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GOD IS A WOMAN

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God Is a Woman

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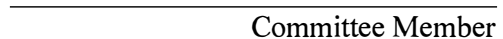
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Abstract

As we step into the world of magical feminine power within literature, where women seem to have the unnatural ability to alter the fabric of reality, talk with the dead, or venture into unknown worlds parallel to our own, it becomes clear that connection to liminal space is required. The powers found within liminality are activated by women's ability of introspection and shapeshifting, transforming herself into a new woman time and time again. She gains powers over herself and her space in the process, often times creating a home or safe space that feels alive alongside her. For characters like Marimar and Orquídea Montoya from Zoraida Córdova's *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina* (2021), Coraline from Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002), and Eva and Sula Peace from Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1976), the connection to the liminal proves empowering as they show their abilities to transform themselves even through supernatural, haunting experiences. A darker side to feminine power is highlighted within these characters, proving the ambiguous and complex nature of feminine power. However, the notion of the "dark" feminine is itself a product of binary thinking. This binary is inherently flawed, as it fails to recognize the complexity of feminine power, which encompasses both life and death, knowledge and mystery. By re-imagining the binary light/dark feminine as the "Wild Woman" instead, the archetype can release her condemned image and reclaim feminine power. By releasing binaries, judgements, and classifications, she is free to use her magic to transform herself and restore her instinctual connection to life and the world around her.

Victor Turner introduces his idea of liminality in his *Liminalities and Communitas* (1969), in which he describes the conditions of liminal spaces as the in-between places of culture and identity. When referring to people in liminal spaces, he states "... these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space."

(Turner 359). Turner explains the space of liminality as a tool for transitioning through key moments in life, earning “rites of passage” to enter the unknown of the future after a transformation takes place within the liminal space, creating a new self. Gloria Anzaldúa ventures further into liminality with *Borderlands* (1987) and *Light in the Dark* (2015), adding a uniquely feminist point of view on life in the in-betweens of identity and culture. Anzaldúa’s profound reflections on her own life within the liminal creates a narrative that challenges our understanding of binary language, culture, and spirituality in the understanding of feminine power. Combining these theories with Clarissa Pinkola Estes’ *Women Who Run With the Wolves* (1992), an archetypal descendant of Carl Jung’s shadow theory, provides an in-depth analysis on the journeys of women while inside liminal space. Through the analysis of folktales collected from many cultures, Pinkola Estes urges women to re-connect with their intuitive, instinctual inner beings, unlocking a creative and knowing spirit reflecting ambiguity within feminine nature. With these theories in mind, I analyze the shape-shifting woman within the selected texts as she creates her powerful and other-worldly essence, transforming herself and her space. This exploration challenges the traditional feminine binaries and reclaims the feminine power that has been historically condemned.

Introduction

Women seem to be deeply connected to the thresholds of the in-between, or in other words, liminal space, and liminal states. These are liminal phases, where one is not fully in one state or the next, but in-between them. In this context, I refer to women who navigate between societal roles, personal identity, and levels of agency or power over themselves and others. The liminal moments of their lives are ambiguous, blurring the lines of one identity and into the next. These liminal, in-between spaces are where feminine power is found; it is where women find their creativity, their fragmented pieces of sacrificed identities, and oftentimes their spiritual connections. I believe it is how women navigate within these liminal moments that defines the course of their lives; it is the crossroads of choosing one's identity.

Victor Turner's *Liminalities and Communitas* (1969), along with Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* (1987), and *Light in the Dark* (2015), have defined liminality as being the in-between of things. Within the selected theories, liminality is defined as being the in-between of identity shifts, cultures, and evolving perspectives. I explore the idea that women use the liminal space in a unique way, not only as a place to transmute their trauma, but to create, shift, and rebuild or rediscover fragments of their identities and perspectives, shifting their relationships and their connection with the natural world.

When women can effectively utilize liminal spaces, their ability to adapt and constantly create transcends through the inner worlds of the psyche and into the outer worlds of physical reality- a reflection of the two spaces in which all people must always exist, between the mind's world of thoughts and feelings and the outer world of action and tangible experience. Exploring the literary journey through liminal spaces, and the abilities harnessed there within the works of Zoraida Córdova's *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina* (2021), Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973), and

Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002), it is apparent that a woman's ability to shift her identity and perspective is directly correlated to her inner understandings of the liminal moments of her life. What occurs in these selected works of fiction is a process of inner transformation, but with a physical representation within the world of the characters. This liminal space is often portrayed as a magical world, a place of substance that can be explored, like the "other world" in *Coraline*. This space of inner transformation can also merge with a realistic world, creating a parallel or mirroring effect, but contain spaces of magic or paranormal activity, like in *Sula* and *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina*, where the characters see spirits and speak to the dead.

These characters display "darker" aspects of feminine power, often condemning them within their society. This fear of the darker aspects of feminine power is not new and is rooted in the limiting language of binary opposition (light vs. dark, good vs. evil, black vs. white, woman vs. man) that categorizes "bad" women together in a group. Unfortunately, our Christianized society has defined for the masses how "good" and "bad" women perform, what they do, what purposes they serve, and how they are to navigate themselves within the patriarchal structure of modern day. Since it is illegal to outright kill women that are "scary" in the modern day and burning them at the stake is no longer trending, we are instead shunned in society, labeled, marginalized, and isolated; a metaphorical burning of our humanity.

The term "witch" was capitalized on by the Catholic Church in the mid-1400s, and by the mid-1500s, it was used to condemn women to their deaths. I place "witch" in quotations because the term was used as a label to demonize powerful women, often with little basis in reality. Around 80,000 "witches" were put to death in Europe alone based on accusations of "witchcraft." As Mona Chollet explains, even in the height of the witch hunts,

The Renaissance demonologists couldn't even imagine women's absolute autonomy; for them, the freedom of those they accused of witchcraft had to be understood as part of a further subordination: they were necessarily under the Devil's sway and therefore still subject to a masculine authority. (Chollet 71)

Thus, powerful women have been associated with the greatest masculine evil of all human lore: the Devil himself. The fear of the masses was so great that they tortured and killed women, killed their children, and the legacy of this hatred has bled into popular culture. Thanks to authors like Shakespeare, whose Weird Sisters from *Macbeth* immortalized the image of the "witch," the culture surrounding "witchcraft" is forever observed in global memory, though today, it is turned into entertainment.

The cognitive dissonance in America surrounding the ideas of ritual, symbology, spiritual exploration and understanding, and its association with feminine power and tradition has forever altered the experience of being an American woman. Symbols and practices once used to condemn women as "witches" are now commercialized without recognition of the historical violence attached to them. For example, wearing symbols like the pentagram or engaging in spell-work is often viewed as trendy rather than acknowledging the spiritual and historical significance. Though we have experienced a surge of "witches" in popular culture since the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and Gerald Gardner's spiritual path of Wicca in 1963, it has now become fashionable to be a "witch," as seen in the popularity of witchy aesthetics in clothing and self-identity. This trend lacks a deeper understanding of the spiritual realities of "witchcraft." In short, the "witches" who were feared in the past were only women who challenged the societal norm. With this altered version of the modern "witch," the fates of women in the past have been trivialized. Additionally, the witchcraft women were accused of throughout history isn't real- at least not to the extent of the accusations. "Witchcraft" is defined as—for the sake of this work— an ancestral spiritual tradition that has been taught across

generations and cultures. These spiritual practices are tools, aiding women in their inner transformations, and often shown through depictions within literature.

Building on the historic fear and misunderstanding surrounding witches, the “dark” feminine archetype emerges as a powerful symbol of women who defy normal societal expectation. Historically, witches have been associated with concepts like darkness, representing danger, mystery, unnaturalness, and power. The label of “dark” has been used to marginalize women who exhibit these traits, like strength, autonomy, and influence over a community. The association of “dark” feminine women with evil has been reinforced through language, like the binary oppositions of good and bad, consistently working to limit their power. However, reclaiming this “dark” archetype allows women to overcome these limiting binaries and embrace their full complexity of femineity. I compare the ancient “dark” archetype to Clarrisa Pinkola Estes’ wild woman archetype from her *Women Who Run With the Wolves* (1992), which re-brands the dark traits into something more instinctual—a being of nature, creation, and wisdom. Instead of something to be associated with evil, she becomes an entity of her truest nature. She becomes intuitive, connected with her subconscious knowledge, free, creative, soulful, and strong. The wild woman lives outside of good and evil, and instead, aligns herself to the natural world. Pinkola Estes provides contextual evidence of this archetype as she examines and analyzes women’s stories through time and across cultures. Explaining how the stories of women’s transitions over their lives became demonized, Pinkola Estes explains

Over the course of time, old pagan symbols were overlaid with Christian ones, so that an old healer in a tale became an evil witch, a spirit became an angel, an initiation veil or caul became a handkerchief... Sexual elements were omitted. Helping creatures and animals were often changed into demons and boogeyes. This is how many women’s teaching tales about sex, love, money, marriage, birthing, death, and transformation were lost. It is how fairy tales and myths that explicate ancient women’s mysteries have been covered over too. Most old collections of fairy tales and mythos existent today have been

scoured clean of the scatological, the sexual, the perverse (as in warnings against), the pre-Christian, the feminine, the Goddesses, the initiatory, the medicines for various psychological malaises, and the directions for spiritual raptures. (15)

By changing the elements and themes of women's stories, women's folk lore became evil instead of instinctual and natural, stripping the stories, and the women they represented, of their purpose and power within their communities. This process of demonization has condemned women's ability to use their natural instincts, their wisdom, and their spiritual practices over time. This act through history strengthened the idea of the "dark" feminine and its association with imagery like witches. However, Pinkola Estes explicitly pushes away the negative connotations surrounding the folk lore explored and instead provides an analysis based in the instinctual nature of women, instead of dark and evil. As Pinkola Estes tells the folkloric stories, she explains that the woman of wildish nature exists within all women, and she is free of expectation outside of our own internal worlds. Instead of internalizing the judgments of others, Pinkola Estes says the wild woman trusts her own internal structures she has built within her psyche. As women connect with their internal power, often found within times of transition in the folk stories, they release themselves from societal expectation and form life paths of their own accord.

Pinkola Estes explains that for women, "... vitality can be restored by extensive 'psychic-archeological' digs into the ruins of the female underworld... we are able to recover the ways of the natural instinctive psyche, and through its personification in the Wild Woman archetype we are able to discern the ways and means of woman's deepest nature" (1). As a student of Carl Jung, Pinkola Estes provides a feminine viewpoint on Jung's shadow theories, stating that women perform this task uniquely and within the backdrop of their subconscious mind. Through stories told over time, and by every culture, the commonalities within the folktales Pinkola Estes

explores lie within the feminine archetypes and their representations. Pinkola Estes relates these representations to what women do in their real lives,

When women reassert their relationship with the wildish nature, they are gifted with a permanent and internal watcher, a knower, a visionary, an oracle, an inspiratrice, an intuitive, a maker, a creator, an inventor, and a listener who guide, suggest, and urge vibrant life in the inner and outer worlds. When women are close to this nature, the fact of that relationship glows through them. This wild teacher, wild mother, wild mentor supports the inner and outer lives... (5-6)

The wild woman defies all archetypes set before her and embodies all at once- proving the complexities of feminine power, beyond the understood binaries. With her exploration of images like the Baba Yaga, Bluebeard, La Llorona, the Bone Woman, and more “dark” characterized folk lore across cultures, Pinkola Estes demonstrates the connection between women and liminal space, as they must uncover their wildish nature through generations of social conditioning and the added layer of the demonization of these natural powers. For example, within the folk tale of Baba Yaga, the young girl, Villisca, travels through a mysterious, foggy, unknown forest (liminal space) and learns ritual work (cooking, cleaning, and other household chores) from the Baba Yaga. Through these tasks she is gifted a walking stick that grants her magical power that she may use in her regular life, outside of the forest. This story reflects the work a woman does inside of her inner psyche (the house keeping of the mind and spirit), speaking to the wild nature of her inner being, granting herself a boon, and coming out of her psyche transformed. It is the process of transformation within her own liminal space. The wild woman’s connection to the liminal becomes strengthened through Pinkola Estes’ analysis of folktales of various cultures, defining the journeys of women through their transitions. What has been historically demonized is a woman’s natural ability to commune with herself, and come out transformed, with the power to route her life according to her own needs and desires. This transformation looks different for every woman, but all women experience these transitions in their lifetimes. Often, these

transitions are accompanied by ritual work- something as simple as cleaning a house or cooking can be considered ritual.

Drawing from Pinkola Estes' approach to analyzing folktales, to examine characters like Coraline, the other mother, Marimar, Orquídea Divina, Eva Peace, and Sula Peace, exploring the magical elements and themes that surround these women offers insight into the character's inner worlds, which mirror the aspects of their feminine experience. Supernatural entities, alternate dimensions, and enchanted objects and symbols serve as metaphors for psychological and emotional processes within literature. I utilize a framework that combines liminal space with feminist theories, and Jungian shadow theory, as this provides the examination of women working through their inner psyche transformations, explaining the connections to power, and providing the best analysis of the magical nature surrounding these "dark" characterized women.

Victor Turner focuses on the "rites of passage" and rituals within liminal space transitions, which alludes to the inner psyche's identity shift before and after major life events. Gloria Anzaldúa's theories, which focus on third world feminism and spirituality within liminal spaces, are explored through *Borderlands* and *Light in the Dark*. These texts examine moments inside liminality from a uniquely feministic perspective, providing more clarity on what makes the wild woman archetype powerful, introducing her liminal journey concepts, like the *nepantlera*. I also incorporate aspects of Jungian theory of the shadow within the inner psyche to explain the transformations taking place in the literary examples.

Throughout Jung's *The Red Book: Liber Novus* (1914-1930), it is noted that shadow integration is performed against the backdrop of the liminal space within the mind. As stated by Tommaso Alessandro Priviero, Jung's theory on, "... the liminal experience describes a passage to an in-between mental space beneath the threshold of ordinary perceptions, with substantial

transformative effects” (169). The dual nature of the inner psyche as a concept must be explored to fully understand the wild woman archetype.

Combining Turner’s anthropological understandings of how cultural liminality happens, Carl Jung’s shadow confrontation, Anzaldúa’s liminal beings and shape-shifting women, and Pinkola Estes’ wild woman archetype, we can examine the space, the transformations, and the results of women’s journeys through this liminal landscape of the inner mind, brought forth by physical manifestations within fiction. The women from these stories learn about themselves, uncover pieces of their identities, integrate, and transform themselves into beings that are feared and respected.

Within the selected texts, the women who possess supernatural abilities are demonized and feared. By reclaiming the “dark” aspects of these women and instead re-branding this as an instinctual nature of women, the demonized becomes divine. Reclaiming the feminine nature involves acknowledging the many complexities and ambiguities of feminine power, which is found within their transitional phases of life. In Neil Gaiman’s *Coraline*, Coraline journeys through the other world and battles against her own internal shadow, personified by the dark feminine entity known as the other mother. As Coraline defeats her shadow, she symbolically defeats her inner shadow. Through her journey she uncovers pieces of her soul after convening with internal guides through her psyche, personified as the black cat and ghost children, who help her escape the other world. This internal journey represents Coraline’s transition into her teenage years and leaving her adolescence behind, a liminal space in which she solidifies an empowering identity. As her initiation into the connection with her wildish nature is highlighted by her bravery and instinctual wisdom in the form of internal guides, Coraline strengthens her trust within herself and is able to come out of the other world transformed.

Within Toni Morrison's *Sula*, the characters of Eva and Sula Peace exhibit "dark" aspects that ultimately determine their positioning within their community. The contrast of the two women's fate highlights the dynamics of power when held by the feminine. As Sula defines her own path that leads to her isolation, she finds empowerment in radical self-acceptance. Sula embodies her wildish nature as she rejects all societal norms placed upon her. Rather than conforming to traditional standards set by her community and her grandmother, she stands for her own personal freedom. The community rejects Sula and demonizes her personal power, but she does not let this communal judgment stand in her way.

In contrast, Eva's positioning within her community provides her freedom and sovereignty through her life experience and transformations, physically and spiritually. Eva Peace exhibits traits like speaking with the dead and seeing visions of the past and future, which highlight her connection to the spiritual and the supernatural. This marks her as a liminal figure, a woman who exists somewhere between life and death, good and evil, and the past and future.

In *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina*, Orquídea Divina gains her supernatural powers from a fallen star, allowing her to manipulate life, death, and nature itself. She is feared by those around her and demonized by her community, but her ability to wield power marks her as a woman who has fully embraced her natural and divine being. Much like the wild woman archetype, who is connected to nature, the stars, and ancient wisdom, Orquídea possesses this same cyclical nature. However, Orquídea passes on the curse of silence to her granddaughter, Marimar, who has been chosen to break the spell and free the family. Marimar's growth is indicative of her success in connecting to her own wildish nature over the course of the novel. Marimar's instinctual wisdom grows alongside the flower bud that is gifted to her upon her grandmother's death, a symbol of her connection to nature. Uncovering Orquídea's past and the

source of her family's magic heals the family lineage and the silence that curses them. Marimar offers her family healing through her strength, knowledge, and supernatural ability. Her protective nature reflects the instinctual and intuitive nature of Pinkola Estes' archetype.

With these characters' newly transformed identities, they become more grounded within themselves, causing a shift to their lives- altering relationships and their connection to the worlds around them. Re-branding the "dark feminine" and "witchcraft" as the wild woman with her own alternative spiritual practices and rituals, liberates the archetype from binary classifications, allowing her to own the wholeness of feminine power: nurturing and fierce, creative and destructive, soft and assertive. By reclaiming the wild woman, we return the creator energy to the hands of women themselves- women who are not defined by societal restrictions but rise above them. This rising is an act of reclaiming power, asserting agency, and embracing the wholeness of the feminine spirit. By aligning women's "darkness," we return to what women have always been- as proven by folk lore and stories that have transcended through time and culture; instinctual, creative, powerful, and free.

