind of loss. The bereavement was national, but it was also personal and gendered. This resulted in what Phelps perceived as the need for a text that would console women whose patriarchal Protestantism did not offer many tools for dealing with traumatic loss.

This chapter argues that in *The Gates Ajar*, religious instruction as it bleeds into surviving grief allows for a transformative experience that I call erotic pedagogy. *The Gates Ajar* is a series of journal entries written by the protagonist middle class New Englander Mary Cabot, who finds out that her brother has been "shot dead" in the war (3). When Mary's widowed aunt Winifred Forceythe hears of her niece's bereavement, she and her young daughter (allegorically

named Faith) come to visit. Winifred's minister husband died three years prior in the border violence of Quantrill's Kansas raid, and her pious strength makes an impression on Mary. Soon her aunt is comforting Mary and strengthening her wavering faith by teaching her how to believe in an afterlife where loved ones are reunited. In an intimate process, Mary learns to cling to the notion of a heaven where she will see her brother again while also continuing with Winifred the taboo relationship she had established with her brother. I show how Mary pivots from a sister desiring her brother to same-sex desire for Winifred as she and her aunt establish a radical new intimacy that exceeds traditional categories of love. When Winifred becomes ill and dies, she leaves her daughter Faith in Mary's charge, continuing Mary's ability to live in a family that sets her apart from the rest of the world. Phelps addresses the transformative power of both grief and religious empowerment in the mid-nineteenth century by offering us a tale of the devastation of loss, which becomes livable with religion because both faith and grief are filled with the potentiality of the erotic.

Before analyzing how erotic pedagogy allows Winifred and Mary to create a new kind of intimacy, an intimacy that enables the continuation of non-normative family, I first examine the incestuous relationship Mary enjoyed with Roy. From the beginning, Mary wonders "whether I am different from other women; why Roy was so much more to me than many brothers are to many sisters" (9). Surmising that their having lived alone together for so long since their father's death has made them one, Mary achingly notes that it did not seem possible that Roy could leave the world without her because they were one; he was "heart of my heart, and life of my life" (9). Marriage had long been off the table for her, Mary reflects, ending her paragraph with "Roy was all there was" (9). Mary's logic follows legal and Christian definitions of marriage, in that she considered herself and Roy to be joined in love, two people recognized as one. The passive

construction of Mary's statement that the question of her marriage "was settled" removes Mary's or Roy's agency from the decision. The tautology of "Roy was all there was" with its kingly register has a divinely monarchical ring that, next to the earlier passive sentence, makes Mary's betrothal to Roy sound like an exalted, ordained decree. Mary, like the biblical Mary alluded to by her name, will not marry, but find a pure love that eschews marriage and sexual reproduction. Implied incestuous passion appears in Mary's extreme emotional and physical intimacy with Roy; not only does she miss his calling her by her baby name, but she yearns for his body. "Roy," she reminisces, "with his smile that lighted the house all up; with his pretty, soft hair that I used to kiss and curl about my fingers, his bounding step, his strong arms that folded me in and cared for me," (6).

We can infer that Roy is a bright spot in Mary's life because of his embodied physicality, a presence who enjoys the intimacy of Mary's kisses and caresses and who returns that intimacy by holding his sister much like Winifred eventually does. Mary's anaphora of "with" gives her sentences a poetic, elegiac quality,[13] making the death of her brother an occasion of intensified eroticism due to the yearning in the liminal space between the living and the dead. Additionally, her last sentence in the text's paragraph evidences an incomplete desire for Roy that builds but can never be satisfied due to his sudden absence. Mary writes that Roy is gone, "never to kiss him, never to see him any more!..." (6). Mary repeats this textual instance of unfinished yearning in the last sentence of a later paragraph, writing that in a heaven where Roy will not remember her, "I should grow so tired of singing [as an angel]! Should long and fret for one little talk,- for I never said good by, and- I will stop this" (6). Yearning for Roy's presence involves an intense desire that reads romantically as Mary's longing for her dead brother continues to develop but is cut short from reaching its climax.

I pause here in order to contextualize the term "incest." Because the incest prohibition was still crystalizing in the nineteenth century United States, its "meaning was unclear" (Connolly, 2). Incest took the shape of many different relations: "the violent abuse of a daughter by a father; the intoxicated excess of siblings; the unregulated desire of religious enthusiasts; relations of affinity as well as consanguinity; the excess effusions of sympathy and sentiment; marriage and/or sex" (Connolly, 13-14). Incest in *The Gates Ajar* combines sibling excess, religious desire (especially in Mary and Roy's allegorical names), and relations of consanguinity, comprising a complex taboo. However, by the end of the 19th century, ethnographers and scientists were theorizing origins for the presumed universality of the incest taboo that reflected a fear of disordered kinship (Connolly, 12). Most importantly, incest is the prohibition that both constitutes and threatens the patriarchal family; thus this radical proscription resists the heteronuclear family's organization around property relations as a means of preserving intergenerational wealth. As one critic has written, because widespread incest "would restructure kinship relations by destroying the crucial distinction between generations…incest dissolves the pater (father) in the son (liber) and replaces the patriarchy with a radical egalitarian liberty" (Shell, 40).

In short, incest is taboo, perhaps the original taboo, because it threatens patriarchal power structures. Roy and Mary's relationship of unrequited sibling love as a queer affront to the heterosexual and patriarchal imperatives of authority and private property, embodied in genealogical inheritance. In his political-theological reading of incest, Shell analyzes early Catholic orders who lived communally in Universal Siblinghood, or relations that recognized members as part of the Holy Family of God where the parent is also child, spouse, and sibling (12). By abolishing the distinctions between one private hetero-nuclear family and another, these

early modern monks embraced a sexual radicalism (manifesting as chastity in the orders and lust in religious movements to come) that was anti-authoritarian and communal. One of those later movements was John Humphrey Noyes' Oneida Community, founded in 1848. The subversive potential of incest is perhaps most evident in the Oneida commune, into which Noyes incorporated Universal Siblinghood in that the grace of God conferred free sex, including incest.

Unsurprisingly, then, Mary, whose feelings for her brother make her unique amongst other women, goes numb when she hears that Roy has been killed in battle. Her shocked grief manifests as a deadened sense that the world is spinning out of control until her Aunt Winifred arrives to right it. Harkening back to Phelps' memoir, the language that Mary uses to describe her grief over Roy in *The Gates Ajar* is the same as that which Phelps uses in *Chapters* to describe the dark, choking atmosphere of Civil War loss. In her first diary entry, Mary writes that she has been sitting in a dark room, thinking about the long week that has passed since news came of her brother's death. She is numb to the life around her; children's laughter in the street sounds wrong and sunsets fail to move her. Roy is not just Mary's brightness, but as his name is short for Royal he is also symbolically "king."

Gates operates on different levels that bring these questions of intimacy, religion, and non-normative kinship to the fore. One of the registers on which this signifies is that of symbolic names, providing evidence of the way that Phelps' text invokes these topics. For example, Royal's name equates him with the status and value of "king," while "Mary" evokes the Virgin Mother, that archetypal figure of female mourning. *Gates*' use of the name Mary, along with the queerly incestuous love that exists between Mary and Roy, rewrites the Protestant narrative of the Virgin Mary as the immaculate exemplar of the unsullied Christian mother/wife. Mary Cabot is devoted to someone with whom she will never consummate because he is dead, but whom she

may not have consummated with any way since he was her brother. The fact that Roy's death interrupts this reinterpretation of the story of the Virgin is pivotal; it makes way for Winifred Forceythe. A pun on "foresight," Winifred's last name signals her role as a wise teacher whose interpretations of heaven are framed as "prophetic conjectures ('Forceythes') based on scriptural probability and earthly likeness" (Smith 113). Character names draw attention to the way *Gates* rewrites the Christian story of the Virgin Mary in its portrayal of Winifred holding Mary Cabot. Rather than the Virgin holding the son of god, Winifred holds her niece.

The way nomenclature operates in *Gates* demonstrates that even on the level of religious allusion, the founding familial relationships of Christianity are reordered to make way for another woman. Although Mary Cabot's name, purity, and intimate affiliation with a "king" align her with the Virgin Mother, her relationship with Roy/the King is foreclosed even before the narrative starts. It is as if he exits the story so that Mary can be held by a woman. Mary, evoking the Christian figure who holds and then loses her son, loses Roy only to be held by her aunt who assumes the maternal Virgin's caretaking role. Founding Christian kinship relations are off kilter, foreshadowing the way *Gates* privileges female spiritual relationships as the basis for intimacy, as well as how the heterosexual Christian family is adjusted to accommodate this intimacy. Such intimacy allows Mary to learn to cling to faith as she clings to Winifred, and through erotic pedagogy the two women develop a radically new relation. Naturally, Mary is Winifred's choice as a substitute mother for her daughter Faith once Winifred finds out she is dying. Thus, Mary's learning to cling to faith *and* Winifred leads to an intimacy that (re)produces Faith as Mary's daughter. Faith the proper noun or faith the noun literally and figuratively represents everything that Winifred leaves to Mary. F(f)aith embodies everything that Mary learns to cultivate.

I have claimed that *Gates* rewrites the Christian story of the Virgin through its portrayal of Winifred holding Mary Cabot without an example from the text, as if Winifred embracing her niece is common knowledge that does not warrant individual citation. I make this suggestion intentionally. In Phelps' novel, the reader cannot help but notice how many times Mary's aunt takes her niece onto her lap to physically comfort her. This recurring gesture catches our attention because it is both sensually intimate and symbolizes the queer familial bonds that precipitate Winifred's arrival and that she further develops. Not only does Mary sitting on Winifred's lap revise the narrative of the Virgin, but this revision is the foundation of erotic pedagogy. Erotic pedagogy allows these fictional women to develop an intimacy in excess of friendship, love, or sexual romance, a closeness that effects already queer kinship structures. The image of Mary sitting on Winifred's lap offers a useful metaphor for the way that erotic pedagogy operates as means of dealing with traumatic loss, particularly enabling these women to create space in their worlds for a new relationship that sits alongside their grief. Here I use "sitting alongside" as a figure of speech, but considering erotic pedagogy in the context of Mary sitting on Winifred's lap allows us to see how their relationship is not a substitute for nor a sublimation of loss. The characters' radical new relationship sits apposite the traumatic absences in their lives; it sides alongside and is defined by, but does not replace, their respective losses.

This chapter is organized into five sections. In this introduction, I have been analyzing Mary's incestuous attachment to her brother in order to foreground the original taboo relation that makes way for Mary's non-normative relationship with Winifred. I continue in the introduction by defining key terms, and then I situate my argument in previous scholarship on *The Gates Ajar*. The second section shows how erotic pedagogy between the women allows them to cultivate a radical new intimacy. I cite this as an extended example of how religious

exuberance invited postbellum women to contemplate embodied pleasure in ways that mark new beginnings for what queer theory has called the affective turn. Finally, in the next section, I explain why this transformative religious exuberance, coupled as it is with grief, is linked to taboo desires. I argue that that taboo desires matter in *The Gates Ajar* because they are part of Phelps' consolation strategy; she comforts readers by creating a unique relationship that makes for the most uniquely devastating mourning. Mary's different love for Roy, I insist, allows for a more exemplary grief for bereaved postbellum readers.

While erotic pedagogy may call to mind Carrol Smith-Rosenberg's theorization of "romantic friendship," or the normative homosocial relationships between nineteenth century American women, erotic pedagogy is different because it articulates how these relationships often enabled erotic expression by way of the Second Great Awakening's religious enthusiasm (59). Such religious vigor was something women could express emotionally *and* physically; thus, erotic pedagogy gives us a phrase for understanding how religious comfort could function as a visceral, vital eroticism.[14] Where Smith-Rosenberg argues that intense, sometimes sensual homosocial friendships amongst women were common in part due to Victorian social norms that put women in physical and emotional proximity for extended periods of time, erotic pedagogy insists that spiritual love in the nineteenth century was loaded with the implications of embodied religious fervor. In other words, spiritual love, read in the wake of the Second Great Awakening, carried with it the connotations of women's bodies and passions. An emotive religious revival that transpired from 1790 to 1840 in the United States, the Second Great Awakening was a Christian (largely Protestant) event that reanimated spiritual devotions across the states.[15] It eclipsed traditional American Protestant conventions and hierarchies, driven as it was by

itinerant preachers who organized outdoor meetings and "incit[ed] listeners to emotionally anguished conversions in often boisterous public meetings" (Stokes, 22).

Many people who followed nineteenth-century propriety were suspicious of the enthusiasm of the Second Great Awakening, since it had the potential to erupt into other radical movements (such as spiritualism, table rapping, abolition, or suffrage) that foregrounded women's bodies. These radical movements threatened to disrupt social norms that encouraged female modesty by, among other practices, keeping the sexes separate. The era's religious zeal infused American culture with a renewed passion for God that threatened to make women's bodies public while also emphasizing, even foregrounding, their ability to powerfully feel. Any sense of anxiety over women's feeling bodies was compounded by the notion of those women being visible for a crowd of publicly mixing men and women. For example, in 1827 a group of ministers reflected sentiments that would have been common to a traditional person, clerical or not. Appalled by the revival, the ministers wrote a letter condemning the practice of "allowing anybody and everybody to speak and pray in promiscuous meetings as they felt disposed" (Ryan, 78).

Erotic pedagogy insists that we attend to the erotic potential of this emotive religious climate since the revival was a vital component of nineteenth century homosocial female intimacy. Scholars of the Second Great Awakening have argued that the era's female friendships often involved a pedagogical, evangelizing dimension aimed at religious conversion. "Friends were missionaries on many fronts," using emotional intimacy to effect religious transformation and education (Quenzler-Brown, 371). The popularity of this conversion-oriented teaching suggests that Winifred and Mary's relationship is historically vested with a missionary-like quality that characterized many mid-nineteenth century female friendships. Although Smith-

Rosenberg's theorization of intimate female friendships draws on examples of spiritual rhetoric such as Mary Grew's reflections on her relationship with Margaret Burleigh, in which Grew insists that "[l]ove is spiritual, only passion is sexual," Smith-Rosenberg leaves unaddressed the influence of the Second Great Awakening on romantic friendship (73-72). Importantly, Smith-Rosenberg's evidence of these relationships relies on women's understandings of the spirit; whether Grew was religious or not, she expressed her love for Burleigh in language that was loaded (or coded) with the implications of religious fervor. Spiritual love, read in the wake of the Second Great Awakening, carried with it the connotations of women's impassioned bodies. This kind of love, one associated with and for God as well as with women's bodies, was Grew's model for the most powerful kind of devotion.

Moving to scholarly work on *The Gates Ajar*, I turn now to the way previous scholars have addressed transformation between Mary and Winifred along with how these scholars have theorized touch and materiality in the novel. Analysis of this work will help me articulate how my own approach differs. In her 2015 study *Time, Tense, and American Literature*, Cindy Weinstein analyzes the irregular verb tenses that disorder linear plots in American novels. She suggests that in *Gates* "Phelps…has define[d] death as life in order to console the women of her nation" (68). Weinstein pays attention to Winifred's intentions with Mary: "Her [Winifred's] goal…is to transform what has passed [ie, Roy's death] into the present" to comfort Mary (68). Weinstein's approach attends to Mary and Winifred as a dyad under the assumption that they are doing a particular kind of work together; however, she sees that work as a persuasive paradigm shift that links the material presence of the dead with present tense grammar.

Rather than Mary and Winifred transforming their sense of time and their understanding of the dead, I see the characters turning trauma into intimacies that alter kinship structure. Where

Weinstein positions Mary and Winifred as entities who change the way that they understand the world, I argue that the characters enact transformative intimacy through their thinking, emotional interactions, and through their physical behavior. These women change their perception of the world by way of changing their relation to each other. Weinstein reads the work of mourning in *Gates* as characters' efforts to seek out materiality that will reflect unity in the present, a reading that leaves unattended the way Winifred and Mary actively mediate that search by intimately feeling one another.

Weinstein's work on tense assumes a correlation between physical presence and the temporal present that emphasizes the importance of materiality in *Gates*. She draws on Lisa Long to argue that Mary and Winifred's desire to bring the absent dead into the present is a result of Civil War carnage. Long focuses on the body in *Gates* and broaches, but does not develop, the importance of touch between Mary and Winifred.[16] In *Rehabilitating Bodies: Health, History, and the American Civil War*, Long reads *Gates*' obsession with Roy's body in heaven as a natural response to the way the war blasted apart soldiers' bodily integrity, thus creating vacancies in the lives of survivors. She writes that Winifred "boldly builds a material argument" for a "palpable heaven" that "is not an empty promise, as the Civil War had proved to be for many grieving Americans, but a factual reality, a material reward befitting the material sacrifices required by those remaining on earth" (72). As the novel's "theological mouthpiece," Winifred embodies a "corporeal theology" through which "conversion is achieved through physical contact" with Mary (72). Long situates this corporeal theology within midcentury Victorian individual authority that "empow[ers] the uneducated and disenfranchised to find spiritual answers in their lived experiences" (72).

By framing Winifred as a mouthpiece, Long effectively turns Winifred into a vessel for propaganda, or more accurately, a pastor with a thinly veiled agenda, rather than an agent whose actions ought to be considered in their own right. Although corporeal theology is an evocative phrase for Winifred's behavior with Mary, it focuses our attention on bodily expression of a divine system. Erotic pedagogy, on the other hand, privileges the sensual process of teaching agents. As the difference between "pedagogy" and "theology" implies, I use erotic pedagogy to signal the importance of teaching and learning subjects. Whereas "theology" implies that Winifred and Mary are engaged in the study of a system or science of god, "pedagogy" insists that the characters are teaching each other. In other words, I emphasize the fact that Mary is in many ways Winifred's student in an educational relationship.

Furthermore, Long's approach suggests that Winifred and Mary's behavior ought to be situated not just within the types of mourning and belief systems elicited by Civil War butchery, but that it be framed within a midcentury emphasis on individual authority and democratic access to spiritual answers.[17] When Long writes that Winifred's corporeal theology is a "usurpation of masculine authority," particularly male clerical authority, she is correct (72).[18] Yet, in her understanding, the rebellious nature of Winifred's conduct obscures its intimate aspects. Long collapses the nuances of complex behavior into a historical explanation. Where independent corporeal theology is an understandable conversion tactic given the era's emphasis on individual spiritual authority, erotic pedagogy insists that we slow down. It allows us to analyze what takes place between two intimately touching, female agents. Far from being limited to a corporeal conversion strategy or a simple manifestation of individual authority, erotic pedagogy is a transformative process that mobilizes touch to change Winifred and Mary just as much as it changes Mary's beliefs.

II. From a Kinship of Pain to Life-Sustaining Love Through Touch

When Winifred appears at Mary's home, the women begin a praxis of erotic pedagogy that enables Mary's re-establishment of a taboo desire relationship but this time with a woman. On the first evening of her visit, Winifred embraces her niece. Mary reflects on this embrace, writing that she "did not speak, for I could not, and the first I knew, a gentle arm crept about me, and she had gathered me into her lap and laid my head on her shoulder" (36). This description of an embrace alerts us to the corporeal, haptic quality of the interaction, as it is not "Winifred" or "Winifred's arm," but a universal, disembodied arm that unobtrusively creeps. Mary emphasizes her wounded, desiring state; she is the passive recipient of much-needed comfort as Winifred arranges her body on her lap. Mary writes "nobody had held me for so long- that everything seemed to break up and unlock in a minute and I threw my hands and cried. She [Winifred] passed her hand softly to and fro across my hair, brushing it away from my temples, while they throbbed and burned … I sobbed out:- 'Auntie, Auntie, Auntie!'"(30). In this moment, Winifred soothes Mary's numb, silent loneliness into a passivity that evidences her niece's desire to be held. Mary "unlocks," crying as her aunt caresses her grief-throbbing temples until she has the energy for a further outburst, this time in words. When Mary finally verbalizes pain, it is not her dead brother's name that she wails but "Auntie." Winifred assures her "I understand. I know how hard it is…I am going to help you," (30). That Mary's pain at Roy's loss takes the shape of a cry for her aunt suggests that mourning can excite passions that stir Mary from her benumbed state. Mary writes that "through the kinship of her pain" Winifred taught her to "unlock" her tightly cordoned grief, evidencing how Mary immediately associates shared experiences of intensity with family relationships (31, 30). The feelings Winifred awakens in Mary illuminate how the

sensational quality of devastating loss can transform from one embodied state to another. Mary feels numb, perceptually dead even, noting before Winifred comes that she does not notice the sunsets anymore, and even that the sound of children's laughter hurts her. But as Winifred comforts and teaches her niece, Mary's intense experience of loss begins to overlap with her growing love for her aunt through erotic pedagogy.

Erotic pedagogy allows Mary and Winifred to discover theological meaning that cultivates between them a passionate, category-defying love. After her aunt holds her, Mary asks if Winifred ever hated God after her husband died. Winifred insists that God would not have made the two women love their respective men only to take them away permanently: "[t]hink that over and over; only that. It may be the only thought you dare to have….but cling to it; *cling with both hands*, Mary" (31). The repetition of "over," "that," and "cling" foreshadows the mimetic behavior that follows, in which Mary "put both hands about her [Winifred's] neck and clung there…it seems, as if I [Mary] clung a little to the thought besides" (31). Mary clings to Winifred as an immediate expression of how good it might feel to cling to the notion that God will allow her to see Roy again in heaven. But Winifred's stress on repeatedly clinging suggests that the stabilizing act of holding on to something is the most important lesson. This emphasis means that to what and to whom one clings might be open to interpretation, substitution, or an ambiguous place in between. To seek comfort, Mary must be willing to literally embrace an experience that cannot be entirely known before it occurs. Because the experience of contact may be unexpected and require interpretation, new devotions to her teacher, not only to God or faith, can take place. In her need for the solace of spiritual knowledge, Mary enacts Winifred's lesson by clinging to Winifred, who functions as part of the lesson's physical representation *and* the lesson's content.

Winifred and Mary's erotic pedagogy is a perfect example of Audre Lorde's explanation of the erotic as a "sense of satisfaction" because Winifred's understanding of heaven, and thus the bedrock of her lessons, is based on the conviction that "I will be *satisfied* when I awake [in heaven]" (97, italics in original). One can almost hear Winifred pounding the seat or gesturing to punctuate her emphatic "*satisfied*." Winifred is quoting a Psalm incompletely to underscore that her beliefs entitle her to complete fulfillment in heaven, not precluding the satisfaction of physical, emotional, and spiritual desires. Winifred's declaration can be read as an explicit claim to personal satisfaction because she does not finish the Psalm she is quoting. Her exchange with Mary is as follows: "[God has taught me that] 'I shall be satisfied when I awake.' 'With his likeness.' [Mary rejoins]. 'With his likeness [Winifred affirms]" (97). The women are quoting Psalm 17:15, the last line of a Psalm that vindicates faith to a group of disbelievers: "I shall behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Authorized King James Version). Winifred's iteration of this scripture stresses her own satisfaction, while Mary's response can be read as a questioning correction or as an acknowledgement. Either way, Winifred makes clear that her love of God is predicated on the belief that heaven is concomitant with her personal desires being sated; she only acknowledges that she will be pleased with God's face upon Mary's tepid rejoinder. Heaven, for Winifred, is a place for her unequivocal happiness in which satisfaction with God's likeness is an afterthought.

Religious exuberance during the Second Great Awakening invited women to contemplate and even advocate for exploring embodied pleasure in ways that mark new beginnings for what queer theory has called "the affective turn."[19] While Winifred's use of the Psalm in this way was not particularly uncommon in the era,[20] it illustrates how Mary and Winifred's relationship embraces an excited desire for spiritual, emotional, and physical completeness. Winifred's

declaration represents the thoughts that women might naturally arrive at when their religious devotion, explored in part due to extreme grief, leads them to conversations in which they foreground their bodies. For example, in one of their conversations "we wonder what it means to pass out of the body" (137) and in another, Mary asks Winifred "Do you suppose that we shall ever *fully* feel it [love for God] in the body?" as opposed to when they are in heaven corporeally divested" (116). The women's preponderance with physiological qualities of religion is inextricable from death in this novel, especially as it emphasizes the overlapping embodied experiences of love, mourning, and spirituality after the Civil War.

Mary and Winifred convert their desire for abstract knowledge of heaven into answers that they can find by touching and loving one another, enjoying together each other's "fullest selves" in the words of Lorde by creating new knowledge through each other's bodies. If this sounds familiar, it should; erotic pedagogy evokes queer thought's theorization of "the multiple capacities of the body" (Liu 3). The two women are at church together some days after Winifred's arrival when the minister Dr. Bland gives a sermon about heaven without humanly bonds of affection. As the afternoon heat compounds the sermon's stifling message for Mary, "Aunt Winifred slipped her hand into mine under her cloak. Ah, Dr. Bland," Mary writes, "if you had known how that little soft touch was preaching against you!" (42). Winifred's clandestine gesture refutes separation and lack of heavenly affection by creating loving connection in the present moment. When Mary asks Winifred if Roy will lack affection for her in heaven. Winifred answers that there will be no fearful separation in heaven, prompting Mary to lay her "head upon her [Winifred's] shoulder" (48). Their pedagogical process involves Mary asking a question, Winifred responding, and then a physical, loving enactment of the lesson through gestures that reaffirm the lesson's content. Crucially, the lesson often affirms reunion and

embodied, physical love in heaven, the enactment of which allows Mary and Winifred to enact love with each other. What is more, the pedagogical quality of this process involves Mary's concerns or questions being answered passionately by Winifred in a way that reproduces that passion on Mary's part. As in the examples above, Winifred's hand-clasp prompts an "Ah!" from Mary, or Winifred's assurance that Mary will meet her brother compels Mary to lay her head on her Aunt's shoulder. Mary's enthusiastic affirmations of the lesson evidence how Winifred's conviction has transformed her own doubt into passionate assurance. As bell hooks has written, instructors who love what they teach enough to bring passion to it often transform their students' consciousnesses through the contagiousness of excitement (195). Erotic pedagogy invokes this transformative quality by melding spiritual fervor with the enthusiasm that comes with learning new things from someone who cares deeply and expressively about those things.

Winnifred's zeal for her topic notwithstanding, Mary is also increasingly drawn to her aunt's physical appearance. From the moment of Winifred's arrival Mary likes to look at her, which foreshadows Mary's physical attraction to her pious aunt. After dinner on the evening of Winifred and Faith's arrival, Mary writes "[m]y eyes have been on her [Winifred's] face the whole evening, and I believe it is the sweetest face-woman's face- that I have ever seen….Take her altogether, I like to look at her" (25). Mary's gazing grows increasingly affectionate as her descriptions of Winifred take on a holy quality. She notes, "I like to watch her brush her beautiful gray hair; it quite alters her face to have it down; it seems to shrine her in like a cloud, and the outlines of her cheeks round out, and she grows young" (77). Winifred's beauty in Mary's eyes is something tensile; her gray hair betrays age, but with care it acts as a sanctifying, youth-giving halo. One evening after Winifred points to St. John as one of the "sweet, rare lives" who exemplifies instant Christian submission, Mary ardently labels her aunt as a similar figure

(33). Recalling the conversation, she imagines addressing Winifred by writing in her diary "'Such, [as]…..you[,] new dear friend of mine, who have come with such a blessed coming into my lonely days….' If I should tell her that, how she would open her soft eyes!" (34). Mary's use of direct address to emphasize adoration is a nod toward the love or devotional lyric. Such a romantic rhetorical flourish conveys Mary's love as an unfolding event, part of the building energies of erotic pedagogy, rather than as a completed, recounted feeling. In other words, Mary's address expresses with immediacy the fullness of her love in the present moment, in contrast to a past-tense description.[21] This allows her to invoke Winifred's presence in a poetic gesture of intimacy. Mary evidences her love for Winifred through figures of romantic poetry like address, but also through classical art, insisting that the artist Raphael could have used Winifred's smiling countenance "for one of his rapt Madonnas" (71). We see Mary's devotion to her beloved aunt taking the shape of physical admiration as Mary makes Winnifred present even in absence and beautiful enough to demand romantically artistic rendering. Just as Winifred's physical appeal to Mary becomes most apparent, Mary's love for Winifred expands to include a sexual attachment.

Sexual intimacy between Mary and Winifred is suggested when we least expect it: with Winifred's revelation that a mortal illness has numbered her days. Winifred shows Mary what the reader might assume is a cancerous lesion on her breast: "'Mary, see here.' She walked feebly towards the window" and then "opened the bosom of her dress…." (134). The ellipsis occurs in the original text, leaving implied empty space in the narrative moment of Mary gazing at her aunt's bare breast. This textual space implies both censorship and ambiguity, suggesting that any possible excitement Mary might glean from looking upon her beloved aunt's sexual body mingles with horror at that body proving its mortality. "There was silence between us for a

long while after that; she went back to the sofa, and I took her hand and bowed my face over it," Mary writes (134). This moment of revelation elicits such a pitch of despair between the women that afterward they must sit in exhausted silence. Winifred's bared breast collides with a moment of catastrophic sadness charged with longing. Such intense feeling aligns this moment of extreme grief with the pitch of sexual desire. Mary eventually puts on a happy face for Winifred, and as her aunt grows more ill, they have "pleasant talks" where "she [Winifred] kisses me softly. Then we dream of how it will all be, and how [after Winifred's death] we shall love and try to please each other quite as much as now" (136). Winifred has been a Christian teacher, an erotically intimate friend, and a love. Kisses and the baring of her breast evokes an unspoken sexual element. The women have invented an intimate bond that does not fit easily into categories of relationality; they are more than friends, teacher/student, spiritual guides, and family. Winifred's ellipsis while revealing her chest leaves space to read Mary and Winifred's relationship as one that contains latent sexual desire.

