

Minor Moves: Growth, Fugitivity, and Children's Physical Movement

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

From tendencies to reduce the Underground Railroad to the imperative “follow the north star” to the iconic images of Ruby Bridges’ 1960 “step forward” on the stairs of William Frantz Elementary School, America prefers to picture freedom as an upwardly mobile development. This preoccupation with the subtractive and linear force of development makes it hard to hear the palpable steps of so many truant children marching in the Movement and renders illegible the nonlinear movements of minors in the Underground. Yet a black fugitive hugging a tree, a white boy walking alone in a field, or even pieces of a discarded raft floating downstream like remnants of child’s play are constitutive gestures of the Underground’s networks of care and escape. Responding to 19th-century Americanists and cultural studies scholars’ important illumination of the child as central to national narratives of development and freedom, “Minor Moves” reads major literary narratives not for the child and development but for the fugitive trace of minor and growth.

In four chapters, I trace the physical gestures of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Pearl, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Topsy, Harriet Wilson’s Frado, and Mark Twain’s Huck against the historical backdrop of the Fugitive Slave Act and the passing of the first compulsory education bills that made truancy illegal. I ask how, within a discourse of independence that fails to imagine any serious movements in the minor, we might understand the

depictions of moving children as interrupting a U.S. preoccupation with normative development and recognize in them the emergence of an alternative imaginary. To attend to the movement of the minor is to attend to what the discursive order of a development-centered imaginary deems inconsequential and what its grammar can render only as mistakes. Engaging the insights of performance studies, I regard what these narratives depict as childish missteps (Topsy's spins, Frado's climbing the roof) as dances that trouble the narrative's discursive order. At the same time, drawing upon the observations of black studies and literary theory, I take note of the pressure these "minor moves" put on the literal grammar of the text (Stowe's run-on sentences and Hawthorne's shaky subject-verb agreements). I regard these ungrammatical moves as poetic ruptures from which emerges an alternative and prior force of the imaginary at work in these narratives—a force I call "growth."

Reading these "minor moves" holds open the possibility of thinking about a generative association between blackness and childishness, one that neither supports racist ideas of biological inferiority nor mandates in the name of political uplift the subsequent repudiation of childishness. I argue that recognizing the fugitive force of growth indicated in the interplay between the conceptual and grammatical disjunctions of these minor moves opens a deeper understanding of agency and dependency that exceeds notions of arrested development and social death. For once we interrupt the desire to picture development (which is to say the desire to picture), dependency is no

longer a state (of social death or arrested development) of what does not belong, but rather it is what Édouard Glissant might have called a “departure” (from “be[ing] a single being”). Topsy’s hard-to-see pick-pocketing and Pearl’s running amok with brown men in the market are not moves out of dependency but indeed social turns (a dance) by way of dependency. Dependent, moving and ungrammatical, the growth evidenced in these childish ruptures enables different stories about slavery, freedom, and childishness—ones that do not necessitate a repudiation of childishness in the name of freedom, but recognize in such minor moves a fugitive way out.

Dedication

“There is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor.”

-Deleuze & Guattari

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1. Introduction

Let our first move be into a stillness—a step into the developed image. Imagine this 1966 Bob Adelman photograph of Martin Luther King Jr. in Camden, Alabama,¹ collected in the High Museum’s catalogue *Road to Freedom*. Speaking from the platform of an early RV home, King stands three-quarter profile like a pillar. He appears to be pushing his way through a door that frames him behind a line, which separates him from the crowd. His right arm shoots out into the middle of the frame with his hand, almost as big as his head, pointing down across the image. His gaze and his open, speaking mouth are also directed across the frame in a line over his arm and above the crowd below. At once attractive and scary, King’s powerful stance is conspicuously transcendent, masculine, singular—conspicuously adult.

King fills the threshold and almost half the frame. He is larger than life. The children, though of varying height and quite close to the stage, appear small, low, and crowded together like sheep. Indeed the door, the way King pushes it open and the way it partially eclipses the crowd suggests a corral gate, as if King has come into the gates to move his flock to a higher ground. His outstretched arm is a scepter and a staff meant to herd the masses. But even as the children appear small in a way that highlights King’s grandeur, their pose reiterates King’s masculine posture. Indeed each boy holds a pose

¹ Bob Adelman, “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Camden, Alabama, 1966,” in *Road to Freedom Photographs of the Civil Rights Movement 1965-1968*, curator & ed. Julian Cox (Atlanta, GA: High Museum of Art, 2008) [Plate 51]: 98.

(or is held by a pose) that communicates to the viewer a perfect combination of individual, thinker, and man. The youth furthest right stands with his arms folded. Another youth stands with his hands on his hip, and the boy closest to King adopts a stance reminiscent of Auguste Rodin's iconic sculpture, "The Thinker"; he literally leans against the stage, one hand curled against his head and the other in a fist against his hip.

The boys' presence importantly refutes a racist history of regarding black people as perpetual children. While at least three of the youths appear visibly young enough to be regarded as boys, their postures allow us to fashion them not so much as boys but as miniature adults. Visually their standing in a row in order of shortest to tallest calls to mind evolutionary charts. The line in which the boys stand is similar to the parabolic rise in now iconic evolutionary chart that starts with a bent over primitive man who greatly resembles a chimpanzee and ends on the far right with an upright walking man. In between are various stages of primitive-man, each one successively less primitive and more man. In the photograph, the boys also mark a developmental rise, and King is its fulfillment. He is the tallest man. However in the evolutionary chart, each figure marks a different state, a slightly different type, so that ultimately the last figure seems like a complete transformation, a wholly different species, from the first figure. In contrast, King and the boys have similar masculine and scholarly countenances. Indeed they prefigure him (as already formed adults). The effect is that while visually we have the allusion of development, the image exorcises any notion of that early-evolutionary

primitiveness that black peoples and children were thought to occupy. Instead the major narrative (or what Roland Barthes would call the *studium*²) the photograph presents is that there are no children here. These boys are not children; they are thinkers, rationale, masculine—they are scholars, and King, by contrast, is the figuration of Emerson’s “man thinking”, that “one, who raises himself [from “protected class” of “women and children”] from private considerations, and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts. He is the world's eye. He is the world's heart.”³

What is troubling about this photographic staging of the negro as *the* “American Scholar” is that so many children’s participation in the movement comes by way of their being absent from class. Consider an advertisement for participation in Selma marches. The handwritten heading of the advertisement reads “School’s Out.” Underneath it we see an image of two children running, presumably away from school. Below them a caption reads “Playing Hooky for Freedom.” “Freedom” is written in cursive and underlined twice. Below this text are details about the march. What we see in this flyer is its call for a childish and fugitive move to animate the Movement. Reminiscent of iconic images of Tom Sawyer (the girl has two pigtails flying in the wind and the boy a book strap also soaring behind him), the flyer nods to playing hooky as an easy and inconsequential act. While some students were absent only for a day or two with the

² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar,” Digital Emerson: A Collective Archive, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://digitalemerson.wsulibs.wsu.edu/exhibits/show/text/the-american-scholar>.

tacit consent of their teachers, for many participation in the Movement meant dealing with schools that closed rather than integrate, schools that integrated under violent siege, the need to assist family with increased financial burdens, and so on. Being radically present in the Movement meant being absent from the very institution and developmental promise that the Movement meant to secure.

Working at the intersections of Black Studies, Child Studies, and American Literature, *Minor Moves* explores the movement of this necessary-but-occluded “playing hooky” (that break from normative order), which the developed photograph struggles to picture. In this way the photograph, as I have been reading it thus far, marks not the subject of my project but rather the ideological structure of a problem to which my project responds by returning to what I argue are its 19th-century foundations. For this impulse that we see in the image to claim American independence and citizenship by way of heralding the figure of the child and its capacity for development on the one hand and by exorcizing any association with a dependent childishness that always seems to show up as dangerously black on the other hand is the robust afterlife of an essentially 19th-century formulation. The four novels I read are each concerned with rendering “moving pictures” to borrow Harriet Beecher Stowe’s language.⁴ In their narrative pictures of minors, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Our Nig*, and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, all respond to and participate in mid 19th-century concerns

⁴ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (New York: Bantam Classics, 2003).

about proper child development and its implication for the progress of the nation, which is to say they also participate in the increasingly racialized divide between the child and childish. I focus on what escapes their developmental designs. As I look at the undeveloped childish movements that the narratives ultimately mean to curtail, I think about these minor moves (Pearl's constant touching the ground or Frado's pranks) as issuing forth a performative and poetic subtext that challenges not only the viability but also the desirability of the freedom these narratives try to claim as the natural product of developing into a normative (raced white) adulthood.

1.1 The Problem "Child" and the Impossible "Black Child" | An American Development

The past fifteen to twenty years of American cultural studies scholarship on the child has illustrated the way in which U.S. understandings of governance,⁵ consent,⁶ independence,⁷ labor,⁸ class,⁹ race, gender, and national belonging¹⁰ have all been

⁵ Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

⁶ Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law, and the Anglo American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁷ Karen Sanchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁸ Viviana Rotman Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁹ Karen Sanchez Eppler, "Playing at Class," in *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 40-62.

shaped through figuring the child as the emblematic site of America's promise and potential for progress. More than anything what we have learned—if not come to accept as a primary point of entry—is that *child* is a social construction.¹¹ Or as Gabrielle Owen explains, the category of the child is a story we tell ourselves for our survival. This is to say that *child* is a term that always bespeaks an adult (or one who identifies as “not child”) looking at and imaging the ones they call *child*.

There is the ‘we’ who know the figure of the child and who recall a childhood that doesn't fit. And, there are people called children who are *fighting* and *moving*, children who have agency of some kind, children navigating the ideas about the child.¹²

¹⁰ See Caroline Levander, *Cradle of Liberty: Race, the Child, and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W.E.B. Du Bois* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Carole Singley, *Adopting America: Childhood, Kinship, and National Identity in Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Anna Mae Duane, *Suffering Childhood in Early America: Violence, Race, and the Making of the Child Victim* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011). See Also: Melanie Dawson, “The Miniaturizing of Girlhood: Nineteenth-Century Playtime and Gendered Theories of Development,” in *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 63-84.