The Shadow in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

Coraline, written by Neil Gaiman in 2002, blends elements of horror with magical realism, creating an enchanting backdrop for its main character, Coraline, on her journey through liminal space as she discovers and transforms pieces of her identity. The novel opens with Coraline Jones moving to a new home, a large manor with flats rented out to other neighbors, with her mother and father, who are both employed with remote positions in an unknown industry. Coraline is the only child living in the flats of the home and has little entertainment within her surroundings upon arrival. She struggles with this transition into a new home, having no friends, and the distracted nature of her parents leads to Coraline feeling out of place and insecure with self-doubt. Coraline's self-doubt is indicated through her feelings of insignificance and emptiness at the beginning of the novel.

The insignificance she feels is highlighted by her parents' inability to provide her with adequate attention, as they are preoccupied with unpacking their belongings and working from home. Her parents are unknowingly dismissive towards Coraline and suggest that she explore on her own. As her father suggested on a rainy day, "Count all the doors and windows. List everything blue. Mount an expedition to discover the hot water tank. And leave me alone to work" (Gaiman 7). Upon exploring her half unpacked and mostly empty home, she discovers a small door that leads to the whimsical and magical other world where she finds the praise, validation, and attention she is looking for.

The other world is parallel to Coraline's real world in a dream-like, distorted way, creating a liminal space that challenges the distinction between waking and dreaming. Coraline travels to the other world while sleeping, but also while awake at different points in the novel, making it unclear where the boundaries of reality exist. This causes Coraline to shift between the

familiar and unknown, pushing her to explore her own courage. Kristen McQuinn states in “Not at Home: Liminal Space and Personal Identity in *The Hobbit* and *Coraline*,” that “An adolescent character on a liminal journey is more focused on initial self-discovery, figuring out who they are as opposed to adding to their own existing understanding of themselves” (16). As McQuinn explains, instead of entering liminal space to find better understanding or integrating more aspects of the self, young characters like Coraline use liminal space to initially find themselves. Liminal space is where Coraline will find her inner courage and learn to trust her instincts and intellect, which will aid in forging her identity as she enters adolescence.

Coraline’s liminal space is conceptualized by the other world. Within this other world is the feminine entity known as the other mother, a parallel image of her own mother, with disturbing differences that reveal themselves through the novel. Upon meeting the other mother, Coraline enjoys the maternal care she offers her, feeding Coraline her favorite meals, and praising her. This contrasts Coraline’s real mother, who is preoccupied and distant, but provides Coraline security in a grounded reality. Once the other mother realizes Coraline does not wish to stay in the other world forever, she shifts shape into a more monstrous form, revealing that her care and attention are conditional and manipulative in nature, much like the world the other mother has created. Initially, the other world is whimsical, entertaining, and a place where Coraline is the center of attention. However, the other world shifts to reflect Coraline’s inner turmoil, imprisoning her within it.

As the other world begins to change, the other neighbors who once entertained Coraline attack her. The colors slowly fade, resembling a desolate landscape, instead of the vibrant other world. Until Coraline can grow and defeat her own fears, she is trapped. Coraline challenges the other mother to a game of wit, instinct, and intellect to negotiate her release from the other

world. It is a high-stakes game of hide-and-seek, in which Coraline must find the lost souls of children who were previously trapped in the other world. If she can locate all the lost souls, she may win her freedom. As Coraline navigates through the ambiguous other world and defeats the other mother, she harnesses the transformative powers found within liminal space—strength, bravery, intuition, and thus she gains agency over herself.

Coraline's themes and elements can be analyzed and explored for more context toward our journey through liminal landscapes within the inner psyche. In Clarissa Pinkola Estes' *Women Who Run With the Wolves* (1992), she recalls Carl Jung's thoughts on liminal space, in which he describes "...the collective unconscious, the objective psyche, and the psychoid unconscious—referring to a more ineffable layer of the former. He thought of the latter as a place where the biological and psychological worlds share headwaters, where biology and psychology might mingle with and influence one another" (29). To Jung, the biological world he refers to is the physical, natural world we experience. The psychological world is within the mind; it is our thoughts, feelings, and mental space. Liminal space exists within two contexts here: between the natural world and the mental space, and between the subconscious and conscious mind, which both exist within the mental space.

Liminal space is the shared "headwater" and is not actual, physical space, but space existing within the mind. It is the blending of the biological and psychological worlds, and the blending of the conscious and subconscious mind states. This space is activated during transitionary periods of our lives, which forces us into the direction of choosing new or blended identities. It asks us, do we go the subconscious route, which often exposes itself as repeated behavioral patterns from ourselves or our generational learning, or do we make conscious, active

choices for ourselves? Ultimately, choices made within these spaces define the course of our lives.

In *Coraline*, the other world and the other mother are aspects of her inner psyche as a physical manifestation, blending with her actual reality. This is Coraline's shared "headwater" where she exists both consciously and subconsciously. Within Coraline's real world, her life is structured with her real parents but lacks warmth and entertainment. She believes her role within this real world is small and insignificant. In contrast, Coraline's other world, her inner world, is vibrant and full of love and validation from the other mother. Coraline manages to blend her psyche and reality to manifest a physical space in which the other world and other mother are fostered. This liminal, other world is the backdrop of where Coraline travels to discover the inner workings of her psyche so that she may take the first step into self-identification. According to McQuinn, "... characters enter their own liminal spaces, begin their rites of passage, grow as individuals, and discover new aspects to their identities within the action of the story" (14). As Coraline seeks for the children's lost souls, which represent pieces of her own soul, she discovers her courageous, instinctual, intellectual, and intuitive aspects of herself. These discoveries transform her from scared child into a brave, more independent adolescent and allow her freedom to leave the other world, but the newly found traits do not stay behind within the other world; they transcend into her natural world and become part of her identity.

For Pinkola Estes, journeys like Coraline's can be explained through many folktales throughout history that have been lost and altered over time. She explains that folktales, and fictional stories like *Coraline* can "... provide understandings which sharpen our sight so that we can pick out and pick up the path left by the wildish nature. The instruction found in story reassures us that the path has not run out, but still leads women deeper, and more deeply still,

into their own knowing” (4). This “wildish nature” Pinkola Estes refers to is the true instinct and intuitive aspect of feminine experience, one that is often condemned in society and characterized as “dark.” These aspects of the feminine psyche contrast with the rigid expectations placed on women’s behavior by society throughout history. Society tends to prioritize control and order, which leaves little room for the curious, creative, and intuitive nature of young girls.

In her book *Untamed* (2020), Glennon Doyle recalls when her childhood joy and wild nature ended at the age of ten. She states, “Ten is when we learn how to be good girls and real boys. Ten is when children begin to hide who they are in order to become what the world expects them to be. Right around ten is when we begin to internalize our formal taming” (Doyle 4). Doyle explains that the process of taming children teaches them to fit into the commonly accepted ideologies of society and culture. She goes on to say, “I wanted to be a good girl, so I tried to control myself. I chose a personality, a body, a faith, and a sexuality so tiny I had to hold my breath to fit myself inside” (Doyle 4). Within Doyle’s personal story, she recalls hiding herself from others to be accepted in society. She suppresses her wild nature for the sake of belonging. In examining connections between folktales and the personal accounts shared by women within her therapy practice, Pinkola Estes suggests a significant link.

These narratives, both ancient and personal, highlight the journey from girlhood to adolescence as a rite of passage that often brings young women closer to their most instinctual, intuitive selves, awakening a primal and wild nature that has been honored throughout history through myth and story tradition. Coraline may seem like an ill-mannered, curious, and troubled girl, but she is truly aligning with a stronger inner nature that defies traditional expectations for girls. Coraline’s story serves as the exploration of this inner nature as she faces her fears and builds her intuition and instinctual skills.

Through the challenge of the other mother, Coraline develops her intuition, inner strength, cunning, and courage. She accesses deeper parts of herself which releases her from the other world. This journey reflects stories told time and time again where the hero must travel a treacherous path and confront dark forces that lead them to their better selves. Coraline's story is a reoccurring narrative that is often seen in folktales, especially women's stories, myths, and literature. Facing the other mother within the other world is Coraline's version of the hero traveling a treacherous path and confronting a dark force. Using Pinkola Estes' way of analyzing collected folk tales, examining the magical elements within stories like Coraline can provide context into the inner worlds of the characters, reflecting the inner workings of the feminine experience. Supernatural beings, alternate worlds, enchanted objects, and colors are often symbolic in nature within literature and can be interpreted as clues into characters' psychological and emotional journeys. By analyzing these aspects and comparing to the collected folktales within Pinkola Estes' *Wild Woman*, common themes like subconscious exploration, facing the shadow self, and reclaiming or harnessing inner strength can be interpreted within the feminine experience.

Through the lens of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* (1987) and *Light in the Dark* (2015), the hero journeying through their own individualized liminal space heals from trauma or discovers pieces of themselves and integrates their shadows into wholeness to form a higher version of self, creating a being known as *nepantlera*. *Nepantla*, Anzaldúa's term that describes liminal space, is a place of integration, where the nepantlera goes to harness her inner capabilities. This mental place of shapeshifting can provide instruction and learning to move beyond traditional, or conventional boundaries and embrace their own contradictions and complexities, leading to a more expansive self. Anzaldúa challenges binary thinking, where

things are categorized as good or bad, light or dark, or black or white. Thinking within binary oppositions limits identifications of the self and creates divides within the self and within communities. Anzaldúa explains that this way of thinking hinders the growth of the inner being and prevents the understanding of others.

Anzaldúa's theory explains the journey women travel through within their inner psyche, while considering the complexities of feminine power and experience. In the story of *Coraline*, Anzaldúa's liminal journey theory helps interpret Coraline's exploration of her inner psyche and the transformations that take place in the other world. Coraline is confronted with the issues of binary thinking, shown in the novel through the contrasting figures of the other mother and her real mother. As she navigates her relationship between the two figures, Coraline's perspective changes about her real mother, illustrated by the monstrous transformation of the other mother. In overcoming the other mother, Coraline learns to see beyond binary thinking, understanding her own resilience and independence in her own significance and validation outside of her real parent's perspective. She builds her own perspectives of herself as she becomes her own hero.

Combining Pinkola Estes' and Anzaldúa's theories suggest that the journey through the inner psyche during times of transition reveals strengths that are hidden within feminine experiences. Pinkola Estes' analysis of folktales and stories like *Coraline* give the feminine experience a voice, despite the alteration of women's stories over time. Anzaldúa's *nepantlera* provides a deeper understanding of how the wildish nature defies societal expectation and overcomes binaries, resulting in a more integrated self. As Anzaldúa explains within *Light in the Dark*, *nepantleras* enter liminal space and transform their inner being through their increased awareness and understanding of the complexities that lie between cultures, views, and identities. Anzaldúa states,

... when a shift of awareness happens we must create a new description of what's perceived—in other words, create a new reality. When we have access to this type of expanded perceptive universe, our viewpoint, identity, and character change... We must empower the imagination to blur and transcend customary frameworks and conceptual categories reinforced by language and consensual reality. To explore the “cracks between the worlds...” (45)

In *Coraline*, this expansion process is represented by her journey through the other world.

Coraline's imagination blurs the lines of what is real and what is imagined when she enters the other world, transcending her understanding of her reality. Her real world is built upon customary frameworks and conceptual categories founded by her parents and social surroundings. As she explores beyond societal frameworks, she finds the other world. The other world is a symbolic parallel of her real world, and the figures found there represent her perceptions of her parents and her identity, creating the liminal space where she will expand her awareness. Her journey through this new reality changes her character, her identity, and her relationships with her real parents due to her widened perspective gained within the other world. By integrating these concepts together, it provides an in-depth understanding of the feminine experience within liminal space, a process that both Pinkola Estes and Anzaldúa identify as vital to self-awareness and self-identification.

Coraline's discovery of the small, secret door behind the wallpaper serves as a tangible representation for the entry of the liminal spaces discussed within Pinkola Estes' and Anzaldúa's theories. Within folktales and fictional stories, secret doors often indicate suppressed aspects of the inner psyche. In Pinkola Estes' analysis, the folktale of Bluebeard and his young bride indicates the relevance of secret doors. Bluebeard forbids his young bride from opening specific doors within his castle, but curiosity takes the young bride, and she searches for the door despite her husband's demands. Pinkola Estes explains this story's key notes and states, “If she attempts to obey Bluebeard... she chooses death for her spirit. By choosing to open the door to the ghastly

secret room, she chooses life” (50). For the bride, choosing to investigate the door and engage in her own natural, adolescent curiosity is initiating herself into her wildish nature.

A wild woman is curious by default, always investigating the dark corners of her own mind. This is directly reflective of Coraline’s choice to open the secret door that will lead to her inner psyche. Coraline is standing on the edge of her subconscious when she is looking into the tunnel of the open door. By Gaiman’s design, it is unclear if Coraline is asleep or awake, blending the conscious and subconscious together, creating the space of liminality. Coraline travels through the tunnel and finds a parallel apartment on the other side with all the same furnishings and décor as her own home. When walking through the door to the other world for the first time, Coraline thinks, “It smelled like something very old and very slow” (Gaiman 45), foreshadowing the adversary that awaited her. Upon meeting the other mother for the first time, she sees her own mother. However, she is disturbed and surprised to see that it was her mother, “Only her skin was white as paper... she was taller and thinner... her fingers were too long... curved and sharp... Her eyes were big black buttons” (Gaiman 27-28). The other mother enters the story as the traditional “dark feminine” figure—alluring, mysterious, and uncanny. The other mother’s strange yet familiar appearance is significant as it causes Coraline to question her understanding of maternal love and safety.

The other mother tempts Coraline with her favorite foods, entertainment, and games, showering her with affection and attention. However, the other mother demands obedience within the other world, which jeopardizes Coraline’s autonomy. The other mother’s eventual request to sew buttons over Coraline’s eyes indicates her desire for total control over Coraline, declaring that she could no longer stay in the other world unless this was done. This is a stark contrast to Coraline’s real mother, who gives Coraline the freedom to explore and be creative

with her time, though she may seem more distant and constantly busy. Coraline's real mother is included in Elizabeth Parsons, Naarah Sawers, and Kate McNally's descriptions of postfeminist motherhood, where it is normal for mothers to, "... share household and career responsibilities with the fathers of their daughters, are not subjugated by an overriding devotion to child rearing at the expense of their own happiness, and thus seem to embody the era of apparent choice and empowerment" (372). Coraline's mother does not give in to Coraline's every whim, is focused, and career driven. In the eyes of Coraline, this is damaging and neglectful. She wants a mother who pays more attention to her and gives her more of the things she enjoys.

Parsons, Sawers, and McNally state that the other mother's seemingly loving attentions for Coraline highlight Coraline's personal wants for a mother who "... cooks the food Coraline loves, provides toys and clothing, and wants to play with her daughter rather than prioritize a career" (373). Coraline appreciates the other mother's attention and effort, comparing her to her real mother who seems distant and busy. The other mother prepares Coraline's favorite foods, stocks her bedroom with toys, and entertains her with games. These are the behaviors that Coraline's real mother lacks. Coraline's real mother is focused and practical, balancing her life between work and motherhood. Though Coraline perceives her as neglectful, she provides a more structured and sustainable form of care for Coraline.

Coraline's perspective on her real mother is fixed on what she considers to be negative aspects. The other mother, in comparison, gives Coraline everything she wants, but it comes at the cost of her freedom. In contrast between the structured but independent nature of her real mother and the possessive controlling affection of the other mother, Coraline's real father demonstrates a nurturing, but hands-off approach to parenting. Coraline finds some of her needs fulfilled within him as he, "... embodies the symbolic law of the father via his commitment to

following written recipes as ruling instructions and his suggestion that Coraline entertain herself by counting, categorizing, and making lists of real world objects” (Parsons et al. 377). Coraline’s real father brings structure into her life through his nurturing approach. He prepares meals for the family, even if they are not what Coraline always prefers, and finds ways to help Coraline keep herself busy. Suggesting that she make lists of real-world objects is a way of teaching categorizing and counting, which are real-life skills. His forms of care are subtle, but consistent and practical. He is the opposite to the other mother in this way, as the other mother is extravagant in the ways she shows Coraline affection. Coraline finds herself torn between a stable, less exciting environment with her real parents, and the colorful, unknown, and unpredictable other world. As Coraline is transitioning out of childhood and into adolescence, she is widening her perspective on her world and discovering the consequences and complexities between the concepts of what is boring and what is safe, finding more appreciation for her parents in the process.

As Coraline initially finds comfort in the other mother’s attention, she begins to sense a hidden danger beneath her elaborate shows of affection. Over time, the other mother reveals her shape-shifting abilities, becoming more horrific as Coraline rejects her offers to stay within the other world with her forever. The disturbing representation of the other mother is not new as she reflects an ancient character trope, the “trickster.” Described in Andrzej Szyjewski’s article, “In the Shadow of Trickster. Research Fields and Controversies in the Discourse on the Trickster Complex in the Studies of Myth,” the “trickster” character type usually is, “... a human or animal figure (or a combination of both) endowed with supernatural features, a figure halfway between the ordinary animal spirit and a god...” (Szyjewski 166). This description bears truth to how we come to view the other mother. Over the course of the novel, the other mother slowly

begins to resemble a spider-like creature. Szyjewski suggests that the trickster can resemble, "... the spider: hanging between the sky and the earth (spider web), between the home and the wild (inhabitant of human settlements, but not domesticated), and finally between nothingness and existence (producing thread out of nothing)" (168). As the other mother is a liminal being, she lives close to humans, but remains wild in her nature, capturing Coraline within the other world she has constructed seemingly out of nothing. Her other world lies in a place of liminality, allowing Coraline to move fluidly between the other world and her real world. The other mother blends together familiar aspects of Coraline's real world with the dangerous other world, positioning her as a liminal figure, the trickster of Coraline's story.

Tricksters occupy liminal spaces within myths throughout history, existing between the natural and supernatural. As the other mother shifts shape to resemble this spider-like creature, she gives form to Coraline's shadow self; the suppressed aspects of Coraline's inner desires, fears, and needs. The spider symbol is significant because it highlights the other mother's predatory nature, luring and capturing its prey within its web. The other mother uses her spider-like abilities of creation to trap Coraline within her web of "perfect" reality and serves as the manifestation of Coraline's fears and desires, always shifting shape into a stronger, more frightening version than before.