The new intimacy that Mary and Winifred create together is erotic not just in its desirous physicality, but also as a force that supports Mary's will to live. Through erotic pedagogy, they create a powerfully meaningful relationship. These women enact Lorde's insistence on the transformative qualities of the erotic as they craft a story about love and satisfactory meaning that produces those actual circumstances between them. Their love is predicated on close support that surpasses standard definitions of spiritual guidance, sexual love, domestic partnership, or even romantic friendship, instead serving as a love that sustains life. Before being diagnosed with her illness, but when Winifred has been with Mary for months, she tells her niece she will soon leave. This makes Mary "choke" and "feel a bit faint" (59). Mary writes in her diary that Winifred "drew me into her lap, and I put my arms around her neck…..I told her, sobbing, how it

was; that I could not go into my future alone,- I could not do it! That she did not know how weak I was…that she did not know what she had been to me. I begged her not to leave me. I begged her to stay and help me bear my life" (59-60). While Winifred's erotic pedagogy is necessary for Mary's religious edification and grieving, Winifred herself is essential to her niece's life. Mary is so sustained by their intimacy that she feels ill-equipped to live without the relationship that provides her vital purpose. In the words of José Munoz, Mary's hope is shot through with an "anticipatory" affect since with Winifred it becomes a "field of utopian possibility" (3, 20).

Resonant with but not limited to romance, friendship, familial love, and implied sexual interactions, Mary and Winifred's erotic intimacy transcends these arenas in order to sustain Mary's ability to believe in a future in which she will see Roy again. Reflecting on her regained faith, Mary writes that "'[n]othing is lost,' she [Winifred] teaches me. And until they [Mary's dreams of seeing Roy] come back, I see- for she shows me- [flower] fields groaning under their white harvest" (112). With Winifred's help, Mary realizes that she has not lost Roy but that she will see him again in heaven. In fact, what Mary can "see" and know in the sentence is interrupted by Winifred's showing, illustrating how imbricated Winifred is with Mary's faith in reunion with Roy. Thus, when Mary writes that without Winifred she cannot imagine her future, she reveals Winifred's crucial role in her ability to live a meaningful life. We can even see embedded in Mary's sentence latent sexual language. Not only are the fields of Mary's dreams groaning pleasurably under an abundant, foamy harvest that Winifred has made possible, but Mary's floral language in itself is loaded with erotic connotations. As scholars have noted, the nineteenth century "poetry of flowers" was often used by women writers as a code that "purified a range of ideas about female sexuality and sensuality that might otherwise have come under

scrutiny" (Richards, 250). Mary's future continues to brim with meaningful possibility, thanks to Winifred.

This love recalls but exceeds the passion of Lorde's erotics, or the "amateur" love of the non-professional, two definitions of love that orient my articulation of the new intimacy Mary and Winifred cultivate (Dinshaw, xvi). As Lorde writes, the erotic is the capacity to feel "a sense of satisfaction and completion," a "fullness" so meaningful that it demands that caliber of satisfaction in future endeavors ("Uses," 54-55). Carolyn Dinshaw articulates the love of the "*ama*teur" medievalist to open up the alternative temporalities available to those motivated by passion (xv). The amateur engages in labors of love that occur outside of traditional work hours, inspired by desire to find time and luxuriate in it (21-22). Like these conceptions of love, Mary's feelings for Winifred are so powerful that she cannot imagine life without her. Their devotion is akin to life force and offers sustenance, providing purpose for the future in addition to romantic, spiritual, and erotic satisfaction. Such love has the power to create new intimacy in the face of traumatic loss, and it has the ability to conjure sustenance out of the unknown. It taps into a life force so precious that its loss would be the end of inspiration. On the one hand, this kind of devotion sounds like the love celebrated in Western heterosexual and marital contexts. Crucial to my articulation of this new kind of intimacy is the insistence that cisgender women in a text and cultural moment saturated by traditional Christian gender roles can cultivate the *eros* normally reserved for heterosexual couples; in these novels, erotically, even sexually, sustaining love exists between women. However, this suggestion relies on paradigms constituted by categories of men, women, and reproductive futurity. Winifred and Mary's love is only tangentially interested in human or material reproduction and more invested in producing faithful devotion to God and to one another. A love that verges on idolatry while inviting erotic religious instruction

to generate new relationships is a love that has been frowned upon in orthodox Protestant thought. What is more, this kind of passion disrupts modern narratives of secularism as a state in which the body is buffered from spiritual, mystical, or magical energies of devotional faith. The relationship that Winifred and Mary build, in its blurring of eroticism, romance, family, sexuality, and religious lessons, transcends the secular assumption that the spiritual does not have the power to manifest new material realities.[22]

Mary's benumbed, pleasureless sense of life is slowly but surely alleviated upon Winifred's arrival, and she is able to survive her loss of Roy by transforming the part of her that died with him into a new self who loves Winifred. Mary's first transformation begins as a metaphorical coming back to life from the stultifying grief that had immobilized her. Because Mary loved Roy so much that she felt they were one, part of her dies too upon receiving news of his death. "Those two words- [he was] 'Shot dead'- shut me up and walled me in…in Hell;" Mary's conception of being mute and confined Hell sounds like being dead in a coffin (3). By creating a loving, category-defying relationship with Winifred that infuses Mary's life with passionate purpose, Mary recovers a reason live as a version of herself without the brother she loves. Erotic pedagogy helps her find faith while also converting her taboo desires for her brother into taboo desires for another woman.

The eroticism of grief and religious enthusiasm enables Mary to carry on her love for Roy as it was expressed in a taboo relationship via a new taboo relation albeit this time with a woman. Channeled through erotic pedagogy, mourning and religion invite Mary to transform her "different" relationship with the bereaved into a similarly "set apart" passion and kinship with her newly beloved Winifred. Not only does Mary establish a same-sex love that blurs the distinction between sexual, spiritual, and family intimacy, but this relationship makes it possible

for Mary to continue the non-normative family that she had with Roy. In the climax of their love, the dying Winifred gives Mary her daughter Faith to raise. By making her niece the mother of Faith (thus the symbolic mother of faith), Winifred offers Mary an alternative to raising her own biological child produced from a matrimonial union. Although embracing prohibitions or being different are by no means the same thing as being queer, Mary's continued taboo relationships and especially her nonnormative kinship structures disrupt heteronormative kinship's dependence on reproductive futurity in ways strikingly similar to some strains of queer theory. Mary's new family recalls one theorist's remark that queers are "never participating in the serious, fully developed social business of family reproduction" (Dinshaw, 32).

III. (Queerly) Behind: Alternative Kinship

Mary's belated, unconventional motherhood indicates her deviation from chrononormativity, or how "flesh is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation" (Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3). A proper timeline of state and socially sanctioned life events like marriage, biological childbirth, and death, are what affix social meaning to physical bodies. The self-proclaimed "old maid" Mary being late in her production of Faith deviates from heteronormative Christian temporalities of meaningful biological events,[23] framing both Mary's faith and Faith as the "queer cultural productions" that Elizabeth Freeman claims often disrupt the "projective logic" of chrononormativity (Freeman, *Time Binds*, xxiv). In effect, Mary has faith and raises Faith because it bides the time as she waits to finally be reunited in heaven with her lost loved ones. Disinterested in the mandates of heterosexual temporality, Mary's eye toward the afterlife sees socio-biological events as tasks to be eschewed (like legal

marriage or childbirth) or patiently endured (like child-raising). Mary's family continues to be different from heteronuclear Christian kinship norms in that her raising of Faith is not just for the benefit of the child. In a gesture that both resists and indirectly condones reproductive futurity,[24] Mary's job is not just to raise Faith but also to continue practicing Winifred's lessons. When Mary writes that Winifred "is showing me, who will have no motherhood by which to show myself, how to help her little girl," she suggests Faith is just as much a reminder of Winifred as she is an actual child (143). With Faith as a replacement and metaphor for Winifred's faith, Mary will raise a pious daughter to demonstrate that she understands Winifred's lesson just as much as she will do it for Faith's own sake. Lee Edelman has described the logic of reproductive futurity as a "compulsory investment" in the importance of the (idea of the) child (13). Mary sidesteps this compulsion to prioritize the Child/child. Her love for Winifred combined with her religious devotion dictate her duties, not her primary investment in the importance of Faith. In *Gates*, the heteronuclear family is delayed in its secondary importance; it takes an ideological backburner to the notion that faith will sustain Mary when Winifred's physical body and spirit are in heaven.

Queer thought, especially as it is expressed in the affective turn and reproductive futurity, owes much to women's postbellum grief writing because these authors theorized contentment through physical and emotional intimacy while ushering into existence new relations and families. The theoretical work done by authors like Phelps involved finding love in the most harrowing loss, a situation that Phelps rooted in intense passions that exceed that which is considered normal. Within the confines of nineteenth century middle class propriety, Phelps embraces a notion similar Audre Lorde's insight in *The Cancer Journals* that "looking on the bright side of things is a euphemism used for obscuring certain realities of life, the open consideration of which might prove threatening or dangerous to the status quo" (76). Lorde's

point is that acknowledging topics such as death, cancer, and fear (not to mention racism and sexism) initiates processes that reveal the power structures of race, class, ableism, settler colonialism, and gender. To those who might argue that Phelps was packaging the disruptive potential of mourning into a palatable story about religious submission, I would point to how patriarchy is disrupted by Mary caring less about the child Faith and her life on earth than seeing Winifred and Roy in another reality that she and her new love have modelled into existence. How is Mary and Winifred's erotic pedagogy, which authorizes their focus on their yearning, impassioned bodies, not dangerous to the status quo? However, it is crucial to acknowledge that Lorde was writing in the late twentieth century as a black lesbian, grappling with the realities of gendered racism and violence in ways that Phelps's white privilege and cisgendered identity shielded her from.

I do not want to elide the relevance of intersectional identities and race to queer theory by claiming that *The Gates Ajar* can be read erotically as an example of queer theory's debt to black feminism. Rather, I want to highlight that this debt to women's grief writing as a genre centrally concerned with embodied, affective transformation is also a debt to black feminist thought. Phelps begins thinking about the power of women's feelings in a way that Lorde takes up more responsibly. Lorde asks in a 1978 journal entry "what is there possibly left for us to be afraid of, after we have dealt face to face with death and not embraced [succumbed to] it? Once I accepted the existence of dying, as a life process, who can ever have power of me again?" (24). In these profound musings, Lorde keenly assesses the state of empowerment that issues from integrating death into life in ways that are "vividly erotic," or involve "cling[ing] with both hands" (Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, 39; Phelps, *The Gates Ajar*, 31). She is tapping into the liberating life force that women have generated throughout history by metabolizing death's intense affects through

the power of their own feelings and bodies, a life force that Phelps writes about in *The Gates Ajar*. What Lorde frames as an act of accepting death, Mary too embraces in her act of "be[ing] brave again to-morrow," which leads to, upon Winifred's death, "waiting for the morning when the gates [to heaven] shall open" to reunite her with Roy and her aunt (139, 143).

Christianity in the nineteenth century and especially in the decade after the Civil War was inextricably caught up in death. The religious invitation to contemplate embodied, passionate excitations mixed with intense sorrow made for potent new affects. The caliber of Mary's loss is such that she feels utterly alone and different because of it; it is as though her grief sets her apart because her love of Roy set her apart. In Phelps' view, mourning after the Civil War was infused with such a unique desire for the deceased that it made the bereaved feel as though they were set apart from the world. We can almost see Phelps reverse engineering a scenario that would logically convince readers of its being the most painful circumstance possible. But of course, this devastating loss is the transformative event that allows for an erotic pedagogy between Mary and Winifred, ultimately paving the way for their own taboo same-sex relationship. With Faith and faith as their child, the women create for Mary a family that has no need for biological childbearing, nor a husband, nor even a (secularly living) male figure. Integrating life with death, *The Gates Ajar* teaches us alongside Audre Lorde that the pain and excitation of eros persistently offers itself up, unveiling opportunities to process grief and fear into supportive communities of love that transcend not just gender roles or the patriarchal family but earthly time.

IV. Phelps, the Christian Scholar

This section is a late intermission in the chapter. It falls closer to the conclusion than the middle, pausing analysis of transformation between the characters to instead look at how an erotics of embodied knowledge was Phelps' basis for a theology of feelings. This crucial framing returns us to some of the earliest scholarly critiques of *The Gates Ajar* as intellectually weak in order to counter those readings by claiming that *Gates* combines erotically embodied power with an intellectually engaged "theology of feelings," as I call it. Erotic pedagogy between Mary and Winifred illuminates Phelps' engagement in the theological debates around reason and feeling that energized Andover, the seminary in Phelps' hometown, from the 1840's through the 1860's. These debates were sparked by the work of Phelps' grandfather Moses Stuart, who by using reason to rationalize the Bible as revelation brought into tension materialist, intellectual reason and immaterial, affective faith (Paretsky 30-31, 36). In the aftermath of the Civil War, Phelps modifies this tension for grieving postbellum American women. *Gates*' theology upends Andover's position[25] on the superiority of an intellectual theology, offering us a theology of feelings. The way that Mary learns devotion to Winifred as Winifred teaches her about heavenly love evidences the novel's theology; through this process the women challenge Andover's rules for interpreting the Bible reasonably. Rather than Andover's hermeneutics in which metaphors and feelings derivatively serve an ineffable truth or the superior intellect, *Gates* insists through the effects of women's intimate, instructive touch that feelings are as important, as powerful as, the intellect. Reading *Gates* this way gives us new understandings of the physical body in sentimental fiction; in Phelps' novel women's bodies reveal her theological preoccupation with surviving loss in the context of the reason-based scholarship that was igniting New England's nascent universities in the mid-nineteenth century.

I describe Andover professors as "Christian scholars" to signal that these theologians were breaking with tradition by also studying worldly knowledge. In her history of the scholarship boom at New England seminaries like Yale, Andover, Brown, and Harvard in the early and mid-1800's, Sara Paretsky describes the men who first taught at Andover as "Christian scholar[s]" (1). These men "belonged to a new type of Christian intellectual. Unlike their predecessors, for whom all paths of knowledge led to theology, these men explored learning for the sake of scholarship as well as religion" (1). Contemporaries often used the term, evidenced by the way that Elizabeth Stuart Phelps called her father and his colleagues "Christian scholars" (*Chapters from a Life* 16). By using the phrase, I indicate that the Andover professors were engaged in a historically significant (and anomalous in seminaries) study of worldly knowledge alongside Christian doctrine.

What did "worldly knowledge" look like? Andover's Christian scholars enthusiastically embraced the secular scholarship coming out of German Biblical studies in the early 1800's.[26] This type of materialist criticism considered only provable evidence to be real. Although Hegelian materialists used linguistic analysis to prove that the Bible was a historical document rather than a sacred text revealed by God, Christian scholars like Moses Stuart were eager to use these new German methods to prove that Biblical texts were reasonable. Stuart, the veritable father of Andover's scholasticism, reflects the contradictory relation between reason and revelation that came to characterize the Andover faculty's scholarship, as "he held that the Bible's truth was established by his heart, independent of reason. Yet his reason caused him to use German historical methods to prove the validity of the texts" (Paretsky 30). Many of Stuart's students would eventually reflect his influence in their own work, especially Edwards Park. A professor of theology at Andover who studied under Stuart, Park hoped to square theology with

the scientific methodologies and discoveries taking place in the mid nineteenth century. Park expressed his thoughts on the subject in his 1850 sermon "The theology of the intellect and of the feelings."

In this sermon, Park argued for the importance of but ultimate inferiority of a theology of feelings. For him, the intellect was primary as the source of derivative passions, a position that the characters Mary and Winifred in *Gates* upend by offering us a theology of feelings. *Gates* values a theology of feelings not as a means of serving the intellect, but for creating new realities such as love. Key to understanding *Gates*' intervention is the way that the literal and the figurative as Biblical interpretive methods are related to reason and feelings in Andover's understanding of theology. In particular, being able to discern between literal and figurative scripture is contingent on knowing that reason is superior to feelings. This basic tenet undergirds Edwards Park's "The Theology," which provided a rhetorical strategy for justifying the use of Biblical content by evangelicals who were more emotional in their piousness than orthodox Calvinists.[27]

Park characterizes intellectual theology as "a science" that "demands evidence" while also being candidly "plain" (4). Feelings, on the other hand, ornament bare truth, giving it a substance we can perceive and by which we can be inspired. Park illustrates this by explaining that figuration works under the premise that although a picture or symbol is a superficial representation, its importance lies in how it expresses the substance of reality (11). Although feelings are "a mere exponent of the exact truth," they are that very truth since they do the work of expressing the truth's substance. The truth or the essence of a thing is the pinnacle of Parks' theology; human existence by way of sensory perception necessitates representations (a clothing of the invisible truth in the ornamentation of metaphor or feeling) in order that our dim faculties

can grasp them. Although feelings have purpose, for example, when the Bible uses the imagination to inspire spiritual inquiry, feelings rather than intelligence are the source of sin (14, 15). The will and its passions have "fallen from the intellectual powers" and thus serve to "enlarge" the primary faculty, the intellect, by collecting representations (15, 38).

Reading *Gates* as an intervention into this discussion of intellectual and affective theologies reveals that Phelps had a vexed relationship with reason, faith, and the reality of women's grief. On the one hand, she valorized reason, both in her memoir and in *Gates*. Winifred's ability to discriminate between the literal and figurative reflects her knowledge that ineffable truth is often expressed through symbols that convey its essence. Echoing Park's language, Winifred is frustrated with clergy who preach an abstract heaven and read the Bible too literally. But on the other hand, as I will go on to show, Winifred's disagreement with abstraction is founded on a theology of feeling that values the reality of embodied emotional experience.

Ann Douglas' famous critique of *Gates* cites the novel as an example of the "anti-intellectual sentimentalism" that contributed to the downfall of a Calvinist "male-dominated theological tradition" and appealed to modern pleasures of consumption (13, 226). Douglas' *The Feminization of American Culture* marks an important starting point for contemporary critical discussion of sentimental fiction's relationship to theology. *Feminization*'s powerful legacy is one of the reasons that critics of *Gates*' heaven often find it at best completely literal, or dismissively read it as a "celestial retirement village" evidenced by "the pleasures of consumption," all of which reveals "the pre-eminence of the average" (Douglas 226).[28] Crucial to note is that *Feminization* equates the decline of Calvinism with weakening intellectuality and scholarship.

In the preface of *Feminization,* Douglas writes that she has a respect for "toughness," and that "American Calvinism possessed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and lost in the nineteenth, a toughness, a sternness, an intellectual rigor" (11, 18). Her respect for Calvinist rigor aligns her with twentieth century "neo-orthodox" religious historians who in their documentation of "Calvinism's decline" also mourned it (Douglas 7). Referring to the neo-orthodox view, Amanda Porterfield points out that "this older historiographic tradition supported a declension narrative about New England theology" (126). She points to Sara Paretsky's study of Andover's Christian scholars as "an alternative interpretation of New England theology" because, unlike neo-orthodox religious historians, Paretsky "has no ax to grind with evangelicals for abandoning their true Calvinist intellectual heritage or any apparent interest in making evangelicalism more intellectually robust" (126). Ann Douglas' ideological alignment with neo-orthodox religious scholars reminds us that the way histories of religion are written influence literary criticism. In this case, we have a particular (hi)story about Calvinism's degradation that also appears as a scathing critique of sentimental fiction.[29] If the waning Calvinist orthodoxy in the nineteenth century is framed as intellectual death, it is all too easy to make the rise of sentimental fiction a corresponding birth of insipid religiosity. Instead, what if we situate *Gates* in direct conversation with Andover scholars' eagerness to incorporate materialist reason into their theology? Charting an alternative story of American literary theology as theorized and novelized by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps acknowledges the seminary as a place where Christian scholarship valued intellectual alongside religious knowledge. Christian scholars' desire for intellectual knowledge, spurred by scientific discoveries and German philology, is reflected in the work of Moses Stuart and his students like Edwards Park. These scholars labored to keep the scholarly study of faith relevant alongside the study of reason and the burgeoning fields of science. Parks' 1850 sermon "The

Theology of the Intellect and of the Feelings"[30] is an example of this labor that Phelps takes up and adapts to women's needs after the Civil War in ways that dive into the complexity of reason and faith.

Through her verbal lessons with Mary, Winifred appears to agree with Park that an intellectual theology is superior; she asks "[c]an't people tell picture from substance, a metaphor from its meaning? That book of Revelation is precisely what it professes to be,- a vision; a symbol" (46).[31] She wants characters to understand that the material objects they love on earth, like pianos, will be in heaven "some synonyme of the thing…Whatever enjoyment any or all of them represent now, something will represent then" (108). In *Gates*, a reasonable theology knows not to read the bible too literally or too figuratively. Since passionate (figurative) language and intellectual (literal) language both exist in the Biblical scripture, the intellectual approach logically discerns between the two via an interpretive system that values feelings as derivative mediators for the intellect. Metaphors, like feelings, are significant only in their relation to a superior truth or intellectual operation; they are only valuable as vehicles for understanding something more important.

However, Winifred's touch and Mary's reaction suggests that the characters value a theology of feelings just as much. Winifred's touch, intended to represent the comfort that heaven offers, leads Mary to take Winifred's representation of comforting love *as* love itself, and specifically as love for her. While Winifred verbally differentiates between figurative and literal descriptions of heaven, her behavior with Mary fosters Mary's disinclination to discern between Winifred's figurative, representative behavior and the truth that Winifred conveys. In the context of Phelps' immersion in Andover's theology, this is a fascinating challenge to Park's elevation of the intellect above feelings.

Phelps saw need for a new understanding of white, middle-class women's grief in the wake of the Civil War. This understanding had to endow emotions like grief, love, and faith with as much clout as material reason or scientific evidence. *Gates*' theology acknowledges the energetic force and the embodied reality of grief and desire. It honors the reality of these concepts in that their presence in the world creates new realities such as the love between Winifred and Mary. Phelps' understanding of women's grief and love for one another was inflected by her proximity to Moses Stuart's and Edwards Park's efforts to frame theology in terms of reason. Park excused feelings by understanding them as evidence of an invisible truth; Phelps topples this perspective by valuing the work that metaphors and feelings do. *Gates* treats feelings as real forces in the world that, when manifested through physical bodies, create new relationships and love.

In a theology of feelings, Phelps sidesteps the Cartesian split between subject and object that, in the face of the knowledge explosion in New England, came to characterize both Andover's theology and scientific reason of her day.[32] *Gates* implicitly shows us that science and Christian scholarly theology have little to offer the bereaved because both assume that the subject and the object are separate. Let me provide some context for this generalization. Park's intellectual theology was in part a solution to the problem of faith in the face of growing, irrefutable scientific knowledge. One way to make affective passions more scientifically plausible for orthodox Calvinists and reasoning, materialist scholars alike is to frame biblical metaphors, and their appeal to the passions, as evidence. In the rhetorical strategy Park lays out in his "Theology" sermon, metaphors are tasked with appealing to the sensate, physical world. Park preaches that through symbols spiritual doctrine is "made tangible by an embodiment" (12). This language of "tangible embodiment" refers to the physically perceptible as sensation that

otherwise dull humans can detect. However, it also reveals that feelings, framed as impassioned metaphors for truth, can do the legitimizing work for theologians that proof, evidence, or material fact does for the scientist. The scientific reasoning that Christian scholars at Andover were exploring descended from empirical Baconian thinking.[33] Such empiricism was rooted in proving a hypothesis by physical experimentation or experimentation rooted in the senses.[34] In the experiment, evidence is the material validation of a hypothesis or an ineffable speculation that evidence makes visible or confirms. Park (following Moses Stuart) sampled the aspects of this Baconian scientific thought that provided theological solutions to the problems posed by reason.

In both Park's theology and materialist science, humanity's limited ability to know about the world outside of and separate from itself necessitates interpretations of evidence or symbols. We can see here a Cartesian dualism in which the subject is separated from and acts upon or interprets an object. *Gates* takes touch and physical proof, that low but necessary object that is supposed to serve a higher theorem or truth, and makes it a creative reality that functions of its own accord. As Mary and Winifred begin to love each other through touch that models heavenly love, they acknowledge that feelings of grief *do* something on earth. Those feelings move something in the world, particularly, women toward each other. The emptiness that Mary experiences drives her to seek physical and emotional solace in her aunt, a solace that creates a love relationship powerful enough to energize Mary's will to live. *Gates* offers us a profound meditation on the place of affect in theology when loss butts heads with reason and an intellectual theology. Materialist science and Park's scriptural interpretation were predicated on epistemologies of understanding something invisible and separate from the subject, whether the object be faith or a universal principle of physics.[35] In contradistinction, *Gates*' privileging of

evidence/metaphor above the concept it represents puts subjects in the middle of the mess, as it were. Mary and Winifred are not subjects separate from the object of their faith or biblical scripture; they are entwined in each other and in the divine love that they are learning about. As the women open up to God, they realize that they want to open up to each other just as much.

The novel's theology of feelings implicitly gestures toward the specific situatedness of our ways of knowing, anticipating modern critics of science such as Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour, who have both studied science as a subjective construction rather than as a purely objective hermeneutic.[36] Considering Winifred's verbal embrace of an intellectual theology, *Gates* does not explicitly suggest that evidence or metaphors ought to be taken literally as that which they signify. But as Winifred the teacher of love collapses into Winifred as love through touch, and as Mary feels the depths of grief and the heights of love, another story unfolds. The novel offers us a theology of feelings in which the power of symbolic proof, of intimate touch as evidence love, can convert characters to belief in whatever truth or hypothesis that proof represents. Phelps recalls in her memoir that during one of her theology lessons, the sound of the nearby Academy Company drilling "is louder than theology" (*Chapters*, 71). When Park stops lecturing, "[s]ilence helps the drumbeat, which lifts its cry to Heaven unimpeded; and the awful questions which it asks, what system of theology can answer?" A system in which feelings of loss and love are as real as the world of scientific and theological reason, *Gates* suggests.

V. Conclusion: Erotic Atmosphere

I move toward this chapter's conclusion by considering domestic space in relation to atmosphere, the private and public spheres, and finally how these spheres help us begin thinking about Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents*. First, I analyze the contagiousness of affect in *The*

Gates Ajar, suggesting that while Mary and Winifred reproduce Mary's original taboo relationship with Roy due to the erotic force of religion and mourning, their domestic proximity is also a factor in this process. That Winifred visits after Roy's death, coming to Mary's home for months of domestic erotic pedagogy, zeroes in on the contained physicality of kinship in *Gates*. Since the plot takes place mostly in Mary's home (in a parlor or a bedroom), the love engendered by erotic pedagogy may also be the effect of being physically confined together for months. Two solitary women come together and gather under one roof for a practice of love and comfort. This practice continues a strange family relation and generates a life sustaining love between these women, in part because they are the only people left to love in the household. It is unclear whether their intimacy leads to or is generated by their highly concentrated presence within the household, but either way, their company is unadulterated by any other family figures save Faith and the domestic help, Phoebe. Mary and Winifred have chosen, in so many words, to quarantine themselves from the rest of the world, full of people who poorly understand their grief and faith. One critic has theorized pedagogical kinship as a meeting of queer theory and contagion cultivated through classroom contingency, randomness, and eventual termination.[37] This triangulation hones in on the situated physicality of a class composed of students' bodies. Such focus on contagion and communicability depends on physically proximate people who affect each other because they are nearby.

Like the classroom, much of the action in *Gates* consists of the two women conversing for extended periods of time in Mary's house, a space where they are close enough to touch. Even when Mary and Winifred are not touching their bodies are proximate for most of the novel. In fact, the home in *Gates* functions as a hybrid classroom-domestic space, suggesting the similarity between classroom confines and close domestic spaces. Mary often describes her physical

proximity to Winifred by virtue of its domesticity: “we spent the evening chatting cozily” in front of the fire or “we have had a quiet, homelike day” or “I was in her room this afternoon while she was dressing” (24, 24, 65). Winifred often quotes theologians and philosophers as she answers Mary’s questions, going to the bookcase as often as she goes to her bedroom or as much as she is nestled by the fire with her niece (39). The pedagogical nature of their relationship is possible because they have been nestled together in a domestic space. I do not argue that the women’s intense love of each other is transmitted like a pathogen or infecting entity, but I do want to suggest that the house as a container or amplifier allows the women to practice erotic pedagogy and to soak in it without many changes of scene or without going far from each other’s bodies. Presence in the same household for months might naturally lead to kinship predicated on shared physical space, as much because Mary and Winifred chose each other as their engagement in erotic pedagogy required them to be next to each other for months on end.

I propose that the force of Mary and Winifred’s erotic pedagogy creates an atmosphere out of the domestic. Where other scholars have considered the domestic space, and the domestic novel, as a site of material production,[38] in *Gates* it functions as an immaterial atmosphere that amplifies the erotic. This configuration may seem counterintuitive, since I have claimed that the house served as a container for erotically charged proximity; this frames the domestic space as a structure rather than as immaterial. However, rather than thinking of atmosphere as a diffuse, unstructured space that tends toward the obstruction of vision or the frustration of containment,[39] I follow Anna Abramson’s thinking about atmosphere. She draws attention to the term’s “sphere,” pointing to the way that an immaterial atmosphere materializes as "something solid" that is "all around you," evoking the architectural image of enclosing walls (336). This approach to the term enables Abramson to study the “atmospheric envelopment” of fog in Conrad’s *Heart*

of Darkness. Like Abramson, I want to think about atmosphere in terms of domesticity enfolding or "enveloping" Mary and Winifred. Focusing on the atmosphere's "sphere" when addressing the domestic may evoke the "domestic sphere" critiqued by Barbara Welter's *No More Separate Spheres!*, a social sphere in which the woman's proper place was at home. I do not wish to confuse readers with this use of "sphere;" rather, I see the domestic atmosphere of *Gates* as a space that holds Winifred and Mary in common. Domestic atmosphere is both literal and figurative, since the characters hold social roles in common as women in their home and are literally housed by the same structure, a structure that invites them into frequent proximity.