¹¹ Philippe Airès, *Century of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Knopf, 1962). Despite challenges to his methodology, Airès is generally seen as calling scholarly attention to childhood and child as socially and historically constructed categories.

¹² Gabrielle Owen, “Queer Theory Wrestles the ‘Real’ Child: Impossibility, Identity, and Language in Jacqueline Rose’s *The Case of Peter Pan*,” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* (2010): 256. (emphasis added). Owen is paraphrasing her reading of Kathryn Bond Stockton’s *The Queer Child or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Stockton suggests that all children are queer or rather that all children gesture and articulate themselves outside of normative gender and sexual strictures. All children show up queer in large part because we not only assume the child’s future gender and sexual identities in the way we talk to them, but we also assume the child has no present or immediate sexuality or understanding of their gender identity. For more on queer theory and the child, see collected essays in *Curioser: On the Queerness of Children*, ed. Stephen Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay,” *Social Text* 29 (1991): 18-27; Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and Adam Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

Minor Moves is interested in the fighting movement of these minors stirring underneath the name *child*, or more specifically where that fighting shows up (even in our narrative imaginings of the child) and interrupts the narrative and political roles assigned the *child* in an American imagination. However while Owen approaches Jacqueline Rose's "impossible" and Susan Honeyman's "elusive"¹³ child via queer theory, and others, such as Natasha Hurley¹⁴ and Adam Phillips, approach the "impossible" child through psychoanalysis,¹⁵ the texts I attend to predate the Freudian child that emerges at the turn-of-the-century. To be clear the texts I look at are not separate or outside the history of psychoanalytic discourse; indeed as Bill Brown argues, particularly with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, these midcentury texts helped draw the pictures of the child assumed in developmental science and psychoanalysis.¹⁶ Still I

¹³Susan Honeyman, *Elusive Childhood: Impossible Representations in Modern Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ *Curioser: On the Queerness of Children*, ed. Stephen Bruhm and Natasha Hurley.

¹⁵ Adam Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery*. For psychoanalysis in child cultural studies, see also: Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Holly Blackford, "Child Consciousness in the American Novel: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885), What Maisie Knew (1897), and the Birth of child Psychology," in *Enterprising Youth: Social Values and Acculturation in Nineteenth-Century American Children's Literature*, ed. Monika Elbert (New York: Routledge, 2008); Jane Thrailkill. "Traumatic Realism and the Wounded Child," and Michelle A. Massé, "Constructing the Psychoanalytic Child: Freud's From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," in *The American Child: A Cultural Study Reader*, ed. Caroline Levander and Carol Singley (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 128-148, 149-166; Kenneth B. Kidd, *Freud in Oz: At the Intersections of Psychoanalysis and Children's Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

¹⁶ Bill Brown, "American Childhood and Stephen Crane's Toys," *American Literary History* 7, no. 3 Imagining a National Culture (Autumn 1995): 443-476.

approach the impossibility of *child* and the elusive movements of the childish minors via the lens of race, bondage, and blackness.

For at least in a U.S. context, that the child is a construction has always been evidenced in America's contradictory inclusion of black adults in the category of child (or childish) and exclusion of black youth from that category. Early on proslavery advocates, phrenologists, and other precursors to evolutionary science were quick to group children and black peoples and women together as legally dependent nonages. Holly Brewer's research illustrates how for Revolutionary America to draw a line between child and adult was also to draw a line between colonial and free nation, between a political ward and a citizen. As Brewer explains these early Americans made that line solid by legally defining the age range that constitutes child and thus who could consent and vote. Their rationale stemmed from a belief that democracy was founded on reasoning, independent men who must be able to consent in order to be governed by elected officials. The capacity for self-reasoning and self-governance gave the individual, like the nation itself, the right to freedom/independence. This independent self had the ability to consent and thus paradoxically to safeguard their freedom by curtailing it under the strictures of law and nation state. Those who could not self-reason or act independently could not participate in this democracy of the free. In this formulation, which already has its enlightenment roots in philosophical devaluations of the primitive, not only children but all wards and dependents (including

women and black peoples) became non-voting nonages. This formulation received additional backing in the early recapitulationist ideas that saw primitive black peoples, women, and children as occupying a similar place in the historical evolution of the race. Particularly as issues of slavery came to a head, black adults were eagerly included within a story of the child that focused on dependency as a justification for captivity. For proslavery advocates, national sentiments about protecting children justified holding slaves as a paternal duty to care for the perpetually childish black peoples who were otherwise thought incapable of education, change, or life.

By the early 19th-century and the rise of liberal Protestantism, however, the story of the child became not only about dependency and lack of self-reasoning, but also about notions of development and potential. The latter had already been a part of the story America told about the child, and it too had its roots in enlightenment philosophy which styled the child as a *tabula rasa* or virgin soil on which / in which nature and consciousness developed a thinking man. Educators such as Horace Mann, Amos Bronson Alcott, and Horace Bushnell coupled romantic ideas of the innocent child (popular among romanticists, most notably in the poems of Wordsworth) with the long-standing notion that child education was essential to cultural survival in the new world (i.e. Cotton Mather's writing¹⁷ in Puritan America and Benjamin Franklin's writings in

¹⁷ Cotton Mathers, "The Education of Children" and *Corderius Americanus: A Discourse on the Good Education of Children. Delivered at the Funeral of Ezekiel Cheever, Principal of the Latin Grammar School in Boston: Who Died*

revolutionary America).¹⁸ These leaders brought the figure of the child center stage as that which could be filled with past knowledge, made to purify a present, and shaped into an ideal future.¹⁹ The child became the fertile grounds on which the nation could be cultivated, an idea often expressed by metaphorically linking the child to fertile earth, seeds, and flowers. For example, regarding the child as “more a candidate for personality than a person,” Horace Bushnell described the child “as a seed forming in the capsule of the parent stem.”²⁰ For Bushnell and others the child physically, mentally, and spiritually dependent has no force of his own and thus can be, must be reared like a plant until the child comes of age and achieves the status of (independent) person.

Here developed maturity, autonomous movement, and independent stance are all bundled together in American notions of freedom. And indeed the Declaration of

August, 1708, In the Ninety-Fourth year of His Age (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1828) Google Books, accessed March 4, 2014.

¹⁸ Franklin, Benjamin, *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* Saturday, September 13, 1749, Benjamin Franklin Papers, accessed on March 3, 2014, <http://franklinpapers.org/franklin//framedVolumes.jsp>. Franklin also talked about development of the child as a developing of the land: “For though the American Youth are allow’d not to want Capacity; yet the best Capacities require Cultivation, it being truly with them, as with the best Ground, which unless well tilled and sowed with profitable Seed, produces only ranker Weeds. For though the American Youth are allow’d not to want Capacity; yet the best Capacities require Cultivation, it being truly with them, as with the best Ground, which unless well tilled and sowed with profitable Seed, produces only ranker Weeds.”

¹⁹ For more on children in early America and history of American childhood, see: Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); Howard Chudacoff, *Children at Play: An American History* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); and for a collection of past and contemporary primary sources on children and education, see *Childhood in America*, ed. Paula S. Fass and Mary Ann Mason (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

²⁰ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 242.

Independence laid claims to freedom by proclaiming America's coming-of-age as a signal of its natural right to independence from a parent country. Brewer shows that with imposition of age restrictions for holding public office and voting, this idea of the mature, developed, and reasoning adult citizen importantly defined who can participate in American politics, and inversely who being regarded as immature, undeveloped, and unreasoning must be wards of some master or legal guardian. But if early America was interested in drawing lines between the independent and the dependent, liberal protestants turned their attention to the development of independent adults—to children's plasticity, their ability to be cultivated, and brought up right into independence that would give them a natural right to citizenship and freedom. Where dependency, however, grouped together children and black adults and women, the issue of developmental capacity became a story about the child that excluded black peoples and often women too, who were believed to be incapable of change.

The peculiar trickiness about the term *child* is that while it came to exclude black children, black peoples continued to be thought of as embodying a perpetual childishness and child-like state. This formulation seems paradoxical. If black peoples are perpetual children than black children should most certainly be children, but this formulation stems from an understanding of "child" as bound up with a notion of future and development, a plasticity that can be shaped into a normative adult citizen. That black peoples were thought to be perpetual children or let's say perpetually childish,

meant black youths could not be said to be a child where *child* implies vulnerability and a capacity for development. Indeed what we have in the racialization of the child is perhaps also a distinction between child and childishness, where the former gets raced white and the latter raced black. All the libidinal, ecstatic, bodily passions and excess associated with a blackness thought to be embodied in black peoples were essential to marking the parameters of childhood and adulthood.²¹ From Tom and Huck escaping through windows into the perfect blackness of darkness or fleeing in the terrifying blackness of darkness to the dark shadows Hawthorne imagines cast over his daughter Una in her “impish” moods to Uncle Tom’s strong, black arms carrying Eva, and to the many black seaman, pirates, “injuns,” black men in the forest, black witches, black strangers—blackness, so often embodied in black peoples, appears as that which colors childhood even as it must inevitably be left behind and transcended as the child develops into adulthood.