The other mother's web reveals the dangers of becoming trapped within one's own mind at the mercy of the shadow self. Viewing the other mother as an aspect of Coraline's inner psyche, it can be assumed that she is an aspect that is uncontrolled—a primitive version of the mind, something between animal and human. In *Jung on Evil* (1995), edited by William McGuire and R.F.C. Hull, it is stated that,

Closer examination of the dark characteristics... reveals that they have an emotional nature, a kind of autonomy, and accordingly, an obsessive, or better, possessive quality. Emotion,

incidentally, is not an activity of the individual, but something that happens to him. Affects occur usually where adaptation is weakest, and at the same time they reveal the reason for its weakness, namely a certain degree of inferiority and the existence of a lower level of personality. On this lower level with its uncontrolled or scarcely controlled emotions one behaves more or less like a primitive, who is not only the passive victim of his affects but also singularly incapable of moral judgment. (Jung 95)

The other mother has an emotional nature of her own; she is possessive, obsessive, and fearful, leading her to become more monstrous and primitive in her behaviors and outward appearances. She is incapable of moral judgement and acts on her own desires at the cost of others. As the other mother shape-shifts into the uncontrolled, primitive monster of Coraline's mind, she can be categorized as Coraline's shadow.

Carl Jung speaks about the shadowed versions of man in his essay "The Other Point of View: The Will to Power." Within this essay, he describes the shadows of the human mind and which parts of the inner self gain power over the shadow and surface identities. Jung mentions that "It is a frightening thought that man also has a shadow side to him, consisting not just of little weaknesses and foibles, but of a positively demonic dynamism... But let these harmless creatures form a mass, and there emerges a raging monster" (96). Jung's descriptions explain the nature of an uncontrolled shadow hiding within the psyche. Coraline's raging monster has immense creative and destructive abilities, making her a dangerous adversary. Through this lens, the other mother is a wild and untamed force within Coraline, revealing an unchecked version of Pinkola Estes' wild woman, capable of creativity and power, but spiraling into chaos if left untamed.

By outsmarting the other mother in a game of hide and seek, Coraline strengthens her intellect, wit, and intuition. Coraline navigates her wildish traits and learns to rule over her true nature instead of being subjected to it. Reflecting on the other mother's projection of her shape-shifting body, she understands that she must hide her true nature and form from Coraline to be

accepted by her. Each time Coraline enters the other world, the other mother looks less and less like her real mother, revealing her true form over time. The other mother also reveals how Coraline feels about maternal care. When the other mother appears 'good,' she embodies the nurturing, homemaker archetype, mimicking Coraline's real mother in form and fashion, but providing what her real mother does not. This highlights the other mother's nature to manipulate Coraline's desires of wanting her real mother's love and affection. However, once demonized and her form becomes more spider-like, she becomes domineering, aggressive, and governs her world with absolute control, even subjugating her own creations, like the other father, and other neighbors, to her will.

This transformation from good to evil reflects society's tendency to categorize feminine power as either nurturing or monstrous, with no room for complexity or integration. The other mother's transformation over the course of the novel reveals how agency or authority, when held by darker feminine traits, are often perceived as threatening. The story uses her spiral into control and manipulation as a way to demonize the idea of an aggressive version of feminine authority, mirroring historical associations of women's power with witchcraft. In fact, the other mother is called "witch" throughout the novel, demonizing her ability to create and build her surroundings. One of the ghost children trapped in her other world refers to her as "the Beldam," which means an old woman, or a witch (Oxford). Nevertheless, the other mother is an alluring character, as she is many things at once, including a predator.

Coraline understands that she has become the prey in the other world, and the hunter is the other mother. In Pinkola Estes' narrative, she analyzes the internal battles of a woman's journey through the psyche when they realize the shadow self is their worst enemy:

Ironically, both aspects of the psyche, the predator and the young potential, reach their boiling point. When a woman understands that she has been prey, both in the outer and inner worlds, she can hardly bear it. It strikes at the root of who she is at center, and she plans, as she must, to kill the predatory force. Meanwhile her predatory complex is enraged that she has pried open the forbidden door, and is busily making its rounds, attempting to cut off all avenues of her escape. (59)

Pinkola Estes' description of the internal battle between a woman's self and her shadow, the predator and the prey, reflects Coraline's battle with the other mother within the other world. This battle highlights a tension between the subconscious and conscious mind, between the controlled and uncontrolled versions of self. Coraline confronts the wild and predatory aspects of her psyche rather than allowing them to control and consume her.

As the other mother shifts her shape to become a more formidable adversary, Coraline evolves herself within the other world to become something more than just prey. Coraline realizes that the other mother's created world only holds a parallel image of Coraline's home and neighbors and is only a limited perspective when she follows a black cat to what seems to be the end of the other world, only to have her path loop back and reappear back at the other house. The world was not extensive, but a looping reality. Once this is discovered, Coraline begins to see through the illusion of the other mother's created world, and that it may not be as perfect as she thought. This change in perspective proves to be the catalyst for seeing through the other mother's illusions. The button eye replacement, previously mentioned, represents Coraline becoming a doll or a puppet—an object for her fear's control. If Coraline were to allow the other mother to sew buttons in place of her eyes, she would succumb to her innermost fears, losing a sense of agency over herself and would, instead, give up her autonomy to the other mother.

Coraline knew that "... the other mother loved her. But she loved Coraline as a miser loves money, or a dragon loves its gold... Coraline knew that she was a possession, nothing more" (Gaiman 145). Coraline becoming her fear's puppet places the other mother in complete

control of her life, leaving no room for her own identity or freedom. Just as our internal fears place our bodies in moments of panic or stress to keep us safe from external harm, the other mother as Coraline's shadow wants to keep her in fear to keep her from the dangers of the real, outer world. This limited existence would prove detrimental to Coraline's development into adolescence. As Coraline begins to disobey the other mother and untangle her carefully spun web of reality, the other mother's reaction of possessive behavior becomes more obvious. Through her anger, the other mother traps Coraline and her family within her other world, refusing to allow them autonomy over their lives.

Coraline realizes she must defeat the other mother to free herself and her family from this entity. If Coraline does not defeat the other mother, she is at risk of being controlled by an uncontrolled, wild force of power that exists within her. Coraline must outsmart the other mother to release control over her life and identity and reclaim her power back into her own hands. Her plan for freedom is forged through her encounters with the ghost children, the other neighbors within the other world, and the mysterious black cat who serves as the guide through Coraline's liminal space. Each of these characters and story elements reflect aspects of Coraline's inner journey to define herself.

The ghost children represent the risks of letting the other mother gain full control of Coraline, serving as the cautious intuition, as they warn Coraline about the predatory nature of the other mother. These children are the example of consequence, haunting the other mother's other world as trapped spirits unable to return to the real world. Upon Coraline's insubordination and refusal to meet the other mother's demand for button eyes, the other mother locks Coraline inside of a mirror—a place where she can reflect upon her actions of not being a “good girl.” Within the mirror Coraline meets the ghost children who are trapped by the other mother and are

unable to escape. The ghost children tell Coraline, “She will take your life and all you are and all you care’st for, and she will leave you will nothing but mist and fog... your soul will have gone. A husk you’ll be, a whisp you’ll be, and a thing no more than a dream on waking, or a memory of something forgotten” (Gaiman 119). The ghost children warn Coraline that giving in to the other mother will lead her to misery. If Coraline allows the buttons to replace her eyes, she is limiting the potential of her soul, only allowing herself to rise as much as her fears will allow.

Additionally, buttons are a magical element used to reflect Coraline’s inner journey; they represent the soul—the awareness, the consciousness of existence. She will become a hollow person, void of any passions or fulfillment. Living with the shadow in control of choice creates a prison for the soul. Here, inside of the mirror, Coraline does reflect, but instead of choosing to be limited by fear, she devises a plan to escape. Her time spent in the mirror, in reflection of herself, helps her evolve into a version of herself that is not contained by fear. The ghost children warn Coraline, but also give her a clue regarding a stone given to her by the real Miss Forcible and Miss Spink, her downstairs neighbors, that she can use during her challenge to the other mother.

The real Miss Forcible and Miss Spink are representations of women who embody the Wild Woman archetype within the text as they give Coraline the tool she utilizes in escaping the other world, the hag stone. During one of Coraline’s visits to the real Miss Forcible and Miss Spink, they give her a stone with a hole in it, telling her that “It might help... They’re good for bad things sometimes” (Gaiman 38). These stones in myths of old English legend are known as “hag stones,” and were thought to ward off witches and bad luck. According to Theresa Bane’s *Encyclopedia of Mythical Objects* (2020) hag stones were “Often worn as a charm, these stones also provided many other services to those who wore them, such as curing whooping cough, warding off evil charms, preventing nightmares, protecting against eye diseases, and seeing

through fairy and witchcraft glammers” (10). Gaiman utilizes a symbolic stone from traditional folklore to provide Coraline with a tool to find the truth about the other world.

The hag-stone is associated with protection and seeing through illusions, creating a magical element within the story that functions as a symbol of Coraline’s widening perspectives. With this tool in hand, the ghost children tell Coraline to look through the hole to find its use. Coraline looks at herself in the mirror in the other world with the stone in her hand. It “... glimmered like an emerald. A trail of green fire blew from the pebble in the mirror...” (Gaiman 131). At first glance, the hag stone was regular, brown, and natural. However, upon looking through the small hole, it is revealed to be more than a natural stone. When used, the stone helps Coraline decipher what is real and what is fake within the other world. Coraline discovers, “Through the stone, the world was gray and colorless, like a pencil drawing” (Gaiman 133). The stone provides her with a new perspective of the other world, and thus she gains new awareness of her surroundings.

As her escape plan, Coraline challenges the other mother to a game of hide and seek: if Coraline finds the lost souls of the ghost children and her parents, the other mother must allow her, the ghost children, and her parents to leave the other world. The other mother’s created world could not hide its illusions when seen through the stone’s eye, and is the tool used to find the children’s lost souls in the hide and seek game. When seen through the eye of the stone, one of the marble sized souls was, “... the color of a scarlet-and-orange tulip nodding in the May sun” (Gaiman 133). As I consider color symbolism within the text, I turn to Faber Birren, who explains, “... red being the color of vigor, yellow the color of warmth and joy... green of abundance and health... gray of old age, white of zest and awareness, and black of gloom” (126). These colors of red and yellow, with orange being a variation of yellow and red, contrast against

the lifeless colors of the true other world, which is black, grey, and white, associated with gloom, old age, and the awareness of dullness. Everything in the illusionary, other world was grey and the only real thing, the soul, was vibrant and full of color. The hag stone itself represents a perspective-shift within Coraline's subconscious. Anzaldúa states that during transition in liminal space,

... shift in perception deepens the way we see concrete objects and people; the senses become so acute and piercing that we can see through things, view events in depth, a piercing that reaches the underworld (the realm of the soul). As we plunge vertically, the break, with its accompanying new seeing, makes us pay attention to the soul, and we are thus carried into awareness- an experiencing of the soul (Self). (57)

Coraline, now able to see the truth of the other mother's false reality, becomes aware of her true surroundings and the fake versus real things inside of it. With this tool, Coraline is able to shift her perception about her own inner fears and decides what is real and what is illusion, even though both are created by her own mind. She is able to see her soul and the illusions that her shadow (the other mother) has built around it. Because Coraline receives the stone from the real Miss Forcible and Miss Spink, there are implications that these two women pass on their knowledge to the younger generation.

Miss Forcible and Miss Spink are the "wise women," or crones, of the story, reading Coraline's fortune and giving Coraline riddled advice. In their youth, these women were actresses on stage performing tricks and plays, which is how they are portrayed in Coraline's other world. In many ways, these two women represent the feminine experience: dedicating their life to a performance, and still somehow holding true wisdom and clarity within. Many women feel that they must perform in a certain manner to fit into their cultural surroundings. During these performances, they hide their true nature, which can stifle their inner beings. However, the

two old crones are able to retain both their inner wisdom and their ability to perform in their old age, reflecting a learned balance between the two aspects.

Their inner wisdom and intuition are highlighted as they are able to sense that Coraline is in danger, even if they do not know exactly what kind of danger it is, and their gift of the mythical hag-stone. Though they do not teach or guide Coraline directly, they provide her an example of what women must do to navigate and balance the transitions of their lives. The real Miss Forcible and Miss Spink live outside the societal expectations. In fact, they live together as a same-sex couple. (Gaiman, Tweet). They followed their dreams as actresses performing on stage instead of raising children or having the family life expected for women. As parallel images, the contrast between the real and the other Miss Forcible and Miss Spink reveal to Coraline the benefits of seeing through performances or illusions, trusting her intuition when she senses danger, and finding balance between both natures. Though the real Miss Forcible and Miss Spink seem boring and old, they are no longer performing and are living out their lives together true to their nature. The other Miss Forcible and Miss Spink are never-ending performers, always on stage and reciting plays, flying acrobatically, and singing. They are entertaining, but the buttons over their eyes reveal that they are hollow creatures, which is why they must constantly perform.

When searching for the lost souls during the game against the other mother, Coraline finds in the place of the other Miss Forcible and other Miss Spink a, "... creature in the sac... horribly unformed and unfinished, as if two plasticine people had been warmed and rolled together, squashed and pressed into one thing" (Gaiman 139). The other mother disfigured the images of the women who help and guide her, creating a scene of horror for Coraline and demonizing the wise, wild women who live outside of the standard of society. She obtains the

soul that is held in the intertwined hands of the disfigured women and the creature attacks Coraline. However, Coraline knows that the other world she walks in is false and full of illusions. “She realized then that, terrifying though the thing on the wall that had once been the other Misses Spink and Forcible was, it was attached to the wall by its web, encased in its cocoon. It could not follow her” (Gaiman 141-142). The fears she carries involving the wise crone characters dissipate as she shifts her perspective. They hold a soul between their hands, a symbol of truth within the darkness of fear. The contrasts between her real neighbors and the parallel other neighbors highlight the nature of distorted reflections that not everyone and everything can be taken at face value. Sometimes, there is more beneath the surface, but can only be seen intuitively. Coraline faces her fears within her liminal space, armed with truth and an ability to shift her perceptions. This shift in Coraline’s perspective, from fearing the real other world to confronting the distorted images, enables her to discover herself on a deeper level, leading to a more solidified identity.

Due to Coraline’s lack of definition of her identity during her transition out of childhood, she places a high regard for her own name and its use. Throughout the novel, Coraline’s real neighbors mispronounce her name, calling her “Caroline” instead of “Coraline.” Kristen McQuinn states that “Coraline still incorporates her name as the primary element of her identity and having others pronounce it correctly is a part of what can make her feel seen and valued; that so many people do not say her name properly contributes to the neglect and unimportance she experiences” (16). This mispronunciation causes her to question how others perceive her, and wonders if they see or value her throughout the novel. These questions cause her to internally look for her own identity, as she still struggles to define herself beyond her birth-given name.

Upon entering the other mother's other world, the parallel images of her neighbors know her real name, "Coraline," without being told or corrected. This contrast of name pronunciation between the real world and the other world is indicative of Coraline's desire to be seen and valued within her community. Though this is a manipulation tactic of the other mother's design, it is a clue in understanding Coraline's liminal space. In Sigrid King's article, "Naming and Power in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*," she discusses the power dynamics of identity in association with naming. She states that minorities, particularly early African Americans, "... have been made aware that those who name also control, and those who are named are subjugated. Slaves were forced to abandon their African identities when they were captured, and were renamed with their masters' identities when they arrived in America" (King 683). Understanding the meaning within naming, and pronunciation of her name (renaming), in correlation to *Coraline* reveals the power dynamics within the real and other worlds. Coraline is identified by her real neighbors by the wrong name, and is therefore renamed, placing her in a position that is not empowering, but is limiting and oppressive. Within the other world, she is called by her real name, which illustrates her level of comfort in the illusion. This identity crisis persists during Coraline's time within the other world, including during her visit to the other Miss Forcible and other Miss Spink, who put on a play for Coraline's entertainment.

During their performance of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* within the other world, the other Miss Forcible recites on stage, "What's in a name... that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet..." (Gaiman 66), which highlights Coraline's internal questions about her own identity. The common analysis of this famous line within *Romeo and Juliet* suggests that it does not matter what we call things. A name does not change the essence of the object or the person, in this case, a rose. Gaiman's incorporation of Shakespeare into

Coraline notes a story theme and questions about identity that transcend time and culture, forcing the reader to consider their own identity beyond their given name, and to instead identify themselves based on traits that illustrate their inner nature. Another way Gaiman highlights the limitations of the connection between names and identity is through the black cat who serves as Coraline's guide through the other world.

The black cat functions not only as the guide within liminal space, solidifying a conscious code that exists within Coraline's mind, but also as the character who helps her resolve her issues defining her identity by forcing her to ask questions about what she believes about herself through riddled dialogue. What I find particularly significant is the absence of the black cat's name. Maria Nikolajeva spends time discussing the importance of naming in her article, "Devils, Demons, Familiars, Friends: Toward a Semiotics of Literary Cats." Nikolajeva states that, "... from myth and folklore, possession of a name gives power over its bearer, and the cat's ability to conceal its true name is indeed prominent in many narratives" (248). This is true in the case of the black cat, as he does not bear a name to help define who he is.

The black cat provides an example for Coraline in self-identification. Instead of defining himself as a name, he defines himself internally, providing no explanation for external figures, as he does not feel it is necessary. After Coraline asked the cat for his name he responds, "... *you* people have names. That's because you don't know who you are. We know who we are, so we don't need names" (Gaiman 57). The cat's response pushes Coraline to reconsider her place and significance in her real life and in her inner world. Sigrid King summarizes Kimberly Benston's "I Yam What I Am": Naming and Unnaming in Afro-American Literature" when she states

Many questing literary characters come to the realization that names are fictions, that no particular name can satisfy the energy of the questing self. So long as the questing character seeks a name through a prescribed social role, he or she discovers only limitation, whereas,

when a character is unnamed, he or she can have limitless designations which disrupt the function of social labeling and deny the applicability of words' topical function to his or her unfolding experience. (685)

As Benston describes, a name can function as limiting to a character who seeks their own identity or label. This process is illustrated within *Coraline* as the black cat notes his lack of name but affirms his security within his own defined identity. With this notion, Coraline places her name aside and improves her mental fortitude and abilities instead, redeeming her identity through the process of outsmarting the other mother, which exemplifies her identifying traits beyond her name. As her example, the black cat helps Coraline learn the benefits of self-identification, and she becomes more confident in herself, feeling safe and brave enough to act upon her intuition. Through this revelation, Coraline discovers that she is more than her name alone—she has life, purpose, and duty to herself, beyond her name.