Revisiting a term from earlier in this dissertation might help clarify. Previously, I addressed how Mary's clinging to Winifred was a gesture that allowed Mary to model the idea of clinging to faith. Analyzing my notion of the domestic atmosphere as an enveloping space alongside my articulation of clinging will illuminate what I mean by it. As Mary is clinging to someone, she and Winifred are at the same time ensconced in something, as atmosphere "dissolves the boundary between subject and object" since it "cannot be conceived of as an atmospheric condition intervening *between* a subject and object, for subjects are themselves *inside*" of it (Abramson, 337). The enfolding qualities of the atmosphere contain Mary's individual efforts to cling to Winifred. Although Mary must hold on to someone else in order to experience what clinging to something like faith would be like, the enveloping domestic sphere scalarly transcends this distinction between Mary and Winifred. It surrounds them by virtue of their being smaller than and inside the home. Enveloped clinging suggests a sense of will in the midst of an overarching embrace.

The way that erotic force transforms the domestic into an atmosphere is worth noting because the domestic atmosphere can be characterized by indeterminacy between subjects as

well as between those subjects and their environment. As inhabitants of a domestic atmosphere, Winifred and Mary have something in common rather than having something between them: a space that in holding the characters dissolves some of the differences between them. The domestic atmosphere of *Gates* is also a place of indeterminacy between the subjects and their environment. As Gernot Bohme writes in "Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept for a New Aesthetics," atmosphere is indeterminate,

> diffuse but precisely not indeterminate in relation to its character..... Atmospheres are indeterminate above all as regards their ontological status. We are not sure whether we should attribute them to the objects or environments from which they proceed or to the subjects who experience them (114).

Do Mary and Winifred create their domestic atmosphere through erotic pedagogy? Yes, they do. But this atmosphere also seems immediately to radiate from their home as they create it by virtue of their surroundings, by chatting or snuggling by the fire, by curling up together over books, or by talking to each other while changing clothes and eating breakfast. The home as a private, contained space is ideal for erotic pedagogy, yet its ideality offers it up as the source of Mary and Winifred's intimacy. This reflects how the force of the erotic in the domestic atmosphere has the power to not just transform people and relations, but also places and gathering sites. A home with the class privilege of privacy and free time may not simply vector family behaviors, but by enveloping can amplify those behaviors.

To treat the erotic as a force that turns the domestic into an enveloping atmosphere suggests that the new realities engendered by erotic pedagogy are immaterial, oftentimes all-encompassing if not overpowering. The erotic as manifested by Winifred and Mary has an

indeterminate quality that can dissolve boundaries based on what it gives inhabitants to hold in common. Mary and Winifred generate through erotic pedagogy a domestic "habitable spatial envelope" of intimacy that changes people and places. Contrary to the notion of the domestic as a space of material production, here the domestic is a space of generative indeterminacy and immaterial transformation. The domestic atmosphere becomes a place of transformation. Erotic pedagogy between these two characters allows them to create a new kind of intimacy in which teacher and lesson or meaning and metaphor merge.

My suggestion that the erotic turns the domestic into an enveloping atmosphere operates on the assumption that the home a private space, separate from the public sphere in nineteenth century discourses of true womanhood. Taking race into account reminds us that this chapter's example of erotic pedagogy is a racially white, middle class iteration. A lack of distinction between the private and the public spheres in the postapocalyptic fictional world of Octavia Butler's 1998 *Parable of the Talents* illuminates how the erotic's transformative qualities are by necessity not confined to the privacy of isolated homes in the fictional twenty-first century. Octavia Butler's novel centers around the character Lauren Olamina, who wanders north in California as society continues to degrade, preaching her new religion Earthseed. Although *Parable of the Talents* was written over 100 years after Phelps wrote *The Gates Ajar*, the two novels have much in common. What makes *Talents* a brilliant case study of erotic pedagogy alongside *Gates* is that Butler's novel, like Phelps', recasts spiritual authority through women and as an erotic endeavor that leads to non-normative family. These novels are committed to imagining new, better worlds that are possible with the sustaining power of women's intimacy. In *Gates*, Phelps' characters imagine in detail how heaven will be better than the current world. Likewise, in *Talents*, the protagonist Lauren decides that the only chance humanity has in the

face of postapocalyptic disasters is her religion Earthseed, which lays the blueprints for a better, egalitarian world in which small communities will eventually blast off to Earthseed colonies on other planets.

Chapter Two

Touch and Teaching in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents*, or Holding as Mothering

> "I think so many of us would be nourished by the sort of symbiotic communities that Octavia envisioned….Where being attracted to someone wasn't the first step of a path toward a singular ownership but could be a move into community and a future. Where interdependence was a given and there was no shame in seeking to learn the right ways to enter and stay in community. And where the truth could be perceived by the physical or telepathic connection, so instead of wasting time on projecting and lying to each other, we would spend our time lifting each other up, generating futures based on our truest selves, truest needs."
>
> -adrienne maree brown[40]

> "Even here in the holding pattern, here in the hold. Here. Remember. Remember. You are. You are held. Named."
>
> -Alexis Pauline Gumbs and Toshi Reagon

I. Introduction

In her 1989 *Essence* article "Positive Obsession," Octavia Butler remembers conversations with her mother as a ten-year-old: "We were in the kitchen by the stove. She was pressing my hair while I sat bent over someone's cast-off notebook, writing" (125). Her mother tells her that she thinks everyone has "a talent," but that it is up to them to figure it out (125). For Butler, of course, writing remains the obsession. As she grows up, she cultivates a successful career as the first black woman science fiction author; she eventually makes a living as a writer and garners prestigious awards. In 1997, she writes a novel in which a black woman named Lauren comforts suffering women by holding them in order to tell them about her invented, egalitarian religion.

Lauren consoles her female followers through physical and emotional intimacy, offering hope by teaching about her religion as survival. Throughout this novel, a religion that levels hierarchy is Lauren's talent, a talent that she exercises with evangelical fervor often while intimate with other women. These women go on to help her build a movement that becomes so compelling to her that she forsakes her child in the service of establishing her faith. This novel is Butler's 1998 *Parable of the Talents*. I begin with her anecdote because it offers an example of how intimacy between women in Butler's life catalyzes her stories about persistent dedication to a goal, a talent, in the face of overwhelming odds. One may note that the presence of "talent" in Butler's autobiographical essay and in the summary of *Parable of the Talents* suggests that Butler used fiction to stir the same transformative energies that both political activism and religion hope to. Butler herself has noted that "Lauren [of *Parable of the Talents*] feels about religion the way I feel about writing. For her it's a positive obsession, even while she realizes it's ridiculous and impossible" (See, 1993).

Building at once on Lauren's womanist revision of Christianity and on black feminist theory that links eroticism with maternity and politics, I argue that in *Talents* Lauren's mode of ministering her Earthseed through erotic pedagogy enacts her religion's creed of valuing material bodies because its tenets require establishing intimacy with those others. Her faith influences bodies in a way that requires flesh to come into contact with other flesh in order to create new intimacies and new communities that are inextricable from one another.[41] This shaping expresses Earthseed's reclamation of the material body as a corrective to her violent, capitalist world and its attendant white supremacist patriarchy. Butler sets *Parable of the Talents* in a destructive, neoliberal investment capitalist era in which an object's value lies in its ability to be abstractly compounded or increased. The body, in Earthseed, is esteemed for circulating as the site through

which characters can cultivate emotional intimacy and value, whether individually or at the level of kinship. Erotic pedagogy is predicated on the intimacy of touch: an embrace, pressed skin, clothed bodies on clothed bodies. This process enacts Earthseed's ethos that shaping others and shaping god involves embracing others, and especially women, to cultivate community. As such, manifesting change begins with ideologies about closeness, agency, and similitude, behaviors that mimic Earthseed's abstracted values of respect for all. I show how erotic pedagogy models between individuals the reflexive, non-hierarchical relations of Earthseed. These new, transformative relations constitute Lauren's radical mothering of her Earthseed community, a practice that allows for family predicated on spiritual kinship rather than biological relation.

The critical reader may pause here, wondering how the anti-institutional ethos of Womanist Theology can be squared with Lauren's design of Earthseed as an institutional religion rather than a spiritual practice. Earthseed has a primary text, written by Lauren, and its ultimate goal is not just self-sustaining communities, but ultimately to seed the stars with Earthseed colonies on different planets. The answer lies in Butler's sense that only something ancient, deeply engrained in human mythos, would have the power to sweep humanity in a different direction. In the below quote, we get a sense of how her decision to make Earthseed a religion is a strategic countermove to the ideological positions of 1970's and 1980's America, destructive positions that she imagined would lead to the post-apocalyptic conditions of *Parable of the Talents*. "Change is difficult for people and people want to find something and adhere to it very narrowly; it becomes almost like a religion. I got the impression that for the extreme right during the Reagan administration, capitalism was definitely a religion. So if you said anything against capitalism, it's as if you were cursing God or a preacher or something" (Jackson, 47).

Octavia E. Butler, (1947-2006) was a path-breaking science and Afrofuturist fiction author whose positive obsession enabled her to become the first successful black female author in a predominantly white, male-authored genre. Her body of work spans twelve novels, one short story collection, and numerous essays and editorials such as the out-of-print 1978 *Survivor*,[42] prize-winning short stories like her 1985 "Bloodchild," her Patternmaster series, her more commercially successful 1979 novel *Kindred*, the Xenogensis trilogy of 1987-1989, and her Parable novels. Winner of eleven awards throughout her life,[43] Butler was the first science fiction author to receive the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship (1996); in 2000 she won the PEN American Center Lifetime Achievement Award. As Butler's accolades and impressive oeuvre might suggest, the complexity of her work demands a wide-ranging approach in terms of methodology and context. This dissertation's claim that erotic pedagogy manifests in different centuries might be temporally disorienting, as moving from the first to the second chapter has taken us from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Thus, I will first situate *Parable of the Talents* by framing it within Butler's previous works before moving on to clarify key terms in the novel. After this, I explain how I see the text in relation to its precursor *Parable of the Sower*, by reviewing *Parable of the Talents*' reception, and then I address previous scholarly treatment of topics like the erotic, materiality, and affect in the novel. Then, in order to frame my methodological approach I will situate Butler's text in a radical black feminist tradition of the 21st century that has roots in 18th century African American women's missionary itinerancy.

Jumping from *The Gates Ajar*'s moment in 1868 to Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents* in 1998 is a dizzying temporal leap that might also seem confusing in terms of genre. Religion is part of the building blocks of sentimental fiction, religion was not a popular component of science fiction in Octavia Butler's late twentieth century moment. Bringing these two novels into

conversation becomes fathomable if we look at them as different approaches to similar questions: how do you deal with unimaginable, debilitating suffering? Can you build community out of incalculable tragedy? Is erotic intimacy linked to imagining new, better futures? This last question in particular is what animates Butler's choice to use religion as a tool in her Parable novels. She has noted that religion replaces the sociobiological basis (genetic engineering) for improving humanity in her previous series (Mehaffy and Keating, 112). In other words, Butler's earlier work explores how (and if) humanity can socially evolve past its violent, exploitative tendencies; her Xenogenesis trilogy (1987-1989) seems to suggest that genetic or biological change as an engine for social progress does not work. Thus, in her next novels (the Parable series) Butler turns to religion because she needs "a force [of change] that nothing could escape" (See, 40). In this case, religion became the sweeping power that could finally improve humanity.

Parable of the Talents is the second book in Butler's Parable trilogy, following the 1993 *Parable of the Sower*.[44] *Talents* is a compilation of the deceased black woman Lauren Olamina's diary entries from the 2030s. Lauren's era has seen a new illness, "hyperempathy syndrome," a condition she has that gives her the delusion that she is feeling any pain that she sees another living being suffer (11, 12). Delusion or not, the pain still feels real; Lauren's condition is the result of her mother's addiction to a drug of the time. In *Parable of the Talents*, Lauren's diary entries are accompanied by commentary by her daughter Larkin, and of verses from *Earthseed: The First Book of the Living*. *Earthseed* is the text written by Lauren to instruct followers in surviving, even improving, 2030s America by creating self-sustaining communities that eventually leave for the stars to settle other planets. In the novel this era is referred to as "the Apocalypse" ("the Pox"), which involves "coinciding climatic, economic, and sociological crises" of neoliberalism, like corporate cities and privatized education[45] (7-8). The Pox drives

Lauren to create a small community in northern California called Acorn where she and her husband farm, take in struggling families, and practice Earthseed. While Lauren sees herself cultivating religion differently than her father's traditional, black Baptist ministry, she does not identify Earthseed with a particular race. Butler has said of her own work "[t]he fact that they're [her female characters] black is not the most important thing on my mind," qualifying the statement with the caveat that her unique perspective is often due to the fact that "I'm the only black woman writing science fiction" (See, 42). Although this may sound like a contradiction, we should understand it as the nuanced position of a writer who is working in a language and culture that have racialized her by default. Butler was an African-American writer whose lived experiences enabled her to write much different material than her white male peers, material that included situated knowledge about racialized and minoritized experience, but who was also uninterested in being tokenized or having her work evaluated only in terms of race. Toni Morrison has expressed a related desire when discussing her work as an "already- and always-raced writer" ("Home," 88). In her essay "Home," which describes her thoughts on writing the novel *Paradise*, Morrison grapples with the question of "how to be both free and situated," how to use "race specific" but "nonracist" language (88).

America's President is Andrew Jarret, from the Christian American party. He promises to "Make America great again"[46] by exterminating the "corrupt heathen" difference that is purportedly at the root of the nation's decline (20, 88). Octavia Butler's prophetic abilities are uncanny. Lauren reflects that Andrew Jarrett's rise to popularity is predicated on postapocalyptic conditions of ignorance and failing education: "It seems inevitable that people who can't read are going to lean more toward judging candidates on the way they look and sound than on what they claim they stand for," eerily diagnosing our nation's own current struggles with fake news[47] (20).

So-called heathens are attacked by "Crusaders" who kill and enslave those who have deviated from traditional Christian American norms. Crusaders wear a "black tunic with a white cross" in an allusion to the Ku Klux Klan as well as the soldiers of the Inquisition (202). Earthseed challenges the policies of Christian America and its Crusaders. Lauren's religion preaches adaptability, communal caretaking, and that "[t]he destiny of Earthseed/Is to take root among the stars" to settle on a new planet (276). Eventually Crusaders attack Acorn so Earthseed followers can be "reeducated" (208). Lauren and her community are enslaved or murdered, while all children are sent to Christian orphanages. Three years later Lauren escapes to preach Earthseed while searching for her kidnapped daughter, Larkin.

Because the Pox is the novel's term for problems often rooted in neoliberalism, and because I disagree with critics who suggest that *Parable of the Talents* endorses postracial neoliberalism,[48] let me clarify what I mean by "neoliberalism." I understand the term to be a "mode of reason," a "producer of subjects," and a "scheme of valuation" designed to let a free trade economy control the market; neoliberal ideology encourages competition, rather than people or legislative oversight, as guiding market forces (Brown, 21). As scholars have written, a primary aspect of neoliberalism that characterizes the 1970's through the 1990's is the value of competition and the attendant privatization of public goods (George, no page number).[49] Political theorist Wendy Brown frames this as a process of "economizing": "As both individual and state become projects of management, rather than rule, as economic framing and economic ends replace political ones, a range of concerns become subsumed to the project of capital enhancement" (22). Thus, in a neoliberal world, "human capital" is encouraged to "strengthen its competitive position and appreciate its value, rather than [act] as a figure of exchange," just like

financial institutions and investment firms (Brown 33). Key to my understanding of neoliberalism is that it thrives on immaterial drivers like value, potential, and investment.

Before addressing previous scholarship on the novel, I first turn to early reviews of *Parable of the Talents*. Then, I clarify my understanding of *Parable of the Talents* in relation to its precursor, *Parable of the Sower*. Upon its publication, *Parable of the Talents* was well received; early reviewers praised Butler's depiction of "one of the most intense and well-developed protagonists in recent SF"[50] and some lauded the work's rigorous, attentive engagement with religion.[51] Others suggested that "[g]ood writing and storytelling" made the novel "a first-rate read" (Deborah Taylor, 1096). Although less popular in scholarly criticism than *Sower*, *Talents* has been studied as a utopian text,[52] as a text of political theology, as an example of black theology,[53] and as a novel that challenges ableism through the use of a capable, disabled black mother.[54]

Often, critics refer to "the Parable novels" when they are only analyzing *Sower*, since the first and second novels share thematic visions and a narrative arc.[55] While I directly attend only to *Talents*, I treat the novel as a continuation of *Sower* in that Lauren develops Earthseed in the first novel. However, as Patricia Melzer points out, there are crucial differences between the two Parable texts. Although both novels use the journal-entry narrative form, *Sower* consists of only Lauren's perspective, whereas *Talents* features the commentary of Larkin, Lauren's daughter, as well as the voices of Bankole (Lauren's husband) and Lauren's brother. Melzer suggests that

> [b]y multiplying the perspectives on events in *Talents*, Butler problematizes the concept of a utopian vision that a single individual formulates. Her notion of difference and its inherent changing nature …..becomes apparent in her narrative technique when the estranged daughter's doubts of the

> validity of her mother's vision critique the utopian dream (2002, no page number).

I agree with Melzer that Butler is complicating Lauren's vision of a better world in *Talents*; I would further suggest that Butler includes multiple perspectives in order to complicate Lauren herself, or more specifically, the way she affects those closest to her. Lauren's decision to start her own biological family in the midst of cultivating her Earthseed community offers readers insight into how intimacy, preaching, motherhood, and kinship operate as forces that in uniting some also alienate or hurt others (Larkin in particular).[56] Many critics have addressed this aspect of the Parable novels as its "critical dystopian" function, or the series' ability to let the utopian and dystopian worlds coexist at the same time.[57] It is worth noting that the differences between *Sower* and *Talents* are also indicative of Butler's larger vision for the Parable series, which included a plan for six total books that spanned generations.[58] The shift from Lauren's singular perspective in outward to multiple perspectives in *Talents* was likely only part of a larger expansion of the story of Earthseed as it spread throughout the galaxy.

While Rebecca Wanzo agrees with Melzer that the ambivalence of *Parable of the Talents*' utopia is part of what makes it a critical dystopia, elucidating this ambivalence by suggesting that the Parable novels are "examples of what Lauren Berlant calls a 'postsentimental narrative'" (73). Wanzo's work helpfully links the Parable novels to the U.S. literary tradition of sentimentality, drawing on Lauren Berlant to posit that *Parable of the Talents* "reflect[s] an investment in the utopian possibilities of feeling right, or more specifically, of feeling pain, but….[is] also deeply conflicted about the perils of depending on feeling in working towards political progress" (73). Part of the way that Butler addresses this conflict, Wanzo suggests, is through Lauren's development of "a liberation theology that revolves around "change" instead of

empathy or feeling. (74) Wanzo points out that in the novel, feelings alone are not a solution for collective social ills, but they are important in that they make Lauren who she is as a hyperempath. Thus, feeling has a crucial relationship to imagining politics otherwise, but in order to carry out that alternative vision, feelings must not provide the index of humanity; feelings are not a "cure all" for this text's society. In other words, feelings play a role to in change, but the primary focus is on communal transformation that might begin as personal emotion or transformation.

Wanzo's reading of Butler's novel suggests that it is a postsentimental narrative as much as it is a black feminist text. I build on this insight, suggesting that Earthseed's veneration of change, the womanist liberation theology that replaces "feeling right," centers the creative transformation of the erotic as described by Audre Lorde. This chapter argues that *Parable of the Talents*' engagement with sentimentality hinges on feelings of loving comfort that approach emotional, spiritual, and physical intimacy as entwined. Where Wanzo attends to how *Parable of the Talents* traffics in sentimental tropes, focusing on the postsentimental as a genre, I analyze the entwined creative quality of affective feelings and physical feeling. Feeling, in this case, signifies doubly as a sensory and as an emotional term, highlighted by my focus on Lauren's holding and shaping of others.

Critics like Marlon Rachquel Moore have studied the eroticism of feeling in *Parable of the Talents*, reading Earthseed as a "zealous humanism," or a reason-based religion rather than a theology since the faith lacks an animate deity (118). While disagreeing with Moore about labels verges on splitting hairs, I want to clarify that I approach Earthseed as a theology rather than a humanist religion since Lauren's project is deeply opposed to the capitalist, white-supremacist patriarchal institutions that also birthed the humanist tradition. More importantly for the purposes

of this chapter, Moore interprets Lauren's enthusiastic zealotry within a genealogy of black queer spirituality. Moore's work on *Parable of the Talents* seeks to bring queer love into more direct conversation with religious spirituality, locating queerness in Lauren's cross dressing and in what Moore interprets as BDSM practices. In a reading of Lauren's trek north after escaping Acorn, a trek in which she dresses as a man for protection, Moore suggests that Lauren uses the pull of eroticism to draw people to her religion. Lauren's hyperempathic awareness of her Camp Christian captors' pleasure in hurting her, Moore argues, is a quality that like BDSM practices allows Lauren to absorb, experience, and then let go of pain as a means of surviving.

Part of my own understanding of how eroticism catalyzes action in *Parable of the Talents* is predicated on Lauren's intimate interactions with other women, but my reading differs from Moore's in crucial ways. In particular, I pause at the suggestion that Lauren's religious seduction of other women is a "queer spiritual articulation" (14). While same-sex desire does not preclude queerness, I do not want to suggest that desire is queer only for this reason. My understanding of her challenge to heteronormativity lies in her non-normative gender performance and non-heteronuclear understandings of family. Thus, I situate Butler's novel in a black feminist genealogy that foregrounds queer theory.

Other critics have attended brilliantly to materiality and biology in *Parable of the Talents*. J. Adam Johns studies Lauren's hyperempathy syndrome, or her status as a "sharer" of pain she sees occurring. Johns writes that

> What Butler is imagining is a biological change which will lead to an ethical, religious and political change…the Utopian order is founded on a Utopian biology: hyperempathy syndrome is a genetic mutation …but is likely a positive evolutionary adaptation, which will lead to enhanced reproductive

> success for the strongly communitarian sharers. Like the sociobiologists who influenced her, Butler envisions human ethics as rooted in human biology; unlike many of them, she envisions human biology as being genuinely fluid…. If communitarian values cannot arise through culture alone, perhaps they will arise through natural selection (no page number).

Along with Johns, I concur that materiality is crucial to a reading of *Parable of the Talents*. Where he makes a convincing case for biological adaptation being the inspiration for Butler's political vision, I focus less on the foundations of Butler's thinking instead analyzing how intimacy between women drives the novel's plot and thus the development of Earthseed. If Johns sees Lauren's hyperempathy as the literal "symbol" that maps out Earthseed's biological yet fluid roots, I suggest that Lauren's behavior with individual women is an equally crucial template for understanding Earthseed's political vision. Just as Lauren's hyperempathy indexes the reflexivity of Earthseed, her intimate preaching to individual women illuminates how she touches the world as a synthesis of bodies, hearts, and minds.

My insistence, along with Johns, that *Parable of the Talents* is best understood as a novel that privileges materiality is shared by other critics. Biographer Gerry Canavan suggests that Butler "believed human beings were biological organisms with sharp instincts for self-preservation that had been honed by evolution over innumerable millennia" ("There's Nothing New," no page number). Samantha Schalk's *Bodyminds Reimagined*: (*Dis)Ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* takes a black feminist disability studies approach to *Parable of the Talents*, insisting that Lauren's hyperempathy syndrome is an "enmeshment" of the body and mind that reveals the impossibility of differentiating between physical and mental processes (5). Chelsea Frazier argues that Butler creates a black feminist subject whose

connection to human and non-human life "allows her to develop an ecological ethics that respects the agency of other forms of matter as well as her relationship to those entities" (59-60).

My reading of *Parable of the Talents* situates Butler's text as part of black feminist thinking that links eroticism with politics in the rich genealogy of womanist theology. Lauren's efforts to spread Earthseed resonate with womanist theology, the black feminist critique of Black Liberation Theology. Although womanism can be traced back to Alice Walker, later twentieth century womanist theology moves from "the identity of the scholar to the ideology of scholarship" (Coleman, 17). This "wave" of womanist theology manifests in *Talents* as an ideological, rather than identarian, religion, as Earthseed is a religious strategy for human survival and liberation, rather than a direct expression of Lauren's racial identity or community. I root my approach to the novel in black feminist traditions that stretch from the 18th to the 21st century. In her wanderings north, Lauren practices erotic pedagogy with women in ways that link her to the rich legacy of 19th century female African American itinerant preachers, illustrating the spiritual roots of 20th and 21st century black feminist theories of the erotic. By fusing the ecstatic energy of religious fervor with the transformative potential of sensual intimacy, Lauren pointedly aligns Audre Lorde's understanding of the erotic with institutionalized religion.

In *Parable of the Talents*, erotic pedagogy is my name for the practice between two female-identified people that is a variation of two related processes that black feminist scholars have theorized as "radical spiritual motherhood" and "revolutionary mothering" (Haynes, 9; Gumbs, 5). Since both these concepts frame my understanding of Butler's novel, I will explain them in detail. My understanding of loving, nurturing quality of erotic pedagogy in *Parable of the Talents* is not just informed by Audre Lorde's classic "Uses of the Erotic," but June Jordan's essay "The Creative Spirit: Children's Literature." Jordan's speech, which anticipates Lorde's

understanding of the erotic as a transformative well of loving energy, is the opening essay of Alexis Pauline Gumbs' edited collection *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*. This text highlights understandings of maternity that are rooted in the woman of color feminism of bell hooks and the "bridge work" of Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua's *This Bridge Called My Back* (Gumbs, 5). Seeing "mothering" as "a transforming, liberating practice" of "creating, nurturing, affirming, and supporting life," *Revolutionary Mothering* seeks to "figure out how to sustain/support our evolving species, in order to participate in and demand a society where people help to create each other instead of too often destroying each other" (9). By untethering mother from gender or even from a single/sole figure, Gumbs' text usefully frames our understanding of Lauren's work in *Parable of the Talents* as a radical praxis of mothering a religious movement through erotic, loving touch. Revolutionary motherhood is a "queer collaboration with the future" that is invested in sustainability; such an emphasis on sustainable futures resonates with Butler's novel (27). Erotic pedagogy is constituted in part by revolutionary mothering because it is a process of ushering forth a new religious movement that establishes a selfless, non-exploitative, communitarian world.

The vibrant history of nurturing, radical black women's evangelism in is one of the precursors to the wealth of black and woman of color feminist theory in the late 20th century. Scholar Rosetta Haynes studies 19th century African American female preachers who used contemporary constructions of motherhood to buttress their identities as public religious speakers. Lauren's strategy for saving her dying world through Earthseed recalls the work of the itinerant missionaries Haynes examines, especially African Methodist preacher Jarena Lee. In this way, I see Lee as one of Lauren's foremothers. Born in 1783 in New Jersey, Lee felt the call to preach and, eight years later, acted on it. She writes in her autobiography of the "fourteen" and

"six" miles she walks from house to church to city in order to share the word, once riding "sixty miles over, hills and mountains (there being no turn-pike or rail-road on that rout [sic] from Wilksbarre [sic] to Easton)" (21, 20, 96). Citing these actions, Haynes argues that Lee practiced "serial domesticity," which involved "travel[ing] from house to house and church to church in their roles as itinerant preachers" (9). Likewise, in *Parable of the Talents*, when Lauren escapes enslavement at Camp Christian and journeys north to find her kidnapped daughter, she too begins a time of missionary itinerancy. Lauren wanders miles looking for a home to seek shelter in, work at and, ideally, to preach in. What begins as Lauren's search for her daughter quickly becomes a time of missionary fervor in which she uses her itinerancy to build a network of Earthseed supporters.

Lauren mothers her religious movement often at the expense of her biological child, leading her grown daughter Larkin to write retrospectively that her mother was mostly at fault for Larkin's being kidnapped and then brought up in an abusive foster family. Lauren's vision of Earthseed which leads her to cultivate a religious movement above all else recalls Lee's refusal to be distracted from her evangelical work, even by her ailing son. Lee writes that one day "I had a call to preach at a place about thirty miles distant, among the Methodists, with whom I remained one week, and during the whole time, not a thought of my [sick] little son came into my mind; it was hid from me, lest I should have been diverted from the work I had to do, to look after my son" (17). Whereas Lee had a community of "friends…which was (sic) of the Lord" to care for her child while she was gone, such that she returned to find "all well," Lauren's child is kidnapped by terrorists with the complicity of the state and, after being placed in a Christian America orphanage, is adopted by an abusive Christian family (17-18).