²¹ Examples of this idea of blackness as embodied in black peoples and black culture being the necessary playground for normative white America abound from critiques of Harlem as a playground for white bohemians and similar critiques of rap music in white suburban youth culture to the many film depictions of white children growing by way of their temporary but essential exposure (usually via some black mother/mammy figure) black culture [Think *Corina Corina* (1994), *The Secret Life of Bees* (2008) and *The Help* (2011)—all notably set during civil rights movement.] I am thinking here though most particularly Leslie Fiedler’s *Love and Death* and his reading of Huck and Jim on the raft. Fiedler acknowledges the miscegenation in the homoerotic relationship between the white boy and (the still childish) black adult. The relationship Fiedler explains is essential to white American masculine development—for the pariah Huck to finally be able to make a very adult move and “light out for the territories” at the end of the novel. Eric Lott continues this critique in his *Love and Theft*, which thinks about minstrelsy and black face as essential to the crafting of a working class white masculine identity. For examples of blackness in white girlhood, see Elizabeth Abel and Jo’s darkness. This idea of a childish blackness will become particularly important to children’s literature if we think of children’s literature as Fred See does in his discussion of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

Focusing on midcentury concerns with innocence and the narrative (scripts) suggested in toys and things for children, Robin Bernstein offers us a generative way of understanding what I identify as a racialized split between child and childishness. Bernstein suggests that we think of American childhood as a performance that not all bodies can perform. Drawing upon Joseph Roach, Bernstein explains that the performance of childhood preserves violent and racist ideas under the presumably innocuous cover of child innocence. This “racial innocence” depended on the innocent white child body—the body that can suffer²²—so that the bodies of black children seemed antithetical to the role of child. Considered not innocent, not vulnerable and not capable of change, blackness came to define the parameters of child. But as *child* became raced white, Bernstein argues, another role emerged for black youths—the pickanniny. The pickanniny is indeed the antithesis of child; it is an inhuman and insensate creature characterized by its imperviousness to violence and its overwhelming blackness.²³ While not child, the pickanniny with its impish antics is the paragon of a crude childishness. This childishness though entertaining cannot be brought into normative adulthood; pickanninies, never having really been a child with a capacity to feel or develop, grow into grown children, not adults. But their unruliness and the queer contortions associated with their movement and talking make manifest a

²² See Duane, *Suffering Childhood*.

²³ Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Right* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

primitive realm and an uncouth childish sociality that children were thought to occupy only for a time before they developed out of it. Put in spatial terms, childhood was a (neighbor)hood. It is a neighborhood in which some upwardly mobile bodies (the ones who develop and grow up) move out of, but others must remain there and indeed become regarded as natural parts of the childish landscape.

Because *child* (as the one who can leave or rise up out of childhood) is something like a politically efficacious threshold to futurity, adulthood, and citizenship, a large part of artistic, scholarly, and political struggles for black political inclusion have included arguing for and/or proving something like a black childhood. Indeed even Bernstein who compellingly shows how childhood is scripted at the exclusion of black children, argues that Harriet Wilson's mulatta child "Frado is Topsy's true redeemer" because Wilson's narrative claims for Frado a *real* and feeling childhood that Stowe content to let Topsy be the pickanniny *par excellence*, denies the black child.²⁴ Bernstein is not alone in this argument. Claiming a childhood has been a prevailing strategy for black civil rights struggle at least since Frederick Douglass who argued that enslaved black boys were more boys than their coddled white counterparts. Indeed the increased attention to his childhood in his second narrative published in 1855 as opposed to his 1845 narrative may reflect his awareness of the increased political value of the child and of claiming a

²⁴ Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 57.

childhood from which one has developed into manhood. Similarly Harriet Jacobs's 1861 narrative puts a greater emphasis on her protected childhood than Henry Box Brown (1816) gives to either his or his children's childhood.

Inasmuch as the material resources that come with citizenship and incorporation are important, this effort to claim something like a "black child" is understandable, but inasmuch as queer theory, child studies, and children's literature scholars are "wrestling" with the idea that *child* is a narrow construction that crowds out (in part by masking) all sorts of generative impossibilities and queer relations, perhaps we need reconsider the desire to claim for black youth an entry space into the category of the *child*. Challenging the desirability of claiming *child*, *Minor Moves* imagines the generativity of the supplement, of childishness and blackness. It may be that this fighting and movement under the ill-fitting term "child" by those people called children (where those people include white children who could be said to be children, grown black folks who have been constantly thought of as children, and black children who have been rendered invisible and/or otherworldly in this adult child construction) is itself a generative force in the world even if it is not legible or considered only trivial and minor.

Even as Bernstein's particular analysis implies a desire to claim the status of child for black youths, her thinking of childhood as a performance is particularly helpful in this pursuit of moving beyond claiming a fraught conception of *child*. Her analysis is

generative not only because it makes clear that studying black children forces a realization of the constructed-ness of the category *child*, of the fact that not all children have been able to fit into the politically prized story we tell about *child*. But her attention to childhood as a performance also (by implication) invites us to consider, or at least to imagine, the life and movement of all those failed and rejected performances. This is to say we might consider them as more than just “not child” or failed performances of child but as positive articulations of some other play. My project focuses on the depiction of children’s physical movements. I will speak more about what I mean when I say movements in the following sections, but for now I want to point out that I read those gestures as performances. The narratives write these movements as depictions of a childishness which it means to fix, but I read these movements as performative and poetic articulations that speaks back and underneath the national performance of childhood—that narrow and already raced white role that renders these gestures dark, illegible, and useless in the first place.

1.2 Minor | Freedom and Fugitive Ways Out

The performance of child and childhood in America is so tethered to development and nation making that there are serious limits to the stories that the category and performance *child* can tell. By-and-large the story that this notion of child can tell necessitates a move towards independent, self-regulation and proper political incorporation. Indeed the genre associated with the story of the child is the

bildungsroman or “novel of formation.” The *bildungsroman* novel, concerned with the building of the young subject, focuses on a child protagonist who undergoes a series of challenges and in overcoming them becomes progressively refined so as to ultimately reach the end of the novel as (or ready to be) an adult. That the end integration into society is the most important part of the story of child is evident in Hawthorne’s insistence that Pearl (after public acknowledgement of her lineage) promise to develop and in the direct correlations between present actions and future personhood by which Horatio Alger’s boys must abide. What is important here, what is always important when looking at the child, is the child’s future. The American *Bildungsroman* (think *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huck Finn*) links the child’s development and individual freedom (from parents/authorities)—a kind of individual reenactment of the nation’s beginning. The freedom child development promises is a freedom predicated on being developed into a discrete, autonomous, and reasoning man standing and thinking independently on his own two feet. But this story of child as the story of an evolving free adult citizen even as it seems desirable (for the oppressed and captive one) cannot tell the story of black children, of black adults thought to be children, or of the many white children thought of as black in their movement and sociality. The freedom of the singular (while understandably attractive) is a limited (if not untenable) formulation for the minor and dependent, particularly for the enslaved and the fugitive. It eclipses the sociality and mutually dependent practices necessary for the minor’s survival.

For if the development preoccupied story of child fails to account for childish movements (those of children or black peoples thought to be children) as anything but illegible, lifeless nothing, it most certainly cannot imagine precisely what it makes possible. It cannot imagine a radical sociality of dependency and care between the black and child. We may take for example the Underground Railroad. Despite our desire to focus on exceptional figures and reduce the Underground flight in our memory to the upward imperative “follow the north star” or “go north,” the Underground Railroad was not a linear movement of the individual. It was a network of many wayward gestures that could appear childish if not actually performed by children. Jonathan Scheckman provides us with numerous instances of such movements in his research on children in the Underground Railroad. Consider the child Allan Jay sent out to meet a fugitive slave by his abolitionist father because the boy could be seen going into the cornfields without having to give an account of himself, the queerness of the situation being attributed to the general queerness of children. Under the cloak of child, he became the fugitive’s primary companion and guide.²⁵ Or a young white girl exchanging clothes with a light skinned fugitive woman—the two becoming child and black in order to escape in the middle of the day.²⁶ Or how fugitive slaves escaped via a

²⁵ Jonathan Scheckman, *Bound for the Future: Child Heroes of the Underground Railroad* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012), 52. For more on social practices of enslaved, see: Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); and *African American Childhood: Historical Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

raft of fencing and grapevines because once discarded and the pieces sent down river, the remnants left the impression that “it was [only] mischievous boys had done it for pure wantonness.”²⁷ The Underground Railroad was full of people moving like the escaping man, Saul, who the early Underground Railroad conductor Addison Coffin first helped as a young boy. Schectman explains that Saul, “exhausted” in his flight, did not so much “wil[l] himself forward” but “more precisely, he moved himself backward”²⁸ to where he knew there were people upon whom he could rely. Indeed rather than the straight epic line of the singular man on his odyssey, the fugitive moved in many directions and gestures that embraced and depended on others. In the early Underground Railroad, even to know which direction might involve a bodily performance of hugging a tree to feel for a nail, indicating the next part of the route.²⁹ It was not moving as an individual, or in legible and reasonable adult ways that enabled the fugitive’s flight; it was moving with children and in childish gestures that made manifest so many lines out. From the Underground Railroad, alternative models of kinship, sneaking food for others, learning to read in secret communities, circle dances,

²⁶ Schectman, *Bound for the Future*, 98.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

work songs and spirituals, much of what constituted the means of life and expression amongst the enslaved and free people of color was bound up in networks of care and mutual dependence. The notion of independence, of the completely singular and self-reliant individual (an ideal always dependent upon serving dependents) cannot account for the sociality of black and childish minors. Such independence is always already figured at the exclusion of the very social structures, modes of being and expression that black life (like the life of many minors) so generatively (in its exclusion from the free and developed singular stance) offers.

Concerned with what shows up as insignificantly childish (as opposed to say instrumentally valuable in the child), my project embraces the term “minor.” The history of valuing children, celebrating childhood, and claiming child has been largely animated by an underlying valuation of development and future progress—of obtaining some end point—and marking who can and cannot achieve these ends. *Child* always bespeaks the hope of an end development. Though I use the term *child* to describe child characters, my project asks us to consider children not so much as *child* but as emblematic of *minor*. I have chosen to emphasize *minor* rather than *child* because my readings work and play from the idea that what is interesting about these novels is not the end they develop, meaning neither the adult citizens they make, nor the conclusive main points they form, but rather the small and easily ignored ideas stirring about the movements of their still unmade minors. I am interested in their lack, their

waywardness. Importantly I use minor and minority to refer to ways of being in the world that are committed (whether by voluntary embrace or assignment) to the little and insignificant, the obscure parts and the junk.