Symbolizing Anzaldúa's *nepantleras* described "... as artistas/ activistas [who] help us mediate these transitions, help us make the crossings, and guide us through the transformation process..." (17), the cat's voice integrates as Coraline's inner voice of guidance during her time in the other world, personifying Anzaldúa's *activista*. The cat becomes a powerful symbol and the physical manifestation of the questions she carries about her own identity. The cat develops into Coraline's voice of reason, and the development of her internal critical thinking and intuition. The function of the black cat is similar to Lewis Carroll's use of the Cheshire Cat within *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), as Nikolajeva states, "It is... possible to see the Cheshire Cat as... a benevolent companion that acts as Alice's protector in an unfamiliar and bizarre world. The Cheshire Cat does indeed have... the function of the mythical guide, telling Alice at least a few necessary facts about the place she had involuntarily come to..." (258). The black cat, like the Cheshire Cat, guides Coraline through the other world, helping her hone

abilities that can only be found within these liminal spaces and assisting her in resolving her identity issues. He also helps Coraline escape the other world when, "... she threw the black cat toward the other mother" (Gaiman 178). As Corline throws him towards the other mother, the black cat becomes a weapon against forces, like her own fears personified, planning to oppress the agency she finds for herself. Thus, the cat becomes the symbol of self-autonomy, and a tool needed to navigate Coraline through the battle against her shadow and complete her self-discovery, resolving her identity issues in the process.

As Coraline resolves her identity issues within the other world, she seeks to close the door to the dangers of the other mother for good. In Kristen McQuinn's "Not at Home: Liminal Space and Personal Identity in *The Hobbit* and *Coraline*," she discusses the internal space within a character's mind. Within the article, an emphasis is placed on doors and what they mean within the context of stories with liminal space. As Coraline is escaping the other world with the cat, rushing to get through the door at the end of the tunnel that will lead to her real world, "The lessons she learns are being physically manifested in the battle with the door, which can be seen as a struggle against herself and her former desires as well as a struggle of good against evil" (McQuinn 17). The duality represented can also be seen as a battle within herself, deciding if she would let her shadow control her decision-making, or if she will lead herself consciously, bravely through her own fears, and with the values she has created for herself within the other world. Coraline finally shuts the door to the other world and defeating the other mother represents the choice that Coraline makes about who she is and what roles she is choosing for herself, her moment of self-identification. The other world itself is an example of the liminal space suggested within McQuinn's article, but more specifically, the tunnel that connects Coraline's real world to

the other world is a focus of interest when examining Coraline's "headwater" between her inner and outer world blending.

The tunnel seemingly gets longer, less magical, and darker with every trip to and from the other world, evidence that Coraline's time spent in the other world alters her perspectives on her surroundings and herself. After the other parents offer the button eyes to Coraline, she leaves into the tunnel, "... into the darkness, where strange voices whispered and distant winds howled. She became certain that something was in the dark behind her..." (Gaiman 70). The tunnel is the bridge between the conscious and subconscious aspects of Coraline's experience. Jung mentions two entities, two halves of the self and soul, in *The Red Book*, and describes the place between them as a desert. This space can be different for every person. There is a place that bridges these two dualistic spirits together, and in *Coraline* it is this tunnel. The tunnel is the symbol signifying the lack of integration; having to separate these entities creates a space that is uncanny, disturbed. The tunnel transforms itself as Coraline travels back and forth. At times it is, "... warm and yielding... a fine downy fur. It moved, as if it were taking a breath" (Gaiman 182-183), suggesting that the tunnel is alive, but can be soft and comforting. In other places the tunnel was "... hot and wet, as if she had put her hand in somebody's mouth" (Gaiman 183), suggesting that the tunnel is also uncomfortable. The tunnel is described in contrasting ways, creating a dualistic nature to her sense of safety. Gaiman describes the tunnel as, "... older by far than the other mother. It was deep, and slow, and it knew that she was there..." (Gaiman 183), suggesting that the tunnel is ancient and living. With this description, the tunnel represents more than just Coraline's internal struggles with her own fears. She hears voices whispers and howls within the tunnel, noting that many have traveled this same route into the dark. This collective experience reflects the journey that all must make to defeat their own primitive shadows or integrate them.

The tunnel itself is the truest form of liminal space within the novel. It is the place between truth and illusion. It is the unknown dark.

Once Coraline escapes the other world and exits the dark tunnel, the grip of the other mother still lingers in her outer world, depicted by the singular, severed right hand of the other mother following Coraline. As Coraline and the black cat escape the tunnel that connects the other world and Coraline's real world, the hand slips through the crack of the door, hoping to retrieve the key to open the door once again. The hand follows her, spying for the other mother and crawls like a spider on its fingertips, mirroring the form from which it came. While waiting for its opportunity, the right hand disturbs the other tenants in Coraline's house, injuring Miss Spink and Miss Forcible's dogs and terrorizing the mice from Mr. Bobinski's flat. Though this stalking fear still lingers over Coraline and her surroundings, she overcomes this fear and captures the dismembered hand through an elaborate tea party trap. As Coraline sets up the tea party with old dolls she no longer played with, she notes that pretending to play with the dolls is the most difficult piece of her plan. The tea party is a symbol of innocence, though Coraline struggles to complete the ritual of playing. This notes that Coraline no longer feels aligned with her girlhood but has transitioned into another stage of her life. She plays and waits for the hand to try and procure the key for the other mother. As it tries to grab the key, "... the other mother's right hand went tumbling down into the darkness of the well" (Gaiman 159). As the right hand represents Coraline's lingering fears of leaving her childhood behind and what comes next for her, the hand falling into a dark well becomes symbolic of Coraline containing her own fears. By performing and staging a play of innocence, following the example of the old crones by performing in the outer world, she contains the fear following her and Coraline finds peace in knowing that the tunnel linking her to her inner fears cannot be re-opened. She has found

courage within her newfound bravery and instinctual nature, placing her one step closer into her initiation of her wildish nature as described in Pinkola Estes' archetypal Wild Woman. Once the other mother is defeated, the neighbors begin calling Coraline by her real name, instead of "Caroline," symbolizing a strengthening in her identity as a resolution.

For many, becoming aware of the inner, uncontrolled shadow is not an obvious task. To Jung, "The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real" (95). Since Coraline is a young girl, the presence of her uncontrolled shadow has to be explored in a dream-like state, away from, but reflective of, the conscious mind. Through Coraline's journey through the liminal other world, she sees through the subconscious illusions in her mind that once held her captive of her own fear. Coraline overcomes these innermost fears as she defeats the other mother in a high stakes game. We can see the transformation that took place when Coraline battles her own shadow, a monstrous creation that tries to take control of her life through exploiting the insecurities surrounding her identity, positioning, and agency. Lastly, she discovers pieces of her soul with her new "sight" that she integrates into her being. Coraline comes out of her imprisonment in the other world as resilient, empowered, and more solidified within her identity.

As Coraline transforms the limitations of her former self, she assumes a role like Anzaldúa's *nepantlera*, as she has self-defined her identity, takes charge of her being and becomes more confident going forward in her waking life. Like Pinkola Estes' wild woman, Coraline has begun her journey to align herself to her intuitive and curious nature. These links to the *nepantlera* and the wild woman occur within the liminal space of Coraline's other world. This successful navigation of liminal space proves the transformation powers that women contain to

shift themselves, their perspectives, their spirits, and their spaces through the work of inner healing and discovery. Although all people look at their shadows at some point, women must examine their shadow, and the power it holds over them, within the lens of feminine complexity; we decide who we are in these battles and in these spaces. By examining Coraline's time within the liminal spaces of her mind, the other world, we see what feminine "monsters" can be lurking in our own shadows, and the benefits of defeating them.

The Complexities of Feminine Power in Toni Morrison's *Sula*

Sula, written by Toni Morrison in 1973, examines the lives of Sula Peace and Nel Wright, two women raised in a Black community called The Bottom in rural Ohio from the 1910s-1930s. Morrison's *Sula* analyses and critiques Black girlhood and womanhood through the eyes of Sula and the various relationships she is involved in throughout her lifetime. *Sula* articulates the complexities of discovering oneself and breaking through liminal spaces in order to cultivate an identity that leads to a more empowered version of self. Sula's relationships with Nel Wright, her grandmother Eva Peace, and her connection with Ajax help to define her path in life, leading to an empowered identity that defies the social standards of The Bottom.

At the core of the novel is the deep connection between Sula and Nel. The story begins in their childhood, contrasting between the girls. Nel's upbringing is structured and restrained by her proper and modest mother, while Sula is raised in a chaotic household led by her unconventional grandmother, Eva. While the girls seemingly come from opposite versions of The Bottom, their friendship bridges these differences, and instead the girls rely on each other for emotional support through the years they spend together. In adulthood, the differences between Sula and Nel expand, as Sula rejects conformity and chooses to remain single, childless, and chooses a life of independence as an alternative. In contrast, Nel follows the conventional path of marriage and motherhood. The opposite paths of the two women reflects the complexities of the feminine experience and the varied ways of navigating their lives. Within Sula and Nel's narrative, the women face the consequences of their chosen paths; Sula leans into isolation as her freedom destroys her relationships, while Nel feels trapped and bound to her limited lifestyle as a mother and wife.

Through the contrasts between Sula and Nel, Morrison illustrates the limited options of Black women within the novel's timeframe and highlights social consequences through their stories. On a deeper level, Morrison challenges the opposite, binary nature of these limited options for women within society, using Sula and Nel as examples. Sula and Nel are seemingly two sides of the same entity, and Morrison reveals the complexities that lie between them, creating a liminality that keeps the women bridged together despite their opposite natures. Sula and Nel may have differences within their roles and responsibilities in *The Bottom*, but their experiences in their own liminalities have more in common. These women have been bonded together by time, space, and shared trauma. For example, as children, the girls witnessed the death of another child named Chicken Little. This death affected each girl differently and shaped the way they managed grief going forward into their adult lives. These points of shared trauma bond the girls closer together and separate them from the rest of the community, as they were there to witness the death together. As Sula and Nel navigate their lives through their shared trauma and the consequences of their choices, the novel reveals the intricate relationships between the women of *The Bottom* and the community's support or rejection of them.

In contrast to Sula and Nel's close bond, Sula's relationship with her grandmother, Eva Peace, is strained. Eva and Sula's relationship highlights the parallels between them, creating a stubborn, cold, and distant relationship through their shared pursuit of independence. As Eva means to remain the matriarch of the family, Sula's independence threatens this notion upon her return to *The Bottom* in her adult years. The similarities between them build tension and conflict, further pushing them apart after an already strained upbringing. The community supports Eva as a respected community member, maintaining her position with her supernatural abilities of visions and speaking with the dead, her financial security, and by being the matriarch of her large

and unconventional family. Though similar in their stubbornness and high-risk behavior, Sula chooses a different path than Eva, choosing an isolated path rather than a larger family with an open house. She also rejects the spiritual path of her grandmother, creating a dynamic within the community that leads to her condemnation as a witch instead of a practitioner of her grandmother's craft, conjure. As she reveals her differences from her supported grandmother, the community rejects her true nature, leading her to seclusion.

After her condemnation, Sula becomes romantically involved with Ajax, engaging in a brief fling that ultimately leaves her feeling hurt and increasingly isolated. During their time together, Ajax reveals that he sees similarities between Sula and his own mother, a woman known in the community for her practice of conjure, telling fortunes, and reading omens. While Sula does not practice conjure like her grandmother, Eva, or Ajax's mother, she is still linked to supernatural occurrences and bad omens within The Bottom, like the flocks of robins that plague the town upon her return. The comparison from Ajax highlights his understanding of Sula's choices to step outside of conventional spaces for women within The Bottom. However, as Ajax's mother is a woman who is feared, but still sought after for her abilities, it is clear that Sula lies outside of the social acceptances, even when considering more independent roles, like the roles Eva and Ajax's mother have. Women like Ajax's mother and Eva are celebrated for their gifts, while Sula is demonized. The Bottom's rejection and condemnation of Sula shows the impact that community can have on a life path, leading Sula into seclusion because of her choice to defy the social expectations of her community.

In *Sula*, the lives of the women in The Bottom reveal ongoing and consistent transitions through liminal spaces as they navigate their relationships and identities. Eva and Sula consistently inhabit these transitional spaces, embracing change, chaos, and ambiguity into their

identities and their lives. Eva lives unconventionally compared to the other women within The Bottom, opening her home to boarders of diverse backgrounds and leading her family. Sula, like Eva, lives in her own way, choosing her own path, unconventionally and separate from the other women within The Bottom. Sula finds her power through her freedom, but not without cost. Her choices, like sending Eva to an elderly home and having an affair with Nel's husband, isolate her from the community. In contrast, characters like Nel seem to avoid these transformational spaces, opting for a more stable and structured life.

Despite Nel's resistance to change, she still holds agency over herself and her family, remaining as the household caretaker after her husband's affair and abandonment. Nel finds strength through her hardships, earning her self-sufficiency through this experience. By exploring these women's stories and analyzing the choices they make, we can examine liminal space and the characters' inner transformations that take place there. These liminal spaces and the transformations within them are represented through symbols, metaphors, and reflections within the novel, like the fuzzy, grey ball that follows Nel after finding Sula having an affair with her husband. Each of the women within *Sula* represents a unique journey, demonstrating diverse ways of forging one's identity. Drawing on Clarissa Pinkola Estes' concept of the "wild woman" within her *Women Who Run With the Wolves* (1992), and the diverse collection of folktales and women's stories, we can see that the feminine experience, identity, and agency can emerge from different paths. Pinkola Estes' collection of folktales suggests a narrative that transcends time and culture, pointing to an inner nature existing within all women. This hidden nature refers to the instinctual and intuitive aspects of the feminine psyche, which can often be condemned and characterized as dark or evil.

Eva and Sula embody qualities that differ from socially accepted roles within The Bottom, which makes them powerful in a way that could be misunderstood as evil by their community. Through Pinkola Estes' wild woman, we can interpret these qualities as expressions of deeper and hidden aspects of the feminine psyche. These hidden aspects are found within their liminal spaces, their moments of transformation and embraced ambiguity. For example, Eva finds strength in her role as the matriarch of her family, which reveals a survival-driven power in her decision making, like when she chose to murder her own son who suffered from addiction. Instead of allowing her son to suffer and lower the family's reputation and livelihood, she sacrifices him for control over her own fate. Despite the darkness within her, emphasized by the murder of her own son, Eva exhibits integration, embraces her contradictions, and sustains her individuality. She struggles with guilt for her actions as Plum's mother, but also feels justified in the way he was the sacrifice for the rest of the family to live on. Pinkola Estes re-tells a folktale about a wolf mother within nature and how she "... killed one of her mortally injured pups; this taught a hard compassion and the necessity of allowing death to come to the dying" (2). The wolf is not condemned for killing her child, and the action is framed as instinctual, compassionate, and a mercy. Plum can be considered injured through his addiction and the destruction he brings to the family. His addiction burdens the family, potentially costing Eva the life she built for them.

Eva's act of filicide contributes to Morrison's consistent theme of Black mothers killing their children, as also seen in her book *Beloved* (1987). Within Eleanor J. Blount's article "Beloved Autonomy: Selfhood and Tragedy in African American and Ancient Greek Female Narratives," she discusses the tragedies of infanticide within literature, particularly Morrison's *Beloved*. Blount notes Morrison's character of Sethe, who kills her infant daughter to keep her from having to enter into slavery as she once had. Blount states,

Becoming defensive in order to protect the children from danger is not the same thing as creating for them a climate of safety, but she possessed insufficient basic information to ascertain that there is a difference. She was reactionary because she was denied the opportunity to gather the wherewithal - in this case basic information as to the nature of life and freedom - to make informed proactive choices. Obviously, being enslaved removes choice from the enslaved, but Beloved shows that the chattel experience enforced ignorance of the human experience upon the slaves as surely as it forced unpaid labor on. (22)

Sethe justifies her own actions as motherly love, doing what she knew to do in order to keep her child safe from slavery. Although this is contradictory, it gives her some amount of autonomy over the fate of her children instead of being in the hands of a slave owner. Like Sethe, Eva's actions can be seen as evil, but they can also be viewed as self-sustaining and compassionate due to Plum's mental and physical state, along with the threat of destitution for the family. She gives Plum a mercy by killing him instead of letting him kill himself with drugs and alcohol. By widening the perspective on feminine power and reclaiming the "darkness" that surrounds characters like Eva and Sula, we can understand these women as figures who reveal the strength of a woman's true nature. Morrison's characters invite readers to reconsider what makes a woman "good" or "bad," and brings light to the complexities of the feminine experience and the diverse paths where power and agency can emerge.

As we widen our perspective of feminine power through the characters of Sula, we can also examine spiritual practice, such as conjure, and how these practices reflect the internal transformations that have occurred within these women's psyche. Women like Eva and Ajax's mother, who speak with the dead and prophesize future events, tap into an inner, hidden power found within their embraced liminality. By exploring these spiritual practices alongside the characters' journeys, we see how mystical abilities serve as symbolic expressions of their inner transformations and self-empowerment. This is reflective of the collected folktales within Pinkola Estes' wild woman narrative, aligning these supernatural powers found in literature and

myths, which represent an unlocking of the inner feminine aspects. The Bottom's perspective on what is considered ancestral practice, and what is "witchcraft," blurs the lines of social acceptance. For example, upon Sula's return to The Bottom, she is condemned by her community and declared a witch, though she does not participate in ancestral or spiritual practice like Eva or Ajax's mother. Examining the mysticism and magical events surrounding these women will highlight their inner transformations as they step into their own versions of sovereignty.