Toward the end of *Parable of the Talents*, Lauren's daughter seeks her now-famous mother out at one of Lauren's well-established Earthseed compounds. Their meeting is bittersweet, as Lauren offers her daughter only a lukewarm reception (rather than, say, scrambling to embrace and legally adopt her biological daughter). Those who might accuse Lauren of a preference for her religious movement that prioritizes her spiritual family over her grown biological daughter when they are reunited forget that Lauren is building an alternative to the religious fanaticism of the state that seized her daughter. Framing Butler's novel and Lauren's missionary work as part of the legacy of Jarena Lee's black feminist radical motherhood clarifies that as acts of spiritual nurturance, religious callings may necessitate being distracted from biological mothering, or called to mother a spiritual movement in addition to their own child. In a tradition of African American missionary itinerancy that empowers black women with the authority to intervene in racist patriarchal worlds, Lauren has much in common with Jarena Lee. What may appear to be different outcomes between the effects on Lee's child (who was cared for in her absence by friends) and the effects on Lauren's daughter Larkin (who was kidnapped by terrorists operating under the state) are illusory. Although Jarena Lee's infant boy was still alive and unharmed upon her return, as the baby of a black mother Lee's child could have been seized by the state or by white persons claiming ownership at any point in time. In the words of Hortense Spillers, black motherhood "*can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by property relations*" (Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 218, emphasis in the original). Lauren's commitment to Earthseed at the expense of her daughter is vindicated (or at least made fathomable) when we realize that her religious vision aims to make a world in which the state does not have the unsanctioned right to steal black, non-Christian children from their families.

II. Doing Ministry Differently Than the Father

In order for Lauren to mother Earthseed through erotic pedagogy, her religion must depart from her father's Christian ministry. Through readings of the biblical parable of the talents, which appears at the novel's beginning, I show that Lauren rejects Christianity's masculinist hierarchical authority and finds religion's might in the vulnerability of physical and emotional intimacy. Before Acorn is attacked in *Talents*, Lauren dreams of her father preaching the biblical parable of the talents. As scholars have pointed out, the parable has often been interpreted as a parable that "encourages the faithful to invest" in the praise of God and as a warning against the slothful failure to "share the riches of God's revelation" (Brisson, 308; Kistemaker, 124). In the Bible, the parable of the talents is a story about a rich man who travels away from home and distributes his "goods," eight talents, or eight units of currency, amongst three of his servants. He gives two of his servants multiple talents, and a third servant gets one talent. The first two servants invest or trade their share, eventually doubling it. The servant with one talent, however, buries it in the earth. When their master returns, he praises the servants who doubled their riches, and castigates the "wicked and slothful" servant who failed to increase his share (Matthew 25: 14-30, King James Bible).

The biblical parable is an important intertext that signals Earthseed's departure from Christian patriarchy and its masculinist demagogues. Lauren's desire to minister differently than her father is also a desire to minister differently than Christian America, in part because, as Lauren points out, the "demagogue" "Jarret…has a voice that's a whole-body experience, the way my father's was…Jarret was once a Baptist minister like my father," explicitly drawing attention to their likeness (20). Lauren's father's ministry and Christian America are different

expressions of a similar hierarchical, masculinist might; Lauren's father is static and immoveable, while Christian America (its ideology in general and the Crusaders in particular) is actively violent and destructive. Both Lauren's father and Jarrett have in common a power that they acquired through their captivating vocal exhortations.

Lauren clarifies how her religion differs from her father's in her portrayal of him as an immovable, conservative patriarch. In a journal entry, Lauren writes of having a recurring nightmare. She describes being back home in her dream, seeing her father "in his church robes: tall, broad, stern, straight- a great black wall of a man with a voice you not only hear but feel on your skin and in your bones. There's no corner of the meeting rooms that my father can't reach with that voice" (10). In this description, Lauren's father personifies masculine ministerial might as immovability, and his racial and his robes' blackness are linked his commanding voice.[59] Importantly, Lauren's language also conveys a view of her wall-like father as a figure whose masculine ministry represents a politics of stasis, containment, and stability.

Lauren's description of her dream illuminates that she does not just associate her father's ministry with a parable that encourages saving souls through ministry; she also criticizes him because he failed to "save" her family from the destruction of the Pox. In spite of the fact that her father disappeared shortly before her family's home was destroyed, Lauren writes that "in my dream, things have come right again. I'm at home, and my father is preaching" the parable of the talents (10-11). Although her language suggests that being home and hearing her father preach are both "right," she repeatedly interrupts her father's sermon. Lauren quotes her father in fragments, interspersing his narration of the parable of the talents with her own commentary and memories. She relates a few sentences from her father's recitation of the parable, following them with her observations. After another two lines of her father's preaching, Lauren interjects her

own remarks again (14). Indicating her aspiration to minister and protect her community differently than her father, Lauren comments on her father's recitation of the parable but does not hear his discourse on it: "[t]here is preaching between the bits of the parable, but I can't quite understand it….I can't catch the words- except for the words of the parable" (14). Lauren's father preaches the last sentences of the parable: "'but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath'," and then she writes that "[w]hen my father has said these words, my mother vanishes" from the dream (15). This marks the dream's transition into a nightmare in which her family members disappear. Her narrative suggests that losing her family and home has something to do with her father's ministerial inadequacy.

In Larkin's commentary on Lauren's journals, she writes of her mother that "[a]s an adolescent, she [Lauren] saw her father's error when he could not see it- his dependence on walls and guns, religious faith, and a hope that the good old days would return" (138). His decision to remain in a walled city and rely on faith alone, rather than the initiative to move or change, reflects a lack of risk that Lauren repudiates. We can see this playing out in Lauren's dream, as her mother disappears immediately after her father speaks the parable's final, ominous warning. She seems to be "taken away" as a result of her husband or his language, a real-time playing out of the parable that demonstrates what happens to religious patriarchs who fail to boldly invest their faith. The sequence of events in Lauren's dream makes clear that she partially holds her father responsible for not rising to the occasion to protect his family. From this perspective, Earthseed is as much Lauren's response to her father's failed religious ethics as it is a response to the loss of her family. Just as Lauren interrupts her father's preaching in her dream, Earthseed interrupts her father's understanding of religion and survival to attempt something different, something riskily itinerant. Her ministry is predicated on freedom from authoritarian, patriarchal

immovability, privileging instead action, risk, and eventual itinerancy that leads to erotic pedagogy.

In her dream, Lauren does not attend to her pastor father's thundering voice and she portrays the churchgoing event as illegible because she wants to create a new religious movement. Lauren describes her father's voice vibrating in her bones; it is a voice that demands attention, but she cannot pay attention to it. Taken literally, the minister whose voice the audience hears from a distance in their bodies suggests an image of the male preacher shouting across the room to his congregants, who hear the Word through the Minister's oratorical might. Earthseed, on the other hand, is a religion Lauren initially spreads by speaking to individual women while walking with them, holding, or comforting them. If we follow the analogy, rather than roaring across the room at her followers, Lauren stands close enough to touch them. Instead of the might of the Word that stirs the ear from afar, Lauren prefers the intimacy of physical and emotional closeness. Lauren portrays the sermon and the churchgoing event as illegible because she wants to create a new religion. Instead of being a receptive, comprehending congregant,[60] Lauren critiques the preacher and does not "catch" any meaning.

Earthseed resists masculinist violence by embracing change, vulnerability, and collective equality. Such qualities are modeled through leadership and worship. Acorn residents host weekly Earthseed Gatherings, and the sermon is given by volunteers who read verses and initiate discussion rather than giving a sermon (347). When Lauren's Christian brother Marc visits Acorn, he is critical of Earthseed's god, Change. He corrects a follower, saying "even you believe your God doesn't change. Your God promotes change, but he stays the same," which elicits community responses like "God *is* change," "God *promotes* nothing" and "Our God isn't male. Change has no sex" (150, italics in original). At the level of grammar, Earthseed followers

correct Marc's vision of God from a sovereign entity that does or acts upon to a God that is the action. They emphasize that Change does not differentiate subject from predicate, illuminating the hierarchies summoned when someone or something is separated from what it acts upon. Insisting on a pure God maintains the Christian foundational story that positions God as supreme authority, separate in his position above all.

Earthseed challenges the exclusionary binaries of masculinist might through vulnerability as Lauren refuses to be static or contained. Before the Crusaders attack Acorn, Lauren and her husband Bankole conceive their first child. Bankole suggests they move to the safer, walled city of Halstead, but Lauren will not leave Acorn to be cloistered in an enclosed city. This is unsurprising, considering the Earthseed verse that warns "Ignorance/ protects itself. / Ignorance promotes suspicion … Suspicious, afraid, / Ignorance/ Protects itself, /And protected/ Ignorance grows" (207). Lauren's husband thinks she is irrational for refusing to move to the "long established, yet modern, familiar, and isolated" city; her friend advises her to go for her baby's sake (139, 146). Unmoved, Lauren reasons that "Halstead is like Robledo with a better wall" (145). As Lauren writes in Earthseed, walled cities embody the "Ignorance" that defends itself by keeping out difference and change. This is the stasis embodied by her father, the same fear of difference or change that characterizes walled cities. Instead of reforming society, Christian American ideology and the walled cities it encourages creates then polices a boundary between (heathen) outsider and insider.[61] Lauren values the work she does in Acorn above any promise of increased security; as she reflects, "I wouldn't walk away from it [Acorn] any more than I'd walk away from the baby I would soon be having" (145). Counter to values that would equate child-rearing with privatized safety, Lauren refuses the fixed security that would also separate her from the outside world or her community.

The parable of the talents makes another appearance at the novel's end, offering insight into the way that Earthseed privileges finite material bodies and rejects the abstraction of value. Analysis of the parable here clarifies Earthseed's value of material life and imminent bodies, anticipating the way that touch and holding are Lauren's dominant modes of ministry, as opposed to her father's use of commanding sound, authority, and the appeal to triumph. The last pages of *Talents* are a journal entry from 2090 followed by a scriptural citation of the parable of the talents. In this journal entry, the eighty-year-old Lauren watches rockets filled with Earthseed followers blast off to fulfill the Destiny (colonizing another planet). Lauren writes in this last scene that "the Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars, after all, and not to be filled with preservative poisons, boxed up at great expense… and buried uselessly in some cemetery" (407).

Then, Lauren's journal entry ends and the italicized parable of the talents concludes the novel: "*For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods*…." (407). The parable is printed in its entirety, complete with citation: "The Bible/Authorized King James Version/St. Matthew 2:14-30" (408). It is unclear whether the parable is reproduced by Lauren in her journal, whether it is appended at the end by Larkin, who compiles Lauren's journals, or whether an even farther removed, implied narrator provides this reiteration of the parable.[62] We ought to pay attention to the irony of biblical scripture cited from an "authorized" source by a narrator who is difficult to identify. Earthseed has no interest in knowledge that comes from the top of the hierarchy or from a sovereign figure whose claim to be the source of that knowledge is exclusively his or her own. Here we can see *Talents*' rootedness in womanist theology, as Earthseed contests traditional

Christian epistemologies that categorize, hierarchize, and even formulate western religions as such.

This final reference to the parable underscores Earthseed as an imminent, material religion committed to preserving yet moving bodies by holding them on Earth and sending them to other planets. Lauren's interpretation of the parable of the talents offers us a critique of neoliberal capitalism in which intimate touch redeems the idea of keeping or holding as a logic of maintaining and circulating bodies. This critique is evidenced by Lauren's statement early in her journal that "my talent…. is Earthseed. And although I haven't buried it in the ground, I have buried it here in these coastal mountains" (21). A literal, pecuniary interpretation of the parable (rather than a theological reading that emphasizes the investment of transcendent faith) reveals that the talent, or whatever is invested, holds its value through scarcity. As a unit of currency, the talent has a finite limit (however large that limit may be) since capital is predicated on material existence, and thus eventual scarcity.

Such an interpretation reveals that Earthseed understands bodies to be not just precious, but limited since they are threatened by Crusaders and the conditions of the apocalypse. When Lauren writes that she buried her talent in the mountains at her commune Acorn, she highlights the fact that Earthseed is designed to maintain, rather than increase, these valuable bodies. *Talents* does not see the third servant's burial of his talent in the biblical parable as a mistake. Earthseed redeems the third servant in its critique of the neoliberal investment capitalism that thrives on the abstraction of value. Since Lauren's religion values actual materiality and the bodily, it is not interested in potential interest that creates abstract surplus value; nor does it care for projected or speculated increase. Earthseed reflects Lauren's answer to the devastation of

patriarchal and religious neoliberalist capitalism in that rather than valuing the surplus that can be gained from bodies, Earthseed values the bodies just as they are in their precarious scarcity.

III. Erotic Pedagogy: Holding Women to Mother Earthseed

Lauren begins realizing her non-hierarchical religion by ministering to other women through erotic pedagogy, or by becoming physically and emotionally close to them. Acknowledging their mutual woundedness as vulnerabilities enables Lauren to relate to one character, Len, as a means of establishing intimacy. After escaping Camp Christian, Lauren disguises herself as a man for safety and travels north in search of her daughter Larkin. She travels with the orphaned Len, who will become her first disciple after having escaped enslavement in Acorn. With Len Lauren demonstrates that shaping God or others begins with finding a community in vulnerability that allows for mutual care. Since Len "lost" her mother to her wealthy family's "virtual room," her parents effectively forgot about her and failed to pay when she was "kidnapped for ransom" (345). "Her [Len's] captors had kept her awhile for sex" then deserted her. Len asks "Do I seem normal to you?" to which Lauren answers "We're survivors, Len…. You are. I am…. We're all wounded. We're healing as best we can. And no, we're not normal. Normal people wouldn't have survived what we've survived" (346). Lauren maintains that she and Len are alike, insisting that the respective "you" and "I" are actually a "we" whose survival of trauma makes them capable of empathizing with and comforting each other better than others who have not lost family or been abused.[63] Along with insisting that she and Len are alike in their vulnerability, Lauren assumes a maternal, experienced position in which she can offer Len comfort by virtue of knowing what she is going through. By teaching

Len that she is not alone and that she does not need to repress grief, Lauren effectively creates an audience for Earthseed founded on likeness and openness.

Lauren physically models Earthseed's doctrine by cradling Len when she begins to cry. "I just held her," Lauren writes (346). "No doubt she had been repressing far too much in recent years. When had anyone last held her and let her cry? I held her" (346). She reiterates "held" three times, emphasizing twice that "I" held "her." Such emphasis reveals how important touch, bodily support and intimate comfort are to erotic pedagogy. Lauren suggests that part of Len's pain is not just the trauma itself but bearing it alone for so long, a loneliness that she ameliorates with an embrace. This gesture assures Len that Lauren can relate to her while at the same time modeling the basis for cultivating community out of loss: the two women are in intimate proximity, vulnerably physical together instead of isolated. To shape others and God as Earthseed instructs, Lauren suggests, one must start by literally embracing and shaping other women.[64] After being held, Len asks about Earthseed: "'If God is Change, then… then who loves us? Who cares about us? Who cares for us?' 'We care for one another,' I [Lauren] said,'" and then Lauren goes on to quote Earthseed to Len (347).

The way that Lauren holds lonely hearts through erotic pedagogy indicates the importance of materiality and thus the constitutive closeness of Earthseed's community. We can see embedded in this religion Octavia Butler's epistemology of "body knowledge," or the conviction that "all we really know that we have is the flesh," (Mehaffy and Keating, 59). But in *Parable of the Talents*, body knowledge is not enough to account for the vivid eroticism of women's interactions. The importance of embodiment as a constituent of Earthseed's transformative qualities calls for analysis alongside Audre Lorde's formulation of the erotic. For her, the erotic is predicated on the sensuality of the situated material body that can share deep

feelings.[65] In *Talents*, erotic pedagogy seizes on the materiality of personhood, offering a black feminist spiritual ethic that in its desire to create comforting community amongst different, suffering women aims to support them physically and emotionally. Days after Lauren comforts Len on their trip north, the women arrive at the house of Nia Cortez, who takes them up on their offer to do yard work for food. After doing work in Nia's garden, Lauren-as-a-man offers to draw Nia. As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, Lauren's hyperempathy syndrome makes her a "sharer;" due to her mother's drug addiction, she was born with the "neurochemically induced illusion" that she feels the pain or pleasure that she sees someone else experience (11-12). So, "[d]rawing someone gives me [Lauren] an excellent excuse to study them and let myself feel what it seems to me that they feel…..drawing a person help me *become* that person" (366, italics in original). Lauren writes that "[s]he was lonely, Nia was. And she was taking an uncomfortable interest in me-as-a-man" (367). The next day, while Nia cooks dinner in the kitchen Lauren tells her she is a woman, which deeply disappoints Nia (370). Lauren writes "I went to her and hugged her and held her. Like Len, she needed to be hugged and held, needed to cry in someone's arms" (371).

Lauren's erotic pedagogy models how the reflexivity of Earthseed's principles, blurring the boundaries between herself and Nia. Such a mutually intimate relationship leads to an intimacy in which the women seduce each other. With Nia, Lauren's erotic pedagogy necessitates Lauren "becoming" Nia by gazing at her then empathizing. She relies on Nia and her own hyperempathic abilities in order to appeal to Nia's feelings. The way Lauren sketches Nia while reciting Earthseed verses selected to appeal to Nia charms her so totally that even when she discovers Lauren-as-man is a woman, Nia still wants to go to bed with her. The process makes Lauren desire Nia. Lauren's erotic pedagogy, her strategic holding in the service of

spreading Earthseed, stirs deep yearning in two women. This quality begins at the level of separate gazing bodies, moves to reflexive gazes and feelings as self and other are integrated, then it culminates with intimately touching bodies, mutual desire, and a departing kiss. Worth noting here is that Lauren resists Nia's sexual pull because "that wasn't the relationship I needed between us" (371). Lauren is strategically bonding with women like Nia and Len but intentionally stopping after kissing because she finds that a more sexual relationship will not serve her religion best. This moment foreshadows how Lauren must repeatedly halt the burgeoning personal relationships that could become intense in order to continue to devote her energies to Earthseed. She cannot afford to let any one person too close since her vision of Earthseed as a family sees all followers as equal, a dynamic that poignantly plays out with her daughter Larkin at the end of the novel and that I revisit at the chapter's conclusion.

Rather than transcendent ideologies or patriarchally situated knowledge, imminent, loving touch models the way Earthseed bonds people, especially women. Bodies touch as bridged beings come together over what they share, becoming part of a relation that alters them. As Audre Lorde writes, the erotic is "an assertion of the lifeforce of women, of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are reclaiming in our language" ("Uses," 53). If we replace "of women" with "of femininity," which I believe better maintains fidelity to the ethos of Lorde's thought than the language of women/men, this phrase highlights the work of Lauren's religion. Earthseed is a spiritual practice that elevates life by doing away with the life-diminishing violence of domination and hierarchy. What is Earthseed other than a feminine voice asserting eros in her own words, as she has recorded it in *Earthseed: Book of the Living*? Lauren, along with Lorde, insists that "the dichotomy between the spiritual and the political" is false, since shared passion is the "bridge which connects them," revealing their

mutual force ("Uses," 56). While her father's patriarchal religious ethics privileged static transcendence in the belief that faith and physical separation from the outside world would counter the apocalypse, Lauren's ministry reflects the doctrinal outlook of Earthseed that physical separation from problems and suffering people does nothing to fix either of them. Via erotic pedagogy, Earthseed insists that material problems call for material answers. One of these answers is freedom from suffering, comfort brought about by engaging first in tactile, then emotional, intimacies that affect oneself as they affect others.

In *Talents*, touch is a gesture that is born of not fully knowing how to build a new world in the face of devastating trauma and patriarchal religion. When one is doing what has not been done before, one is often literally and metaphorically working in the dark. As Lauren writes, "The thing that I want to build is so damned new and *vast*! I not only don't know how to build it, but I'm not even sure what it will look like…. I'm just feeling my way, using whatever I can do" (51). As she "feels" her way, Lauren is creating a new religion with the power of the erotic. Lauren's praxis of erotic pedagogy is a physical embodiment of the world Lauren wants to build through Earthseed. Through intimacy, Lauren is able to comfort by fostering feelings of desire,, safety, and community with followers like Len and Nia. Touch requires the space between bodies to be diminished, and as such they become more vulnerable to each other. Earthseed is about people coming together into mutually reflexive contact.

Although *Parable of the Talents* is less about race and more about hierarchical oppression as an intersection of all bigotry, I frame it with Alexis Pauline Gumbs' and Christina Sharpe' black feminist theories around the hold and holding because they offer useful analytics for theorizing how Lauren uses holding as a means of mothering an egalitarian, communal, non-hierarchical religion in the wake of trauma. In her musical collaboration with Toshi Reagon,

"HELD Chant and Meditation," Gumbs meditates on maternity in conditions of captivity: "If it was me, if it was you, I would say this in the way I could say it…….remember this feeling. There is something called love. ….there is me calling you in a world I don't control. There is something called freedom and you know how to call it. Even here, in the holding pattern. Here in the Hold. Remember. Remember. You are. You are held. Named." Gumbs articulates holding as an expression of love that recognizes new life. Such an acknowledgement is predicated on naming as a conferral of freedom despite conditions of captivity; it insists on maternal agency in the act of cradling, an agency through which the mother tells her child that they are free in spite of whatever circumstances they are born into and that they are maternally recognized as free. Whether the holding is literal or metaphorical (in the case of naming), that holding is the only action the mother in captivity is allowed. To hold the child is to love it by speaking its name as an insistence that the child deserves freedom.

Holding as framed by Gumbs surpasses therapeutic action, or Winnicott's "unclever ego-supporting" in that it is a wider-ranging act of loving support that recognizes the existence of environmental power structures that have already determined the child to be, in the words of Hortense Spillers, "nonhuman" ("All the Things," 117). In adverse circumstances, whether they are chattel slavery or violently limited options of a postapocalyptic world, holding is an act of mothering, of naming as adoration and of loving as an act of bestowing freedom on a child whose freedom might be foreclosed in the world it is about to inhabit. The kind of holding Gumbs refers to is much like Lauren's holding as acts of comforting compassion in the face of disaster. Lauren's actions with Nia and Len constitute her creation, her naming, of Earthseed as a religion seeks to give humans a sustainable future through the freedom of equality.

What Gumbs calls "the holding pattern," where the child in captivity is nonetheless held lovingly by its mother, Christina Sharpe has described as "the wake," or living in and living through the continuous present of slavery's unresolved traumas as they continue to unfold (13). Within her articulation of the wake, Sharpe theorizes "beholding," or caring about others in ways that imagine a different, better world. As Sharpe writes, "we might envision, imagine, something else-… 'a liberated zone'….In what ways might we enact a beholden-ness to each other, laterally?...Beholden in the wake, as, at the very least, an opportunity…in our Black bodies to try to look, try to see" (100-101). Lauren's erotic pedagogy, expressed in part through holding other women, is an instantiation of beholding because it is part of Lauren's vision for a new, liberated world that she has imagined and is now willing into existence. As she builds Earthseed's momentum through her revolutionary mothering, she creates new kinship structures that further the work of enacting Earthseed's creed.

IV. Revolutionary Mothering and Spiritual Kinship

Erotic pedagogy and Earthseed change those whom it touches, creating a world that is animated by new relations. Seeing Lauren as the ministerial mother of Earthseed helps us understand that as Lauren ministers, at Acorn or later through erotic pedagogy, she is mothering a religious movement in which followers become family. Lauren's commitment to Earthseed necessitates mothering of a religious movement often at the expense of her biological child, or a radical motherhood that enables Lauren to form alternative kinship structures predicated on what I call "spiritual kinship." We can see glimmerings of these new relations early in the novel, where we get a sense of Lauren's split affection for her daughter and her religious vision through a narrative digression. During Lauren's journal entry on Larkin's birth, immediately after

describing labor and her love for Larkin, Lauren details the way Bankole is rocking the newborn "in the beautiful ornate wooden rocking chair that Gray Mora paid Allie Gilchrist to make for him. Gray likes to build big things- cabins, storehouses…" (172). This launches the entry into a history of community-member talents. Such an unexpected digression from the narration of Larkin's birth might lead some to pity Larkin, as this journal entry evidences that even during her daughter's birth, Lauren never forgets about her Earthseed community. Larkin later writes in her commentary, "if only my mother had agreed to go with my father to live peacefully, normally in Halstead, it [her kidnapping and upbringing in an abusive foster family] wouldn't have happened" (184). Larkin frequently expresses envious sentiments like "my mother was giving her attention to her other child, her older and best beloved child, Earthseed" or "Earthseed was her first 'child,' and in some ways her only 'child'" (379, 404). Lauren's daughter is not imagining a sense of being sacrificed for or equivalent to Earthseed; in her journals, Lauren often refers to herself as mother of Earthseed (145, 201, 203). We get a sense of this while Lauren watches rockets blast off to fulfill the Earthseed destiny, writing "[t]hey're young adults now, leaving the nest…. It's always rough on the young when they leave the protection of the mother" (405). Lauren expressed this sentiment when her own daughter Larkin was kidnapped, but although she spent time looking for her, Earthseed proves seductive enough to eventually draw all of Lauren's attention.

But Lauren has groomed these Earthseed followers to leave the protection of their "mother" from the beginning, approaching her religion as a revolutionary mother in the words of Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams.[66] This kind of "mothering, radically defined, is the glad gifting of one's *talents*, ideals, intellect, and creativity to the universe without recompense. Radical mothering is the imperative to build bridges that allow us to relate

across….barriers" (Gumbs, xv, emphasis added). Such mothering is a work that seizes on one's talents for cultivating new, better forms of relationality. Lauren's praxis of religious comforting is predicated on building egalitarian relationships out of the wreckage of her current world, an effort driven by her own talent to usher people into Earthseed's egalitarian worldview. As Lauren mothers her religion and its followers, she changes with them as they begin to model a better kind of community. Lauren is a revolutionary mother who "choose[s] to stand in a zone of claimed risk and fierce transformation;" one can almost hear her announcing that she puts her body "between the violent repetition of the norm and the future we already deserve, exactly because our children deserve it too" (Williams, 40). One articulation of radical motherhood as "fluidity anchored in groundedness" sounds as if it could be a line from *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*.

Lauren's mothering asks us to recognize that Lauren is parenting in a non-normative way, treating her religious adherents as children who are just as important as, or more important than, her biological child. It also necessitates understanding *Parable of the Talents* as a story about a mother who nurses into existence a non-human (a religious vision) because she knows it will serve her "children" and humans in general. In the plot of *Talents*, Lauren gains a family in Earthseed, forming alternative "spiritual kinship" structures in which nearly every member of her religion is part of an interchangeable erotic extended family. I designate this kinship as alternative due to the fact that religious scholars have noted that spiritual kinship frequently falls outside the parameters of what anthropological kinship studies consider legitimate (Thomas, Todne, et al., 3). Indeed, "spiritual kinship studies," according to religious studies scholars, has had to adopt kinship methodologies from feminist studies in order to theorize nonbiological belonging (Thomas, Todne, et al., 3). Rather than appropriating the "friends as family" kinship

model popularized by feminist and some strains of queer theory, I suggest that spiritual kinship in *Talents* is alternative because it is not simply friends who choose each other as family. Rather, in *Talents* spiritual kinship is possible through religious belief that unifies during a time of post-apocalyptic austerity. Community members depend on each other for safety, food, education, and care. Such interdependence is coterminous with continual opportunities for Lauren to minister through erotic pedagogy. This allows for kinship that is markedly alternative in its incestuous quality; Earthseed followers are dependable family members who may invite erotic pedagogy. Hortense Spillers has pointed out that patriarchal incest taboos expose "the principle upon which threatened male sexuality is said to turn" ("The Permanent Obliquity," 234). If the incest taboo indicates patriarchal insecurity and thus the patriarch's constructed authority, then it follows that doing away with the hierarchy would do away with the taboo. This sense of relationality in which kin is interchangeable yet always potentially erotically charged leads to a heightened sense of filiation in which Lauren, by the end of her life, considers Earthseed to be her family.

I do not want to suggest that a mother who dedicates more of her energy to cultivating a religious movement than to finding her kidnapped daughter presents desirable parenting. Rather, I want to consider how important Earthseed is to Lauren as a young religion requiring the care, energy, and nurturance that a child would. A religion this important to one woman might make her seem megalomaniacal if her vision hadn't created an extended family, eventually a successful, institutionalized community. In her commentary toward the novel's end, when grown Larkin is trying to find her mother after Lauren has established self-sustaining Earthseed communities, Larkin writes that Lauren "had no home of her own… she drifted between the homes of her many friends and supporters, and between the many Earthseed Communities that she established or encouraged" (395). Mother of Earthseed, Lauren settles nowhere, instead

making her home among the many people who share her religious vision of mutual reflexive relationality. With Earthseed as her family and her place of rest, Lauren's spiritual kinship with other Earthseed members enables her to call all and any of them home. Biological ties do not necessarily possess the spiritual and communal connection that Lauren builds into Earthseed. As Larkin reflects, "[a]ll Earthseed was her [Lauren's] family. We never really were, Uncle Marc and I" (405). Spiritual kinship makes shared religious beliefs and practices the basis of one's true family. The way Earthseed commands the status normally reserved for blood kin implies that Lauren is sustained by this religion in a way that compensates for the loss of her daughter and brother Marc.

Spiritual kinship, made possible by Lauren's revolutionary mothering, reflects Earthseed's nontraditional approach to relationality in the wake of the masculinist hierarchy embodied by Lauren's father and by Christian America. These brutalizing approaches to power drive Lauren to invent Earthseed and then minister it through erotic pedagogy, a process that is radically non-hierarchical and vulnerably intimate. This practice is her response to the destructive violence around her and amongst her people. Lauren manifests her new approach to relations and family, enacting Earthseed's creed of shaping others and the self by comforting, teaching, and holding women. Erotic pedagogy embodies the reflexive mutuality of a religion in which it is impossible to shape or touch others without being touched and changed by them, since Earthseed is a religion in which every follower is part of your extended family. I want to conclude by returning to Lauren and her daughter, especially adult Larkin's desire to meet her mother that is realized at the novel's end.