This shift from the child to the minor is also a shift away from notions of freedom to notions of escape, fugitivity, and a “way out.” Freedom as that which has been denied enslaved persons—indeed as that which according to Toni Morrison, slavery in its shadowy relief illuminates³⁰—has been a hard to negotiate idea in the tradition of black struggle. For on the one hand it is the obvious boon of the disenfranchised, and we see and hear its praise everywhere in the long history of black struggle. On the other hand the American dream of freedom is not an absence of regulation. It is bound up with incorporation and being a citizen, which is to say being subject to law, and this stance is a tricky position for the one who comes to freedom first by way of escaping the law. But where *child* as scholars such as Karen Sanchez-Eppler, Caroline Levander, Anna Mae Duane, and Holly Brewer have shown is bound up with singular development and U.S. notions of freedom, *minor* as I integrate it from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari bespeaks multiplicity and begs a pivotal distinction between freedom and a “way out.”³¹

³⁰ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 38. Morrison states that “Nothing highlighted freedom—if it did not in fact create it—like slavery.”

In their discussion of Franz Kafka and a minor literature, Deleuze and Guattari highlight the narrating ape in Kafka's "A Report to an Academy." The ape draws a difference between freedom and a way out. Recalling being locked up in a cage, the ape explains that

No, freedom was not what I wanted. Only a way out; right or left, or in any direction; I made no other demand; even should the way out prove to be an illusion; the demand was a small one, the disappointment could be no bigger. To get out somewhere, to get out! Only not to stay motionless with raised arms, crushed against a wooden wall.³²

For Deleuze and Guattari the need/desire for a way out is the difference between a minor literature and a major literature. A minor literature written in a major language is not looking for syntax mastery or to be included as "good" by the standards of the major literature. Rather a minor literature revels in its "poverty" of language. It does not want an accuracy of genre and representation; it wants to disrupt language and find an escape. Quoting Kafka on minor literature as a political program, they point out that escape and radical disruption or what they call an absolute deterritorialization can only happen in the underground and subtext of major narratives:

³¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, *Theory and History of Literature*, 30 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

³² Frantz Kafka, "An Address to an Academy," *The Kafka Project.org*, accessed February, 24 2014, <http://www.kafka.org/index.php?aid=161>.

What in great literature goes on down below, constituting a not indispensable cellar of the structure, here takes place in the full light of day, what is there a matter of passing interest for a few, here absorbs everyone no less than as a matter of life and death.³³

I am interested in “the not indispensable cellar” precisely because it fails to be indispensable. What is wanted in the cellar, the dark and lowly narrative holes, of these great works concerned with freedom is not freedom, I argue, but a way out. I call attention to the ape’s styling a way out as a resistance against a “motionless” stay and a “crushing” confinement. He is clear that this way out is not about “lighting out” for new territories [as Twain will make for Huck] or “the spacious feeling of freedom on all sides”; it is not a movement from point a to point b. It is not a movement about occupying a position. He styles movement that would occupy a different position as impossible; the way out, as the ape describes it, demands that he “stop being an ape.” He needed to become not and more than ape, or rather not and more than himself. For Deleuze and Guattari it is this becoming (this deterritorializing from ape) as a way out that a minor literature foregrounds. And indeed while I am not looking at “minor literature,” I argue that in the growing but not developed movements of the minor, what shows up as inconsequential and minor and illegible details, we see evidence of a deterritorializing becoming. In response to the problem of development, the narrowness of *child*, the elusiveness of children, and my ongoing commitment to black social life

³³ Frantz Kafka, *Diaries* (December 25, 1911) Quoted in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, 194.

(over/under social death), I call this becoming—this deterritorializing of development—growth.

1.3 Growth / The White(ness of) Development and a Black(ness of) Growth

The problematic insistence on a perpetually childish black adult, the impossibility of a “black child,” and the illegible (let us say occluded or darkened) movement and fighting of (even white) children underneath the term *child* are all linked to national preoccupations with development. In an American national imaginary where freedom and independence are linked, these bodies can only be imagined as growing rather than developing. Undeveloped, they are thus necessarily dependent. No one more clearly states the problem than Frederick Douglass when in *My Bondage and My Freedom* he describes his boyhood relation to his white master’s son: The young master Tommy “could grow, and become a MAN; I could grow, though I could not become a man, but must remain, all my life, a minor—a mere boy.”³⁴ For Douglass this just growing without becoming “MAN” was a key problem that he intended his narrative to eradicate. His writing illustrated his capacity for becoming a “MAN,” and not just a man. The prefatory note from the African American physician, abolitionist James McCune Smith anoints Douglass (and by extension himself) “a Representative American man—a type of his countrymen,” which Smith explained, meant “a full grown

³⁴ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Project Gutenberg, Ebook (Release date July 1, 2008. Updated January 26, 2013), 238.

man” who has “pass[ed] through every subordinate grade or type, until he reaches the last and highest—manhood.” And having achieved this transcendence and self-development, “Frederick Douglass ... bears upon his person and upon his soul everything that is American.”³⁵ For Douglass and for the Americans, who strive until they reach the last and highest state, to be just growing and always minor is to be unmanned and moored to the “mere” and lowly ground.

Minor Moves though is interested in precisely these minors on the ground, and their just-growing movements are the topic of my inquiry. These movements call attention to the prior though often-occluded force of growth. Indeed they ask us to consider the easily overlooked distinction between *development* and *growth*. Coming from the early English *disvelop* which means “to unfold, unfurl, display, heraldically” and the Latin *dis* and the verb *vello*, which means to unravel, disentangle, unbundle, *development* refers to a process of making visible and legible by straightening and simplifying into a line. The Italian *sviluppare* literally means “to rid free,”³⁶ and indeed development (by way of Locke’s and other enlightenment notions of individual self-cultivation and self-possession³⁷) is integral to U.S. understanding of freedom. For the

³⁵ James McCune Smith, Preface. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Frederick Douglass, 14, Project Gutenberg Ebook, accessed March 19, 2014, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/202/202-h/202-h.htm>.

³⁶ “development, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2014) accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/view/Entry/51434?redirectedFrom=development#eid>.

³⁷ My understanding of enlightenment thinkers and their engagement with the child and childrearing centers on readings of John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (New York: Oxford University Press,

developed individual's right to his labor and self-governance is the animating logic of The Declaration of Independence and continues to constitute the major notes of America's ongoing praise-song for liberty.

Growth, by contrast, is an unruly and additive force. The word with etymological roots in Old Germanic *grô*, meaning "grass," more accurately refers to plant and molecular life, life thought not to have a conscious mind or a capacity to move independently. Growth is not necessarily linear or orderly but often, like grass, rhizomatic.³⁸ Even plants that normally grow up will under a lowered ceiling bend and grow sideways. While always in excess of and not reducible to development, growth is the substance of development (meaning development is not only subtractive but it's

1989) and *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, London, 1690 (released 2004) Project Gutenberg, Ebook (accessed March 3, 2014); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile on Education*, 1762 (released 2004) Project Gutenberg, Ebook (accessed March 2, 2014) and *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right*, trans. G.D.H. Cole, Project Gutenberg, Ebook, <http://ebooks.gutenberg.us/WorldBookLibrary.com/socon.htm> (accessed March 2, 2014); and Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, ed. Hans Aarsleff (Cambridge: University Press, 2001) especially on "Language and Method"; and Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" (1784) Marxist.org <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/enlightenment.htm> (accessed March 4, 2014). For analysis on child in philosophical thought (particularly enlightenment thinkers) see also; David Kennedy, *The Well of Being Subjectivity, and Education*, SUNY Series, Early Childhood Education: Inquiries and Insights (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). Kennedy provides a philosophical interrogation of the problem of the other and intersubjectivity in dealing with what he calls the child within and the child before us; Larry Wolf, "When I Imagine a Child: the Idea of Childhood and the Philosophy of Memory in the Enlightenment," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, The Mind/Body Problem 31, no. 4 (Summer, 1998): 377-401; and Bernadette Baker, *In Perpetual Motion: Theories of Power, Educational History, and the Child* (New York: P. Lang, 2001). Baker mean to give a reading of the theories that turn of the century child development and education theorists were working with. Her work gives in-depth reading of Locke and Rousseau's theories of motions and change and how the child is integral to crafting those theories.

³⁸ "growth. n1 and n2." *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2014) accessed March 1, 2014, http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/search?searchType=dictionary&q=growth&_searchBtn=Search.

particularly subtractive of growth). In modern thought then growth is somewhere between imagination, which Immanuel Kant argued must have its “wings” “clipped” in order to produce legible thought³⁹ and the fecund grounds of the commons, which Locke argued has no value without being developed and cultivated into useful property.⁴⁰

Though the minor is illegible because it is not developed, it may nevertheless be growing. This is to say that rather than lament with Douglass (even though we can understand his lamenting) the “merely growing” this project, like Ishmael Reed’s novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, thinks about “merely growing” or “jesgrew” as a generative movement of resistance and fugitivity.⁴¹ My inquiry moves playfully in the curious articulation of Topsy’s “I spect I growd” existence. When Topsy’s declared that she “[d]on’t think nobody never made [her],” that she “growd,” she baffled and shocked Ophelia, and the statement continues to go before Topsy defining her as a baffling and shocking minstrel configuration. But this articulation of just growing, which has contributed so much to how we have come to regard Topsy as a black lack, sounds the running ethos of *Minor Moves*.

³⁹Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (Part One, The Critique of Aesthetic Judgment) trans. James Creed Meredith, EBook, accessed March 2, 2014 (Stilwell, KS: Digiread.com Publishing, 2005), 100.