Gloria Anzaldúa's liminal space and identity theories, as defined in *Borderlands* (1987) and *Light in the Dark* (2015), describe the way that culture blends together in some ways, and not in others. Anzaldúa describes her borderlands as more than just physical or geographical boundaries, but psychological, spiritual, and emotional landscapes where people with mixed identities navigate their contradictions and complexities when considering identity and agency. Mary Klages says it best in her book *Literary Theory: The Complete Guide*, when she explains Anzaldúa's theory stating, "There is a space between cultures, classes, races, sexual orientations...where they meld, where they mix, where they are both worlds/world views and neither world/world views" (126). Within *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa calls this, "los intersticios," which means "the spaces between." This is Anzaldúa's concept of liminal spaces and the blending/transitions that take place there.

The cultural border described in *Borderlands* is the backdrop to examine the experiences of the characters in *Sula*. The forced blending of culture for the people of The Bottom affects the way they interact with each other and how they cherish and condemn each other based on a blended view of their world. For example, the community's acceptance of Eva and Ajax's mother, but the condemnation of Sula, reveals the cultural perceptions of power and spirituality. These perspectives are shaped by the origins of the community, a blended space, or cultural

borderland, between Black and white communities in the early 1900s. Ajax's mother openly reads fortunes and omens, but she is not condemned in society for these spiritual practices. This Black community holds Eurocentric ideas about witchcraft, but accepts African spirituality, like conjure. Sula's unconventional behaviors lack value to the community and are instead labeled as dangerous and evil.

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* also introduces her concept of the *mestiza*, which explains the process of forming new identities within liminal spaces. The *mestiza* embraces their own ambiguities and integrates opposite aspects of the self. This concept is common for people who experience cultural borderlands. For example, a person who lives within a community with multiple cultural influences experiences cultural borderlands through their exposure to more than one cultural understanding of their community. The *mestiza* integrates multiple cultural aspects as part of their identity. They are able to exist between the cultures, bridging gaps that cause divide within communities. Eva can be considered as a new *mestiza*, embracing her liminalities by understanding her own hidden aspects and utilizing them, which raises her position within her community. Through this process, the new *mestiza* is born, and a new identity is forged. Through the combined lens of Pinkola Estes' analysis of folktales and women's stories, and Anzaldúa's cultural borderlands and *mestiza* concepts, we can examine how feminine power emerges or is reclaimed within borderlands of cultural and spiritual belief systems, emphasizing the complexities of identity formation in these liminal spaces. Examining Morrison's themes of agency and feminine power through this framework releases the women within the story from societal boundaries, and instead envisions them as women who embody a wild, instinctual nature that both Pinkola Estes and Anzaldúa theorize.

By expanding this framework to include Carl Jung's exploration of the psyche, specifically his concepts of the shadow self and its integration, we can deepen our understanding of Sula, Nel, and Eva's journeys and the reclamation of their inner, hidden feminine aspects. As the predecessor of theorists like Pinkola Estes and Anzaldúa, Carl Jung analyzes the inner psyche of the mind, specifically the liminality of the mind, along with the shadow of the self throughout his work. Alessandro Tommaso Priviero describes in "Traversing Hell: Carl Gustav Jung and the Practice of Visionary Travelling," liminality "...for Jung...is associated with a shift in thinking. The liminal represents man's direct experience of different stages (horizontal axis) and degrees (vertical axis) of psychic reality. It is a symbol of plurality, complexity and, in one word, self-transformation" (156). Priviero highlights the transformative nature of Jung's shadow theory, noting the pluralities within the inner psyche.

When the pluralities of the mind are accessed, accepted, and integrated, they can transform identities and self-perception. For example, Sula accesses the pluralities within her inner psyche, which is reflected through her actions that defy the community's expectations of her. She navigates her path with a radical self-acceptance, though it comes at the cost of isolation. Sula's widened perspective on herself illustrates her integrated hidden aspects, embodying the plurality and complexity Priviero describes. However, as Sula is able to embrace her pluralities, she also must integrate the shadow of her inner psyche. Through Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1962), he describes the shadow within the unconscious mind,

...the shadow [is] that hidden, repressed, for the most part inferior and guilt-laden personality whose ultimate ramifications reach back into the realm of our animal ancestors and so comprise the whole historical aspect of the unconscious...If it has been believed hitherto that the human shadow was the source of all evil, it can now be ascertained on closer investigation that the unconscious man, that is, his shadow, does not consist only of morally reprehensible tendencies, but also displays a number of good qualities, such as normal instincts, appropriate reactions, realistic insights, creative impulses... (702)

For Jung, integration, and control over the shadow side of the mind results in self-transformation. As suppressed aspects of the mind, the shadow is found within liminal space moments. The journey of integration through liminal space often reveals the shadow aspects of the psyche as we face moral dilemmas and social conflicts. For Eva, an integration and embracing of her shadow is evident throughout the novel as she chooses her self-sustainment despite the moral ambiguity that surrounds her choices.

The Bottom itself is a cultural and physical representation of a cultural borderland, as it exists between two worlds. In this case, The Bottom exists between the white communities and the heavens—an ambiguous space where the Black community exists. This cultural and physical separation causes a blended society, one where white American ideas are still present, along with the surviving, modified African ideas and tradition. Though this cultural borderland is hard to navigate as a surface level liminality, the Peace women harness their liminal capabilities within The Bottom, along with Ajax's mother.

First, I will examine Ajax's mother within the context of her spiritual practice of conjure, which determines her place within The Bottom. In Yvonne Chireau's "Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition," Chireau explains that "African American supernatural traditions contained the essence of the primitive vision, a perspective believed to be at the heart of the religious beliefs of many of the descendants of Africans living in the United States" (123). Ajax's mother illustrates the primitive vision that Chireau describes and is depicted as a woman who "... knew about the weather, omens, the living, the dead, dreams, and all illnesses and made a modest living with her skills" (Morrison 126). Toni Morrison uses this rite of "knowing" in characters like Ajax's mother and Eva Peace, along with other characters from

her novels, indicating that Black women have a deep connection to their inner knowing, their intuition, and the traits Pinkola Estes describes as wild and true to the feminine nature.

Within Ahmad Greene-Hayes article, “Discredited Knowledges and Black Religious Ways of Knowing,” Morrison’s consistent use of her character’s knowing is analyzed. She states that, “...Black religious ways of knowing, too long discredited, do not solely emerge in physical locations, but are their own sacred geographical "lands" that Black people enter intentionally, in meditation and with deep thought” (42). Greene-Hayes describes a non-physical space where strong intuition and supernatural abilities are harnessed. Like Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* concept, supernatural ability, like the ability to know, is accessed within the liminal spaces of the inner mind. Greene-Hayes continues to describe the historical connotations within the concept of knowing, stating that “Black religions have historically emerged within, not necessarily in reaction to, systems of domination, confinement, and captivity... In addition, there is an environmental component. Black people literally read the earth and nature, including... the trees, water, and the winds, to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences” (43). Greene-Hayes links together Black spirituality and the treatment of Black people within America through history. Through their oppression, Black people turned inward to grow their spiritual strength, as their bodies were owned by others. Thus, reading nature to intuitively predict the weather, and accessing deeper parts of themselves from being forced inwards has granted them an increased ability to know. Characters like Ajax’s mother and Eva Peace illustrate this concept of Black knowing, and through this highly intuitive trait, they are embodiments of Pinkola Estes’ wild woman alignment and Anzaldúa’s *mestiza*.

Building on the connection between Black spirituality and oppression, knowing can be explored within the spiritual path of conjure. Jeffrey Anderson uses the term “hoodoo” interchangeably with “conjure” in *Conjure in African American Society* (2005) stating that,

Historically, hoodoo has been distinguished from other forms of magic by its role as a tool of an oppressed race. Among the black populace, conjure was thought to be a source of protection against abuse by slave masters and unfair employers, economic success in a white-dominated business world, and hope to those charged with crimes under the Jim Crow justice system. From the standpoint of conjurers, the profession allowed them to assume a variety of roles otherwise closed to them by economics and white prejudice. (152)

Understanding that conjure is a way for Black communities to regain their power in society, from within instead of outright physical or violent means, highlights the power dynamics between Black and white communities. For example, instead of dealing with a problem directly, one could see a conjurer to take care of the problem energetically, or spiritually, without the physical threats of violence. Anderson further explains in context of Black women, and their limited roles within society, that, “Conjuring was one of the few professions that allowed women to escape the domestic ideal and to avoid the necessity of menial labor. While women by no means constituted the majority of hoodoo practitioners, they were highly visible members of blacks’ magical world” (153). For many Black women, conjure was an alternative to the norm of having children and being a housewife. Ajax’s mother is an example of a conjurer and matriarch, leading a family of seven sons off her practice alone. She illustrates the alternative means of taking care of her family, whilst engaging with her inner knowing and spirituality.

Morrison’s engagement with Black knowing and spirituality contrasts within the cultural borderland of *The Bottom*, highlighted when the community accuses Sula of witchcraft while actively accepting Eva and Ajax’s mother’s practice of conjure. When defining the differences in conjurers and “witches,” W. L. Rouse explains that “African Americans, like their European

American neighbors, maintained a strong belief in the power of witches and other supernatural evils. The distinction between witches and conjurers blurred although each was believed to have the supernatural power to harm others” (23). Ajax’s mother practiced her supernatural abilities in a way that was accepted by the African tradition. This comparison of magic, through the African lens versus the American lens, shows that the blended culture of *The Bottom* accepts the African magic, but when the blurred lines are suddenly defined by their perception of what is “evil,” they use the condemnation of witches in a very Eurocentric fashion, mirroring the demonization of feminine power through history. We can see that when a spiritual tradition is widely accepted within a community, the practitioners, and their actions, are respected. When a spiritual tradition is not accepted, it is only feared and sought to be eliminated as a threat. Gloria Anzaldúa explains within *Light in the Dark* that, “Humans fear the supernatural, both the undivine (the animal impulses such as sexuality, the unconscious, the unknown, the alien) and the divine (the superhuman, the god in us). Culture and religion seek to protect us from these two forces” (17). Anzaldúa describes how easily a community can condemn different types of power through fear. Although Ajax’s mother is a respected source of alternative power, she is also feared. However, Ajax’s mother provides for the community through her conjure by reading fortunes, mixing potions, and providing advice, and the community provides to her in return. This seems to be the point of acceptance or condemnation, as Sula is condemned because her actions do not seem to serve the community outright. They label her as a witch instead of a respected conjurer, even though she engages in neither practice.

The distinction between a respected conjurer and the condemnation of witches is further explored through the character of Eva Peace. She embodies the Black knowing that Morrison’s characters are famous for. This is evident in her ability to interpret dreams throughout the novel,

predicting deaths and events that had yet to take place. Additionally, Eva reveals that she can speak with the dead when she tells Nel that she knows the events surrounding Chicken Little's death—information obtained during her conversations with her deceased son, Plum. She is not condemned by society for these spiritual inclinations. Like Ajax's mother, she displays her ability to perform conjure, and thus displays her connections to the world beyond life and her deep inner psyche. Eva is respected within her community because of these other-worldly, supernatural attributes. The portrayal of Eva speaking, "... with two voices. Like two people were talking at the same time, saying the same thing, one a fraction of a second behind the other" (Morrison 71), serves as the physical manifestation of blended inner mestiza- an ability harnessed within her time of inner liminality. As Eva speaks with two voices, her plurality is noted, displaying a multi-faceted existence and link with her inner being. Anzaldúa describes what a new mestiza does in *Borderlands* and states that,

The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity... She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in pluralistic mode- nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else (110).

Like the new mestiza, Eva navigates the between spaces of culture, identity, and concept. She speaks to the living and the dead. She lives in The Bottom, a place between heaven and Earth. She has given and taken life. Through this concept, her outer world and positionings are transformed, highlighted by her supernatural abilities. Eva is many things at once, highlighting a blended inner world and spirit through her time spent in the blended outer world of The Bottom. Eva's inner integration between shadow and light unfortunately required some degree of sacrifice, including the loss of her leg.

Eva is one of the few economically free women living in The Bottom and her freedom is brought about by an undescribed and unfortunate incident leaving her with one leg. Eva's physical disability implies more than physical damage to her body; it is a powerful symbol of the cultural trauma sustained by generations of Black communities in America. Eva's missing leg represents her broken ties to her ancestor's culture and homelands, indicating that a piece of her is literally missing. Eva herself represents the African and American experience- the blending of cultures and the people who must forge the way for those who come after, even though they are missing pieces of their history.

The mystery surrounding the loss of Eva's leg provides ambiguity to her character's nature. She tells many stories about her experience that left her with one leg, "How the leg got up by itself one day and walked on off. How she hobbled after it but it ran too fast. Or how she had a corn on her toe and it just grew and grew and grew until her whole foot was a corn..." (Morrison 30-31). These stories range from accidental to mystical and through these stories, Eva essentially becomes the folktale she speaks about herself, never revealing the truth. Catherine Gooch explains in her article, *"Shall we gather at the river?": the Folklore and Trauma of Toni Morrison's Landscape in "Sula,"* about the importance of storytelling in African culture, and that "... sharing folktales was more than a practical function; it has also historically been an important mental and emotional function in that it provided a creative outlet that allowed Black Americans to better understand and cope with their continued exploitation and abuse" (94). Eva copes with her physical fragmentation by engaging in the mysterious nature surrounding her situation directly. Her refusal to disclose the truth about her loss parallels her perspective on her inner world, where she clearly navigates her liminal spaces, encompassing fluidity and proves her willingness to transform.

The stories of Eva's missing leg indicate a time in her life in which she was forced to shift her shape- literally, through missing a limb, but also her perspective. Anzaldúa defines this process of dismemberment in *Light in the Dark* as

... the Coyolxauhqui process)... [a] shamanic initiatory dismemberment that gives suffering a spiritual and soulful value... The shaman's initiatory ordeal includes some type of death or dismemberment... Torn apart into basic elements and then reconstructed, the shaman acquires the power of healing and returns to help the community. (29)

Although Eva's dismemberment was a physical experience for her, it aligned her with the path to becoming a community leader and matriarch for her family, like Anzaldúa's Coyolxauhqui process. Through her dismemberment, she gained an unusual freedom as a Black woman living in America. Her outer dismemberment reflects an inner initiation that changes her and reflects her connection to her inner space of liminality. This connection keeps her grounded, one foot in and one foot out of the threshold.

Through the sacrifice of her leg, Eva gains a position in her society that gives her the opportunity to provide for others, like opening her home to boarders and taking care of her entire family. This sacrifice is indicative of pieces of herself that she had to let die in order to become a new woman more in tune with her inner complexities and dualities. This is reflective of the wild woman that Pinkola Estes discusses when she makes note of the dismemberment of the inner psyche and refers to

... our meditation practice as women, calling back the dead and dismembered aspects of ourselves, calling back the dead and dismembered aspects of life itself. The one who re-creates from that which has died is always a double-sided archetype... Because of this dual nature, or double-tasking, the great work before us is to learn to understand what around and about us and what within us must live, and what must die. Our work is to apprehend the timing of both; to allow what must die to die, and what must live to live. (31)

As Pinkola Estes describes, having the ability to create out of loss indicates a woman who accesses the hidden aspects of feminine nature, giving increased creative ability according to her dual nature and inner knowing. This successful navigation of liminal space, the space that gives her the opportunity to connect with her pluralities of her inner psyche, allows her to transform into a woman who has ties to energies or forces beyond the natural world, and an understanding of the natural cycles of life and death. Eva's supernatural essence displays the successful navigation of an inner liminal space, and an outer liminal space like The Bottom. While her outer roles grant her positioning within the community as a leader, her inner *mestiza* positions her to accept herself fully through her contradictions, gaining inner power and strength. This is contradictory to historical perspective, as explained by Lisa Kroger Harrow and Melanie Anderson, during the Witch Trials, "... association with the occult was used to police people's prescribed positions in society..." (21). Instead of the condemnation that women have experienced in the past, Eva and Ajax's mother experience a higher seated position within society for their gifts. Unfortunately, this is not the case for Sula, whom The Bottom condemns in adulthood.

Sula's condemnation is noted upon her return to The Bottom and is foreshadowed by a "... plague of robins..." (Morrison 89). The people of The Bottom "... dreaded the way a relatively trivial phenomenon could become sovereign in their lives and bend their minds to its will" (Morrison 89). The people of The Bottom viewed the plague of robins as an omen of something evil coming. They did not realize the omen they associated with evil foretold Sula's return until after she sends Eva away to live in a home for elderly people. The Bottom reacts to Sula's actions as if she were something unnatural and evil. The displacement of Eva, one of The Bottom's community leaders, condemns Sula to a life of isolation and rejected by the

community's collective opinion. Sula does not provide the same type of communal leadership as Eva, as she rejects the practice of conjure and rejects becoming the replacement leader or matriarch to take Eva's place. She even rejects her divine family ability to know. As Sarah Aguiar states, Sula "... makes the choice, either consciously or subconsciously, to reject the traditional roles open to her and to possess power, a power that is always pre-supposed to have been usurped from the male sphere" (98). As Sula rejects her generational gifts of knowing, conjure, and matriarchal leadership, she chooses her own path. However, once she rejects this part of her ancestors and herself, the town begins to think of her as evil, placing her within another layer of liminality and reinforcing her outcast status. As an outcast, she is placed outside of her community and shunned, reminiscent of the treatment of women through history that were accused of witchcraft.

In terms of protecting themselves against witchcraft, Many black communities during this time in American history believed strongly in superstition and the supernatural, which meant "... ensuring protection against witches [that] mirrored some of the practices of Anglo Americans and included placing a knife under one's bed or pillow [or]... laying a broom across the doorway, ... or sprinkling salt, pepper, or mustard seed in one's shoes, around the bed, or throughout the house" (Rouse 23). Through these methods, communities believed that these actions would keep them safe from the effects of any witchcraft. The Bottom treats Sula similarly when "... they laid broomsticks across their doors at night and sprinkled salt on porch steps" (Morrison 113). This indicates that Sula's own community thought of her as a witch, despite the association of conjure within her family.