Given that all of Earthseed becomes intimate, interchangeably dependent family, Lauren must keep her biological daughter at bay to preserve this structure. This final caveat of

Earthseed, at emotional cost to Larkin, throws into relief the religion's principles. After discovering her mother is the leader of the now-famous Earthseed movement, Larkin is able to locate her at an Earthseed community. Larkin travels there, excited yet nervous to visit her mother for the first time since being kidnapped as an infant. Upon seeing her daughter for the first time in over twenty years, Lauren says "I didn't even know whether you were still alive… I tried so hard for so long to find you" (402). Larkin does not know how to respond, but wonders to herself how hard her mother actually looked (402). Eventually, Larkin decides to leave, eliciting a lukewarm reaction that reinforces Larkin's doubts about her mother's professed devotion. Lauren tells her departing daughter "come back whenever you want to. We have so much time to make up for. My door is always open to you, Larkin, always" (403). Lauren effectively tells Larkin that if she wants to see her, Larkin can come to her. The extent of Lauren's exertion is her welcome; she will not pursue her daughter further. Lauren essentially refuses the biological particularity and intensity of the mother-daughter relationship, because the specificity of it violates Earthseed. If she is to be part of her invented kinship in which everyone is part of her erotic yet interchangeable family, then Lauren cannot engage in the intense primacy of the mother-daughter dyad. Such behavior would privilege biological kinship over spiritual kinship; kin cannot be interchangeably erotic and individually unique at the same time. Just as Earthseed is uninterested in a primary, divine authority figure, Lauren has to relinquish the preeminence of the mother-daughter relationship. If the incest taboo has disappeared due to the community's belief that all Earthseed kin is non-biological and erotically available, then the privileged relations that blood ties allow for must also dissolve.

In *Parable of the Talents*, Lauren's family dilates. It expands almost cosmically, encompassing all of her religious followers, many of whom she has converted through erotic

pedagogy. The Earthseed family is incestuous in that Lauren's religion is predicated on vulnerable, embodied love that makes everyone family. In *The Wide, Wide World*, Ellen's family contracts, but Ellen makes up for the limited scope of her love with intensity. Her passionate devotion to her ever-shrinking family and her ever-rotating caretaker manifest as a promiscuous erotic pedagogy, a love that does not discern between socially proscribed categories like self and other or brother and husband. Where in *Parable of the Talents*, Lauren forecloses intense biological or sexual relationships with individuals in order to cultivate a dynamic Earthseed family, in *The Wide, Wide World*, Ellen's isolation and continuous family losses prevent her from being able to have a large community. Her community, and the porous relationships she cultivates in them, are predicated on learning to love a God who, unlike Earthseed's Change, actively offers his followers salvific love. The only caveat? The disciple must manifest a fleshy heart, permeable to God's will.

Chapter Three

Promiscuous Intimacy in *The Wide, Wide World*

I. Introduction

This third chapter turns back to nineteenth century American literature. With Susan Warner's 1850 novel *The Wide, Wide World*, we step away from texts that through erotic pedagogy explicitly theorize a better future or an afterlife to an extended, detailed engagement with the sheer forces of that eroticism between people. *The Wide, Wide World* pulses with affective energy, demonstrating how erotic pedagogy operates between two women and between a woman and a man to dissolve the distinctions that heteronormative kinship structures strive to maintain. But before explaining this chapter's argument, I want to contextualize Warner's novel with some biographical information. As mentioned in this dissertation's introduction, Susan Warner and her sister Anna were born into a well-to-do New York family that lost its substantial wealth in the 1837 financial crisis. As Susan was coming of marriageable age, she watched her insolvent family sell off their opulent belongings before leaving their Manhattan flat to relocate permanently to their summer house on Constitution Island. Anna Warner writes of this time that

> "our affairs were on a steady progress downhill. From waiter and coachmen and cook to the skill of our own hands (chiefly) was a broad step; oars and saw and hatches succeeded our frisky black ponies; while from dainty silks and laces, we

> came down to calicoes, fashioned by our own fingers; and from new bonnets with every turn of the season, to what headgear we could get…for my sister in the bloom of her your womanhood, it must have been hard (176).

Indeed, the family's bankruptcy led to a particularly painful social poverty:

> "The banishment of silk dresses entailed a much heavier loss; that of intercourse with other people. If you have 'nothing to wear,' few want you; while some think it kind not to invite you, because of course (in such case) you cannot want to come! And for a good while we had little to do with visits or visitors. … it tried my sister more than anyone guessed…she had grown fond of…society….[she had] a great liking for strangers, a great taste for change and stir. She wanted to go about, to talk to entertain" (177).

Thus, the late 1830s and the 1840s saw Susan and her sister not just performing hard labor on Constitution Island, struggling to eke money from their financially inept father, and rationing the barrel-bottom of flour before going to chop firewood in the snow; they were socially isolated. As Susan's father continued to make poor financial decisions that plunged the family further into debt, Susan and Anna published stories and hymns. When Susan got word that her manuscript for *The Wide, Wide World* was going to be published in 1851, she cried with relief over the desperately needed income it would provide. Crucial for the purposes of this chapter is Susan's diary entry in the winter of 1841, where she writes of "the rather depressing effect of going over there [to church] walking through the people, through such a heyday of life…yet not touching it. We go in and come out, and the effect rather is that we have nothing to do with the world. Every human tie, beyond our quartette, is so broken and fastened off" that her life feels "cut loose from the world" (Anna Warner, 332-333, 338). Susan's sense of being left

out of the world suggests that the cruel whims of characters and social circumstances in *The Wide, Wide World* issued from being utterly abandoned by that world. *The Wide, Wide World* is about surviving challenges and emotionally managing that survival, rather than imagining a better life, because Susan's destitution limited her to managing survival and feeling everything that it entailed. In its furious conviction to make do with the crumbs you have left, her novel's iteration of erotic pedagogy is presentist rather than engaged in futurity.

But that very presentism, the way Susan's deprivation only allowed her time to survive and experience that survival as lonely, lends *The Wide, Wide World* its passionate intensity. Susan's limited "quartette," and her increasing intimacy with the only other people she saw, her sister and Aunt Fanny, required her to cathect the energy meant for many onto a few. In her biography of Susan, Anna remembers that her "real intimacy" with her sister began when together they joined the Presbyterian church in 1841, since their conversion puts them on "ground where neither years nor knowledge went for much" (204). This religious bond widened the parameters of their relationship, offering the sisters the solace of commonly held affects in their tiny circle of emotional and physical support. Crucial is Warner's understanding of religion as something joyful, ebullient, and inspiring; she writes in her diary of her and her sister's meeting with Presbyterian minister Thomas Skinner as part of the church's process of determining whether the sisters could join. Warner notes that she answers in the negative when the minister asks her if she thinks religion is a melancholy thing (203).

The presentism of erotic pedagogy in Warner's novel is crucial for this dissertation because it clarifies one reason why I bring *The Wide, Wide World* into conversation with *The Gates Ajar* and *Parable of the Talents*. Warner's novel's present-moment focus on managing the relationships that exist for protagonist Ellen Montgomery involves intense outbursts of feeling

and wildly passionate relationships between character dyads. These relationships are what I focus on as instances of erotic pedagogy as the promiscuous, porous function of charged love. To oversimplify, if my previous chapters on Phelps and Butlers' novels highlight erotic pedagogy as a force that changes normative family structures or sustains taboo kinship while animating visions for new worlds, Warner's novel is hyper-focused on a handful of characters' erotic relationships. In *The Wide, Wide World*, this magnified focus suggests that love has the power to melt differences between subjects, levelling hierarchy and notions of exclusivity even in a seemingly traditional, patriarchal Christian novel. Now, I turn fully to the argument this chapter makes about erotic pedagogy in Warner's text.

Early in *The Wide, Wide World*, protagonist Ellen Montgomery snuggles contentedly with her ailing mother in bed. Even as Ellen adores "the heart beating where her cheek lay," she asks how she could ever love Christ with more than the passionate love she has for her mother (38). The pious Mrs. Montgomery answers that her daughter can learn to love God above all others "by His grace who has promised to change the hearts of his people- to take away the heart of stone and give them hearts of flesh" (38).[67] While this moment appears as an example of maternal training in religion, readers might overlook how much it matters to Ellen as a moment of intimate physical contact. With Ellen's cheek against her mother's beating heart, a heart that will soon cease its beating, Mrs. Montgomery reveals the novel's ostensible project by telling Ellen to "Pray, pray my dear child, that he would take away the power of sin" that has so "hardened" her daughter's heart (38). Throughout the novel's presentations of intimacy, Ellen's efforts to transform her stony heart to one of flesh that can respond to Christ's call[68] turn out to involve intimate touch as much as prayer.

This touch is imbued with a love that dissolves binary distinctions between God and other people, a touch predicated on a promiscuous, polyamorous love in which loving God better than another person means loving that person more. For example, in the moment after Mrs. Montgomery tells her daughter to pray for a heart a flesh, Ellen asks "do *you* love him [God] *better than you do me*?" thinking it "scarcely possible that herself could have but the second place in her [mother's] heart" (38, italics in original). "I do, my daughter," says Mrs. Montgomery, but "that does not make my love of you the less, but the more, Ellen" (39). Mrs. Montgomery's faith follows an inclusive logic of addition, in which complete love of God above all others comes to, paradoxically, include those others within it. "'Oh, mamma, mamma,' said Ellen, clinging to her, 'I wish you would teach me! I have only you, and I am going to lose you. What shall I do?'", the answer to which is Mrs. Montgomery quoting scripture, implicitly telling her daughter that God will love her if she loves Him (39). In this moment from *The Wide, Wide World*, we have the reappearance of a key word from Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' *The Gates Ajar*: clinging. Ellen's actions suggest that the emotional weight of losing one's most cherished relationship necessitates a weakness that calls for clinging as a kind of reflex survival gesture. Ellen relaxes her clinging when she remembers that her mother's precarious constitution must not be agitated too much, laying again on her mother's bosom. "Mrs. Montgomery did not know that when she now and then pressed a kiss upon the forehead that lay so near her lips, it every time brought the water to Ellen's eyes and a throb to her heart" (39). Ellen's mother answers her daughter's question about what she ought to do by first, telling her to love God and secondly, by delivering maternal love to Ellen's forehead. By pressing kisses on her daughter, Mrs. Montgomery models a tactile knowledge practice in which a query's answers may not involve practicable instructions or language but rather simply invoke the answer through an embodied

action. It is as if Ellen asks her mother what to do and Mrs. Montgomery answers with a kiss: "feel love (for) and loved (by God)."

In this chapter, I claim Ellen's cultivation of a faithful heart involves developing relationships that, despite the novel's traditional religious framing, challenge patriarchal Protestant doctrines of purity, exclusiveness, and hierarchy. I trace how Ellen's interactions contest these doctrines by analyzing a sequential process in *The Wide, Wide World*. This sequence begins with erotic pedagogy, or emotionally and physically intimate teaching between Alice and Ellen, that allows for what I call promiscuous intimacy. Such intimacy ultimately leads to promiscuous kinship. Analyzing sequences of erotic pedagogy allows us to see how Warner's text traffics in potentially radical modes of relation and kinship organization, noting how Ellen's relationships are predicated on emotional intercourse that erodes boundaries and opens toward others. One might point out that the maternal character is obviously the child's access to a Protestant god in Warner's domestic, Christian revivalist novel; the mother's status as special yet replaceable is incidental to the child's relationship with God. However, I want to foreground the possibilities opened up by the contradiction of a physically, emotionally intimate person who is both special and replaceable in a sentimental novel. Queer theological approaches to incarnation have observed that since the unique or the holy that expresses itself materially is a God who is everywhere, in everyone, "the porosity of flesh means incarnation can only be promiscuous" (Rubenstein, on Schneider, 294). With this thought in mind, I also turn to Audre Lorde, who theorizes the erotic by articulating how white supremacist, patriarchal Christianity worked to separate the spiritual and the erotic, which she sees as deeply entwined. Her critique helps me hone in on the unspoken limit of the evangelical Christian tenet that loving and teaching (sharing the Word) are the same; the threshold of this tenet is physical love with God. Ideologically,

Presbyterians (of whom Warner was one) would not endorse having this kind of bodily relationship with God.[69] But Ellen models the true logic of loving Christians and teaching Christianity being one and the same, in that she loves deeply, and potentially sexually, those from whom she is spiritually learning.

In this chapter, "erotic pedagogy" establishes a paradigm for Ellen and Alice's relationship as one rooted in teaching through comforting. By describing Ellen's earliest interactions as erotic pedagogy, I signal that an initial, crucial transformation takes place between Alice and Ellen. Erotic pedagogy exists between Alice and Ellen and then between John and Ellen, but it evolves in specific ways. In order to articulate its development between Ellen and her respective teacher, I use the phrases "promiscuous intimacy" and "promiscuous kinship." "Promiscuous intimacy" refers to the dynamic that quickly grows between Ellen and Alice. What begins as an experience of erotic pedagogy transforms the two young women such that they bring vulnerability to its most extreme expression: identification with one another.

This promiscuous intimacy models an intense merging that does not always discriminate between socially constructed identity categories like self and other. Promiscuous intimacy between Ellen and Alice Humphreys then enables promiscuous kinship between John Humphreys and Ellen, a state in which family roles are both intimate yet replaceable. For Ellen, who has a rotating cast of caretakers, including mother, sister, romantic partner, friend, brother, teacher, and husband, the differences are often unclear. Indeed, one of these figures often supplants another while retaining the preceding relation's affective quality. By promiscuous, I mean "indiscriminate," "making no distinctions," and "mixed together," rather than the adjective's more common contemporary meaning of "sexual indiscrimination" (Oxford English Dictionary). As scholars have pointed out, the etymological history of "promiscuous" is varied.

The word can connote sexual indiscrimination, the mixing of genders, social classes, or races, and even (archaically) it can refer to a third gender (Schneider, 233). By modifying "intimacy" with "promiscuous," I intend to signify a state of closeness between characters in which they do not discriminate or differentiate between social categories of individual separation like sister-mother or self-other. "Promiscuity" is meant to convey a sense of mingling and mixture predicated on flexible, porous, undifferentiated identities. The porous social roles and the intimate mixing of the novel's characters precedes "promiscuous kinship," or family structures in which the most emotionally intense bonds between a mother, daughter, sister, or husband and brother tend to blur and become unfixed. With the word "promiscuous," I deliberately privilege the fleshly and the bodily that has, with the exception of womanist and liberation theology, often been deemed inferior in Christian doctrine to abstractions like the soul, the immutable, and purity (Schneider 232).

I approach *The Wide, Wide World* from a literary historical perspective that acknowledges the significance of the Second Great Awakening for the flourishing of sentimental fiction in America. The Second Great Awakening was a Christian revival that took place roughly between 1790 and 1840 in the United States (Stokes 21).[70] This particular religious resurgence eclipsed traditional American Protestant conventions and hierarchies, "fueled" as it was "by Methodist circuit riders and itinerant preachers roaming the land, organizing revivalist camp meetings, and inciting listeners to emotionally anguished conversions in often boisterous public meetings" (Stokes 22). As such, Claudia Stokes' *The Altar At Home: Sentimental Literature and Nineteenth Century American Religion* has been a foundational text in my understanding of Warner's novel. This chapter proceeds with the understanding that "the Second Great Awakening provides an important etiology for sentimental literature, for many of the period's

distinctive qualities became, through their textual assimilation, signature features of this literature: female-centeredness, emotionalism, and anti-clericalism characteristic of the Second Great Awakening became distinguishing generic traits of sentimental literature" (Stokes 23).[71]

Erotic pedagogy as a teaching practice comprised of promiscuous intimacy and promiscuous kinship is a sentimental literary microcosm of the physical and emotional mixing that offended conservative Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist ministers of the revival period. In her study of the Second Great Awakening amongst middle class Oneidans in New York, Mary P. Ryan mentions that in 1827 a group of ministers appalled by the revival wrote a letter condemning the practice of "allowing anybody and everybody to speak and pray in promiscuous meetings as they felt disposed" (78). Clearly, the minsters' use of "promiscuous meetings" refers to the public mixing of men and women. But this sentence also reveals ministerial anxiety over men and women being allowed to act as they *feel*. The logic of hierarchical exclusivity behind the ministers' scorn at men and women intermingling is the same logic behind the disapproval of a congregation acting as their feelings, rather than their reason, incline them. This is evidence of an orthodox Protestantism that still smacks of its Calvinist roots; scholars have pointed out that Christian theology has historically privileged singularity, noncontradiction or excusive logic (see Schneider's *Beyond Monotheism*).[72] Promiscuity of all varieties offended traditional Protestant sensibility, which was often founded on masculinist, patriarchal values. Erotic pedagogy is an analytic for exploring the way that touch, emotional intensity, and interchangeability characterized the female-centric teaching of this nineteenth century religious revival. Before proceeding to analyze this process, I want to provide a summary of Warner's novel.

The Wide, Wide World is Susan Warner's famously successful 1850 novel that was outsold only by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the nineteenth century. The novel's protagonist is ten-

year-old Ellen Montgomery, whose peaceful life with her ill Christian mother is disrupted when her parents must go abroad to Europe. Ellen's mother encourages her daughter to cultivate a relationship with Christ before Ellen goes to live with her gruff Aunt Fortune, whose cantankerous nature tries Ellen's "passionate" temper. Feeling abandoned and lacking teachers in Christ, Ellen is eventually taken under the wing of Miss Fortune's neighbor Alice Humphreys. The refined Alice imparts lessons about faith, offers Ellen a sense of maternal intimacy, and begins her Christian and secular education. As Ellen begins to tame her own desires in the service of the difficulties Christ has bestowed upon her, Alice introduces Ellen to her brother John Humphreys, who goes to seminary in a distant town. Too soon, Alice falls ill and dies. John takes charge of Ellen's education, but before long Ellen finds out her parents have both died abroad and that she has been deeded to her relatives in Europe. Loath to leave John but abiding by the dictates of authority, Ellen leaves for Scotland where she is petted by her aristocratic kin. This new family forbids Ellen to study her Bible while pushing her to drink wine and become less studious; fortunately, John makes contact with her. Ellen finally realizes that this episode is another trial in her life and patiently waits out her remaining years until she is an adult and can, the plot implies, marry John.

After showing how previous scholarship has addressed teaching and the erotic in *The Wide, Wide, World*, I will turn to how erotic pedagogy is different. One critic has observed that in Warner's text, "[r]ather than a teleological process whereby students acquire knowledge and learn to master different subjects, education proves to be a complete failure" since Ellen repeats the same mistakes in order for her teachers to tell her what she has done wrong and thus who she is (Margolis 54). Margolis develops this reading of pedagogy to suggest that Ellen as a subject lacks individual agency, relying on teachers outside of herself to define who she is. This example

of the "nonliberal model of the self" that existed in the midst of 19th century American possessive individualism maintains a focus on subjectivity and agency that is peripheral to erotic pedagogy (Margolis 53). Rather than teaching that reveals the historic complexities of subjecthood, erotic pedagogy zeroes in on the relationship between subjects in the student/teacher relationship. Erotic pedagogy privileges what occurs in those relationships, or how teaching and learning take place through the affective intensity of touch as a galvanizing action.

The Wide, Wide World imagines open, nonviolent relationships because erotic pedagogy is not physically violent. This quality sets it apart from other analytics for nineteenth century intimacy and teaching, such as Richard Brodhead's concept of "disciplinary intimacy" (69). The phenomenon he describes involves an authority figure conveying power to his or her charge through intense love, as part of an antebellum middle-class movement toward non-visible, non-bodily forms of discipline such as surveillance and control (69, 71, 72). Brodhead's term names a dynamic in which authority derives from the refuted, yet always-present specter, of the lash. This of physical violence was is rooted in "mind-set partly defined by its need to picture scenes of bodily correction" (70). A controlling, anti-whipping socialization is the driver of "discipline through love"; in contrast, erotic pedagogy describes a dynamic in which an erotic charge is the driver, eroding or rearranging boundaries through intimacy (71). Although in the novel emotional violence (such as death, loss, and separation) is set in distinct relation to the touch that is both love and teaching in erotic pedagogy, that emotional violence is the state of the wide, wide world; it is the gritty, unremarkable fact of antebellum life as a spiritual, emotional, and biological orphan.

As a nonviolent teaching process, erotic pedagogy sees Ellen's relationships as creative collaboration, rather than as transactions. Brodhead argues that *The Wide, Wide World* "charts the psychological transactions" required by disciplinary intimacy's middle-class socialization scheme; that is, Ellen must "compulsive[ly]" seek the love of an authority figure in order to become one again with her lost mother through Christian likeness (80, 81). Discipline rooted in anti-whipping ideology is transactional in that it makes for subjects who need something that they believe their teacher can provide. Once the subject finally gets enough, they can recover something lost. Erotic pedagogy, however, imagines new, radical bonds infused with egalitarian, manifold, nonexclusive love. The process gains momentum by tapping into mutuality or collaboration rather than the give and take nature of a transaction whose sole purpose is completing action. The mounting energy of love and vulnerability offers Ellen, John, and Alice a changed and increased family. Although it is undeniable that Ellen is indeed seeking comfort, she receives and gives more, to the extent that her relationships change, than a "disciplinary intimacy" reading would have it.

Whereas the lens of disciplinary intimacy encourages a reading of the novel in which religion is a means of training for and eventual participation in eternal (middle class Protestant) family, erotic pedagogy invites a more capacious interpretation of religion as queer. Queer in this chapter signifies an identity or a way of being that unsettles binary definitions; I draw on the concept as it is theorized by thinkers like Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldua as well as more contemporary queer theorists. Sharon Marcus articulates this contemporary definition of queer theory as inspiring a both/and approach to thinking about supposedly separate social formations such as women and men, homosexuality and heterosexuality, or same-sex bonds and family/marriage bonds.[73] Ellen's faith, cultivated as it is through the boundary-defying practices

of erotic pedagogy, is queer from this perspective as does not sit neatly on one side of the homo/hetero divide. Rather, it occupies both heteronormative and nonnormative imperatives by, for example, confounding patriarchal doctrine *and* adhering to that doctrine. In *The Wide, Wide World*, turning toward mutual love and growth enables modes of being that are not limited to one kind of orientation.

Just as other scholars' analyses of teaching in *The Wide, Wide World* serve to contextualize what makes erotic pedagogy different, I clarify the phrase by considering other critics' work on the erotic and the novel. Interestingly, much of the scholarship on eroticism in Warner's text understandably builds on Brodhead's work on pedagogy, since it privileges intimacy and the body. Both Kathryn R. Kent and Marianne Noble draw on Brodhead's disciplinary intimacy, framing the mother as the disciplinarian and the purveyor of desire and pleasure. In *Making Girls into Women: American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity*, Kathryn R. Kent points to Warner's novel as a precursor to the postbellum period sentimental fiction that contributed to the establishment of "protolesbian" and "queer" identities in early twentieth century America (2). Kent argues that "Alice's fervent desire to convert and domesticate Ellen produces as a side effect homoerotic feeling. Her [Ellen's] efforts to be Alice express a desire also to have her and to continue their intimacy, forged most centrally in the text through moments where the two young women pray and then weep" (13). Kent reflects on an instance in which Alice kisses Ellen then reminds her to read her Bible, writing that "this exchange illustrates the instabilities between conversion and perversion" (13). Although I agree with Kent that intimacy between the characters is forged in moments when they pray and weep together, I want to examine some of the questions prompted by Kent's claims. Why is conversion an unstable process? What is being perverted between the characters? I argue that

Christian theology and historical religious context are crucial components of what is "perverted," or in the language of this chapter, made promiscuous, between Ellen and Alice. I suggest that what Kent calls a "homoerotic feeling" is not an ancillary "side effect" of Ellen and Alice's interactions, but a practice, a state, a mode of relation that can affect kinship structures.

Marianne Noble reads Ellen as a masochist whose "sexualized response to authority" is the result of the way that "the predominant discourse of her upbringing make Ellen feel love for the one who afflicts her" (94-95). Studying the relationship between John and Ellen, Noble suggests that "Ellen is excited by John's qualities of paternal violence" (95). Not only does Noble, in her genealogy of Ellen's teachers, skip over Alice by claiming that John replaces Ellen's mother; Noble also locates Ellen's enjoyment of pain in the "Calvinist sentimental" value of true womanhood in which pain seems "alluring, simply because it affords the most basic experience of embodiment" (96, 95). My approach differs by centering the relationship between Alice and Ellen, along with emphasizing the way the student/teacher (rather than the student/disciplinarian) relationship is one in which categories of separation intermesh. My approach to *The Wide, Wide World* diverges from this stance; I claim Warner's novel privileges embodiment and experience in the context of Methodist and Congregationalist revival practices. Rather than a persistent Puritan ethos in which "Warner posits the human body as unreliable at best," I insist on the fundamental importance of the body and its register of touch and feelings in *The Wide, Wide World* as both a mark of its Methodist-revivalist roots and as a vital aspect of erotic pedagogy (Noble 97).

Scholarship that addresses "queer" and *The Wide, Wide World* in tandem is even scarcer. A rare instance of work that reads sentimental fiction through queerness is Kristen Proehl's 2017 essay "'love of kindred spirits': Queer Friendship and the Evangelical *Bildungsroman* from *The*

Wide Wide World to *Anne of Green Gables*." However, Proehl stops at articulating exactly what is queer about "conceptualizing one's relationship with God as both a friendship and a relationship that surpasses all others…destabiliz[ing] cultural hierarchies that privilege familial and romantic bonds" (174). Rather than being subversive, queer, or even non-normative, this sounds like the ideal of 19th century sentimental theology in which female pathos is devoted to God above all else. Samaine J. Lockwood has staged New England Regionalist women's encounters with history writing as a queer, non-human, erotically charged process in *Archives of Desire: the Queer Historical Work of New England Regionalism (*3). She reads female characters' encounters with each other as loving, religious interactions that draw on erotic power to convert pain into passionate belonging. Although Lockwood does not read *The Wide, Wide World*, her scholarship engages the potential of the erotic in 19th century women's writing in a way similar to mine, pointing to the possibilities for change that inhere in erotic interactions between women. However, the most important distinction between Lockwood's text and this chapter is that I emphasize queerness as a distinction-dissolving function of the erotic, whereas Lockwood is addressing history writing as a queer process. Queerness in this chapter is useful because it offers another means of addressing erotic pedagogy's propensity to challenge binary categories. The novel ushers us into the world of the erotic through the sense of touch that in "challenging the notion of individual agency" can reveal its queerness, its "waywardness" (Cahill, 393).

II. The Promiscuous Intimacies of Touch

For Alice and Ellen, touch as a gesture of comforting recognition inaugurates the process of erotic pedagogy. Critics have suggested that Warner's novel "endorses the bourgeois ideal of bodiless true womanhood," celebrating sentimental and Calvinist renderings of women as "unknown and invisible" (Noble 97). However, what this reading of gender in *The Wide, Wide World* misses is the way these women are visible to each other and the way that their "seeing" of one another is often negotiated through touch that precipitates erotic pedagogy. After an argument with her aunt Fortune, Ellen flees into the wooded mountains (145). She sobs hysterically on a stone until Alice Humphreys (whom she has not yet met) passes on her way home. When Alice asks what is wrong Ellen puts her hands over her face. "But gentle hands were placed upon hers and drew them away; and the lady sitting down on Ellen's stone, took her in her arms; and Ellen hid her face in the bosom of a better friend than the cold earth had been like to prove her" (149). Before Ellen knows who this woman is, Alice has unmasked Ellen's attempt to hide her pain, using hands on hands to unveil Ellen's suffering face. Alice's uncovering of Ellen is a physical gesture that signals a willingness to see her as she is in order to comfort and teach her. Ellen's willingness to let Alice remove her hands from her face reveals a desire to be seen in vulnerability, a desire to know something other than her own attempts to console herself and to discover how to manage her confusion.

Through touch, the women open up to each other. What were previously two physically and affectively separate entities begin to receive each other through their touching flesh. The moment of Ellen's and Alice's contact is one in which the characters become accessible to each other, exposed and searching for knowledge (both how to be comforted through and how to comfort through Christianity). These young women begin an erotic pedagogical process by

putting their s-kin into reflexive contact, unfolding with each other toward knowledge of Christianity, and thus toward each other's comforting bodies. As philosopher Michel Serres has suggested, "knowing things requires one first of all to place oneself between them. Not only in front in order to see them, but in the midst of their mixture" (80). To know comfort, Ellen must open herself to mixing with Alice. Conversely, to instruct her charge, Alice must open herself to mixing with Ellen.

As the foundation of erotic pedagogy, touch is premised on mutual, consenting vulnerability that allows the young women to share deep feelings together as they are expressed physically and felt invisibly. Alice is so moved by Ellen's violent crying that she brings a young woman she has never met into her arms. These two characters are so earnestly attuned to the other's intense desires that they take up each other's bodies as if pulled into each other's orbit; identifying who might need who the most is difficult. Alice's tender urging that Ellen share her hurt is only matched by Ellen's desperate craving for Alice to hold and thus console her. As Audre Lorde has written, the erotic is characterized by sharing "the sensual, those physical, psychic and emotional expressions of what is deepest, strongest, and richest within each of us" (56). This sensual encounter between Alice and Ellen thickens as Alice wraps Ellen into herself while Ellen cries on her chest. Both characters convey passionate desires that the other satisfies by feeling her new companion physically and by feeling with her emotionally. The haptic quality of erotic pedagogy harnesses "the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person," marking the beginnings of a relationship between Ellen and Alice that thrums with love (Lorde, "Uses" 56).