⁴⁰ John Locke, “Of Property,” *The Second Treatise of Civil Government*, 1690. Constitution.org, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.constitution.org/jl/2ndtr05.htm>.

⁴¹ Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media), 10.

1.4 Movement / Development and Departure

This illegible nothing, this childish just-growing that always shows up as the nature/predicament of blackness, is my object of study. But such an object presents a problem for study. For if it is indeed lawless, the unclipped wings of the imagination, and the wild commons, it is also impossible to represent, to define and fix, which is to say it is impossible to ever quite see. (A problem the photograph makes clear.)

Constrained always as we are to the representational field, what is needed then is a means of detection—of both sensing and imagining—what cannot wholly be depicted or grasped. When and how does the growth of the minor show up in a representational field? One answer is to identify what aspects of children’s comportment reformers sought to control by the subtractive process of development. Where do the anxieties about failures or interruptions to that development congregate? In childrearing manuals and early education sciences, children’s capacity for speech and movement occupy two of the biggest focuses on proper development. While I attend to what children say in these narratives, I focus in particular on depictions of their physical movements.

I focus on movement because development (of any kind) is figured as a movement. Importantly though development is a particular way of thinking about movement that is concerned with positions and moving from point to point—a

preference as Tim Ingold might point out for *transport* rather than *travel*.⁴² Arising out of modern valorizations of potential and a desire for factory line efficiency, evolutionary supremacy, and imperial expansion, this modern movement has been characterized by various theorists as a position-based movement that is constantly at odds with and concealing movements of departure,⁴³ “wayfareing,”⁴⁴ “errantry,”⁴⁵ and “lines of flight.”⁴⁶ Position-based movements collapse journeys into contained, calculable points and straight lines. They operate under a logic that regards the minor as significant solely for what it *develops* into (once ready to enter the majority). However “movements-of-departure” *grow* in all directions, difference, relations and between. These movements may go all over and not get anywhere. They register as play or trivial, as moments of getting carried away. Looking at the “movements-of-departure,” which I argue litter the asides, breaks, passage ways, corners and undetectable nooks, enables us to imagine that the minor can happen anywhere, that it is precious but common, that it is not without harshness or pain but it is also inseparable from moments of elation, that it not only

⁴² Tim Ingold, “Against Space: Place, Movement, and Knowledge,” in *Being Alive Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, ed. Tim Ingold (New York: Routledge, 2011), 149-152.

⁴³ Liselott Mariett Olsson, *Movement and Experimentation in Young Children’s Learning: Deleuze and Guattari in Early Childhood Education* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1-3.

⁴⁴ Tim Ingold, *Being Alive Essays*, 12 and also 59, 148-151.

⁴⁵ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 11-23.

⁴⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 4.

recalls a past and bespeaks a future, but that it is also up to some things in the present tense.

Reformers in mid 19th-century America concerned with the progress of individual and nation were wary of children's many movements of departure and focused a great deal on the regulation and development of children's physical movements. In laws, pictures, news articles, narratives and other texts, dealt with its anxieties about the always present possibility of a failed development, of a just growing, by socially and legally curtailing the unregulated movements of minors. We can see evidence of that curtailing in the Fugitive Slave Act (which applied to white indentures and labored-out children as well as black slaves), child-rearing manuals like Horace Bushnell's *Christian Nurture*,⁴⁷ anti-truancy rhetoric, orphan trains,⁴⁸ rise of the common school, and anti-child onanism literature.⁴⁹ Bushnell stages an exemplary picture of his Christian nurture (what Richard Brodhead calls "disciplinary intimacy") as an act of controlling the child's physical movements. Where early Puritans dealt with wayward movements of children by swaddling and hanging wrapped children on hooks so as to

⁴⁷ Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1861) Google Books, accessed March 3, 2014, <http://books.google.com/books?id=C9TaShjLB5gC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>(accessed.

⁴⁸For more on the Orphan Trains, see Stephen O'Connor, *Orphan Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001); Marilyn Irvin Holt, *The Orphan Trains: Placing Out in America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

⁴⁹ See Russ Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) and Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Book, 1990).

eliminate their unregulated gestures and touching, Bushnell encouraged parents to constantly but gently correct children's movement, to literally put them into the right and obedient positions. "Take [the child] up then, when the fit is upon him," Bushnell urges, "carry him, stand him on his feet, set him here or there, do just that in him which he refuses to do in himself—all this gently and kindly, as if he were capable of maintaining no issue at all."⁵⁰ For Bushnell the child in this moment was attempting to "lift his will in mutiny, and swell in self asserting obstinacy." If not corrected, this trait would sprout up like weeds of immorality and difficulty in their grown personhood. It was imperative then for parents to pay close attention and serve proper guidance of the child in this young state where, still a seed, the "child had no force" and could be moved.⁵¹

The narratives I look at all reflect these mid 19th-century anxieties about regulating child movement in the service of child development. The narratives style children's physical movements (Pearl stamping her foot or Topsy spinning) as minor moments meant only to communicate a childishness it must abolish in order to restore order and set the child free. These movements are not legible to the adults in the story and indeed cause them much anxiety. Consider Hester Prynne's nervous wondering about her daughter Pearl's movements. Hester is so overcome by Pearl's allover and

⁵⁰ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* 245.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 244.

unpredictable movements that she imagines that Pearl is like some other-worldly witch or “little imp, whose next freak might be to fly up the chimney.”⁵² Or more subtly consider cousin Ophelia’s exasperation not just for Topsy but all the black children in the St. Clare household. After she reluctantly consents to do her antislavery duty by Topsy, a still overwhelmed Ophelia asks her cousin why he needed to purchase Topsy for this experiment when there were tons of other black children already there.

Your house is so full of these little plagues, now, that a body can’t set down their foot without treading on ‘em. I get up in the morning, and find one asleep behind the door, and see one black head poking out from under the table, one lying on the door-mat, — and they are mopping and mowing and grinning between all the railings, and tumbling over that kitchen floor!⁵³

The plague of Topsy, though presented as her blackness is also bound up with a “wild, fantastic” and “[out] of time”⁵⁴ movement. What is repulsive about Topsy is not just her blackness but her wily undeveloped moping and mowing; indeed that movement becomes constitutive of her blackness. Ophelia wants to have the floor clear and stilled. To be certain this unpropitious movement that gets colored as so very black in Topsy is not unrelated to Eva’s disorderly and constant movement on the steamer that Ophelia also found exasperating. These movements whether benignly regarded as play (as in Wilson’s narrative) or more malignantly as plagues and freaks are illegible in these

⁵² Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, accessed March 3, 2014, Kindle, 44.

⁵³ Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 271-2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 271.

narratives and must be contained and resolved under rubrics of childishness and a child that can be developed.

Ultimately I regard depictions of children's physical movements as evidence of a just-growing force that moves underneath and in excess of the narrative development. I take seriously these errant and trivial gestures as interruptions in the narrative that are up to something in the moment rather than as a raw, virgin soil material, out of which the narrative will make something in its end development. As child development and education scholars continue to point out, observations of children's physical movements make clear a constant tension between the linear trajectory of development and the actuality of growing. Children, as early childhood scholar Liselott Olsson explains, learn to walk by experiments in becoming one, moving with, and being carried by other bodies. They do not neatly hit each development marker (i.e. crawl, then toddle). Instead they improvise many between gestures. And these between gestures are not reducible to the crafting of a developed gait, for children, well after they have learned to toddle may still take pleasure in crawling or rolling.⁵⁵ These inefficient moves and gestures, in as much as they involve the child becoming one with the floor, the coffee table, or a person's leg, resist the singular stance of development. Indeed these gestures not only resist the singular stance (and even the "sovereign" strides of the modern *flaneur*) but in children's reveling, they reveal the singular stance (and the *flaneur's*

⁵⁵ Olsson, *Movement and Experimentation*, See Preface.

removed and observant gait⁵⁶) to be a sham. For every gesture is metaphorically and physically dependent on other bodies; to move depends upon leaning into, joining, adding body-to-body, which is to say growing or becoming more than a singular being. When I say become more than a singular being, I mean that when you put a foot down on the ground to take a step, you can only walk by putting your body into the body of the earth, by feeling out the surface, trusting it will carry you and negotiating its changes in terrains. For a moment at least you are not you with your foot you are you with your foot as part of the ground.

This idea of moving by giving up singularity and joining other bodies is a very different understanding of walking from that described by 19th-century physician and author Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. in his "Physiology of Walking." For Holmes walking, though it is one of two "accomplishments of all mankind" (the other being talking),⁵⁷ is a violent encounter with the earth:

Walking, then is a perpetual falling with a perpetual self-recovery. It is a most complex, violent, and perilous operation, which we divest of its extreme danger only by continual practice from a very early period of life.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006).

⁵⁷ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Physiology of Walking," *Pages From An Old Volume of Life in The Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes, 1892*, Unz.org Ebook (accessible March 3, 2014), 121, <http://www.unz.org/Pub/HolmesOliver-1892v08>.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 127. This idea that walking is a battle against the ground and falling perhaps takes its fullest recognition in how dance critic A.K. Volinsky described the art of ballet. In his explanation of dancing *en pointe*, Volinsky provides a reverie for the vertical in which he claims that man's ideal (realized in ballet) is to be "soaring away from the ground and fre[e] . . . of unnecessary supports." Quote from A.K. Volinsky, "From the Book of Exultation: The Vertical: The Fundamental Principle of Classic Dance," *What is Dance?*:

Describing the act of walking at least three times as a matter of “strick[ing] the ground,” Holmes styles walking as a kind of battle that the practiced and mature man conquers. And indeed Frantz Fanon equates his own “stumbl[e]” (after being called a “[d]irty nigger! Or simply, ‘Look, a Negro!’”) as a fall from manhood, from the modern, and as a realization of himself as “an object in the midst of other objects.”⁵⁹ But I am interested here in all those objects the fall brings into awareness and how the fall is not only part of walking, but integral to it. In walking we do not conquer the ground but constantly return and rejoin it. Here children, in their reveling and tumbling, remind us that we need the ground, to lose ourselves, our singularity, our illusions of an independent stance on our own two feet.⁶⁰

If the minor moves us out of the ideological binds of freedom and allows us to consider instead a necessary way out, minor moves, or the physical movements of the minors, of the growing but not developed, allow us to return to the failed performances of childhood. It allows us to think more specifically about departure and fugitive movements of minors on the ground. Animated by/as dependency and growth, the

Readings in Theory and Criticism, ed. Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 255.