Sula is compared to Ajax's mother in the novel, but she defies the African traditions and expectations, just as she defies the American traditions and expectations- leaving her without a

place in her community because both cultures seek to condemn her actions. She is trapped in the borderland of both cultures she exists within, leaving her isolated in the shadows of her blended experience. Although Sula's decisions ultimately isolated her, Pinkola Estes explains that the wild woman "... can endure exile. It makes us yearn that much more to free our own true nature and causes us to long for a culture to match..." (195). Enduring exile becomes Sula's path through the rest of her life, longing to be accepted, but only finds acceptance through herself.

Sula's dedication to exploring and integrating the shadow aspects fragments of her inner psyche places her in conflict with the women closest to her in her life, freeing her from the expectations of them as the outcome. Upon her return to The Bottom as an adult, Sula confronts Eva about memories of family trauma. Their argumentative exchange revolves around the fires that have harmed their family and home, indicating that Sula knew that it was Eva who set Plum on fire. As a parallel character, Eva states that she saw Sula watch her own mother burn instead of helping her. The two women are bridged together in understanding of their moral ambiguities- they each have integrated fragments of their dark feminine into their life experiences. They threaten each other in metaphor, understanding that each woman is powerful, but in their own way. Eva notes to Sula, "Hellfire don't need lighting and it's already burning in you..." (93 Morrison). Sula responds, "... I'll split this town in two and everything in it before I'll let you put it out!" (93 Morrison). Sula fully understands that her own individuality will come at the cost of isolation. She would rather sacrifice her connection to the entire town than forgo her own individuality. Sula also understands that feminine power can require a degree of sacrifice. Unfortunately, for Sula, this means sacrificing the relationship she shares with her childhood friend, Nel Wright.

For Nel, Sula is “who made her laugh, who made her see old things with new eyes, in whose presence she felt clever, gentle and a little raunchy. Sula, whose past she had lived through and with whom the present was a constant sharing of perceptions. Talking to Sula had always been a conversation with herself” (Morrison 95). The relationship between these women transcends the surface-level and highlights the deep connection between them. Nel and Sula are on opposite ends of the resistance of change when they enter their liminal spaces. Nel focuses on fitting into the mold of society while Sula focuses on her individuality. For these women, shared trauma is the bridge that connects them. The discovery of Sula’s affair with Nel’s husband shifts Nel’s entire world and perspective of Sula. Sula no longer brought her joy and understanding, but instead shifted her perspective into confusion and betrayal. Anzaldúa discusses the turmoil that can happen within states of extended liminal space (nepantla) transitions,

Transitions are a form of crisis, an emotionally significant event or radical change in status. During crisis the existential isolation all people experience is exacerbated. Unruly emotions and conflicts break out. In nepantla we hang out between shifts, trying to make rational sense of this crisis, seeking solace, support, appeasement, or some kind of intimate connection... we fall into chaos, fear the unknown, and are forced to take up the task of self-redefinition (17).

Nel goes through her own transitions after the affair and becomes a different version of herself. Sula completes this transition as well, but does so in an opposite fashion, showing the dualistic, opposite nature between the women within their liminal space journeys. Nel and Sula both struggle with the contradictions within themselves and experience hardship after the two are separated.

For Nel, this separation and grief came in the form of a grey ball that follows her until the end of Sula’s life. Nel noticed the ball, “Quiet, gray, dirty. A ball of muddy strings, but without weight, fluffy but terrible in its malevolence. She knew she could not look, so she closed her eyes and crept past it out of the bathroom” (Morrison 109). This mysterious, haunting, grey ball

that follows Nel represents the avoidance of her grief. The strings could unravel at any moment, throwing her into a moment of true turmoil, but the mud kept it stagnant and still, formed, and solid. She fears the ball and its presence, so she avoids it and does not acknowledge it, keeping the ball at a distance. Nel avoids her own grief and carries it with her through her life, instead of giving herself time to process the feelings.

When Nel finally allows herself to grieve her friendship with Sula, it is well after Sula's passing. Nel attends Eva's funeral and afterwards notices, "A soft ball of fur broke and scattered like dandelion spores in the breeze... It was a fine cry- loud and long- but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow" (Morrison 174). Nel carries the muddled connection to Sula for her lifetime, never acknowledging the pain of their separation. Sula and Nel represent the two sides of the feminine experience and transformation, reflecting Pinkola Estes' analysis of the inner psyche of feminine nature. I link Morrison's characters of Sula and Nel to describe two sides of the same entity, as they have been depicted as connected opposites throughout the text. Pinkola Estes explains that,

... when both sides of the dual nature are held close together in consciousness, they have tremendous power... By itself the more civilized self is fine... but somehow still lonely. By itself, the wildish self is also fine, but wistful for a relationship with the other. The loss of women's psychological, emotional, and spiritual powers comes from separating these two natures from one another and pretending one or the other no longer exists (124).

Nel can be identified as the civilized self of the entity, and Sula can be identified as the wildish self. Both sides of the self must be held close together to achieve a higher degree of power within. However, as Sula and Nel continue to navigate their lives without the other, they are not content and are seemingly suspended in trapped states of isolation and unhappiness.

For each of these women, it feels like a piece of them has died. They do not ever reconcile their relationship and spend the rest of their days in separation, indicating that neither of them is working in their true nature, but instead, denying it. Nel, representing the civilized self, longs for Sula's company and laughter. Sula, the wildish and uncontrolled self, longs for Nel's understanding and acceptance. Pinkola Estes also discusses the consequences of living unaligned to the true feminine nature, "When we lose touch with the instinctive psyche, we live in a semi-destroyed state and images and powers that are natural to the feminine are not allowed full development. When a woman is cut away from her basic source, she is sanitized, and her instincts and natural cycles are lost, subsumed by the culture, or by the intellect or the ego..." (7). As Pinkola Estes describes, women who cut off their resource to the true nature of the feminine experience struggle and suspension within their growth. Their power is fractured consequently. Sula and Nel's separation weakens the power each of them can wield individually because the two are stronger mentally together.

Central to the subject of Sula's fractured power is The Bottom's perception of her. One way the novel depicts The Bottom's view of Sula and thus determines her experience, is the birthmark on Sula's face. As it is first described as a "stemmed rose" (Morrison 52), as it transforms depending on who is viewing her. Barbara Blair explains that "Sula's birthmark is a sign that is alternatively read and assigned diverse meanings by different observers (rose, rattlesnake, ashes, tadpole.) Each reading ascribes Sula as "other" and in turn becomes a referent in how Sula signifies herself" (515). Morrison uses Sula's birthmark to explain how others perceive her on a deeper level. For Sula's birthmark to be perceived as a rattlesnake, or a serpent, implies a biblical evil surrounding The Bottom's view of Sula. Sula's shape-shifting birthmark is comparable to the historic "Devil's Mark" during the witch trials of history. During the discovery

stages of an accused woman's trial, sometimes a bodily search would be conducted to look for the mark of a covenant with the Devil. According to Orna Darr, in her book, *Marks of an Absolute Witch: Evidentiary Dilemmas in Early Modern England* (2011),

The belief was that the devil branded the bodies of witches with symbolic yet concrete corporeal malformations such as marks and growths... These traits made the mark subject to search and pricking, two techniques employed in the quest for physical evidence of witchcraft. The devil's marks were an example of physical evidence that could help 'discover witches', as the contemporary expression put it (112).

Just as women throughout history have been marked as witches and associated with the devil throughout history based on natural body marks or growths, Sula's birthmark becomes the symbol of a serpent within the perception of The Bottom. It is clear that Sula has been demonized, associated with the Devil, and shunned within her community through her demand for her own sovereignty. They hate Sula, but they also benefit from her. Melanie Anderson explains in her book, *Spectrality in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2013), that The Bottom needs Sula, as "...[h]er positive effects come from her identity as a community scapegoat, and they dissipate after she dies. The townsfolk do improve because of her, but this is because she forms the baseline for evil that everyone wishes to rise above..." (Anderson 30). Sula provides the community with a model that is communally unacceptable. This outcast status forces Sula to further her journey of radical self-acceptance, as she is not accepted by anyone else.

Sula has been condemned by her actions; however, this condemnation is freedom. For Sula, she has freed herself from other's expectations and projections of character. She is free to define herself completely on her own, winning back her power. However, she completes this transition of radical self-acceptance in a destructive manner. In his essay "The History and Psychology of a Natural Symbol," Carl Jung suggests for the reader to "... imagine someone who is brave enough to withdraw all his projections, then you get an individual who is conscious

of a pretty thick shadow... Such a man knows that whatever is wrong in the world is in himself, and if he only learns to deal with his own shadow he has done something real for the world” (236). As Jung explains, someone who is aware of their shadow and chooses to integrate it to keep it from destruction, does a favor for the community they live in. Integrating the shadow means to become less destructive to the self and others. Sula does not take care to repair the relationships sacrificed in her life- she lives outside of the community, isolated, but fully herself.

Despite the community’s attempts to label and categorize her, Sula refuses to accept any identity at all- something that suspends her within her inner psyche’s liminalities. With this understanding of *The Bottom*’s rejection of Sula, and her own rejection of the understood cultural norms within African and American culture, we can identify Sula as the physical embodiment of a borderland. She exists consistently in the space between cultures, identities, and moral codes. She is a representation of the blended culture, and the rejection of it, left feeling out of space and time. Sula is caught within her liminalities, as she resists labeling herself, which suspends her within the liminal permanently, but allows her to explore her true wildish nature. Sula has gained sovereignty over her own being, allowing her to be her authentic self in all situations of her life, leading to radical self-acceptance. However, through her destructive behavior, we can identify Sula as the uncontrolled wild woman, unbalanced as she is separated from Nel. Both women need each other to become the truest nature of themselves, as designed by Morrison. Their complex relationship is foreshadowed throughout the novel, drawing constant opposite comparisons between the two women, positioning them to be two sides of the same entity. Nel and Sula are both powerful women in their own ways, but strongest together, explaining the complexities of feminine nature, which draws power from various means, including destruction, independence, sacrifice, and morally ambiguous actions.

Inherited Power in Zoraida Córdova's *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina*

Within *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina* (2021), Marimar Montoya shares a deep connection to her grandmother, Orquídea, as both women are caught between the worlds of magic and mundane, revealing a shared link to their inner liminalities, reflected by their supernatural abilities. Through the text, the two women's timelines are parallel, flashing into Orquídea's past to mirror Marimar's present. The parallel timelines are the foundation for understanding the silence, secrecy, and generational trauma that shapes Marimar and Orquídea's journeys, transcending their feminine experience through time and space. *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina* illustrates the benefits, and the curses, that come from inherited generational power, specifically from maternal parentage. As Marimar uncovers Orquídea's past and inherits some of her supernatural gifts, she aligns to her inner nature, reclaims her family power, and regains agency over her life.

Marimar's complicated connection to her grandmother is central to the novel, constantly comparing and contrasting the two women and how they navigate their paths through life. Their relationship is introduced in the beginning of the novel, when estranged Marimar receives word from Orquídea that she is dying and wishes for Marimar to return home to receive her inheritance. Marimar's reaction to the news is complicated, drifting between fear and annoyance as she wonders if Orquídea is dramatizing the situation. The lack of trust in her grandmother's words exposes the strained relationship between them and highlights Orquídea's long-time secrecy of her younger life, as Marimar explains, "Orquídea was so many things: evasive, silent, mean, secretive, loving, and a liar" (Córdova 20). Marimar does not understand her grandmother's traits and treatment towards her own family, resenting her grandmother for her silence most of all. Orquídea maintains her silence throughout the novel about many things,

including Marimar's father's identity, where she harnessed her supernatural powers, and her own upbringing. Orquídea only displays what she wants to with her grandchildren, creating an image of mystery for them.

Marimar and Orquídea are similar in the ways of their silence but differ in the way they choose to protect their families, and the way they choose to grow within their experiences. Orquídea chooses to run and hide from her issues, burying her past in silence and secrecy in hopes that avoidance will resolve her problems. As a younger woman, she steals power from a fallen star in order to gain her own supernatural capabilities to aid her in her plan of hiding from her former lover, Bolivar, empowering her to control her own fate. However, Orquídea later keeps this a secret from her family, creating resentment between them. As Bolivar hunts Orquídea to regain the stolen power, Orquídea must maintain her silence to keep her family safe. In contrast, Marimar chooses to uncover Orquídea's hidden past that is affecting the family and finally breaks the curse of silence, growing into her own supernatural gifts in the process, empowering her to not only take control of her own fate, but also the fate of the family. Marimar inherits not only supernatural abilities, but the position of family matriarch as she resolves the issues haunting Orquídea's past. Through the parallel timelines of Orquídea and Marimar, Córdova skillfully weaves the concepts of generational trauma and feminine experience together in the text, highlighting the hidden power that can be found upon breaking patterns like silence and avoidance of emotional wounds.

Drawing from Clarissa Pinkola Estes' feminine archetypes within *Women Who Run With the Wolves* (1992), and her analysis of collected myths, women's stories, and magical symbols, we can dive deeper into Orquídea's and Marimar's journeys, relating them to repeated themes within folktales that are symbolic and reflect the transitions that occur over the course of a

woman's life. Pinkola Estes' narrative suggests that despite the rewritten and incorrectly translated women's stories and myths of history, that the feminine experience transcends time and culture, pointing to a hidden nature that inhabits all women. This hidden nature within the feminine psyche holds aspects like intuition, curiosity, strength, and an ambiguous nature that defies cultural norms. According to Pinkola Estes, to align with the wildish nature of the inner feminine psyche means, "... to speak and act in one's behalf, to be aware, alert, to draw on innate feminine powers of intuition and sensing, to come into one's cycles, to find what one belongs to, to rise with dignity, to retain as much consciousness as possible" (10). The wild woman is in tune with herself and the cyclical patterns of nature, embodying a timeless wisdom. Within *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina*, Orquídea and Marimar uncover the hidden aspects of their feminine psyche along their journeys, aligning closer to an ambiguous nature that allows them to transcend beyond the ordinary and become divine, reclaiming agency over themselves.

In *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina*, the Montoya family's relationships and supernatural abilities intertwine with layers of magical elements and symbols. These elements reflect key themes: liminal space, the demonization of feminine power, and the reclaiming of feminine power. For example, the laurel leaf that Orquídea paints on the doorframes and walls of her home is a long-time symbol of protection, used in myths throughout history. Theresa Bane's *Encyclopedia of Mythical Objects* (2020) retells the mythical story of Ogier, which makes note of the "... Crown of Forgetfulness, a priceless crown of gold myrtle leaves and laurel branches, more costly than any mortal treasury could purchase. The crown removed all of Ogier's past worries and fears; nothing troubled him, and a living love stirred up from within" (53). The Crown of Forgetfulness, made from myrtle and laurel, enchanted by the magic of the legendary Morgan La Fay, comforted Ogier from his troubles. Laurel seems to be used in similar fashion

for Orquídea, finding comfort in the protective qualities of the symbolism and the magic that is attached to it. Oftentimes, the magical elements used within literature are metaphorical symbols that reflect the emotional and psychological journeys of characters. In the text, the laurel leaf notes Orquídea's desire to shield her home and family from outside threat. Orquídea and Marimar's personal narratives are rich with magical elements and liminalities that can be analyzed to examine their inner transformations.

As they navigate their paths in life, both women uncover their shared inner liminalities and ambiguities, aligning themselves to a feminine nature described within Pinkola Estes' wild woman archetype; a woman who uses her intuition and intellect, embraces her own complexities that may defy cultural standards, and empowers herself to control her own fate. Marimar and Orquídea's harnessing of supernatural abilities serve as a representation of them unlocking their inner feminine aspects, hidden beneath their generational trauma and curse of silence. For Orquídea, alignment with her ambiguous nature found in her liminalities is often demonized throughout her life, which condemns her character, limiting her potential for growth. As Marimar takes the matriarchal role of the family after Orquídea's death, the magic that was once condemned is empowering.

Córdova uses Orquídea as a liminal figure throughout the novel, illustrating the divine connection between feminine power and liminal spaces. Orquídea's connection to her own liminalities is central to her personal narrative and allows her to harness supernatural capabilities to take control of her fate. Victor Turner introduces his theory of liminal space through his *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969), in which he describes the conditions of liminal spaces; the in between of culture, ideas, and things. When referring to people in liminal spaces, Turner states "... these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that

normally locate states and positions in cultural space” (359). He explains further by noting that this type of “passage” can be applied to people going through cultural transitional periods in life, like marriage, puberty, and parenthood. For Orquídea, liminal spaces are not only a transition site for her, but a space she was born into and spends most of her life within. Orquídea’s liminal nature is noted from the beginning of the novel, stating that she was born “... May 14, three minutes to midnight, when Orquídea chose to kick herself out of the womb before getting stuck halfway, as if she knew the world were not a safe place... At 12:02 a.m. on May 15, the baby was finally yanked out, half dead...” (Córdova 8). She was born across two days, May 14th and May 15th, which marks the mid-point of the calendar year. She is half dead when she is born, one foot placed between the worlds of life and death. From the moment she enters the world, Orquídea lives within liminal space.

To further solidify her as a liminal figure, in childhood Orquídea lives between the cultural divides within South America, between Latin and Afro-Ecuadorian culture, from mixed parentage of a Latin woman and an Afro-Ecuadorian man. Within Ketty Wong’s *Studies in Latin America & Car: Identity, Mestizaje, and Migration in Ecuador* (2012), she discusses the views on race and class within Ecuador’s power structures. Wong states that

Although “mixture” has been the norm in the demographics and cultural scene of Latin America, the trend among upper-middle-class mestizos has been to self-identify as “white” (of European ancestry) and to deny their indigenous and/or African heritage. “Whiteness,” in this case, has less to do with race than with social distinction and socioeconomic status among mestizos, which are features used as a means to build social boundaries between upper-middle-class mestizos (white-mestizos) and lower-class mestizos... (2)

Orquídea is not white-mestizo, but a mixture of indigenous and African heritage, meaning she does not fit into the idealized identity within the culture of Ecuador. The social boundaries between white-mestizos and the Afro-Ecuadorian cultures are clearly solidified within

Orquídea's community and this cultural liminality becomes a limitation within her experience, which leads to a place of subjectivity and isolation. Orquídea's darker skin and textured hair becomes a racialized exclusion, even within her own family dynamic early in Orquídea's life. Her own mother, Isabela, and Isabela's husband, Wilhelm, neglect Orquídea because of her appearance and her natural resistance to conventional expectations, placing her as the outsider within her own family.