Through erotic pedagogy, Alice and Ellen transform from strangers to intimates. This change ushers in the physical and emotional mingling of promiscuous intimacy. After Alice

introduces herself and is able to parse Ellen's complaints against her aunt, Ellen reveals that she is also troubled by not "feeling right," or failing to be a faithful Christian (151). Since feeling right is another version of praying for a faithful heart, Alice tells Ellen that she cannot expect God to change her feelings without daily prayer. She suggests they do so: "[T]hey knelt together there on the moss beside the stone…[w]hen they rose Ellen silently sought her friend's arms again, and laying her face on her shoulder and putting both arms round her neck, she wept still-but what different tears!....they kissed each other before either of them spoke" (152). Alice teaches Ellen what it would mean to be a faithful Christian by telling her to pray and by modelling the act with her. Then, Ellen drapes herself around Alice, sealing her commitment to being a faithful Christian. Their bodies and their lips mingle as they trade kisses to close the practice. After their prayer, Ellen initiates what will become a characteristic interaction with Alice that involves Alice teaching Ellen, followed by the two of them completing the lesson through forms of intimate intermingling such as kisses, hand squeezes, or an embrace.

This embrace marks the beginning of an intense relationship between Ellen and Alice in which their pedagogical interactions reflect an emotional, physical merging. Erotic pedagogy infuses the women with the ability to identify with one another, which ushers in promiscuous intimacy, or porosity between categories of separation like student/teacher, family members, or the self and the other. [74] We can trace this merging by attending to the way Ellen's and Alice's bodies mingle through touch. After a mishap in snowy weather leaves both characters bedridden for a week, Alice is finally well enough to visit her still-ailing young friend. A recovering Ellen is ecstatic when Alice visits her. Alice "sat down in the rocking chair and took Ellen in her lap; and Ellen rested her head on her bosom as she had been wont to do of old time on her mother's," recalling

> those times gone by!- when she had sat just so; her head pillowed on another as gentle a breast; kind arms wrapped round her, just as now; …the same weak helpless feeling; the same committing herself to the strength and care of another;- how much the same, and oh! How much not the same!- …Blessing as she did the breast on which she leaned and the arms whose pressure she felt, they yet reminded her sadly of those most loved and so very far away; and it was an odd mixture of relief and regret, joy and sorrow, gratified and ungratified affection that opened the sluices of her eyes (219).

The swirl of emotions that Ellen experiences as she feels Alice's body alerts us to the complexity of this moment in which distinct, pure sensations (both physical and emotional) are difficult to isolate. Likewise, Alice's body reminds Ellen of her mother's. Leaning on Alice and feeling the pressure of her arms triggers in Ellen an "odd mixture" of positive and negative affects that don't seem to belong together yet exist in concert. Ellen's mixed feelings and associations mirror her and Alice's entangled bodily posture. The fact that Ellen's fusion of feelings occurs while she is clutched in Alice's arms, noting both how like and different Alice is from her mother, tips us off to the way that mingling sensations cannot be separated from mingling bodies. Indeed, it is impossible to know whether Ellen's raw torrent of feelings for Alice is imbued by sentiments for her mother, or whether Ellen feels for her mother through Alice as a proxy, or both. Physical and emotional entwinement allows Ellen to associate Alice with her mother, as Alice's bosom, arms, and the sense of safety she imparts are immediately the same as and different from what Ellen's mother offered.

It seems at first that Alice and Ellen's pedagogical process necessitates the upholding of a distinction between Alice as teacher-comforter and Ellen as comforted student. For example,

Alice maintains temporarily the separate position of teacher and Ellen as student. While holding Ellen, Alice instructs her in proper grammar, pointing out that Ellen has used "ain't" often during the visit (221). Alice reminds Ellen that her difficult times are partially due to Ellen's own failings; her initial befriending of Nancy Vawes made Nancy's earlier mischievous visit possible (which angered Ellen's Aunt Fortune). Ellen's own passion and impatience with her grumpy aunt, Alice tells her, must be tempered: "But remember, 'charity suffereth long and is kind.'" "I will try all the while, dear Miss Alice, to keep down my bad feelings," replies Ellen (222). Although Alice acts as a teacher here, it turns out that learning how to keep down bad feelings and to be charitably "kind" involves an increasingly fuzzy distinction between instructor Alice and student Ellen.

The unfixed boundaries between Ellen's and Alice's bodies, emotions, and their social roles become most legible in their erotically charged exchange of tears. When Ellen comforts Alice for the first time, their tears mingle on Ellen's face. Shortly after this moment Alice declares to Ellen that they are no longer just friends but sisters, signaling the way that their melding does not merely blur the roles of maternal teacher/comforter and daughterly student/comforted. Rather, the distinctions between Ellen's and Alice's separate identities disappear. Their roles become as porous as distinctions between family members will soon be, as their newfound sisterhood is predicated on a promiscuously intimate identification with each other. Here, Ellen and Alice model an extreme closeness that does not always distinguish between family members or the self and the other, which paves the way for Alice and Ellen to move from a mother-daughter or student-teacher relationship to one of sisters.

As soon as Ellen takes on the role of comforter-teacher, the characters begin sliding into each other's roles. When Alice gives Ellen the letter from her mother that Ellen's cruel aunt had

withheld, Ellen is so hysterically happy that it brings Alice to uncontrollable tears. The characters return to the rocking chair where "[Alice] took Ellen in her arms again……Leaning her face against Ellen's forehead she remained silent…Ellen …lifting her hand once or twice caressingly to Alice's face…was distressed to find her cheek wet still" (223). Alice tells Ellen that she has reminded her of her own dead mother. "Ellen felt a hot tear drop upon her forehead and again ventured to speak her sympathy only by silently stroking Alice's cheek" (224). Until this point in the novel, Ellen has cried on Alice, but here Alice's tears fall onto Ellen's face which only moments ago was stained with her own tears. When Ellen assumes the comforter-teacher position, the characters' roles become indistinguishable. This scene closes with Alice being so similar to Ellen that she can operate as a mother figure *and* as sister.

In an example of the way that promiscuous intimacy makes permeable the distinction between maternal/daughterly, Alice tells Ellen that their shared affects make them so alike that they ought to be sisters. "[W]e are both motherless," she says, "both of us almost alone…don't call me Miss Alice any more. You shall be my little sister and I will be your elder sister, and my home shall be your home as well" (224). Alice emphasizes her and Ellen's similarity by repeating "both." Alice emphasizes her and Ellen's similarity by naming their relation to each other from both Ellen's and Alice's position. Their merging flesh and feelings suggest that their similar experiences and affective empathies make the characters, if not interchangeable, then much more alike than different. Promiscuous intimacy brings Ellen and Alice from mother-daughter roles to a place of greater similarity as sisters, showing how erotic pedagogy encourages a porosity between the boundaries of social categories of separation like mother and sister, or as I will soon suggest, self and other.

In *The Wide, Wide, World*, Ellen and Alice's physical and emotional proximity melds them, shrinking the differential between them in an intimate teaching relationship. Thus, Ellen's cultivation of a fleshly heart in place of a heart of stone engenders a permeable, receptive heart, or a heart that can be filled with God's faith. Cultivating this open heart is an affective faith practice that Ellen develops not just through prayer and Bible reading, but through intimacy with Alice. Such intimacy exceeds traditional ideas of closeness or affection by making Alice and Ellen so alike that Ellen can take Alice's place. To address the way that promiscuous intimacy enables Alice and Ellen's pedagogical relationship to fluidly telescope from mother/daughter to sisters to stand-ins for one another, we must introduce John, Alice's brother.

Ellen and Alice have been acquainted for months before John arrives on the scene. One wintry night John makes a surprise visit to his father's house. Alice's reaction reveals that as she and Ellen merge as mother/daughter, student/teacher, and comforter/comforted, their intimacy absorbs John. Or, perhaps John and Alice's blood kinship absorbs Ellen. When John walks in the door, Alice delightedly says "John…this is my little sister that I wrote you about- Ellen Montgomery. Ellen, this is your brother as well as mine, you know" (274). Her phrasing "my little sister" first introduces Ellen only as Alice's kin, but in the next sentence she extends that kinship to the entire Humphreys family, telling Ellen that John is her brother just as he is Alice's. John has playful misgivings: "Miss Ellen, this sister of mine is giving us away to each other at a great rate- I should like to know first what you say to it. Are you willing to take a strange brother upon her recommendation?" Ellen acquiesces, and then "colors" before giving John the kiss he asks for. John's contractual language is tongue in cheek, but the matrimonial connotations of 'giving us away' register the creation of new family bonds, a strange marrying of Ellen and John

as brother and sister. This language foreshadows Ellen's role as John's future wife, only alluded to in the novel but explicitly addressed in Warner's unpublished last chapter.[75]

Just as John's ceremonious language alludes to a new kinship relationship that Ellen has to agree to, when Alice's health fails, she entreats Ellen to "take her place" in her father's home. Ellen's assent seals new kinship bonds with the Humphreys that make her more than Alice's adopted sister through their shared orphanhood; her assent makes her a replacement for Alice. As the plot moves forward, Ellen finds out that her mother has died abroad, which devastates her. Through Bible study, she is able to come to a place of peaceful acceptance, until she is hit with another dose of bad news (347). When sickly Alice tells her "adopted sister" that she fears she will be "going home" before Ellen, Ellen breaks down: "in the first burst of her agony, Ellen thought she would die" at the thought of losing Alice (347, 428). She plaintively asks Alice "But what shall I do without you?" to which Alice replies "You must come here and take my place, and take care of those I leave behind; will you? –and they will take care of you" (432). Alice goes on to tell Ellen that she has made arrangements with Aunt Fortune so that she can come live in her father's home; all that's needed is Ellen's agreement.

> Will you do it, Ellen? I shall feel easy and happy about you, and far easier and happier about my father, if I leave you established here, to be to him as far as you can, what I have been'…In words it was not possible; but what silent kisses, and the close pressure of the arms around Alice's neck could say was said….'I am satisfied, then,' Alice said 'my father will be your father- think him so, dear Ellie-…And my place will not be empty (432).

In the eyes of Alice, she and her "adopted sister" have gone from sisters linked by their lack of a mother to suitable stand-ins for one another. Their practice of erotic pedagogy, in which

they have comforted each other and in which Alice has taught Ellen about being a proper Christian, has endowed Ellen with the beginnings of a "heart of flesh" that, through entwinement with Alice, bears enough of Alice's mark to make Ellen a suitable extension of her. While Ellen hasn't become a perfectly submissive Christian yet, and as such hasn't completely cultivated a heart of flesh, she has developed a burgeoning openness to God's will through emotionally and physically mixing with Alice. Where John's offer for Ellen to take him as her brother requires only assent and involves no physical intimacy, Ellen can only respond through physical intimacy to Alice's request to take over her role. If we look closely, we see that Ellen as subject is only implied in the sentence. Grammatically, Ellen's kisses and the pressure of her arms are the agents who say 'yes.' It is as if Ellen's own separate will is either nonfunctional or not the appropriate way to respond to Alice's request. The two characters have merged so deeply that physically intimate responses are the most effective way to communicate. Alice and Ellen's intimacy makes them so alike that they can take the place of one another, which prepares the reader for John's fluid role as brother-father-instructor-husband. Since the only role John can't fulfill is to literally be Alice, he acts as her proxy.

Before turning to John and Ellen, and to punctuate the long-lasting effect of erotic pedagogy between Ellen and Alice, I would like to turn briefly to a scene that registers the importance of touch and teaching to Ellen. After she moves into the Humphreys' home, Ellen finds out that her mother and father have both died. To her dismay, she is told that she has been deeded to distant, and worse, slovenly Catholic relatives in Scotland. After moving there, her tyrannical uncle eventually forbids her attempt at Christian study: her daily readings of *Pilgrim's Progress*. In response, Ellen is "silent, struggling between the alternate surgings of passion and checks of conscience. But at last the wave rolled too high and broke. Clasping her hands to her

face, she exclaimed, not indeed violently, but with sufficient energy of expression, 'Oh, it's not right!–it's not right!'" (553). An affective "surge" gathers into a "wave" that proves too powerful for Ellen to contain. This moment reveals the emotional volatility of a young girl who can only touch her own face and feel overwhelmed when she has not only lost her female teacher Alice, her new brotherly-fatherly-husbandly educator and protector John, *but has also* has been barred from learning on her own. Lacking a maternal-sororial figure to model Christian lessons through intimacy, or a brotherly-fatherly protector to stand in for this lost maternal guide, Ellen's outburst registers the amount of affective energy that was previously nurtured or redirected through physical and emotional contact. Much like the scene on the mountain between Ellen and Alice when Ellen hides her face and Alice unmasks it, Ellen expresses her excess feelings by both disappearing behind her hands and reassuring herself of the modicum of material support she has left- her own body and self.

Erotic pedagogy between Ellen and Alice is a mode of teaching in which intimacy creates porous boundaries between social identity categories. This leads to promiscuous kinship, or the interchangeability of intimate kin, which we see most clearly with John and Ellen. After Alice dies, Ellen moves into Mr. Humphreys' (and thus John's) home. As Ellen takes on Alice's domestic role, John steps in as Ellen's religious and scholarly instructor. Although John and Ellen hold hands intermittently and embrace immediately after Alice's death, this is the extent of their intimate physical contact. John is a (lesser) proxy for Alice, since in this dyad there is no clinging, no cuddling, there are no kisses, and no crying on each other. Once Alice dies, the legacy of their erotic pedagogy and its attendant promiscuous intimacy lives on as Ellen and John explore the full meaning of promiscuous kinship.

III. Promiscuous Kinship as an Expression of a "heart of flesh"

Promiscuous intimacy loosens the boundaries between the family roles of mother, daughter, brother, sister, and husband. These supple boundaries lend themselves to overlapping roles, roles that mix like Ellen and Alice's bodies and feelings. Although Alice's death means Ellen no longer has a female teacher with whom she can be intimate, Alice's death opens up space for a John. While Ellen's physical and emotional intimacy with John is markedly less intense in scope and kind than that which she had with Alice, this fact is compensated for by the fact that John eventually becomes Ellen's husband. John is first Ellen's brother and educator, but towards the end of the novel the implied author suggests he will become Ellen's spouse.[76] In the novel's unpublished chapter, John and Ellen are married. When John brings Ellen back from Scotland to his father's home in Carra-Carra as his wife, the domestic Margery hides her face in her apron when she is told that Ellen is no longer "Miss Ellen" (573).

John's standing as Ellen's educator-brother-husband reveals the incestuous quality of promiscuous kinship, a quality that highlights the openness and the refusal to regulate desire that characterizes Ellen's relationships. At the end of the published novel, Ellen is miserable with her relatives in Scotland where she has yet to hear from John. When he finally locates her family's home, they thrill to each other's presence (559). Ellen bemoans the fact that her youth prevents her from shirking the guardianship of her relatives to live with John. He asks Ellen "What will they say to you then, Ellie, if you leave them to give yourself to me?" cryptically recalling the language of their first interaction, in which John asked Ellen if he would "take" him as a brother and by which he foreshadowed their eventual marriage (563). Ellen replies to John "with abundance of energy, and not a few tears… 'I love them, but I had given myself to you a great

while ago; long before I was his [her uncle's] daughter, you called me your little sister- I can't undo that, John, and I don't want to- it doesn't make a bit of difference that we were not born so!'" (563). Ellen's having "taken" John as her brother by "giving" herself to him continues to allude to marriage. And although she articulates her desire for John in the language of sibling love, John's question is framed as such that it implies a matrimonial relationship.

Promiscuous kinship is not only defined by affectively intense yet interchangeable family roles, but is also marked by incest that refuses order, that is open, and that politely declines the religio-political mandate to regulate desire. In her impassioned response to John's question, Ellen argues that her yearning to "give" herself to John as his sister ought to outweigh the strictures of legal guardianship. But she also emphasizes the gravity of "giving" herself to John by proclaiming that it does not make a difference "that we weren't born so [as siblings]" (). In Ellen's small speech, she "gives" herself to John, but the role in which she is offering herself disappears; she wants to be John's wife at the same time that she would rather they were biologically related. Ellen's ambiguous language suggests that she has made a choice, accepting John as both a brother and fiancé. By choosing a husband who is also her brother, Ellen has broken the rules undergirding the incest prohibition. As Michel Foucault has pointed out, incest serves the dual role as that which the family must prohibit and that which constitutes the family (108-109).[77] As "brother," John would not be eligible for the choice of marriage. As a husband, John could not be the blood relation that Ellen so wishes he were.

During a time period in which the incest prohibition was being theorized and universalized, ethnographers coined phrases like "promiscuous intercourse" to refer to "incest in the absence of the prohibition," which links promiscuity to incest and returns us to kinship in *The Wide, Wide World* (Connolly, 5). John and Ellen's incest is a mode of promiscuity that does not

recognize the socially constructed limitations that in composing the biological family forbid its intermarriage.[78] This mode of kinship privileges postures of generous interrelation; Ellen's position as John's sister does not foreclose her potential as his wife, and John's role as educator and brother does not prevent his also being Ellen's husband. As one critic writes, "incest was a rejection of the circulation, or exchange, of persons constituting the structure of kinship" in the nineteenth century (Connolly, 30). This exchange of persons, much like the condemnation of promiscuity, served in religious discourses to maintain distinctions of purity and to trace patriarchal lineage. This line of thinking might seem contradictory, as I have previously argued that promiscuity involves an open willingness to mingle, while I define incest here as a refusal of (non-familial) mixing. My point is that incest is the most prohibited mingling of all. By choosing each other as siblings and as spouses, Ellen and John are radically, generously open to the one relation that is socially forbidden.

Ellen navigates the constellation of wife and sister through a desire that makes kinship more indiscriminate, incestuous, and generous than patrilineal Protestantism would have it. Incest anxiety is the fear that unregulated desire leads to the downfall of society; this same fear undergirds religious disapproval of promiscuous relations ("promiscuous" meaning both male/female mixing and sexual indiscrimination) (Connolly, 32).[79] As regards Warner's novel, the way that nineteenth century incest anxiety evidenced a fear of unregulated desire helps us identify how Ellen negotiates relationality on her own terms. That is, Ellen determines her kin relations through desire rather than through reasoning, the dictates of the church, or the laws of the state. At bottom, the incest taboo is an attempt to regulate appetites and protect the socio-political order from the unpredictability of sexual desire. In her wish to be John's sister and his wife Ellen remarkably ignores the rest of the world, instead focusing only on the individual

caretakers who surround her. In her promiscuous kinship with John, Ellen follows the authority of her desire above all other institutional or social proscriptions. What could be more threatening in the eyes of the church, state, or society?

After Alice's death, or perhaps after Ellen's mother's death, erotic pedagogy blossoms into a promiscuous kinship in which John can be Ellen's brother-educator-husband. The question of whether erotic pedagogy begins with Alice or Ellen's mother Mrs. Montgomery is a relevant one. It returns us to the scene that opens this essay, a scene in which Ellen listens to her mother's heart while Mrs. Montgomery implores her daughter to love the god whose "grace who has promised to change the hearts of his people- to take away the heart of stone and give them hearts of flesh" (Warner, 38). Ellen and Alice demonstrate that cultivating a fleshly, promiscuous heart open to the love of God means not discriminating between intimate teachers, self/other, between kin relations, nor between brother and husband. Ironically, or perhaps indicating the complexity of Ellen's faith, Ellen labors to become a good, submissive Christian by inadvertently challenging certain patriarchal Christian doctrines of purity, exclusiveness, singularity, and hierarchy.

One reason this is remarkable is due to *The Wide, Wide World*'s imagination of kinship and relations in nonviolent ways. Alongside violent historical events perpetrated in the name of Christianity, queer and feminist theologians have pointed to how patriarchal Christianity necessitates violence. For example, one critic has suggested that the growth of imperial Christianity required "actual bodies" to diminish "in favor of immutable souls and the separation of divinity from world (Schneider, 232) This eclipse of material bodies was also the effect of patriarchal doctrine that emphasized purity, singularity, and hierarchy in order to regulate female sexuality and the transmission of property (Schneider, 232). Scholar of patrilineal kinship in the

Old Testament Carol Delaney has argued that "the price of establishing the [Abrahamic] notion of paternity was violence, exclusion, denial, and betrayal" (45). She evidences a series of "cuts" Abraham makes "to establish patriarchal kinship" (447, 448). To demonstrate fidelity to deity that founds a patrilineal religion, Abraham "cuts the bonds that tie him to his father and brothers," institutes circumcision as a covenant that imagines the penis as the organ of procreation, and is gifted with a "carved out," exclusive lineage and national land (448, 449, 450, 451). Perhaps Abraham's most famous cut is his willingness to sacrifice his only son Isaac at a divine's command.

Rather than the violence of separation and exclusivity Delany locates in patrilineal Christian kinship, in *The Wide, Wide World* Ellen's personal and then kin relations lead to indiscriminate intimacy along with a perpetually renewed teacher-caregiver who mends or takes the place of a previously broken emotional bond. Ellen's relations with her various caretakers are intensely intimate yet never limited to a single person. One caretaker is never superior to another. While her relationships with her mother, Alice, or John are all successive rather than synchronous attachments, one is never more important than the other if the intensity of Ellen's emotional bond is an index of value. Rather than the singular Abrahamic hierarchy of power (god-man-wife), the appearance of Ellen's caretaker-teacher is cyclical; when her mother passes, Ellen eventually encounters Alice, and when Alice dies John marries his sister who stands in for Alice. Ellen's vigorous emotional capacity allows for a rotating cast of teacher-caregivers who serve their purpose and, in the logic of the plot, seem to disappear so Ellen can forge yet another bond with a new caretaker.

It is worth noting that the Old Testament cuts that Delaney analyzes are often referred to as Abraham's trials. Trials of faith are a trope that *The Wide, Wide World* (and sentimental

fiction in general) mobilizes to challenge a protagonist to hone her faith. Ellen's trials take the shape of her temper and, most importantly, the continual loss of a loved, emotionally intimate teacher. However, these trials do not lead to violent breaks or "cuts" in Delaney's parlance, but allow Ellen the opportunity to establish intimacy with a new person. Trials in Warner's novel allow for the renewal of human love for the sake of access to a Christian god. Ellen's trials necessitate an erotic pedagogy that opens up promiscuous, deeply intimate relations. In a fascinating paradox, trials, which are the Abrahamic gesture that establishes Christianity, manifest in *The Wide, Wide World* as occasions for interchangeable intimacies that do not discern between the rigid categories and hierarchies required by the establishment of that patriarchal religion.

A critical reader might ask if all of Ellen's caretakers are truly equal, wondering if John is on par with Alice or if he is valuable only as a proxy for Alice? This question plunges us into a complicated web of relations; we cannot consider John to be a replacement for Alice without noting that Ellen is a replacement for Alice. This fact proves that even if John is proxy for Alice, in a manner of speaking he is an Alice-proxy for an Alice replacement. Furthermore, the suggestion that John takes Alice's place does not give Alice original superiority since Alice took the place of Ellen's mother. Does this mean that all Ellen's caregivers after her mother are replacements for the lost maternal figure? Not quite, because erotic pedagogy makes characters' distinctive roles fuzzy. As Alice and Ellen slide in and out of mother-daughter-sister, student-teacher, comforter-comforted, and self-other roles, we can see that the relationality of erotic pedagogy is predicated on the momentum and effects of intermingling that draws Christians toward knowledge of God through intimacy with each other. *The Wide, Wide, World*'s interpersonal and kinship relations are open to many since they are predicated on emotional

intercourse that challenges the separation of the self from another. Reminiscent of the love of God that Ellen's mother Mrs. Montgomery inducts her daughter into in the novel's beginning (in which Ellen's mother loving God best makes her love her daughter more), thinking of Ellen's caretakers as replacements for one another follows a successive or progressive logic that her Christian love ties into a thick knot of contradiction. Although loving God better might imply loving God supremely, at the top of a hierarchy, it also implies that love is the subject of the sentence and thus the most important factor in all relationships. The forces of eros take precedence over the person or deity who receives the love.

As this chapter winds toward its conclusion, I want to end where I started with a note about Susan Warner, specifically how Warner crafts a story about love that fuses richly interwoven bonds between people. The emotional vitality of Ellen's relationships is the opposite of Warner's own experience of being "cut loose from the world;" specifically, erotic pedagogy's promiscuous embrace is the antidote to social and emotional isolation from others. When I gave a version of this chapter as a talk, a scholar in the audience pointed out that Ellen's choosing John as husband seemed less about incest and agency than about "keeping it all in the family" in a literally and ideologically conservative gesture.[80] This point was well taken. It spurred me to include biographical information on Susan Warner in this chapter's beginning in order to suggest that Ellen's limited family and partner choices is more a symptom of Warner's life experience while writing the novel than a structuring component of erotic pedagogy. What are indeed Ellen's limited romantic options (how could she choose anyone but John, when there is nobody else?) are the product of a family network that perpetually shrinks as loved ones die and "abandon" Ellen just as Warner felt abandoned. Erotic pedagogy illuminates how the power of eroticism as a fountain of love can make Ellen's life worth living, even abundant in emotional

intercourse, in spite of her own series of losses and "cut offs" from her previous worlds. Warner imagines in her novel not an ideologically conservative nor contained narrative about patriarchal romance but a story about finding deep, meaningful love that makes one feel connected in spite of being very alone.

Erotic pedagogy offers us a unique reading of Susan Warner's bestselling novel. As a nonviolent, emotionally expansive, erotically porous analytic, it provides a language for articulating how a libidinally charged teaching relationship leads to surprisingly fungible relationships in sentimental fiction. In spite of Susan Warner's traditional Presbyterianism, *The Wide, Wide World*'s Ellen flouts patriarchal Christian doctrines of exclusivity and hierarchy; erotic pedagogy and its promiscuities encourage us to trace the contours of radical modes of relation. As Ellen vivifies her stony heart, she cultivates a porous love for other Christians that allows her to love Christians by learning from them. Warner's novel is complex enough for Ellen's interchangeable, egalitarian relationships to bring her toward a patriarchal Protestant God. If, at the beginning of the novel, Ellen had asked her mother "What is my God's love like?" perhaps the answer, at least from this essay's understanding, would be: permeable, indiscriminate, expansive. A seductive teacher. A sensual instructor much like Consolata, the nun from Toni Morrison's 1997 novel *Paradise* who helps a group of suffering women transform themselves in 1970.

Conclusion, Consolata, Convent, Coven

(*Paradise*'s Lap of Love)

> "My bones on hers the only good thing. Not spirit. Bones. No different from the man. My bones on his the only true thing. So I wondering where is the spirit lost in this? It is true, like bones. It is good, like bones. One sweet, one bitter. Where is it lost? Hear me, listen. Never break them in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary's mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve."
>
> -Consolata, *Paradise*[81]

> "Out yonder all slithery in a house full of women. Not women locked safely away from men; but worse, women who chose themselves for company, which is to say not a convent, but a coven"
>
> -Lone, *Paradise*[82]

I. Introduction

My conclusion pivots one last time from nineteenth century American literature to the twentieth century. Toni Morrison's 1997 novel *Paradise* is the last text I examine in this dissertation, and I close with it as an expansive example of erotic pedagogy that transcends institutional religion as well as the couple or dyad. Like Butler's *Parable of the Talents*, *Paradise* shows how erotic pedagogy was part of a historic, black feminist effort to heal the violence of and to resist the patriarchal family as a means of controlling difference. One crucial difference between *Parable* and *Paradise* is that Butler's novel takes place in a near future where apocalyptic conditions have made race less of a focal point (the apocalypse of being a black

woman in America has become an urgent condition shared by every person without wealth), whereas Morrison's novel is situated in a watershed moment for race and gender in the United States: the 1970's. Morrison's novel investigates an all-black Christian community in Oklahoma whose pride in their racial purity replicates the values of the white, patriarchal family as an institution that polices and exterminates deviation from their definition of purity.[83]

Erotic pedagogy in this text is different from the examples in earlier chapters, since it operates collectively, rather than in student-teacher dyads, in order to facilitate the process of falling in love with and recuperating the self (a self that has been brutalized under patriarchal regimes of gender and race). This chapter argues that the women gathered in the novel's Convent fictionalize the 1960s black feminist efforts at self-definition that Toni Cade Bambara describes in the preface of her landmark 1970 collection *The Black Woman* as a "turning away from the larger society and a turning toward each other" (1). Erotic pedagogy is a crucial part of this turning toward each, articulating a spiritual love predicated not just on intimacy between students and teacher, but also a devotion to the self in the presence of others. Intimacy in *Paradise* is the vulnerability of healing together by imaging or reconnecting with one's ideal self.