⁵⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

⁶⁰ In truth *standing on one's own two feet* makes sense only via its idiomatic authority; for we do not stand on our feet. In the same way we lean not on our hips but with our hips against a wall, we also stand with our feet and on the ground.

movement of the minor is a matter of giving up singular, joining body to body, becoming multiple—with the wall or chair. This idea of giving up singularity and consenting to no longer be a single being is how Édouard Glissant in his discussion of the “vocation” of Diaspora, calls “departure.”⁶¹ Reflecting on the Middle Passage, the hold of the slave ship, and the Africans at the bottom of the ocean, Glissant reminds us that black diaspora was a mixing of bodies, not a loss of identities but of a loss of a singular and individual subject position. Thinking about these childish movements as departure then connects them again to blackness but this time not by way of racist biological assumptions about black primitivism, or recapitulationist narratives that freeze black people in an eternal past, lacking contemporary presence or futurity. Instead childishness and blackness link by way of generativity, by way of an excess that escapes the constraints of a singular independent development. They offer departure not emancipation, not freedom but an on-the-ground and underground, fugitive social of the undeveloped-but-nevertheless growing.

1.5 Four Little Girls | A Minor Note

Fittingly I began this discussion of literary depictions of children’s movements with a photograph. The image here is not merely a convenient visual analogue. Not only are the vertical aspirations of the image, its desire to picture developed black adults

⁶¹ Manthia Diawara, “Conversation with Édouard Glissant Aboard the Queen Mary II,” trans. Christopher Winks. University of Liverpool Black Atlantic Resources. http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/csis-2/blackatlantic/research/Diawara_text_defined.pdf (October 11, 2013). [Original source “Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic” Exhibition Catalogue (2010: Tate Publishing, London)]: 2.

as free American citizens (or at least more than worthy candidates for that citizenship) the legacy of 19th-century formulations of the child as white and emblematic of national citizenship; the image itself, the photographic imagination of manipulating light and dark, of fixing movement for legible development, are also informing 19th-century imaginations of development, person, and race. And indeed the novels I look at have an imagistic imagination. Consider Hawthorne's desire to make romantic pictures, high contrast representations (writing when the lighting is just right for the imagination); Stowe's explicitly stated desire to make "moving pictures"; Wilson's constant attempts to *expose* the abused black child; and Twain's attempt to sketch a "study of a boy" and the constantly disappearing child. These novels while they may be operating in a different medium (textual rather than photographic) are nevertheless operating within a logic of pictures, of developing pictures, building a narrative structure that represents certain truths or reality. In the process of making pictures, of representing, and developing, which is to say of fixing an image so as to make it legible, movement, growth, and embrace can only show up as a blur that is at once a black negative space. It is in this black and negative space—both a nothing and a constitutive element of the picture—that children, women, and black peoples constantly get regulated. Put differently it is in this space that the minor haunts the development with a growth and a life that is moving. It is precisely these childish and minor movements that cannot and

are not supposed to show up in the developed picture except perhaps most benignly as play and most malignantly as a black nothing that my project enables us to consider.

My project invites us to think about the serious business of play and the abundance of nothing. So let us look again at that King photograph, for even there in the dark space above the male youths, the photograph's quest for a singular, adultish, male subject fails. The undevelop-able movements of the childish in this image interrupts (or as Roland Barthes might say, punctures and wounds) the *studium's* stance and its claim for black uplift. For in the blur of these movements emerges the possibility of departure and that attempt to be more than a single being, which Glissant marked as diaspora's vocation. In that hard-to-see second row (a dark hole in the photo's development) are what appear to be the bodies of four young girls.

Where the iconic images of the four little girls who died in the church bombings appear only as four floating obituary photographs of the girl's smiling faces, girls who appear to us only as perfect martyrs, still in their death, their movement, and in the Movement, here we cannot see the girls' faces. They are not looking down in some personal interior isolation nor towards King or even out towards us and the cameras. Rather they turn inward, facing each other. The two on the left face right and the two on the right face left, so that the two in the middle almost have their foreheads touching. We cannot see their whole faces, only snippets of their profiles: an ear, a ponytail. What they are doing is unclear. What is clear is that they are both there and not there. They

are there inasmuch as they appear to be involved in an intense sociality amongst themselves. They are moving and doing things within the image. They are not there though inasmuch as they are not a part of the *studium*. Their turned and dark heads show up as negative space. They are absent from, indeed playing hooky from, the developmental narrative the photograph presents. While these gestures refuse to be schooled, they are not outside of thought or the Movement but rather, like Pearl's touching, Topsy's hooking, Frado's pranks or even Huck's sitting down, they are constitutive of its radical departures and its animating socialites of mutual dependence—of carrying and getting carried away.

The photograph seems to say, "Hey, look; even our children are rational, males, and individuals. And our shepherd is the realization of an American ideal." This proposition while understandable as part of a struggle to secure political representation is a denial of the childish, the female, and the ecstatic movement of these girls. And yet the girls are there, in the depths of the crowd, adding other currents, gestures which invite us to imagine different narratives—of "multiplicity" rather than unity, with a school more interested in swimming together than in graduation. And if we see the image of the crowd as a sea (one that King, almost like Jesus, walks across) then these girls, in addition to the boys call to mind the Middle Passage and the Africans at the bottom of the ocean. The girls allow us to imagine that these Africans are not still or chiseled out statues of man thinking, but rather they move and are moving. And we

must imagine, for they are not fully knowable or transparent. We cannot know what these girls are doing or saying or by any means the full measure of their sociality. They, as they turn into each other, retain a kind of uncouth opacity, the right to which, Glissant argues, is essential for the multiplicity of diaspora's departure, for multiplicity cannot own others physically or intellectually. In this sense the photograph makes clear precisely what a unified development fears, which is that movement blurs and messes with the frame and the recognition of a single subject. It does not erase individuals, but it shows them hauntingly as black and more than—as growing.

1.6 Chapter Break Down

In the first chapter I trace the movements of Pearl in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. In this chapter I establish my reading practice of interpreting the physical gestures of these minor children, and I begin to highlight how such gestures interrupt narrative developments in a way that reveals subtextual articulations in the text. In particular I focus on Pearl's unproductive movements as indicating the serious business of an alternative imaginary at work in Hawthorne's developmental narratives. I argue that Pearl's wild gestures interrupt rituals of development as described by Victor Turner. Her movements are what Édouard Glissant might call "departures," both from the social world of the story (her dancing and screeching in the face of puritanical conventions of proper development) and from Hawthorne's narrative (a break down in the continuity of his metaphors, the economy of his punctuation and the efficacies of his

binary oppositions). Considering the relationship between Hawthorne's developmental desires for his oldest daughter Una and his romantic depictions of fugitive slaves in his essay "Chiefly about War Matters," I think about the relationship between Pearl's departures and the black fugitive who do not appear in Hawthorne's fictive return to colonial America but everywhere litter the 1850 moment in which he wrote his romance.

In chapter two I show how Harriet Beecher Stowe, sharing Hawthorne's faith in order and proper development, also pens Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as the embodiment of a lawlessness (now raced black) that epitomizes the sins of slavery, much as Pearl's lawlessness epitomized the sins of Hester and Dimmesdale's adultery. But in the explicit context of racialized slavery, the fugitive force that Pearl's movements of departure suggest become with Topsy an all the more urgent way out. Highlighting Stowe's allusion to the *corps de ballet*, I read Stowe's antislavery project of "bring[ing Topsy] up right" as a choreographic project and Topsy's movement as improvisational hooks. Turning in the disorder of Stowe's own prose, Topsy's movements not only illuminate how mired both slavery *and* antislavery positions are in notions of physical constraint and discipline, but they also rupture Stowe's narrative investment in development and issue forth evidence of a movement that exceeds the purview of development—a fugitive force that resists notions of social death and that we may, taking our cue from Topsy, call growth.

Reading Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*, I ask how approaching depictions of childish movements as a fugitive force of growth rather than a not-yet developed lack enables a reconsideration of the black radical tradition's relationship to the childish. Attending to Frado's playful pranks, I argue that far from acting as a corrective to Stowe's Topsy as critics have suggested, Frado dances in the same fugitive steps that Ishmael Reed called Topsy's "jes grew" dance. I show how Frado's pranks rattle the symbolic and structural trajectory of the novel and its desire for black uplift. I argue that these pranks presence instead alternative readings that foreground the potential of departing by way of dependency, by way of a mutual caring and an abdication of an independent vertical stance for the potential to get carried (away).

In the conclusion, I focus on the way the illegality of the fugitive and the truant become in Mark Twain's iconic *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* romantic and entertaining acts of "playing hooky." I show how Twain, more comfortable with disorder than his New England and prewar counterparts, attempts to harness (make something of) the physical and imaginative flight childish gestures enable by gendering these gestures male and racing them white, and making such flights fundamental to the crafting of an ideal American. I argue though that the fugitive force of growth continues to show up as black and feminine in the minor moves of crawling, sitting, eating, and groping in the dark, movements with which Huck is infinitely more comfortable than Tom. Comparing and contrasting Tom and Huck's movements and their proximity to

enslaved black peoples, I discuss the relationship between “playing” and “hooky” — between childishness and a minor fugitivity—in a way that begins to consider what it might mean for Civil Rights activists, eighty years later, to call upon black children’s participation in the Movement with flyers that read “Playing Hooky for Freedom.”