This theme of exclusion recurs for Orquídea through her life, relating her closely to characters who also experience an outcast status, like the river god and the fallen star, Lazaro. Turner's theory of *communitas* represents people who exist within the liminal spaces, bound by rules of their culture to stay there until they are allowed passage to the other side, after their transition into their next identity is completed with the "rites of passage." However, the people caught in the liminal space for prolonged periods of time sometimes come together and form a community, or *communitas*. Turner explains that "... *communitas* emerges where social structure is not" (371). In other words, those who are suspended within liminal states form kinship to others that are also caught within the same liminalities. Through this connection, bonds are formed between people who cannot be categorized in bordering cultures fully but are instead caught in between them. The kinship built between these liminal figure characters is Turner's *communitas*, which is where Orquídea gains her supernatural powers.

In contrast, Marimar is not placed as a liminal figure within the novel but is instead used as the cycle-breaker of the family, defying the reoccurring patterns of the Montoya lineage. Instead of being born into her liminalities like Orquídea, she inherits and transforms them through her journey. From childhood she is deeply embedded within the curses of silence and avoidance as she grows up in Orquídea's magical home. In adulthood she still suffers from

silence- something she learns from her grandmother. She notes that "... New York evolved because it survived on blood. It was loud because it was a symphony of people shouting their dreams and hoping to be heard. Marimar had longed to add her dreams to that song but when she tried, her voice was a whisper" (Córdova 22). Marimar notes her own silence in comparison to the loudness of New York and struggles to find a place amongst all the voices. Marimar's silence was not only present in New York, but even in her childhood home in Four Rivers with Orquídea. Upon discovering a photograph of her father hidden away in one of Orquídea's closets, Marimar's "... mouth could barely form the word. She usually went out of her way to avoid saying it out loud..." (Córdova 101). Even in moments of betrayal and great pain, Marimar keeps her silence.

In Audre Lorde's essay "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," she discusses women and their learned behavior of silence. Lorde explains that "In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear- fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgement, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation" (39). Lorde's listed fears as the cause of silence reflects Marimar's inherited curse of inaction and inability to speak up for herself. Lorde suggests that "... we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us" (Lorde 42). Lorde points out the choice of silence over personal needs in order to avoid feelings of confrontation. For Marimar, directly confronting the long-avoided family issues will prove beneficial as she breaks the silence. Lorde suggests that "... the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger..." (39). As Marimar learns more about Orquídea, she also learns more about herself, leading to a self-revelation of who she is, and of what she is capable. As

Orquídea has embedded the family within her liminal space limitations, Marimar transforms it, making it useful instead of limiting. Marimar's transition from silent to speaking up for herself is symbolized in the novel by a magical seed gifted to her upon Orquídea's death.

One part of Marimar's inheritance is a magical seed, which lodges into her throat, blooming into a bud that surrounds the skin of her neck. This bud rarely opens and is symbolic of the silence that curses the women of the family. Covering Marimar's throat and neck, the bud is a constant reminder of the voice within that she does not use. Since the gift is in plant form, it symbolizes a place to grow, which for Marimar is her own voice. For example, during a consensual sexual encounter with a man, Marimar's bud opens and attacks him as, "... vines of ivy had wrapped around his ankles and up around his muscular calves... needles pricked her throat and when she touched the bud, she felt it opening" (152). The bud opening reflects her inner desires, as she knows she does not want to continue the relationship with the man but is too afraid to say 'no.' She knows she does not love him but does not want to hurt his feelings by speaking up about how she truly feels. Her bud's magic does the speaking for her when she cannot. The bud's opening throughout the novel as Marimar learns more about her grandmother's past can be examined to analyze Marimar's internal transformations. Through uncovering the past, she changes her perception of herself and her family, and ultimately teaches her to end her silence.

Within Orquídea's timeline sections of the novel, her past is revealed to the reader, giving them an inside view of what happens in Orquídea's life that leads her to the secretive, mysterious grandmother she becomes. These scenes of Orquídea's life depict a troubled, traumatic experience for her, as she learns silence, avoidance, and hiding as beneficial actions to keep

herself alive. This self-sustaining attitude bleeds into her relationships, creating distrust and strains that transcend through generations.

The Montoya family curses of silence and avoidance can be traced to Orquídea's childhood. These curses transcend through time to her descendants, affecting Marimar and the other grandchildren. In her childhood, Orquídea is used to silence, as she has a small number of friends and support systems outside of her mother. She spends most of her time with her mother, fishing, or wandering through her poverty-stricken hometown in Ecuador. Orquídea is often alone, exploring her own thoughts and doing whatever she can to help her mother, Isabela. As she takes on large responsibilities, like catching fish for dinner in order to feed herself and her mother, Orquídea connects with the natural world, learning a self-sustaining attitude at a young age. Through experiences like this, Orquídea is isolated from society. The only true friend Orquídea has in her adolescence is a river god.

Upon meeting the river god, she describes his monstrous appearance as a, "... crocodile face and reptilian humanoid body less than three feet tall. It had the patterned belly of a turtle... Its webbed hands ended in sharp yellow claws, but not as sharp as the toothy smile it flashed" (70). Despite his appearance, Orquídea refers to the river god as a cousin because she relates to his complex existence and connection to liminalities. Although Orquídea is not truly monstrous in appearance, in comparison to the impossible standard set by her mother and stepfather, she feels that she is like the river-god; monstrous and forgotten, living outside of society.

In Samantha Langsdale and Elizabeth Rae Coody's *Monstrous Women in Comics* (2017), the concept of female protagonists with "monstrous" appearances and traits is explored in relation to society's view on feminine power. When examining these protagonists, Langsdale and Coody state that,

... liminality and the abject are paradoxically sources of their power as revealed through their relationship to profanity, blood, and boundary crossing. While these female characters are undoubtedly situated as monsters because of their liminal, abject natures, they are also the protagonists, and so the reader is compelled to identify with monstrosity. (7)

Orquídea learns from a young age that she is different and is unphased by the river god's monstrous appearance as she has endured similar experiences. Living within the cultural borderlands of white and Afro- Ecuadoran societies lead Orquídea to believe that she is too brown and not lady-like enough to deserve affection or decency. This is reinforced by her mother and stepfather's treatment towards her.

Life after her mother marries Wilhelm becomes a nightmare, as Orquídea turns into the maid, baby-sitter, and parentified eldest daughter. As Marimar sees pictures of her grandmother, Orquídea, as a young girl, she notices that Orquídea is always placed off to the side of family pictures. She comments, "Surely Wilhelm Buenasuerte had no problem with his wife's little brown daughter, as long as she stayed in her place" (Córdova 226). The reality of Orquídea's early life is perfectly illustrated in the photograph, as she is placed off to the side of the rest of the children, representing her placement within the family. Marimar highlights the racialized structure of the Buenasuerte household, commenting on Orquídea's darker skin color in comparison to the rest of the children. This reveals a marginalized role for Orquídea, as the picture symbolizes an exclusion and an identity associated to the "other," much like her kinship to the river god. Orquídea's place is ultimately determined by her stepfather's authority and expectations, positioning her in a submissive role within the family. As Marimar sees her grandmother's photo, she becomes aware of Orquídea's oppression and the need for survival in her past, shaping her to become the secretive grandmother that Marimar knows. The exclusion within Orquídea's stepfamily reminds Marimar of the exclusion she feels when she is kept from knowing the truth about Orquídea's secrets. Orquídea has repeated the pattern of silence and

avoidance within her immediate family, highlighting the complicated nature of Marimar's relationship with her grandmother.

The novel highlights strained mother-daughter relationships throughout the narrative between Orquídea and her mother Isabela, and between Orquídea and Marimar. Marimar's mother died when she was a young girl, so she looks to Orquídea for maternal care. The strained relationships first appear between Orquídea and Isabela, who abandons her emotionally during her marriage and chooses her husband, Wilhelm, and the children she had with him over her first-born daughter. Isabela's abandonment is significant because this attributes to Orquídea's placement within her own family. This also introduces the cycle of generational trauma, where silence overrides maternal care and affection. On Isabela's wedding day, Wilhelm insults Orquídea and she "... looked to her mother, waiting for Isabela to interject. But she only stared at her own reflection, hidden behind gauzy white lace..." (Córdova 47). Her mother's inaction and choice to hide behind her wedding veil instead of defending her daughter reinforces Orquídea's devalued and ignored position.

Isabela prioritizes her new husband over her eldest daughter and sacrifices the relationship between them. Instead of addressing the issues between Wilhelm and Orquídea, Isabela chooses avoidance and silence in order to secure her own position of the wife of a rich man. Isabela values her position in high society, so much so that she "... never corrected her guests when they assumed Orquídea was another housemaid. She never let Orquídea sit at large banquets or put her in too-pretty dresses..." (Córdova 95). She suffered abuse from her half-siblings and stepfather, but—most of all—she was hurt deeply by the woman who gave her life. Isabella reminds Orquídea during her teenage years, "... you're a reminder of the mistake I made all those years ago" (Córdova 98). As Isabela tells Orquídea that she is a burden and a mistake,

this creates a lasting emotional wound for Orquídea. However, Orquídea does not pass down the same abuse to her descendants.

In contrast, Marimar's experience in childhood was within Orquídea's magical home, surrounded by supernatural elements in her daily life. As the children of the home saw magic on a daily basis, the questions surrounding the magic were kept secret. Due to this secretive nature, the family distrusts Orquídea, but still recognizes her as the powerful matriarch. As Marimar and her cousin, Rey, return to Orquídea's home to receive their inheritance from their dying grandmother, they reflect upon the time spent there. As Rey reflects on Orquídea he, "... thought of his grandmother as a witch, a bruja with a house that buzzed with magic..." (Córdova 45). Pinkola Estes makes note of magical homes within myth, stating the "... house is alive, bursting with enthusiasm, with joyous life. These attributes are the main fundamentals of the archetypal psyche of Wild Woman; a joyous and wild life force, where houses dance... where the old woman can make magic, where nothing is what it seems, but for the most part, is far better than it seemed to begin with" (93). When Rey reminisces on childhood wishes, "He knew from Orquídea that wishes didn't grow on trees. They had to be nurtured, carefully constructed like houses so you got exactly what you wanted. Orquídea had an alter with candles and crystals and pictures of forgotten saints, bones, and safety pins, dry roses and seashells" (Córdova 109). Córdova reveals the perception of Orquídea from the perspective of her grandchildren, which adds complexity and ambiguity of her character, further solidifying her as a liminal figure. Her grandchildren love her and her magic but distrust her. Though the reader understands her actions and silence, there is still secrecy and suspicion from her family and community's perspective.

As her own grandson labels her as a witch, or a bruja, it highlights his respect, and fear, of her. Witches and brujas have been infamously portrayed throughout history in Hispanic

culture. These women have often been medicine women, healers, guides through life, and matriarchs of their families and communities who have been accused of witchcraft and evil magic. Orquídea's power is demonized within her own house due to her dedication of keeping the source of her magic a secret. Although she did not follow the example set by Isabela in the form of emotional abandonment, she does repeat the pattern of silence and avoidance, creating its own emotional wounds for Orquídea's children and grandchildren. In her attempt to protect the family from the truth, she harms them instead.

The truth about Orquídea's supernatural abilities lies within her past, when she once siphoned power from a fallen star, named Lazaro, who took the form of a man after crashing into Earth. During Orquídea's time in the circus, Lazaro is held captive by Bolivar and held within an iron cage that keeps him from using his own magic to escape. A ring with a star symbol is the tool Bolivar uses to control Lazaro. Orquídea and Lazaro find a kinship amongst each other, both supposedly divine as Orquídea Divina's name implies, but held captive by Bolivar and his traveling circus. Orquídea first meets Bolivar after running away from Isabela and Wilhelm's home and immediately falls in love. Within the traveling circus, Orquídea feels important, and Bolivar makes her a star of her own attraction. She becomes Orquídea Divina (Divine Orchard). Finding her place within a circus full of people who embrace their unusual traits, like the bearded woman, or the woman who eats knives, reflects her acceptance of her features, like her dark brown skin and unruly hair. When she finally feels accepted, she willingly gives away her autonomy to Bolivar, transferring the control of her life from her stepfather to her new lover.

Though Orquídea loves Bolivar, their relationship eventually becomes unhealthy and toxic. Bolivar repeatedly violates Orquídea's boundaries and loyalties with affairs and lies, and she forgives him each time. Bolivar represents Pinkola Estes' "predator." Within old folktales,

and countless women's stories, the predator takes advantage of the young and naïve woman, manipulating her and allowing her to sacrifice herself again and again. Pinkola Estes explains that,

As long as a woman is forced into believing she is powerless and/ or is trained to not consciously register what she knows to be true, the feminine impulses and gifts of her psyche continue to be killed off. When the youthful spirit marries the predator, she is captured or restrained during a time in her life that was meant to be an unfoldment. Instead of living freely, she begins to live falsely. The deceitful promise of the predator is that the woman will become a queen in some way, when in fact her murder is being planned. (49)

Bolívar's renaming of Orquídea Montoya to Orquídea Divina allows her to believe that she is divine in his eyes, she is his queen. However, he continues to have affairs with multiple women and betray her trust, just as her family betrayed her trust through their poor treatment of her.

Bolívar continues to exploit Orquídea's love for him and takes advantage of her devotion.

Orquídea becomes trapped in a cycle of affairs, betrayal, and pain with Bolívar, but does not see a way out of her situation. She has been isolated away from her family and has only herself to rely upon to escape.

Orquídea's lack of support systems in her life leads her to compromising situations that are hard to escape from, which contribute to her vulnerabilities. As Pinkola Estes explains, "... a young girl learns to see the predator via her mother's and father's teachings. Without parents' loving guidance she will certainly be prey early on" (46). Without trust and care in her childhood, Orquídea has no foundation built with parental figures to seek healthy attachments, reflecting a pattern of seeking love from those who would hurt her. Refusing to return to Isabela and Wilhelm's oppressive household, Orquídea chooses to endure the emotional pain she is experiencing with Bolívar with pride, even though the love connection is damaging. Pinkola Estes explains, in her unpacking of the predator, that "...if she does break away, he pursues her relentlessly, as though he owns her... it is common for women to kill off their entirely original,

creative, soulful, and wildish natures in response to threats from the predator... Consciousness is the way out of the box..." (71). In other words, a woman who is not self-aware is more susceptible to the types of treatment Bolivar is integrating into his and Orquídea's relationship. This common woman's story implies that vulnerable women often find themselves in relationships with controlling and toxic men and in response, these women kill off parts of their own identities in order to fit into the expectation their predator wants from them. Orquídea does not kill off parts of her identities, and instead, she escapes and hides for the majority of her life. In agreement with Pinkola Estes archetype, Bolivar pursues Orquídea until the end of his life, attempting to regain control over her, and steal Lazaro's power back.

For Orquídea, the Star symbolizes her access to the hidden secrets of her psyche; her hopes, dreams, desires, and inner drive that have been crushed, sacrificed, and locked away as she remains Bolivar's bride. Stars are a symbol of hope across many cultures. For example, the idea of making a wish when seeing a shooting star is a common story theme. Within the text, the Star does represent a wish, but also the divine connection of power and nature. As explained in John Warden's *The Diamond and the Star: An Exploration of Their Symbolic Meaning in an Insecure Age* (2009), he uses Jung's symbolism of the star, stating that "The star can... be seen as symbolizing the spiritual nucleus or creative force as the heart of the two-dimensional mandala, the Self symbol..." (109). As the mandala represents the Self, the star becomes the life force center of the symbol, noting that the star is the symbolism of inner drive within the psyche. Jung views the star as "... symbolizing twin polarities, the concept that every property has, or gives rise to, its opposite..." (Warden 109). Jung's analysis of the star fits with Lazaro's explanation of his own origins and his connection with divine power. When the Star explains what he is to Orquídea, he states "There are beings across the heavens, above and below, in the between.

Sometimes, we find planets and rule over them. Become gods and saints and prophets. Other times, we become weapons” (Córdova 253). Lazaro explains in his own words the powers found in between worlds, in between nature and man, embodying Jung’s symbol of polarities. In her own way, Orquídea becomes something like a god after she gains Lazaro’s powers, and she becomes a weapon, over her own family. As she did not harness her power from the heavens, above or below, she did find this power in between man and nature, further accentuating the divine connection of women and their liminal spaces. Without accessing the powers of the Star, Orquídea is trapped in the repetitive cycles of her life’s pattern.

As Lazaro and Orquídea are bonded by imprisonment from Bolivar, he offers to share his power with Orquídea if she helps him escape with Bolivar’s star ring. However, Orquídea siphons too much power than previously agreed upon from The Star. While Orquídea holds Lazaro’s hand after freeing him from his cage and giving him the star ring that controls him, Orquídea does not stop siphoning at the agreed upon timeframe. As she steals more powers than Lazaro offers, an explosion occurs, creating a scene of chaos and ruin in Bolivar’s circus. However, all power comes with a sacrifice- a notion women throughout history have understood. For women, sacrifice has been the nature of existence. Sacrificing their bodies to bring life into the world, sacrificing their own wants and desires for their families (with or without children). When Orquídea siphoned power from Lazaro, her first born son unintentionally became the sacrifice. Orquídea trades her son’s life for her own freedom.