Before I examine *Paradise*, I first provide some context on the author, the novel, and the text's scholarly reception. Born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931, Toni Morrison grew up in Lorain, Ohio and in the early 1970's took the literary world by storm with novels that, at the time, did what few texts had done: privileged the interior psyches of black women for a black audience. Morrison published her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, in 1970; she went on to publish ten novels (including the Nobel Prize-winning *Beloved* in 1987), a play, children's books that she co-authored with her son, and collections of essays and literary criticism before she died in 2019. Morrison has said that *Paradise* is the final novel in a trilogy about love that begins with *Beloved*

and *Jazz*.[84] Depending on which interview with Morrison you read, *Paradise* is about "group love or love of God" (Christian, 418). Scholars have located Morrison's earliest novels in a genealogy of African American women writers who insisted that it was not just oppression from white society that was a problem, but that sexism within the black community also needed to be addressed. This wave of black feminist writers[85] focused their literary talents on defining themselves in their own terms. These authors, Barbara Christian notes, put "more emphasis on reflecting the process of self-definition and understanding…..rather than refuting the general society's definition of them" (237). Thus, we can see how *Paradise*, a historical novel about the 1970's, historicizes the very movement that Morrison helped inaugurate.

The novel's origins can be traced back to Morrison's editorial work on *The Black Book* during her tenure as editor at Random House. In the 1970's, Morrison helped put together a "scrapbook" or "collage" of African American history that featured widely varying print media from black people such as newspaper articles, letters, bills of sale, poems, patents, music, recipes, portraits, photos, and more.[86] The piece from *The Black Book* that piqued Morrison's imagination of *Paradise* was the line "Come Prepared or Not At All" in an 1890's advertisement for the all-black towns that were emerging in the Midwest after the failure of Reconstruction. In an interview, Morrison states the novel's questions were

> related to research that I was doing on Black towns, […] and the line, 'come prepared or not at all,' directed at people coming to these towns to ensure that they had resources to last them for two years. At one point there were 200 freedmen and their families who came to Fort Smith and tried to get into one of these Black towns and were turned away precisely because they didn't have anything. […] I was interested in what on earth that must have

> felt like, to have come all that way and look at some other Black people who said you couldn't come in (Morrison, 1998, 14)

What Lauren Berlant might call a novel of the "history of the present," *Paradise* was written in 1997 but set in 1970; its complicated, non-linear plot delineates the events of the diegetic present as well as the history of the inhabitants of Ruby, Oklahoma (845). Established in 1949, Ruby is a second-generation all-black town, the continuation of Haven, established in 1900 by a group of nine dark-skinned families. In chapters narrated from the perspective of the novel's women, we learn how Ruby carries on the tradition of a prideful refuge from white people as well as intra-racial colorism in which darker skin is privileged at the expense of historical accuracy and those who are lighter skinned. The community's privileging of darker skin is based on the traumatizing rejection of the founding dark black families who were unwelcome in other black towns with lighter skinned residents, an event that they refer to as the "Disallowing" (194).

In the 1960s, news of the Black Power movement filters into the closed-off community of Ruby. The town's youngest generation expresses interest in the radical black politics of the outside world, upsetting the patriarchs who value tradition. Amidst this, there is a growing female presence at a nearby Convent, seventeen miles from Ruby. The only remaining nuns of Convent are Connie and Mother Mary. The Convent eventually attracts women who are looking for a place to escape from past pain or oppressive families. These black, unmarried women (an unnamed one of whom is white) elicit the judgmental scorn of Ruby's leading men because they threaten the town's patriarchal definitions of womanhood as demure wife and monogamous mothers of dark-skinned children. In 1976, as more traumatized drifters end up at the Convent, the nun Consolata initiates a healing process that empowers the women. As the women become progressively independent and content, the men of Ruby become increasingly perturbed.

Eventually, armed with weapons, the men break down the door of the Convent to hunt down and shoot the women. When the undertaker comes to the Convent for the corpses, he finds the women's bodies have vanished. The novel ends with each of the women's spirits returning to the earthly plane to address unresolved matters with their loved ones.

Now I turn from a summary of the novel to previous scholarship on Morrison's oeuvre and *Paradise* in the context of pedagogy, the erotic, religion, family, and gender. Critics have argued that Toni Morrison's cunning narrative uses language as a pedagogical tool. Susan Huddleston Edgerton insists that *Beloved* gives "testimony that brings the past to bear on the present in uniquely pedagogical ways. Yet, the works in question are neither preachy nor didactic. A language of translation is at work here that is not distinct from, although it may be different from, dialogue, conversation, communication" (340). Although Edgerton is referring to *Beloved* and *Jazz*, as *Paradise* had not yet been published, her understanding of how pedagogy functions in the first two novels of the *Beloved* trilogy is an important point of departure for my own approach. Paradise, in the non-linear difficulty of its narrative, is laboring to teach the reader that the truth cannot be understood by narrating the past as separate from the present; the past is knotted into the present, unravelling every other moment with ripple effects.

While Edgerton sees *Beloved* and *Jazz* giving testimony on the past in order to teach us in the present and help us memorialize, I focus on how pedagogy manifests in *Paradise* in a different way. Rather than a function of the novel itself, I frame erotic pedagogy as a practice undertaken by the novel's characters. The women of the Convent do indeed bear testimony, but I see their pedagogy as a practice performed to transform themselves collectively by resolving personal trauma, rather than something the novel does to translate or to enter into dialogue with readers. Each woman's pedagogical practice, in my reading, is as much an effort on the

character's part to teach herself who she is, and to discover who she is, as it is an effort to teach the reader anything. What Edgerton calls a language of translation, I see as a transformation initiated by letting the harm of a purity-enforcing patriarchy be sloughed off; this transformation allows the women to see themselves as they would like to be. Transformation is a key component of in this chapter, as it indexes how the Convent women alter in personally fulfilling ways, rather than moving from one "language" or communicative register to another.

Edgerton is not the only scholar who is interested in *Paradise* from the perspective of pedagogy. Eleanor Traylor argues that *Paradise* is engaged in pedagogical work for humanity, an example of "contemporary African American fiction as the world's [instructive] beacon" (169). She sees the scene of Consolata's transformative lessons to the Convent women as part of a lineage of pedagogical African American texts that teach readers how to be in the world and how to come to community through "transformative decolonization" (169). Traylor's reading aligns the humanities and the human, claiming that the literatures produced by African American experiences of oppression are a result of being denied human status. She sees in the novel's Convent teaching scene a metaphor for the Culture wars/the canon wars. These wars, she claims, are a movement that includes black feminist efforts to define themselves. I approach *Paradise* and erotic pedagogy in the Convent's teaching scene as representations of a particular moment in African American women's history. Whereas Edgerton sees *Paradise* operating at a macro level as a representation of black feminist efforts to reimagine and decolonize the literary canon and the humanities, and thus a metaphor for transforming the definition of the human, I analyze it as a story about women developing radical, healing intimacy with themselves by being vulnerable together as a community. Traylor's reading, in its focus on the canon wars and the humanities,

threatens to ignore the importance of the erotic and the spirituality that characterized the black feminism of the 1970's.

My approach to erotic pedagogy is indebted to work on religion in *Paradise* done by scholars like Maha Marouan. Marouan shows how Morrison's novel seizes syncretic religion (Afro-Brazilian Candomblé) and Egyptian Gnosticism to "fashion an empowering model of black female spirituality" for its protagonists, rewriting "them against historical and religious discourses that have silenced women's powers and constructed women as spiritually inferior" (3). Marouan defines Candomblé as a mix of various religious traditions, African and European; "they emphasize the importance of healing, knowledge of plants, a close relationship with all elements of nature…The worlds of humans and spirits are actively interconnected through rituals and ceremonies of possession….The openness offered to women in African diaspora religious systems can be traced to West and Central African cultures that do not exclude women from the domain of priesthood and spiritual authority" (4). I take my cue from Marouan, approaching Candomblé in *Paradise* a belief system that is not merely countercultural but "as an integral part of what constitutes the [hybrid] cultures of the Americas" (6). *Paradise*'s Consolata, in Marouan's understanding, in spite of her devotion to Catholicism has been gifted with supernatural powers that in Judeo-Christianity are the sole province of a male God. Thus, Marouan suggests, Consolata must eventually step outside orthodox Judeo-Christian discourse because she "is a priestess and healer, who like ancient goddesses owns the power and wisdom which enables her to cure others" (92). Like Marouan, I assume Consolata is a spiritually endowed healer whose break from patriarchal religious institutions marks her full embrace of those healing powers.

Much of the scholarship on *Paradise* assumes that the rigid patriarchy of Ruby, which privileges racially dark purity, initiates Ruby's undoing and the destruction of the Convent. Thus, most readings of the novel are undergirded by a general agreement that the novel is a women-centric critique of male domination. For example, Shirley Ann Stave notes that *Paradise* reveals "a pattern of growing sympathy for women's situatedness in patriarchal society, along with a growing willingness to critique of men for their use of entitlement and their use of violence as a mechanism of maintaining control" in the context of African American history "during and immediately after the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s" (73). However, Noelle Morrissette and Marleen Barr have written about the importance of understanding why Morrison has refused to classify her novels as "feminist." Both critics have pointed to separate instances in which Morrison has explicitly resisted aligning her writing with feminism. Morrissette cites an interview with Morrison to articulate how *Paradise* "steps away from labels and from being categorized with other writers of her generation, particularly feminists, whether black or white," (156). Morrison's rejection of "isms" is crucial context for *Paradise*, Morrissette argues, because the novel encourages inquiring openness rather than circumscribing knowledge. (145). Morrison "leaves it to her readers to discover and explore feminist themes in her work (156). Marleen Barr points to a similar moment when she recounts asking Morrison at a public reading "'if the separatist feminist community she [Morrison] depicts in *Paradise* is akin to the ones appearing in feminist science fiction'" (1). To this question, Morrison answered that "'*Paradise* reflects her [own] querying and interrogating some of the assumptions of feminism….that *Paradise* reveals efforts to 'unrace characters to highlight how we think about race'" (1). That Barr picks up on a similarity between the separatist female community of *Paradise* and those of feminist science fiction suggests that Morrison envisions alternative possible words in a way similar to that of

science fiction and utopian novels.[87] While I discuss *Paradise* alongside *Parable of the Talents* later in this conclusion, probing what it means to think of *Paradise* as a speculative novel, at this juncture I provide context on *Paradise*'s Convent and the women who come to live there so I can then analyze erotic pedagogy.

II. Communal Erotic Pedagogy: Self-Definition Heals in the Wake of American Racialization

Early in the plot, Consolata and Mary Magna are the last remaining nuns of the Convent; Mary Magna, who Consolata worships, saved Consolata as a child from the slums of Brazil. Thirty years later, Consolata alone cares for the dying Mother in the Convent as women boarders begin to appear, looking for a place to stay. We learn that Consolata has "in sight," or the ability to bring the dead back to life, and while she sustains Mary with this gift for years, eventually her beloved nun dies (247). Although Consolata's comforting of the Convent's itinerant occupants seems to mirror the scenes of erotic pedagogy in the *The Gates Ajar*, *Parable of the Talents*, and *The Wide, Wide World*, eventually she realizes that the women need something more in order to process their pain. For example, in *Paradise*, a young woman named Pallas who has been betrayed and raped meets Consolata after arriving at the Convent. Consolata asks '"Who hurt you, little one?'….She just stretched out her hand and Pallas went to her, sat on her lap, talk-crying at first, then just crying.… it was backward and punctured and incomplete, but it came out- little one's story of who had hurt her" (172). Connie tells Pallas to stay as long as she would like and to share the rest when she wants to. Eventually, though, Consolata realizes that she cannot stand these broken, weak, frightened women since "the timbre of their voices told the same tale" of disorder, deception, and indolent lack of vision (221, 222). After holding Pallas on

her lap, Consolata understands that the women who bicker while drifting in and out of the Convent need a more powerful process. What follows is a religious reorientation in which Consolata bids her Catholic god goodbye and opens herself to syncretic religion (251). With the power of a Candomblé, Consolata initiates a healing rite in which the women divest their traumas in order to imagine themselves anew.

Consolata's religious reorientation demonstrates how a Christian (Catholic) erotic pedagogy does not serve black women (and one white woman) of the 1970's whose suffering has broken them. Black feminist erotic pedagogy calls for a non-institutional, non-dyadic approach to healing instruction, one that rejects patriarchy by turning to the women themselves. The erotic pedagogy of 19th century white fictional characters in *The Gates Ajar* and *The Wide, Wide World* issues from a patriarchal Christianity, even though the characters in these novels reimagine their relationships and kinship structures in ways that often implicitly challenge their religious traditions. In *Paradise*, this erotic pedagogy (in which a student appeals to a teacher) could have taken place between Consolata and Pallas as the older woman held and comforted the crying younger woman. But Consolata realizes that Pallas' brokenness is not something she can mollify alone as a teacher, nor is it something Pallas can heal on her own as an individual. Erotic pedagogy in this novel is a communal healing and a self-loving eroticism that is different from the moments of erotic pedagogy that I have examined in my earlier chapters.

Consolata's embrace of a shared Candomblé ritual recalls the ethos of *The Black Woman*'s 1970's black feminism in that she leaves patriarchal, white Christianity behind by encouraging the Convent women to turn toward each other to learn who they are. Toni Cade Bambara points to Christianity as a basis for sexist gender roles in the black community; her essay about historical white incursions into African life reasons that white Christianity privileged

masculinity in order to control property. Patrilinear inheritance "guarantee[s] the transmission of property," which meant "woman's liberty and mobility, especially sexual, was curtailed through monogamy" ("On the Issue of Roles" 104). Consolata's bidding goodbye to her Catholic god represents stepping away from the legacy of white, patriarchal Christianity and toward the women upon which this patriarchy has staked its claims.

Shortly after this moment, Consolata begins a ritual of nurturance that will symbolically satisfies desire by cooking a meal for the women. The narrator's prose is voluptuous, evocative, and deeply sensitive to the sensory aspects of food preparation, hinting at the embodied quality of psychic nurturance that this meal foreshadows:

> Consolata cleans, washes and washes again two freshly killed hens….She lifts the skin to reach under it, fingering as far as she can. Under the breast, she searches for a pocket close to the wing. Then, holding the breast in her left palm, the fingers of her right tunnel the back skin, gently pushing for the spine. Into all these places- where the skin has been loosened and the membrane separated from the flesh it once protected- she slides butter. Thick. Pale. Slippery (252-253).

Description of Consolata's cooking is interspersed by short vignettes of women from the Convent in private moments of struggle with their personal suffering. Pallas has been abandoned and humiliated by her family, only to be later raped. Meanwhile, "Consolata tils the fowl and peers into their silver and rose cavities" (255). Then we hear about Gigi in the bathtub, unable to forget the violence of a race riot gone wrong before the narrative shifts into a description of Consolata "peeling and quartering small brown potatoes…she sprinkles paprika and seeds of blackest pepper over them. 'Oh, yes,' she says. 'Oh, yes'" (257). Another vignette: a scene from Mavis' mind, who ran away from her abusive husband and

her murderous children. Connie's preparations in the kitchen continue, and then we hear about a final Convent woman, Seneca, whose childhood abuse has led her to start cutting herself. The narrative of each Convent woman's individual suffering is strung together by Consolata's sensual cooking, showing how these traumatized women will soon unify in a collective ritual of self-satisfaction. The meal they share is just the beginning. "The table is set; the food is placed. Consolata takes off her apron…'If you want to be here you do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for'" she tells them (262). Because the women find that they cannot leave the one place where they have the freedom to do so, they eat the meal that inaugurates their erotic pedagogy ritual. As Audre Lorde indicates, the erotic is a "fullness" of deep feeling, an "internal sense of satisfaction," that are the both the opposite of empty hunger (54). Not only are the women of the Convent encouraged to find out what they want, need, and feel deeply about, but Consolata makes it clear that the women must choose to be present. The erotic quality of this ritual "requires an intentionality that is fueled by the desire to determine one's own destiny" (Lorde, 54).[88] Morrison weaves into this intentionality the possibility of Candomblé initiation rite, as her invitation to "stay here and follow me. Someone could want to meet you" could refer to their true selves or a meeting of the Candomblé gods, orixas (Morrison, 262; Marouan, 97).

Before describing their ritual, I pause to historically contextualize this food foreplay in black feminist scholarship. *Paradise*'s sumptuous scene asserts that caring for how black women nourished their bodies, and with whom, was a crucial part of determining who they were and how they were healing together. Verta Mae Smart-Grosvenor's call to "PROTECT YOUR KITCHEN" [89] in *The Black Woman* bemoans the rise of instant, prepackaged food

that will make kitchens obsolete, citing the absence of slave labor as one of the reasons why white people invented easy-to-make food. The glorious cuisine made by enslaved cooks, "biscuits so light they could have flown across the mason Dixon line if they had wanted to," was time-intense labor for one of humanity's basic, most important needs, since "food is life./food changes up into blood, blood into cells, cells into energy, energy changes up into the forces which make up your lifestyle" (150, 152). Smart-Gosvernor's point is that cooking is becoming unfashionable because white people do not want to do the work of making good food. While enslaved cooks historically did that work, American culture prides itself on ignoring African American's rich food history that was characterized by immense time, effort, and skill: "the cooking of food is one of the highest of all human arts. we need to develop food consciousness" (151). Smart-Grosvenor's words remind us that historical awareness can be linked to the culinary through desire, and that desire is key to the work of healing since it is both related to sustaining the physical body and predicated on that body's capacity for pleasure.

We can further see how the Convent dwellers recall nascent black feminism's historical moment by analyzing their healing process. The women follow Consolata's instructions to undress and lay down on the cellar floor, symbolizing their shared vulnerability. Consolata paints each woman's silhouette around them on the floor, creating a template as well as indicating where each woman's attention should be. Pallas, Gigi, Mavis, Seneca; all four Convent women undergoing the ritual focus on and within themselves. Then Consolata tells her own story about realizing that, contrary to Catholic teachings, the body and spirit must not be separated nor the spirit valued above the flesh. Her story concludes with the myth of Piedade in a paradise where "fruit tasted the way sapphires look." In Consolata's story, synaesthesia is a metaphor for the

illusion that the body and mind are separate, as their separation is intended to privilege the mind over seemingly inferior body. In her tale, fruit does not register traditional properties of taste; rather, its flavor is visualized. Sapphires are not markers of wealth or ornamentation, but imagined as the similitude of another object's taste. The synaesthesia does not organize objects in traditional categorical terms of sensory likeness, privileging instead a comparative rendering of experience that emphasizes imaginative possibilities. Consolata lays out an important first lesson in her erotic pedagogical ritual: the personal cannot be separated from the holy, which illuminates the interwoven quality of the spiritual, the erotic, and the political. Lorde offers up this concept as crucial to the erotic, writing that it is the bridge that connects the spiritual and the political (56). In other words, since sensual energy issues from a wellspring oneself and one's joys, it is the most authentic means we have of gauging how our existence is valued or thwarted by larger political, cultural, and social structures. After Consolata opens this door for the women, her students begin to process the pain that they have ignored, diving into the work of sundering themselves from the circumstances and people who have persecuted them.

Immediately after Consolata's story, the women begin a "loud dreaming" in which they tell their own stories of hurt or joy. The narrator writes, "it was never important to know who said the dream or whether it had meaning" (264). The women's words are part of a collective healing process that does not require the speaker of a dream to correspond with what she says. The dreaming is more important than its content, revealing that in Loud Dreaming transformative power does not necessarily hinge on a coherent subject or contained information. There is no strict equivalency between speaker/spoken words or voiced words/meaning; rather, these "[h]alf-tales" and "never-dreamed" utterances exist in a not-quite-real world in which each woman "can step easily into the dreamer's tale" (264). Since "monologue is no different from shriek" and

"accusations directed to the dead….are undone by murmurs of love," loud dreaming is a safe, shared space in which to divest trauma by neutralizing what may or may not be haunting a speaker. Stepping into other's tales allows the women to witness and acknowledge the offered dream while also providing distance from contained subjectivity, or a lived experience liable to be consumed by the powers defining that subject. As the narrator weaves the women's different loud dreaming together, the events the women narrate happen to "they" and "them" rather than an individual; the women go through this loud dreaming in its pain and pleasure together.

As days of the healing process proceed, the women purchase chalk and paint in order to draw details on their cellar floor silhouettes. When Seneca, a character who cuts herself, "had the hunger to slice her inner thigh, she chose instead to mark the open body lying on the cellar floor" (265). The narrator writes that "Pallas had put a baby in her [floor] template's stomach…days passed uncut from night as careful etchings of body parts occupied [the women]" (265). Seneca's tracing is described as an open body, reflecting the outline's unbound quality to absorb, divest, or embody. Pallas' is a "template," suggesting that the drawing is a preemptory expression of who or what she wishes to manifest. Even the days cannot be clearly separated from nights as the women are engrossed in recuperating or imagining themselves under Consolata's tutelage (265).

This pedagogy's eroticism lies in how these women choose to love themselves by healing as embodied, empowered beings. The women of the Convent are literally and metaphorically naked together as they bear their secret loud dreams before drawing their new selves into existence on the cellar floor. Their vulnerability issues from profound honesty about the new vitality they are cultivating within themselves, for themselves. The narrator writes that the women "had to be reminded of the moving bodies they wore, so seductive were the alive ones below," revealing

how all-encompassing their entrancing new selves are (265). After nights of this ritual, Consolata notes a new calm in the Convent; the women, herself included, are "no longer haunted" (266).

Erotic pedagogy here provides a mutual intimacy in which women are vulnerable amongst each other as they nurture respect for expressions of themselves that a racist, sexist, classist world has told them does not deserve to exist. Part of the healing work involves recovering the ideal self that their world has damaged, rejected, or ignored. Such a process resonates with Lorde's insistence that the power of the erotic is rooted in "sharing deeply any pursuit with another person," such that it is impossible not to recognize one's own deep feelings and joys (56). This allows one to "give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation" (58). As an instance in which the women turn to each other to love themselves, divesting suffering or damaging beliefs in the process, eroticism infuses their community by opening up the possibility of sensual self-love. The women are healing themselves, the one part of the world they can control, in the abundant momentum of collective nurturance. If this dissertation's previous chapters privilege dyads that condone capitalism's liberal individual subjectivity, the erotic pedagogy of *Paradise* reveals that the racialization of African American women necessitates alternative versions of the erotic pedagogical process.

One way to index how twentieth century American racialization necessitates a different erotic pedagogy is by examining the Convent as a model of kinship that contrasts with the patriarchal family's social function. Reading erotic power in the Convent reveals that the women counter the violence of the racially pure (white or black) heterosexual family as a means of control. My claim builds on Eden Osucha's "Race and the Regulation of Intimacy in the Moynihan Report, the Griswold Decision, and Morrison's Paradise," [sic] which theorizes how legally protected, white, heterosexual family structure is linked to the nation and regulation in

twentieth century America. Osucha reads *Paradise* in the context of a 1965 state ban on contraceptives, *Griswold v. Connecticut*, and the "Moynihan Report," circulated in 1965 by Daniel Moynihan as *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Osucha's "Race and Regulation" argues that *Griswold*'s doctrine of privacy banned state intervention in heterosexual marriage, effectively establishing privacy as a heterosexual, white right that contrasted with the "pathology" of the black family that, according to the Moynihan report, was in need of state intervention because of its purportedly problematic matriarchy. "Through the Convent women's queer intimacy," Osucha argues, "Morrison represents an alternative to the liberal ideal of 'privacy' forged in the overlap between heteronormative sexual culture and the legal regulation of race and intimacy" (258). In other words, through the women of the Convent, *Paradise* critiques how heteronormative, patriarchal sexual culture necessitates the regulation of racial purity and relationality.

This approach to *Paradise* is important for my own critique because it reads the social and legal discourses black women were challenging in the 1970's and specifically in Bambara's *The Black Woman*. Osucha identifies the liberal, white supremacist patriarchal keystones of the family in late twentieth century American social doctrines, which clarifies why *Paradise* is a necessary companion for sentimental fiction. Thinking of the Convent as an alternative kinship structure illuminates how the novel explodes the 19th and 20th century American Christian family as a potential regime of domination that yoked together whiteness, patriarchy, and heterosexuality. The white family as a mechanism for control attends any sentimental fiction's engagement of Christian family values, whether it is latent (as in *The Gates Ajar*'s complete omission of slavery as the cause of the Civil War) or explicit (as in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). In the case of *Paradise*, it is the all-black community of Ruby that adapts these "white man's ways."

Since Ruby's rigid traditions leave no room for women who desire agency, freedom, or non-traditional gender roles, defectors go elsewhere. The nearest place is the Convent, which functions as an alternative space to Ruby's proscriptions. The women who come to the Convent and challenge (intentionally or inadvertently) the heteronormative family do so in order to repair themselves.

For instance, Mavis, one of the Convent women, runs away from her husband and children after accidentally letting her twin toddlers suffocate in the back of a hot car. Miserably spread thin as a mother, alienated by her husband who enjoys humiliating her during sex, Mavis is so wracked by guilt about her twins that she is sure her remaining children are plotting to kill her. After her husband degrades her in bed at night, Mavis wants to leave the bedroom but is terrified that her children are waiting to hurt her outside the door. After escaping her home in the morning, she visits her mother, telling her "They're going to kill me, Ma…They already tried but I got away….They got no right to kill me" (31). Mavis' mother thinks her daughter has gone insane, and days later Mavis leaves, at best ignored by her family, at worst completely dehumanized (171). Not only is she so upset by killing her twins that she is consumed by guilt, but her children actually seem to be maliciously plotting to hurt her, a fact that concerns neither her husband nor her mother. Mavis is suffocating in this fictional allegory for the black masculinist imagination only recognizes black femininity as subservient, self-effacing motherhood in the model of the heterosexual family. In her essay anthologized in *The Black Woman*, Kay Lindsey critiques masculinist Black Nationalism's embrace of the ideal (white) family modelled after the state, writing that "[t]he family, as a white institution, has been held up to Blacks as a desirable but somehow unattainable goal, at least not in the pure forms that whites have created" (86). "If the family as an institution were destroyed," Lindsey continues, "the state

would be destroyed," because "it is immediately within the bosom of one's family that one learns to be female and all that the term implies" (106). Mavis dramatizes black masculinity's dehumanizing demand on black women to submissively exist for the male at the expense of oneself. Later in *Paradise*, Mavis finds that a fistfight with Gigi makes her feel empowered. She realizes gleefully that "the old Mavis was dead," the one who was defenseless, who was so overwhelmed that she did not pay attention to where she left her small children when she went into stores on a hot day, who had no sense of self because nobody acknowledged her as worthy in and of herself (171).

III. Speculative Kinship

The model of kinship that the Convent offers is an embodied, pleasurable openness to one's best self as the basis of community, privileging a "we" rather than the "us" versus "them" relied on the patriarchal family's racial hierarchies of purity. Consolata's healing pedagogy suggests a possible model for kinship at the Convent in which uniting the soul and body is the way to begin imagining who you could be in relation to others. Rather than the compulsory, petrified gender roles of Ruby or the white Christian family in which one's position in the family and the social order is part of a hierarchy that separates and polices individual feminine subjects who exist beneath and for the male counterpart, the Convent women get to imagine their own place in the world. At the Convent, kinship and personhood are speculative. They are acts of birth ushering forth life that is just beginning to explore its true potential.

To bring previous chapters into consideration: in *The Wide, Wide World* and *The Gates Ajar*, non-heteronormative kinship structures emerge from within the white Christian family, but

these structures do not intentionally problematize that family, nor do they probe it as a potentially violent institution. These novels are less resistant to the traditional Christian family, as they imagine something that overlaps with or fits in the bounds of that family. *Paradise* and *Parable of the Talents*, however, frame the heteronormative, white family as a static force that maintains its strictures through controlling violence. They use the force of eros to not just develop relationships with oneself or with another, but to actively reimagine more just kinship relations. This fiction suggests that American racialization necessitates a more critical stance toward the straight, white family as a means of perpetuating norms like purity and patriarchy. These two twentieth century novels by black women illustrate that erotic pedagogy does not just transform relationships in nineteenth century fiction, but persists to be taken up by black authors in the twentieth century as a means of actively challenging and reimagining the white, heteronuclear family.

However, in *Paradise* Mavis's family is not the only kind of masculinism that the Convent women are seeking refuge from. These women's traumas are embodied by the patriarchs of Ruby, men who have decided that their traditional town must be rid of the "coven" of "slut" "witches" at the Convent (276). Shortly after the women have experienced their newfound, healing transformation, a group of Ruby's original founding men gather to discuss the increasing disorder in their town. Eventually, "[u]nbridled by Scripture," they consider it God's mission to bring patriarchal order; they arm themselves with guns and rope, head to the Convent, and hunt down the women, shooting them one by one (306). A few days after the town helps clean up the carnage, the undertaker arrives to care for the women's corpses. At the Convent, he finds no bodies. In disbelief, Richard the town minister and Pat the town historian come to see the absence for themselves. As they explore the premises, they sense out in the garden a door or

a window to "another place- neither life nor death- but there, just yonder," a portal to an in-between space (307). The novel ends shortly afterward with descriptions of the Convent women as ethereal apparitions, humans or saints. All with hair cut short, Mavis, Gigi, Seneca and Pallas visit their loved ones or their homes, visible to only specific people and bringing with their presence an unearthly, disorienting effect. They achieve what they came for and disappear out of their loved ones lives as quickly as they came in.

A keen reader might ask if I am collapsing Candomblé ritual into pedagogy, which would be a pertinent question. But pedagogy is framed in this dissertation as a teaching practice that issues from a rich theological tradition that blurs the line between ritual and transmission of knowledge that is sometimes formalized and other times located outside of or on the periphery of an institution. Erotic pedagogy in *Paradise is* a ritual, in that erotic pedagogy is capacious enough to include sacred ceremony. Ritual is a continuous, generationally rhythmic teaching that connects the person learning to a longstanding tradition, people, or religion. Consolata is teaching women to love themselves and let go of pain in order to learn about their innate divinity, in the syncretic tradition of Candomblé. *Paradise*'s futurity, then, is the Convent women surviving as orixas, saints, ghosts, or people in another dimension who persist because they have established an erotic tie to their own divinity.