2. In Search of Better Pastime | Pearl's Play and Childish Movements of Departure

In the July 30th, 1849 (1/2 past 10 o'clock) entry in his notebook, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote about his daughter and her curious and unnerving relation to his mother, then on her deathbed. The entry is pierced through with Hawthorne's simultaneous awe and horror at Una's eagerness to be in the sick room and then later to play reenact it with her brother Julian. Notably Julian's complicity in the play is not troubling. Of Una, though, Hawthorne writes, "there is something that almost frightens me about the child—I know not whether elfish or angelic, but of all events, supernatural. She steps so boldly into the midst of everything." I begin here where Hawthorne links some supernatural quality of his daughter to her physical movement, her bold steps. Hawthorne goes on to enumerate the many unnatural contradictions in Una's vacillating moods in a manner that leads him to conclude (or confess) that "In short, I now and then catch an aspect of her in which I cannot believe her to be my own human child, but a spirit strangely mingled with good and evil haunting the house where I dwell."¹

T. Walter Herbert Jr. argues that Pearl—the offspring, in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) of Hester Prynne and Minister Dimmesdale's unforgivable act of adultery—represents Hawthorne's literary attempt to explore and refigure the problem of his oldest daughter

¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, "[Monday], July 30th, [1849], 1/2 past 10 o'clock" in *The Business of Reflection: Hawthorne in His Notebooks*, ed. Robert Milder and Randall Fuller (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009), 112.

Una's haunting gestures and wayward development.² Reading Hawthorne's observations of Una, Herbert argues that Hawthorne found the child's masculine boldness and unshrinking "comprehension of everything" unnerving. Although it was mixed with what he saw as a more gender appropriate "tenderness, wisdom, and the finest essence of delicacy,"³ the capricious and "lusty cries" of the female child even upon birth constantly troubled Hawthorne and challenged the likelihood that Una would grow into her Spenserian namesake. Una, "The Maiden of Holiness" in the *Faerie Queene*, was a model of feminine purity and grace. She was the counterpart to the "shape shifting monster Duessa" who was intelligent, aggressive, and full of sexuality. Una is supposed to be the good and desirable half of "the polar tension between the derivative position of the domestic angel and the tormented assertion by women of the autonomy men increasingly claimed for themselves."⁴ But Hawthorne found that his daughter moved differently from the Spenserian ideal he and his wife had imagined for her. The turn of her moods and limbs suggested more of that dark, female monster Duessa than Una. Struggling under the sign of her name, Una Hawthorne's gestures were often frustrated they appeared to Hawthorne as unreal. To him they made her

² T. Walter Herbert, Jr., "Nathaniel Hawthorne, Una Hawthorne, and *The Scarlet Letter*: Interactive Selfhood and the Cultural Construction of Gender," in *The Scarlet Letter and Other Writings*, A Norton Critical Edition, ed. Leland s. Person (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 522-40.

³ Herbert, (paraphrasing Hawthorne), 523.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 525.

maybe elf, maybe angel, but definitely a spirit, terrifying and haunting the structures of his dwelling. Hebert argues that in Pearl Hawthorne tries to naturalize the feminine gender role that Una's movements resist:

... the conception of gender as a natural essence supports Pearl's transformation [at the end of the narrative] even as it structures Hawthorne's diagnosis of the aberration he saw in Una, which he elaborates in detail as Pearl goes through the therapeutic process it envisions for her.⁵

Hawthorne pens Pearl as a developmental problem of lawless "unfeminine" growth, which the narrative development will resolve that problem by bringing the child into a gender appropriate adulthood. "In Pearl," Herbert points out "these unearthly contradictions are resolved,"⁶ but importantly Hawthorne's attempt to write his daughter into a normative development did not save Una who continued to display assertions of will and a desire to move against her father's words.

Herbert's reading of Pearl as a literary enactment of therapeutic reform enables us to think about *The Scarlet Letter* as an experiment in bringing up Pearl (and by extension Una). That is to say that while not a *bildungsroman*, it allows us to see the way development is central to the narrative and to its conception of freedom. Indeed when Dimmesdale confesses his part in the adultery and his relation to Pearl, the "spell [is] broken"; Pearl is freed. And suddenly all her "sympathies" are "developed." She is free now to cry and to "pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor

⁵ Ibid., 530.

⁶ Ibid., 532.

forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it.”⁷ And having made this pledge, the narrative makes her rich and allows her finally to depart from this Puritanical site of her oppression. Among many, the implication here is that the Pearl we see skipping about most of the narrative is an odd, unfeminine creature arrested in her development. (Indeed she cannot properly recite her catechism.) Yet frozen as she is in her development, Pearl’s body and attention constantly move and escape arrest. In this chapter I focus on Pearl’s un-development, her just growing minor gestures—all that disturbed Hawthorne in his observations of Una and that he meant to fix in Pearl.

Hawthorne styles his narrative as a romantic realm in which Pearl (Una’s literary avatar) works through these childish gestures and queer growth so that she can ultimately be incorporated back into normative and real order. In this way Hawthorne imagines his narrative to be something of what Victor Turner identified as the liminal space—the bush, the forest, the (no)place—apart from the everyday and societal spaces. In ritual, a society’s youths separate from the rest of the community and enter a liminal space in which they encounter chaos and go through some testing acts, so that they can then reenter society more thoroughly initiated as a full participant—what in a modern and western tradition we might call an adult. By the end of the narrative development, both Pearl and Una are supposed to come into society as adults—as the women their society (or at least their father) expects them to be. I argue though that Pearl’s gestures

⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*. EBook (Kindle Edition), 121.

interrupt this ritual drama of development even as Hawthorne means for her to be brought up out of the spell of impishness and to be freed and developed in the public sphere. Her gestures interrupt the narrative's symbolic developments of chains, isolation, and independence, and indeed not unlike Stowe who having brought her impossible to raise black child up, cannot imagine or abide her. Hawthorne must send Pearl across the Atlantic just as Stowe banishes Topsy (though the former to Europe and the latter to Africa).

Pearl's movements in the liminal space are movements of departure, which is to say they are movements not concerned with keeping or gaining a particular location. They are not in the service of her development, but rather are constantly just growing and joining body to body. Her movements may not help her develop into the (desired) subject, but they are always becoming. Part of what haunted Hawthorne about his own daughter was her ability to shift not only from mood to mood, but to become, in her playing gestures, a dying woman, then nursing daughter-in-law, then doctor, and once again the sick grandmamma, "groan[ing], and speak[ing] with difficulty and mov[ing] herself feebly . . . recalling the scene of yesterday . . . with a frightful distinctness."⁸ This constant becoming—the deterritorializing of development that I call growth—exceeds Hawthorne's narrative designs. For even as Hawthorne's narrative development breaks the spell and brings Pearl and Una into normative development at last, her just growing

⁸ Hawthorne. "[Monday]," 113.

movements have already in their embrace interrupted his symbolic order of oppositions—black and white; dark and light; in and out—and they have made room for other colors and relations. Particularly they make room for or constantly suggest that outside societal incorporation there is not only the solitude of the abject or the solitude of the enlightened individual standing apart from the common and normative, but that there is on the margin also a sociality of the undeveloped—the not real wild and colorful objects—a sociality of the enchained and mutually dependent.

Like the other literary children's movement on which I focus, Pearl's movements challenge the notion of the singular, independent, free individual. A rogue spirit, she nevertheless brings bodies together; she grows and increases even if she does not develop. Her just growing and departing gestures, particularly once she enters the space of the market and the square, articulate a different and radical narrative about what it means to be bonded to and dependent, which embraces the dark other in a publically feminine holding that Hawthorne would have disdained.

2.1 *We Wayfarers*

The narrative represents Pearl's movements differently from the movements of the other characters (except at times Mistress Hibbins, the governor's eccentric sister whom the town regards as a witch). Where most characters seem to appear and disappear from a particular site, the narrative spends time describing Pearl's movements between and about various places. Pearl moves among locations and contrasts in the

grey and colorful realm that haunt the black and white/shadow and light landscape of Hawthorne's antebellum imagining of Puritan society. Her movements between binaries and fixed points challenge the dualism at work both in the moral structure of the Puritan society and in the narrative's aesthetic design. The narrative works to contain that threat by marking this differently moving Pearl unreal, denying her corporeality, and literally taking her movements off the ground. Regardless of this tendency, if not to some degree by way of it, Pearl always touches the ground. She epitomizes what Tim Ingold calls a "wayfarer." For Ingold the wayfarer moves about and with the ground, the light, the air. Wayfaring is not about delimiting and occupying (developed) spaces. It is about living and dwelling and as such the lines of the wayfayer not only zigzag but they loop and knot and return and indeed even break two dimensions and go up and down.⁹ A wayfarer lives in intimate relation to the ground and indeed the ground and earth are so intimately bound up with Pearl it may be that only in Pearl's gestures is Hawthorne able to imagine a ground in the narrative at all.

2.2 Buildings and Binaries

There, at the hour where the magic of moonlight kisses a "familiar room, falling so white upon the carpet, and showing all its figures so distinctly—making every object so minutely visible, yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility—is a medium most

⁹ Tim Ingold, "Against Space: Place, Movement, and Knowledge," in *Being Alive Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 149-152.

suitable for a romance-writer....” According to Hawthorne’s Custom House narrator, who writes the story of the scarlet letter, it is in the space and places where the uncanny meets the familiar that romance arises. “[T]he floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other.”¹⁰ This statement is the novel’s primary aesthetic principle. *The Scarlet Letter* depends on appeals to contrasts, binaries, mirrors, and the juxtaposition of the real and unreal. This appeal to symbolic (particularly allegorical) contrasts is everywhere in the novel. We can see it in Hawthorne’s repeated juxtaposition of light and darkness, in and out, bleak and ornate.