As she holds Lazaro’s hand to siphon his powers, in the other hand she holds her first born son. When the explosion occurs, the raw power exchange between Lazaro and Orquídea calcifies the baby into moonstone. The moonstone baby becomes a powerful symbol of the connection between liminality and feminine power within the novel. Pedrito, Orquídea’s first-

born son, was born from Orquídea's relationship with the manipulative, controlling Bolívar. As Orquídea gains her freedom and power, the sacrifice is Orquídea's baby. As Pedrito is crystallized into moonstone, his transformation highlights the path Orquídea has chosen- she suspends her future descendants within her own liminalities, trapping them within the reality she chooses for them all and for the preservation of her power. Though Orquídea's reach for power was intended to protect herself and her future lineage, it ultimately traps the family, and in some cases, is the reason for their demise. Orquídea's reach and sacrifice for power was not malicious- it was an attempt for her to control her own fate for once. As a woman from mixed heritage, abusive upbringing, and trapped in a cyclically toxic relationship, power was the only path to freedom that Orquídea could see for herself or her future. As Pedrito is calcified in moonstone, he becomes a symbol of liminality, stuck between life and death, potential and stagnation. Moonstone, as its name implies, has symbolic connections to the moon, which often represents femininity and the natural cycles of life. Within Erich Neumann's *The Fear of the Feminine and Other Essays on Feminine Psychology* (1994), he discusses the unconscious qualities of the moon and its longtime link to feminine power. Within the article he states,

Woman knows herself to be bound to the moon and identical with it in all essential experiences of her existence, dependent on and merged with it. Woman's relationship to the moon is represented in the relationship of the moon to the Earth and to life... the moon is regarded as the celestial earth and that earth goddesses are extraordinarily often also moon goddesses points to the multileveled quality of the female psyche that depicts itself in the Earth and the moon in their mutual relationship... the symbolism of matriarchal consciousness rest upon this unitary character of the Feminine, for which the night sky and the Earth form the great egg-circle of the matriarchal uroboros, in the center of which stands the moon that, as silver egg, represents and illuminates the dark egg orbiting it at a higher level. (77)

As moon symbolism represents the link to natural feminine power, the moonstone baby is a symbolic keepsake of Orquídea's decisions, and an unbreakable memory of choosing her own divine power, but at the cost of her own blood.

For Marimar, Lazaro's magical symbolism is the catalyst for her growth, as she discovers that the star is her biological father. Throughout Marimar's life, Orquídea keeps his identity a secret. When uncovering Orquídea's past, Marimar meets Lazaro and he tells her that she carries more power than the gifts passed down from Orquídea; Marimar is the daughter of a star, half of a celestial being with divine powers that were not stolen, but by birthright. She internalizes this awareness of her own power and uses it to destroy Bolivar, who still hunts the Montoya family. Bolivar chases Marimar back to the family home in Four Rivers but Marimar opens her mouth and, "... a piercing cry split the valley awake" (Córdova 311). Marimar uses her newfound powers of voice to assert authority over the magical valley, symbolizing the completion of her inner transformation and strengthening her relationship between her hidden feminine aspects and nature. As the Earth swallows Bolivar and buries him deep underground, the Montoya family is safe thanks to the destructive, but powerful abilities of Marimar.

The contrast between Orquídea stealing Lazaro's power and Marimar being born with Lazaro's power reflects the generational growth of the Montoya family. Orquídea siphons her powers from Lazaro, revealing the desperation she feels while trying to escape Bolivar. For Marimar, supernatural abilities are her birthright. This symbolizes a shift within the family, noting that reclaiming feminine power within lineage is possible. Through Marimar's healing journey, she heals the family as well. The uses of this power also contrast between Marimar and Orquídea. Marimar uses the power to defend her family and finally face Orquídea's past. Orquídea uses her power to root herself to the ground within her home. She does this literally upon her death, choosing to take the form of a tree instead of dying a natural death. Córdova explains that Orquídea "... wanted to be rooted so deep into the earth that nothing, no human, no

force of nature, save an act of the heavens themselves, could rip her out” (Córdova 47). The house becomes her refuge, a sanctuary away from the pain of her past where she can be herself.

Upon building her magical sanctuary, Orquídea alarms the townspeople in Four Rivers. She seemingly builds her house overnight within a barren valley, and brings life back to the deserted area, creating an oasis of magic. As she brings life back to the valley, her character is demonized within the perspective of the town and adds to the demonization of her character in the eyes of her own family. Through the mystery that surrounds Orquídea, her dedication to her own silence binds her to a life of alienation and she remains outside of cultural boundaries that are commonly accepted. The sheriff of Four Rivers comes to check on Orquídea to appease the complaints of the townspeople. According to the sheriff, “... the complaints he’d received was that the new Mexican family were witches who used coyotes as familiars. Another call had said that the dried up valley... was being changed and they couldn’t have that...” (Córdova 11). The townspeople are anxious and in fear of Orquídea’s sudden presence, uncomfortable with the changes and perceived threat of danger.

The understood concept within Four Rivers is that the law is the power and authority, but upon Orquídea’s arrival, that power dynamic is disrupted. The townspeople meant to “... arrive with shotguns and pitchforks trying to scare away the witch who lived in the center of the valley” (Córdova 9). As they stepped onto the oasis that was Orquídea’s land, “Mosquitoes swarmed, ravens circled overhead, the grass grew tiny thorns that drew blood. Discouraged, they turned around and went instead to the sheriff” (Córdova 10). The natural world defended Orquídea and her home from the attacks of the townspeople, highlighting her alignment with nature and wildlife.

According to Stephanie Spoto in her article “Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power,” there is a strong link between the ideas of witchcraft and defiance against the understood cultural positions of women through history. Spoto states, “Witchcraft and magic... become disobedience to the earthly authority...” (55), which explains the anxieties of the townspeople and their desire to bring in authorities, like the local sheriff. The idea of witchcraft as disobedience reveals the powerful imagery that surrounds witches and witchcraft, and as Spoto explains, “... witchcraft offered a way to gain respect by capitalizing on the fear of a political upheaval, allowing increased political and domestic influence within villages, towns, and... the courts” (68). Although Orquídea uses her magic to protect herself out of necessity, the perception of others and their condemnation of witchcraft in general leaves Orquídea in a position to acknowledge the threat of power she carries. Orquídea uses this power to align with nature, protecting herself and her home, highlighting her hyper-independence. As her powers reflect her inner, emotional world, we can see that Orquídea’s choice of magic has themes of protection and defense throughout the novel, like with the laurel leaves. After the sheriff affirms that Orquídea’s presence on the land is legal and that her ownership is legitimate, he never bothers her or her family again. His authority and power could not topple Orquídea’s agency or her legal claim to the land of the valley.

As the sheriff recognizes that Orquídea is not an ordinary woman and is potentially dangerous, he also realizes that she is not in Four Rivers to cause trouble to the town or the people. Orquídea understands the paradox of being feared, but respected. In agreement with this, Langsdale and Coody state, “Monstrous women are neither wholly empowered nor entirely disenfranchised, but of then they are both” (6). The demonization of Orquídea’s power isolates her from the community, disenfranchising her and preventing her power from being seen as

something to cherish. The witchcraft in question is Orquídea's clear connection to her inner liminalities as these rituals are Orquídea's anchors to her power and her transformations through her life. The sanctity of the Montoya home serves the family protection up until Orquídea's death.

When the grandchildren arrive at the house to see their grandmother before her death, they see the house is still full of magic but is in disrepair. They notice "Dark green ivy and vines crept between the wood panels, through shattered windows, all-consuming, as if devouring the house back into the ground. Roots broke through the porch like tentacles, strangling the door handle to shut the way in" (Córdova 58). The natural world is taking the house back as Orquídea becomes the tree within it. Once they break into the house through completing one of Orquídea's riddles, they sense the coldness where there was once warmth. Marimar and Rey reflect on times spent in the house with Orquídea, like when they learned simple rituals from her. Cleaning the house, lighting candles, and cooking was a form of ritual within the house. According to Pinkola Estes, in folktales across cultures, "To wash something is a timeless purification ritual. It not only means to purify, it also means- like baptism... to drench, to permeate with a spiritual numen and mystery" (97). As the grandchildren clean Orquídea's house while she is dying, purifying her overgrown space and remember the times that Orquídea was healthy and taught them the cleaning rituals. Sweeping, mopping, and dusting is part of the family rituals, taking care of Orquídea's magical house. Within Pinkola Estes' analysis of the stories of the ancient witch Baba Yaga,

To sweep the premises means not only to begin to value the nonsuperficial life but to care for its orderliness. Sometimes women become confused about soulful work, and neglect its architecture till it is taken back by the forest. Gradually the structures of the psyche are overgrown until they finally are but a hidden archeologic ruin in the psyche's unconscious. A cyclical and critical

sweeping will prevent this from occurring. When women have cleared space, the wild nature will better thrive. (97-98)

Pinkola Estes uses the cleaning rituals within the stories of the Baba Yaga to explore the relationship between mirroring effects of the inner psyche and the outer world as reflection. In other words, if a woman's space is clear and orderly, her mind is clear and orderly as well. The disrepair of the house as Orquídea sits dying reflects the status of the state of her mind; disorderly and neglected. For Marimar and Ray, completing Orquídea's cleaning rituals accesses a part of their own psyche that is clearing away their unconscious debris- a way of starting to make amends with her and their childhood home. A woman's true and wild nature is easier to access when her surroundings are cleansed and in their proper place. This mirroring relation, the reflection of the inner and outer worlds, persists throughout the novel, proving Orquídea and Marimar's alignment between their inner and outer world struggles.

As she is dying, Orquídea lists out the gifts of inheritance and names Marimar the inheritor of the magical house, enraging some of the children and other grandchildren of Orquídea. The house catches on fire while they are there and watch as it burns to the ground. This destruction of Orquídea's sanctuary, the place that protects Orquídea and her family from being hunted by Bolivar, is symbolic of the destruction of her protection. Orquídea dies within the house, and she transforms into a tree as the house burns around her new form. She can no longer protect her family from the generational curses that affect them all. Marimar must rebuild the house, symbolizing the passing of matriarchal responsibility from Orquídea to Marimar. Pinkola Estes explains within dream symbolism that, "... the symbol of house comments on the organization of the psychic space a person inhabits, both consciously and unconsciously" (92). As the house falls, it reflects the state of Marimar's internal psyche. Marimar knows she must take the time to rebuild the house she inherits from Orquídea in her own vision. The only thing

left of Orquídea's house is the foundation, symbolic of Orquídea's dedication to her family and the foundations of the growth that has potential to take root. Though she could not keep the house standing, the foundation remains for Marimar to build anew from. As Marimar begins to rebuild the house, she also begins to investigate Orquídea's past for answers to her grandmother's lifetime of silence.

While searching for answers through Orquídea's past, Marimar travels to Ecuador to meet some of Orquídea's estranged family members. Although Orquídea's mother, Isabela, is dead, Marimar uses magic to raise her spirit back to her corpse in order to speak to her. She is told by Isabela's housekeeper that, "... the ingredient to call on the dead involve a blood sacrifice. Your family is still brushed by so much recent death and that is enough... blood is like a tether, even when the tether is frayed. The connection is there, deep down, hasta la raíz. *Down to the root*" (Córdova 266). Like the sacrifice of Orquídea's first born son, the blood sacrifice of Orquídea's descendants was enough to wake the dead. When performing the ritual, Marimar is urged to "... focus all of your energy on that connection that every family has. It's in our bones, our blood. More than that, it's in the questions we need answered. The secrets, traumas, and legacies that we don't know we've inherited, even if we don't want them" (Córdova 266). Once Marimar focuses her consciousness on the energy of her lineage and the secrets and traumas that came with it, she was able to call her great-grandmother's spirit. When Isabela's corpse re-animates, she says, "We don't talk. None of us. Why don't we ever talk? Silence is a language of its own in this family. A curse of our own making. That's the inheritance my daughter got from me, and I am so very sorry" (Córdova 272). Isabela acknowledges the family curse of staying silent and keeping secrets from one another. Within Brian Norman's *Dead Women Talking*

(2012), he discusses the function of bringing back the dead to speak in a literary sense: the dead women,

... accept the task of addressing those injustices a living community might prematurely consign to the grave. While these women occupy the centers of their narratives, ultimately it is the job of the living to seek justice, for dead women need only talk when the living abdicate that responsibility... In due course, these women prompt us to explore the prospects for achieving a world in which dead women need not talk. (21)

According to Norman's point, it is up to Isabela's living descendants to break the family curse of silence between them. Marimar, with the bud on her throat, has been gifted this fight from Orquídea. She is chosen by her grandmother to break the silence. Once given the information from Isabela, they are given three bones for protection from their great-grandmother and sent on their way when she says, "I failed to protect my daughter, but perhaps I can protect you" (Córdova 273). Pinkola Estes highlights the meaning of bones through story, myth, and historic folk tales, stating that "Archetypally, bones represent that which can never be destroyed. Stories of bones are essentially about something in the psyche that is difficult to destroy..." (56). Isabela carries regret for not protecting her own daughter and tries to redeem herself gifting her own finger bones to her great-grandchildren. By sacrificing parts of her body, she seeks to make amends, making the bones not only a physical gift, but a symbolic gift representing the family's strength- something that cannot be easily destroyed. Isabela's gift of a piece of herself is an inheritance in addition to Orquídea's gift of the seeds. With the maternal ancestors' gifts of resilience and growth, this allows Marimar to explore her liminalities with the tools she needs to break the family curses of silence and stagnation.

The final image of *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina* shows Marimar able to leave Four Rivers and her home with new confidence, ready to assert her place in the world and use her voice to accomplish her new goals. As Marimar becomes stronger within herself, she

becomes stronger within the world. She expands herself into the world as she expands within herself. This is the nature of the wildish woman and the strength of women who connect with their instinctual being. Often times this being is found within the depths of the subconscious, and only after defeating internal and external enemies that seek to prey on the natural essence of feminine power. Orquídea understood that after she stole her powers, she would be hunted for the rest of her life. In her attempt to protect her family, she kept her silence and isolated herself, but these choices bled into the lineage and deeply into Marimar. By the end of Orquídea's life, she knew that Marimar would be the descendant to break this cycle of isolation and silence, freeing the entire family from the binding sacrifice made for Orquídea's power- her control over her own fate. Marimar does not share Orquídea's full experience, as she herself is not demonized for her dual powers (powers from Orquídea and her father, the Star), but is accepted by her family. With a step towards healing, the lineage can now utilize these powers gained from their grandmother's sacrifice to aid them in their future and decide their fates for themselves.

Conclusion

This thesis explores the feminine journey through liminal space where the shadow is encountered, the diverse ways in which feminine power emerges, and how inherited power and liminalities can be transformed. Through the stories of *Coraline*, *Sula*, and *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina*, themes of feminine power and its link with the liminal spaces of the inner psyche are explored, providing literary context.

In Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, Coraline discovers her identity within the whimsical other world after challenging and defeating the other mother, who represents the shadow of Coraline's inner psyche. Coraline's journey symbolizes the feminine journey of leaving girlhood and entering adolescence, which is a repeated theme in many folktales and myths across cultures. Within her journey, she strengthens traits like her intuition, intellect, and bravery, aligning her with her newly discovered inner feminine aspects.

In Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Sula defines her identity through her radical self-acceptance as she navigates her societal and familial roles. Through Sula's life, she dedicates herself to autonomy, defying her societal roles within her community of The Bottom. As a contrasting character, her grandmother, Eva, is also analyzed as an archetypal liminal figure, traversing the spaces in between and embodying a wild nature that is often demonized. Sula and Eva's comparison reveal that each of the women are powerful in their own ways, suggesting that feminine power can emerge through different paths.

In Zoraida Córdova's *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina*, Marimar Montoya shows how inherited feminine power, and generational curses, can be transformed through self-discovery and healing. With the help of Orquídea's magical gifts upon her death, Marimar uncovers her grandmother's past and confronts long hidden issues within the family, breaking the curses of

silence and avoidance. As contrasting characters, Marimar and Orquídea's liminal space journeys reflect the transformations that take place within liminal spaces, and how defining identity can change generationally repeated behaviors and patterns. Through these resolutions of generational limitations, new power can emerge or be reclaimed.

Through these narratives, the texts reveal that liminal spaces are not only Victor Turner's sites of transitions but are also the realms in which feminine power is discovered, challenged, and claimed. Through definition and re-definition of identity within the inner psyche, girls and women can transform themselves through their lives. These transformations over time reflect the timeless feminine archetypes found in myths and folktales across cultures.

Analyzing these texts alongside myths, folktales, and eternal women's stories reveals enduring patterns in the feminine journey. Across cultures, women's stories and myths often depict women navigating boundaries between life and death, the natural and supernatural, between human and divine, that emphasize the transformative capacity within liminal spaces. By exploring these connections, it is evident that liminal space is a powerful lens to view women's stories, modern or ancient, and how they reflect and challenge identity and autonomy. Stories like *Coraline*, *Sula*, and *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina* invite readers to reconsider the idea of social boundaries and identity of the feminine.

In addition to challenging social boundaries and reimagining identity, aligning these texts next to timeless myths and folklore also invites readers to reconsider their beliefs on binary thinking and categorizing. Characters like Eva Peace in *Sula*, Orquídea Divina within *The Inheritance of Orquídea Divina*, and even the other mother from *Coraline*, are often demonized and misunderstood because of their immense feminine power and ambiguous natures.

Eva Peace within *Sula* defies the social norms of motherhood and morality, demonstrating a self-preserving agency that sustains her role within her community and family. Similarly, Orquídea Divina positions herself as the revered matriarch within her family, but also becomes the haunting, supernatural being of her lineage, guarding the secrets of her past. The other mother represents a distorted maternal figure who is deeply loving but embodies the consequences of uncontrolled feminine power as she shape-shifts into a monstrous figure. These liminal figures embody paradoxical identities, shifting over time, re-defining themselves time and time again. Their relationship to the liminal creates their contradictions as they are nurturing and destructive, human and divine, and between good and bad. These characters disrupt binary categorizing and defy the social positioning of women in each of their stories. As these feminine figures are villainized in their stories, readers are asked to consider the potential of liberation in liminal spaces, where feminine power can be defined outside of societal norms.

By reimagining the darker aspects of magical women, characters who challenge binaries can reflect real world struggles against categorization in gender, identity, and power. Readers are invited to embrace the complexities, fluidity, and freedom found within liminal spaces, and instead, recognize the profound potential found within it. As feminine power has been condemned through the famous witchcraft trials of history, the lens of liminality helps dissolve the binaries, limitations of boundaries, and instead gain insight and new understanding into the true nature of feminine archetypes. The potentials within liminalities are endless, granting freedom and divine creation to women who can embrace their complexities and define themselves outside societal standards. With the divine creation of the Self, God is a woman.

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