With mention of futurity, I want to consider *Paradise* alongside *Parable of the Talents* as speculative fiction, or writing that sits apposite science fiction since it "is less defined by boundary-making around the word 'science,' stretching to encompass related modes such as fantasy and horror, forms of knowledge in excess of white Western science, and more work authored by women and people of color" (Streeby 20). In the words of another scholar, speculative fiction "does not specify a nonrealist literary genre so much as it characterizes a

range of texts…that enact a mode of thinking" rooted in "wonder, uncertainty, contingency, imagination, invention, and collaboration" (Friedman, 207). While most scholars have read *Paradise* as magical realism, I make a case for the speculative nature of the book to emphasize its world-building qualities.[90]

Paradise is a speculative novel because it insists that Black feminist practices of instructive, erotic collective healing build a space that honors them rather than degrading them. Places like this do not exist for the women until they imagine them, bringing into existence something that was not real until they made it so. The kinship that the women of the Convent cultivate during their loud dreaming ritual is a speculative kind of belonging much like *Parable of the Talents*' Earthseed in its aims to create a better world that is free from, in the words of *Paradise*, "men whose power to control was out of control and who had the nerve to say who could live and who not and where," those who "judge, rout, and even destroy the needy, the defenseless, the different" (302, 308). Speculative fiction as a genre envisions a future that is not beholden to science, technology, or the limitations of "rational" empirically-based Western knowledge (I base this definition, in my own words, from Shelley Streeby's articulation of speculative fiction). Thus, it makes room for religious and spiritual dynamics to affect the transformation that magic or futuristic progress can make. As a function of sentimental and Afrofuturistic speculative fiction, erotic pedagogy shows that its own true magic lies in yoking embodied, personified love to the possibilities inherent in that which we do not yet know.

Erotic pedagogy's epistemologies affirm life in the midst of conditions that are designed to destroy, or at least subjugate, those who deviate from patriarchal power structures. As much as this analytic is about embodied experiences, it is also an epistemology perfectly illustrated at the end of *Paradise*. The novel's final pages suggest that the Convent women still live as saints or

spirits in another dimension or *in another way of knowing*, suggesting spiritual change in that they all sport ritually shorn hair. My statement does not justify or negate the fact that in the material world of the novel, the women have been brutally murdered. It proffers the suggestion that two realities can exist at once in *Paradise*'s epistemology; the women can be dead while also living on. As Toni Morrison once said, African Americans "are a very practical people…but within that practicality we also accept what I suppose could be called superstition and magic. Which is another way of knowing things…to blend those two worlds together at the same time is enhancing" (Morrison 2008, 61)

Paradise closes on a mystical beach with an unnamed woman, perhaps Consolata, laying in the arms of a "dark as firewood" woman, Piedade. The figure in Piedade's arms "adore[s]" the "black face" above her as Piedade sings, stroking maybe-Consolata's hair. Piedade's song evokes memories "of reaching age in the company of the other….of the unambivalent bliss of going home to be at home- the ease of coming back to love begun" (318). Heat waves of devotion shimmer between these women as they worship each other's divine femininity. Their shore, a liminal space much like the door Richard and Pat sensed, situates them right around the corner from earth while they bask in their safe adoration, singing and stroking. Just as Winifred gathered her niece in her arms in beginning of *The Gates Ajar*, rewriting the holy family as a woman holding Mary, Piedade holds a beatific woman who could be Consolata in her lap. There is no need for a masculine or male figure in this sacred family. Within and without dominant social structures, in and outside of our world's allowable knowledge, these students of erotic pedagogy have conjured that which deepest love makes possible: the lap of feminine belonging.

Notes

[1] Hereafter referred to as "Uses."

[2] As Gerry Canavan writes in his biography *Octavia Butler*, "Butler would hold the same anti-utopian, deeply pessimistic perspective on the possibility of 'progress' across her career; in a 2000 New York Times interview, asked 'Will racial and sexual attitudes improve in the 21st century?'" she replied, "Absolutely not…In countries where there are no racial differences or no religious differences, people find other reasons to set aside one certain group of people and generally spit in their direction" (52).

[3] It was uncannily crushing to write my conclusion on Toni Morrison's 1997 novel *Paradise* during the summer of 2020. Since *Paradise* is, among many things, a historical novel that tells the story of how a small 1970's Oklahoma town is affected by the revolutionary currents of Black Nationalism and burgeoning Black Feminism, it felt as though I was in a hamster wheel of racist, sexist history. Police brutality against black men, women, trans men and trans women made it seem as though nothing had changed, and that the race protests of the 1970's had not achieved much.

[4] See Travis Foster and Timothy M. Griffith's "Introduction: American Women's Writing and the Genealogies of Queer Thought."

[5] Although scholars like Lauren Berlant and Ann Cvetkovich have written extensively on feelings and sentimental fiction, their later work on queer theory and affect focuses on the archives, topics, or texts from the twentieth and twenty first centuries. As Christine Yao points

out, Berlant, Cvetkovich, and Dana Luciano "began their research on sentimentality in nineteenth-century American and British literature…and are now more widely known for their work as critics at the intersection of queer, feminist, and affect theory" (21, note 2).

[6] I follow Toni Morrison's reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an example of "romancing slavery" in that Stowe neutralizes the threat of blackness by making slave quarters, and the enslaved people themselves "safe, even amusing and especially kind, generous, and subservient" (*The Origin of Others*, 13).

[7] See, for example, Rambuss' introduction to his *The English Poems of Richard Crashaw*, as well as his *Closet Devotions.*

[8] Novels like James Baldwin's *Go Tell it On the Mountain* and Randall Kenan's *A Visitation of Spirits* explore the crippling legacy and effects of masculinist religious homophobia in, respectively, black Pentecostal and fundamental Baptist churches.

[9] A version of this chapter was also published in *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and Theologies of the Afterlife: A Step Closer to Heaven,* Routledge, 2021.

[10] *Chapters from a Life*, 96.

[11] Page 39.

[12] As Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller write in *The Northern Home Front During the Civil War*, "[m]ilitary service spread through the class structure of the North, but the majority of families who had to deal with absent menfolk were of the middling sort of the working class. In

part, this was simply because there were more men available from such families to fill the ranks" (53).

[13] In the words of Max Cavitch, "every elegy is a love poem," (246).

[14] Erotic pedagogy builds upon what Ashley Barnes has described as the "exhibitional style" of Mary and Winifred's physically intimate religious instruction (181). Where exhibitional style synthesizes the Protestant will to scriptural depth and the Catholic commitment to surface in worship (evidenced by how "the body and hands communicate more effectively that then abstractions of minds and words"), erotic pedagogy sidesteps Phelps' interest in synthesizing denominational differences to insist that any mode of religious interaction in this era brought with it the fomenting energies of spiritually excited bodies (Barnes, 195).

[15] Claudia Stokes, *The Altar At Home: Sentimental Literature and Nineteenth-Century American Religion,* 21. Some scholars date the Second Great Awakening from 1790- 1830, rather than 1840; see David Kling's "For Males Only: The Image of the Infidel and the Construction of Gender in the Second Great Awakening in New England" (2).

[16] Although Long suggests that the Civil War's incessant reminders of mortality and physical materiality lead to touch, rather than eroticism, between Mary and Winifred, other scholars have read the unprecedented physicality of the Civil War as something that encouraged erotic or queer encounters. See also Peter Coviello's "Whitman's Children," in which he suggests that Whitman's work in Civil War hospitals allowed him to live out the brotherly camaraderie and

erotic attachments he describes in *Calamus* (72). In short, "under the pressures of the war….Whitman's vision of sex transforms and extends itself" (74).

[17] Long sees the emphasis on individuality stemming from reform culture. See her article "The Postbellum Reform Writings of Rebecca Harding Davis and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps" in *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth Century American Women's Writing*.

[18] Long sees Winifred's corporeal theology as a "usurpation of masculine authority," particularly male clerical authority that resists "the psychological and experiential restraints of religious orthodoxy" (72). It is a common claim that *Gates* challenges religious orthodoxy, especially the Calvinism that saturated her upbringing in Andover, Massachusetts, home of the famous Andover Theological Seminary. Many feminist scholars that *Gates* evidences Phelps' rebellion against her strict, traditional upbringing and education by Old Calvinist teachers (like Edwards Park, her father, Professor Austin Phelps, and her grandfather, Moses Stuart, who was one of Andover's original faculty members). As I address later in this chapter, I see Phelps as a theological intellectual who built on her grandfather's scholarly work in order to theorize through *The Gates Ajar* a "theology of feelings" (see page 47 of this dissertation).

[19] In their encyclopedic taxonomy of the eight affective approaches, Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg articulate the methodological work of the affective turn as it often appears in queer theory as "politically engaged work- perhaps most often undertaken by feminists, queer theorists, disability activists, and subaltern peoples living under the thumb of a normativizing power- that attends to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing

ephemera, of the daily and the workaday, of every day and every-night life, and of 'experience'….where persistent, repetitious practices of power can simultaneously provide a body (or, better, collectivized bodies) with predicaments and potentials for realizing a world that subsists within and exceeds the horizons and boundaries of the norm" (7). Ann Cvetkovich offers an evocative definition of the affective turn in queer studies when she cautions that "I would not want to suggest that work on 'affect' comes after queer theory or is separate from sexuality…Indeed, affect and sexuality are not merely analogous categories but coextensive ones with shared histories" (172). Other theorists often grouped in the "affective turn" camp of queer theory are Heather Love (*Feeling Backward*), Carla Freccero (see "Queer Spectrality: Haunting the Past," from *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*), and Carolyn Dinshaw (*How Soon Is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amatuer Readers, and the Queerness of Time*), to name a few.

[20] A short essay by "J.P." in an 1853 issue of *The American Tract Society's* publication *American Messenger* called "'I shall be Satisfied.' Pslam 17:15" ends with the stylistically similar, emphatic lines "What is there *not* in heaven to satisfy every soul which divine grace has sweetened for that blissful inheritance? All that is holy and pure and righteous and lovely shall be there, and all 'shall be satisfied.'"

[21] As Jonathan Culler writes of address to the beloved in lyric poetry, "it gives us an event in the lyric present….[t]his permits a more vivid expression of feeling, not something to be described from a past which is narrated but rather as an act of praise or blame in the present," Theory of the Lyric. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015, 208. Jay Hopler and

Kimberly Johnson argue that the Western lyric has always been in conversation with and inspired by devotional poetry in *Before the Door of God: An Anthology of Devotional Poetry*.

[22] For a detailed articulation of this assumption, see Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age.*

[23] Laurel Schneider has shown how Abrahamic, patriarchal doctrine emphasized purity and hierarchy, especially around matrimonially bound heterosexual dyads, in order to regulate female sexuality and the transmission of property.

[24] With Faith as Mary's new daughter, reproductive futurity is both eschewed and continued. One could see Mary as the spinster figure who has an avuncular, indirect, and sidelong relationship to futurity that Sarah Ensor theorizes in "Spinster Ecology: Rachel Carson, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Nonreproductive Futurity."

[25] Although I am referring to specific scholars and texts; I write "Andover" here because these specific scholars represent a genealogy of thought carried from Stuart and largely accepted at Andover.

[26] John Giltner writes of Moses Stuart that "in biblical learning he was an authentic pioneer, borrowing early and extensively from the far away, and still very new, German biblical critics and linguists" (vii).

[27] Scholar Charles Phillips suggests that Park's rhetorical strategy excused passionate piety in order to dismiss it because Phillips wants to reclaim Park from accusations of being a romanticist

(155). Paretsky has a different understanding. She sees Park's sermon as an "apology for the [traditional] style of theological training offered at Andover," an apology in the face of the growing importance of science (61).

[28] Although Lisa Long's reading of *Gates'* heaven is not necessarily negative, it does not consider Phelps' heaven to be a serious theological proposition. Instead, Long understands heaven in *Gates* as a secularized, utopian solution to the problems of the "nerve disease" of grief and Civil War trauma (61).

[29] In a brilliant return to *Feminization*, Kevin Pelletier, Claudia Stokes, and Abram Van Engen point out that Douglas' book "is as much about the changing status of the public intellectual as it is about the rise of literary sentimentalism" (186). They contextualize Douglas' writing style (her generalizations about and her aggressive, dismissive stance toward women's writing) by pointing to the way that Douglas was navigating a misogynist, male-dominated academy. As a woman up for tenure, it is perhaps unsurprising that Douglas would reproduce in her book certain masculinist institutional norms.

[30] Hereafter referred to as "The Theology."

[31] This is Gail Smith's claim that *Gates* was "a revision of the long tradition of 'material' heavenly depictions for a new audience, and an extension of biblical figuration to meet the pastoral needs of the mid-nineteenth century" and that Phelps was continuing Moses Stuart's

hermeneutical "reading of biblical figures as figures, especially in the Book of Revelation" (125, 109).

[32] Quoting Park's sermon, Paretsky observes that "'[h]oly feelings' served the intellect, prompting it to 'new discoveries.' He [Park]could make no clearer statement about Andover's commitment of orthodoxy to the dictates of modern science" (63).

[33] New England Calvinist theology of the 1840's and onward was a philosophical mode of thinking that can be traced back to Scottish Commonsense Philosophy, or Scottish Realism, and the theology of Jonathan Edwards (Paretsky 20, Philips 112-114). Paretsky points out that "[t]he [Scottish] realists believed they could base moral philosophy on axioms of human thought, using the inductive method derived from Bacon and Newton" (21).

[34] See Laurence Carlin's *The Empiricists*, 10, 24-28. As Kristin M. Girten observes, Baconian "new science" and the 18th century philosophy it ushered in had a "foundation in the physical world and its investment in experimentation" has been well documented (499).

[35] This observation echoes scholars like Bruno Latour, who writes cheekily that scientists "ceaselessly manipulate invisible things themselves," spellbound by "belief in causes" (*On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, 12, 13).

[36] Before Bruno Latour studied the constructed quality of science and called for more networked knowledge, Donna Haraway wrote that "[f]eminist objectivity is about limited location and

situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object" (583). The "multiplicity of local knowledges," Haraway argued, is the only way to have "an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects…*and* a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwide projects of finite freedom" (579).

[37] Sarah Ensor, "Relative Strangers: Contracting Kinship in the Queer Ecology Classroom."

[38] See Lori Merish's *Sentimental Materialism: gender, commodity, culture, and nineteenth century America*.

[39] "The sphere of atmosphere tends to get overlooked in literary studies. Part of the problem is that many commentators conflate atmospheric and painterly aesthetics, particularly in the case of comparisons to visual impressionism. Within an impressionist paradigm, one frequently reads of visual and epistemological versions of "atmospheric interference"[2]—the way in which air and light occlude, distort, or otherwise color a subject's perceptual access to an object" (Abramson, 336-337).

[40] "A Spoilerific Gush on How Octavia Butler Turns Me On," in *Pleasure Activism*, 56-57.

[41] Earthseed's value of the bodily builds on a rich black feminist tradition of theorizing the flesh begun by scholars like Hortense Spillers in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." It also continues the work of reclaiming the humanity of black women, placing *Parable of the Talents* in the literary-theoretical genealogy that includes Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Audre Lorde.

[42] Maria Holmgren Troy's 2010 statement that *Survivor* "is not in print and has not been reprinted since the early 1980s" is still accurate (Troy 1122). Used copies of this novel are listed on Amazon.com for prices between $100 and $1,000 (*Amazon*).

[43] The list of Butler's awards is impressive: 1980, Creative Arts Award, L.A. YWCA; 1984, Hugo Award for Best Short Story – *Speech Sounds*; 1984, Nebula Award for Best Novelette – *Bloodchild*; 1985, Science Fiction Chronicle Award for Best Novelette – *Bloodchild*; 1985, Locus Award for Best Novelette – *Bloodchild*; 1985, Hugo Award for Best Novelette – *Bloodchild*; 1995, MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Grant; 1999, Nebula Award for Best Novel – *Parable of the Talents*; 2000, PEN American Center lifetime achievement award in writing; 2010, Inductee Science Fiction Hall of Fame; 2012, Solstice Award, Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America.

[44] *Talents* also precedes Butler's unfinished *Parable of the Trickster.*

[45] The narrator of the text quoted is Bankole, Lauren Olamina's husband who "was born in 1970," locating him at the beginning of Reaganism (8). Interestingly, James Berger writes in his introduction that *After the End* was inspired by his fascination with 1980s catastrophe movies along with the fact that he "spent the 1980s trying to understand and endure the Reagan presidency" and its "gorgeous mechanisms of amnesia" (xiii, xiv). There seems to be a cultural understanding of the correlation between neoliberalism and representations of the post-apocalyptic.

[46] Yes. Octavia Butler was a prophet.

[47] I follow Lydia G. Fash's understanding of fake news as "news built around a kernel of truth and disseminated by someone who knows the information to be false and has the intention of deceiving others for some type of gain. Though it has been frequently used this way by Donald Trump, I do not use the term as a politicized mode of deauthorizing legacy media that follow journalistic standards and publish fact-checked stories they fully believe to be true" (472, n. 10).

[48] Vincent Lloyd claims that the parable series narrates a "post-racial" celebration of diversity (as difference rather than necessitating justice) that is part of a politically evacuated "neoliberal love" (457). According to Lloyd, Earthseed ignores actual worldly differences like race in order to focus on intangible concerns like community building and fostering intimacy (457). The immanent, or Earthseed's material concerns, have adulterated the clean line that leads up to a transcendent God that can model earthly sovereignty. Such ideology, Lloyd argues, fosters an undesirable "environment where the flux of sameness and difference, defining identity, displaces contest over visions of how the economy ought to be organized and how politics ought to be organized" (456).

[49] As George notes, "The public sector must be brutally downsized because it does not and cannot obey the basic law of competing for profits or for market share" (no page number).

[50] An anonymous *Publishers Weekly* author writes in 1998 that "Lauren, at once loving wife and mother, prophet and fanatic, victim and leader, gains stature as one of the most intense and well-developed protagonists in recent SF" ("Forecasts: Fiction," 60).

[51] In his 1999 *New York Times* Book Review, Gerald Jonas writes that *Parable of the Talents* is an exception to the way that religion in science fiction has historically served "merely as a symbol of irrational reaction" or "figured as window dressing" (18).

[52] See Patricia Melzer (2002) and Peter Stillman.

[53] Tweedy III, no page number.

[54] Anna Hinton, 442.

[55] Rebecca Wanzo defines "the *Parable* books" as critical dystopias according to Raffaella Baccolini's understanding of the genre, although Baccolini's essay only refers to *Parable of the Sower* (75).

[56] As Gerry Canavan writes in "There's Nothing New/ Under The Sun, /But There Are New Suns": Recovering Octavia E. Butler's Lost Parables," Lauren Olamina's "daughter is the main narrator of *Talents*, and her daughter finds her to be selfish, destructive, and extremely dangerous, a zealot willing to sacrifice anything and anyone for the Destiny. In the archives we actually see this revisionist attitude borne out from an objective, third-person perspective; lost stories and cut scenes set during Olamina's missing decades reveal her as a steely and callous

power-broker when she needs to be, even ordering a local politician's assassination for daring to defy her. (One version even has Olamina slave-collaring people who try to leave her Earthseed villages: "Boy," she said, "the dogs eat what's left of people who try to break into our Communities. We burn what's left of people who try to break out.") For anyone who has read the published versions of the novels, this is absolutely startling; Butler's personal reflections on Olamina reveal her as a much, much darker character than the one we get to know in the books, a character Butler never really trusted and only grew to like despite herself over time" (no page number).

[57] "Critical dystopia or open-ended dystopia" is a term coined by Baccolini in her essay "Gender and Genre in the Feminist Critical Dystopias of Katharine Burdekin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler" in *Future Females, the Next Generation: New Voices and Velocities in Feminist Science Fiction Criticism*. Belk relies on Baccolini to articulate how in the Parable novels "the opposed goals of utopia/dystopia (utopia gives readers something to aim for, dystopia gives us something to avoid) actually coexist" (373). Rebecca Wanzo (75) also frames her reading of the Parable novels with Baccolini's formulation of the "critical utopia."

[58] "What Butler had ultimately hoped to do was write four *Parables* sequels: *Parable of the Trickster, Parable of the Teacher, Parable of Chaos,* and *Parable of Clay*," Gerry Canavan's work in the Butler archives reveals ("There's Nothing New," no page number).

[59] Lauren locates in her father an understanding of Black sermon as one that privileges sound, the Word, and the ear. Spillers articulates this view, writing that in "the African American's sermon of exhortation" "the listening *ear* becomes the privileged sensual organ" (252).

[60] Characteristically, Spillers articulates this point beautifully: "The sermon itself has formal success only to the extent that the preacher knows that his or her 'readers' choose to *agree* with the sermon 'contract'- to obey to the rules of listenership that obtain in the situation" (263).

[61] As Gloria Azaldua has written, "borders and walls …. are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas [and bodies] out…..The only 'legitimate' inhabitants are those in power" (101).

[62] The only other times italicized text is used in *Talents* is when Lauren herself is quoting Earthseed.

[63] The two have been living in a community where Lauren fled after escaping the Crusader-occupied Acorn. Len knows about Lauren's sexual abuse and enslavement there, as well as the loss of her husband and daughter.

[64] When Larkin is grown and goes to visit Lauren after her mother has built an institutionalized Earthseed movement, Larkin observes that at the Earthseed compounds her mother is referred to as "shaper Olamina," 'shaper' being "a title of respect akin to 'reverend' or 'minister'" (397).

[65] Lorde writes that the erotic is the power of deep, feeling passion, "-the sensual- those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passion of love, in its deepest meanings" (56).

[66] Lauren's alternative mothering could also be described as an iteration of what Susan Fraiman has called "sodomitical maternity," in particular "butch maternity," a kind of motherhood that is "outside biological mandates and [nuclear] familial paradigms" (135, 152). However, I footnote non-black feminist theories of relationality to foreground black feminist voices.

[67] As Warner's readers would have known, Mrs. Montgomery is paraphrasing Ezekiel 11:19: "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh."

[68] Ellen's mother is referring to God's promise to the exiled Israelites to replace faithless hearts with faithful ones. Scholars and theologians have interpreted this promise as an action that makes hearts responsive to and perceptive of God's will through a "faithful vitality" (Wendland 29, 81).

[69] Critics like John Rowe have pointed out that Warner "must be understood within the politics of her Presbyterianism, which was deeply conservative" in that it manifested through traditional gender roles and imperialist missionary projects (28).

[70] Some scholars date the Second Great Awakening from 1790- 1830, rather than 1840; see David Kling's "For Males Only: The Image of the Infidel and the Construction of Gender in the Second Great Awakening in New England" (2).

[71] Claudia Stokes draws our attention to the importance of the Second Great Awakening as a context for Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World.* Warner and her sister Anna didn't just abandon their Calvinist heritage but were active agents in the Awakening, as they "embraced instead many of the new teachings and practices developed in this period" (23). As other scholars have pointed out, Susan and Anna Warner were prolific hymn writers who participated in the Second Great Awakening's dissemination of gospel through writing and hymnody.

[72] Even male conversions, in spite of the movement's privileging of intense feeling, still tended to rely on a sense of reason in that the typical male would only convert after he was convinced of the "reasonableness of God" (Kling 8).

[73] Marcus writes that "Queer theory led me to ask what social formations swim into focus once we abandon the preconception of strict divisions between men and women, homosexuality and heterosexuality, same-sex bonds and those of a family and marriage….*Between Women* makes a historical point about the particular indifference of Victorians to a homo/hetero divide for women" (13).

[74] A process that enables a blending of the categories of self and other in sentimental fiction might recall Elizabeth Barnes' work on sympathy. Barnes argues that "sentimental literature subordinates democratic politics to a politics of affinity, employing a method of affective representation that dissolves the boundaries between "self" and "other." I suggest that sentimental literature teaches a particular way of reading both texts and people that relies on

likeness and thereby reinforces homogeneity. In the sentimental scheme of sympathy, others are made real to the extent that they can be show in relation to the reader" (4). My reading of *The Wide, Wide World* differs from Barnes' chiefly in that she analyzes rhetorical strategies that make readers identify with fictional characters, whereas I track the way these characters slip into such close relations with one another than these relations become interchangeable. Barnes diagnoses sentimental literature's assimilatory designs on readers; the self and other to which she refers are the reader and the character. The "self" and "other" to which I refer are Ellen and Alice. Finally, Barnes' reading of the way identification operates between the reader and sentimental literary characters is mediated by "imagination," which remains separate, uninformed by sensory input regarding the person with whom one is sympathizing (4). Conversely, erotic pedagogy as a process that allows Ellen's and Alice's identities to bleed into one another is enabled by the sensory input of touch.

[75] For an excellent reading of this unpublished chapter, see Jana L. Argersinger's "Family Embrace: The Unholy Kiss and Authorial Relation in *The Wide, Wide World*."

[76] When John comes to visit Ellen in Scotland he is powerless in the face of the law to take her with him, so he asks her a series of favors, the third of which he does specify. Although "Ellen puzzled herself a little to think what could be the third thing [favor] John wanted of her," the reader understands a veiled marriage proposal in that John is offering Ellen a way to escape her relatives when she comes of age (569).

[77] Karen Sanchez-Eppler nicely articulates the contours of this prohibition/constitution when she writes that incest is either symbolic or enacted: "the incest that structures [constitutes] the family is symbolic, more felt and disciplined than acted upon; the incest that destroys the family [the prohibited kind] is one that has been acted out" (9).

[78] Marc Shell points out that in the work of Thomas Aquinas and Sigmund Freud, incest becomes a gernal term for the telos of lust: "all sexuality is essentially incestuous, so that a successful eradication of the desire for incest, assuming that were possible, would mean the complete annihilation of sexual desire" (45).

[79] See also Marc Shell, *The End of Kinship*. Shell writes that "Widespread incest could lead to a radical transformation of the body politic since such sexual liberty would restructure kinship relations by destroying the crucial distinction between generations. Teleologically, incest dissolves the pater (father) in the son (liber) and replaces the patriarchy with a radical egalitarian liberty" (40).

[80] Elizabeth Maddock Dillon made this point after I presented at the 2019 Futures of American Studies Institute at Dartmouth.

[81] Page 263.

[82] Page 276.

[83] Justine Tally points out that Ruby's racial purity and obsession with maintaining dark-skinned bloodlines depends on controlling women's bodies as the sites of reproduction in a perverse version of the Southern cult of "true womanhood": "In order for the one-drop law to be effective it meant that white women as well as blacks must be controlled" in a way that mirrors Stewart and Deacon's efforts to control their own black women (21).

[84] Morrison has stated in multiple interviews that *Beloved*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise* are a trilogy about love (Christian "The Past is Infinite" 418, Tally *Paradise Reconsidered* 15). *Beloved* swirls around maternal love, *Jazz* focuses on romantic love.

[85] Such as Alice Walker, Gayl Jones, Margaret Walker, and Toni Cade Bambara, along with Morrison. Christian notes that "in its radical envisioning of the self as central, and in its use of language as a means of exploring the self as female and black, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a forerunner of the fiction of the seventies and eighties" (237).

[86] Co-editors Middleton Harris, Morris Levitt, and Roger Furman described The Black Book as a "scrapbook"; see Cheryl A. Wall's "Reading the Black Book" (105). Wall writes that "[t]he preponderance of material in The Black Book and the unexpected ways in which it is combined create a collage-like effect," characterized by "fragmentation and assemblage" (108). She argues that "[t]he volume's novelty cannot be gainsaid" in the way that it documents "the synchronicity of achievement and degradation" of African Americans (108).

[87] Other scholars like Mark A. Tabone have read *Paradise* as a utopian novel that "interweaves its rethinking of 'paradise' as a concept with a political interrogation of the entire history of a

traditional utopian social, spatial, and literary form" (129). Tabone argues that the Convent in Paradise is everything Ruby is not; it is a community that allows for openness and impurity in the face of Ruby's demand for closed categories and purity (136). While I agree with this reading of the Convent, I am less focused on the form of *Paradise* and more concerned with what happens to the characters in the novel and how they change together. In other words, my reading of the Convent illuminates the work done by intimacy, and intimacy with oneself, to transform women. I focus on how relationality in the Convent prioritizes the power of erotic teaching to initiate a healing process amongst others.

[88] Toni Morrison has remarked on the eroticism of consent that is specific to African American history, enslaved people were not only prohibited from choosing who they could love but also generally prohibited from loving. She says in interview about jazz: "At that time, when ex-slaves were moving into the city, running away from something that was constricting and killing them and dispossessing them over and over again, they were in a very limiting environment. But when you listen to their music- the beginnings of jazz- you realized that they are talking about something else. They are talking about love, about loss. But there is such grandeur, such satisfaction in those lyrics…..It's as though the whole tragedy of choosing somebody, risking love, risking emotion, risking sensuality, and then losing it all didn't matter, since it was their choice. Exercising choice in who you love was a major, major thing" (Schappell, 365).

[89] Smart-Grosvenor provides an author's note before her text: "i do not consider myself a writer, i am a rapper, therefore do not read this piece silently…rap it aloud" (149)

[90] See Gabrielle Foreman's "Past-On Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call" and Melanie Anderson's "Introduction" and "'What Would Be on the Other Side?' History as a Spectral Bridge in Beloved and Paradise," in her *Spectrality in the Novels of Toni Morrison*.

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