This romantic appeal to contrasts finds a particularly strong home in the narrative because Hawthorne styles his characters and their puritanical social-religious order as relying on moral and social extremes (even when the presence of contradictions would insist on in-betweens). The characters voice or endorse a dualistic order of things and occupy binary positions throughout the story. From the second scene in which the rough, old woman complains that in order to match the vile nature of the crime, Hester’s penitential “A” ought to be crafted out of her menstrual rags rather than fine threads to Dimmesdale’s fiendish desire to taint the pure and white with a whisper of dark sinfulness, the town articulates their beliefs and desires in dualistic terms. Things are

¹⁰ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 15.

either good or bad. If you do not like or live in white you must be reveling in black. Justice is here the neat alignment of these binaries. Justice is when white is good and attracts light and happiness and black is bad and attracts dark and misfortune. But as anthropologist Victor Turner explains, such dualistic thinking is the tricky constriction of society: "Binariness and arbitrariness tend to go together," Turner explains.¹¹ They are "often seductively elegant, a *frisson* for our cognitive faculties." However, binaries freeze symbols' signifying play, reduce their multitude of meanings to two diametrically opposed ones, and remove them "from the complex continuously changing social life, murky or glinting with desire and feeling, which is its distinctive milieu and context, and imparts to it a dualistic *rigor mortis*."¹² These binaries stiffen the movements of human life to the point in which the body or symbol is merely a location to be occupied. This stiff and dead but definable and occupiable point is what Tim Ingold calls "space." It is the reduction of physical, mental, political, emotional lines into points and segments in which life must take place without ever exceeding these parameters. The problem here is that life always escapes; there is under the whiteness implied in Pearl's name, a wild, red bird of paradise moving under the logic of white angels and black devils, with which Hawthorne's Puritans (but also he and his 1850s readers) see the world.

¹¹ Victor W. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 23.

¹² *Ibid.*

2.3 Pearl's Flight

Within the narrative's general tension between occupying a public space with a private sin (Dimmesdale) and occupying a private space as a result of a public embrace of sin (Hester's), the narrator and the adult characters struggle with the more removed and pointed challenge of how to definitively place Pearl's life within the stiff binary order of the Puritan society. Always moving, always many, Pearl's capacity for departure is one of the key attributes associated with her character, but when adults in the novel, the narrator included, bear witness to Pearl's departures, they see only erratic movements and disorder. For Pearl is, as her mother fears, "a being whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder, or with an order peculiar to themselves, amidst which the point of variety and arrangement was difficult or impossible to be discovered"¹³ Whether or not Pearl is really the embodiment of disorder (or whether or not disorder can be figured in a body), the fear here is that she is not legible. The fear is that Pearl's mode of being "lacked reference and adaptation to the world into which she was born." The fear is that Hester "could only account for the child's character—and even then most vaguely and imperfectly" as the result of the child having imbibed something deeply impure, wrong and other than the Puritan society. For "the rays" of the "unborn infant's" "moral life," "however white and clear originally, ... had taken the deep stains of crimson and gold, the fiery luster, the black

¹³ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 40.

shadow, and the untempered light of the intervening substance.”¹⁴ Even though Hester acknowledges that there may be some apposite order at work in Pearl’s nature, she (and the other characters) assent to a binary understanding of natures as innocent or “deeply impure.” Tuner acknowledges this reliance on binaries as part of the “normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses.”¹⁵ A key aspect to being a part of a social structure, a family, a clan or nation is consenting to the reduction of the dynamic nature of symbols and actions, or the containing and flattening of the *limen*. Turner describes the *limen* as the margins, the “betwixt and between” essential to his discussion of *liminality*, *liminoid* and antistructure, in which normative order is disrupted, rearranged in all type of monstrous and innovative ways. While the liminal, Turner argues, is important for tribal ritual and rites of passage, it must be contained to the rite and incorporated into a distinct aspect of the social structure. It must remain submissive to the social structure. The inclination to suspend Pearl in a binary order, even at the acknowledgment that something else might be at play, is an inclination to contain, if not instrumentalize, her monstrous otherness. It is an inclination to preserve and reinforce the normative structure rather than recognize the possibility of an antistructure.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 44.

Not being legible in the reigning social order, the narrative consistently defines Pearl's whole nature as opposite; the townspeople envision Pearl always as something diametrically opposed and other from themselves. They see themselves as having a firm stance on the ground of the world the narrative has created, so Pearl becomes loose and fancy. They attempt to rhetorically contain Pearl in the air. Both the narrator and other characters typically describe Pearl by comparing her to a nonhuman creature. Although the creatures range from other worldly beings (usually elves and sprites) and the pure elements (usually light and fire) to animals (always birds), there is a shared quality of weightlessness and airiness to creatures that supposedly "mould" Pearl and inform her shape and being. Particularly in her play, she is an "airy sprite, which after playing its fantastic sports for a little while upon the cottage floor, would flit away."¹⁶ Her smile has a "sprite-like intelligence" that pierces her "play"¹⁷ She is also referred to as "elf," by the magistrates, her mother, the narrator and Hawthorne who includes the name "elf-child" in his chapter titles. She is an "imp of evil, emblem and product of sin" who has "no right among christened infants."¹⁸ Her "gesticulations" are "humoursome" like that "of a little imp, whose next freak might be to fly up the chimney."¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., 41.

¹⁷ Ibid., 43.

¹⁸ Ibid., 42.

¹⁹ Ibid., 44.

It is this freak of flight, of being far above the earth, on the rooftops and in the sky that these diminutive addresses work to express. As such, Pearl is perhaps most often compared to a bird in flight. When she comes into town, she is described as a “little bird of scarlet plumage”²⁰ and then again as a “wild tropical bird of rich plumage.”²¹ In these two instances her rich red garb contributes greatly to the image, but it is an image that comes alive through her movement. Precisely what makes her “the scarlet letter in another form: the scarlet letter endowed with life!”²² is that she moves about in these red garments; she animates them with dance like a flickering flame. Elsewhere the narrative is clear that she “fl[ies] away, like a bird”²³ and “flit[s] with a bird-like movement, rather than walk[s] by her mother’s side.”²⁴ Pearl’s “bird-like motion” is evident in the market against the official and bleak atmosphere. There amongst the people she “flew” to whatever and whomever (including the Indian and the Spanish sailor) interested her. “While the procession passed, the child was uneasy, fluttering up and down, like a bird on the point of taking flight,”²⁵ but nevertheless in her play, “[s]he made the somber crowd cheerful by her erratic and glistening ray, even

²⁰ Ibid., 49.

²¹ Ibid., 50.

²² Ibid., 45.

²³ Ibid., 78.

²⁴ Ibid., 109.

²⁵ Ibid., 114.

as a bird of bright plumage illuminates a whole tree of dusky foliage by darting to and fro....”²⁶ And finally “the child, with the bird-like motion, which was one of her characteristics, flew to [Dimmesdale], and clasped her arms about his knees” in the market, which spurs him on in making his climatic confession and embrace of Hester and Pearl.²⁷

Importantly in these descriptions of Pearl in the air, *air* does not refer to some aspect of nature in which we all move, or the sky, or clouds, or any part of the present and here earth. Rather, air functions allegorically in a parallel to what Ingold argues has become negative or invisible “space” in the wake of modern attempts to define and contain the movement of life within binary constructed segments. This negative in between might also be viewed by Turner as the monstrous topsy-turvy of antistructure and liminal that ultimately must be “put into the service of normativeness almost as soon as it appears.”²⁸ The air is an idea, a realm (much like how the romantic and literary are realms in which Hawthorne can see other things and imagine a cure for his daughter). *Air* is signaled by a geographical and natural sign as if to imply its naturalness, but it is socially, politically and morally delineated. It is a plotted and implicitly policed negative space.

²⁶ Ibid., 116.

²⁷ Ibid., 119.

²⁸ Turner, 44-5.

In using a rhetoric that relegates her forms of movement and being to the groundless and unreal, to the air, the Puritans and the narrator seemingly prevent a liminal romp in the forest and reinforce their parameters of real, acceptable, and normal. What they prevent is not necessarily the forest, but the romp—the movement that would muddy the boundaries between the normative real and the non-normative that gets read as fantasy or other-worldly. By placing her in the air or in an enchanted realm, they assign her whole being to this other realm; they contain her by making her physically as well as symbolically stiff.

In the normative structure, Turner argues, “[t]he rules of togetherness are known and shared.” Only in the liminal space of rites or saturnalia is it okay for this togetherness to be broken, for some elements not to share in the same rules. Pearl’s seeming abdication of the shared rules makes her a liminal or saturnalia object, both of which in the festival-less and adolescent less Puritanical society have a limited place of expression. It is in the night air and in the dark of the forest ruled by Hawthorne’s infamously elusive “Black Man” where “the bizarre becomes the normal, and where through the loosening of connections between elements customarily bound together in certain combinations, ... scramble[s] and recombine[s] in monstrous, fantastic, and unnatural shapes.”²⁹ These realms are figured as distinctly separate places and so the notion of origination and travel becomes extremely important. The danger of Pearl is

²⁹ Ibid., 42.

that she insists on what Ingold calls wayfaring. To wayfare is to live and find one's existence in movement. Ingold makes a distinction between "transport" and "wayfaring." The former he sees as a modern inversion and reduction of the latter. Transport is interested only in occupying a position, in getting from A to B. In the growing parlance of modernity, the positioned-based movement from A to B becomes synonymous with movement in general, but Ingold parses out this conflation in order to highlight "wayfaring" as movement that constantly leaves and leans into; it forgoes position. In describing and circumscribing Pearl within the air, as a creature of air, the narrative reduces her wayfaring to a simple matter of transport.

That these depictions of Pearl as a creature in the air are meant to capture both something enigmatic about Pearl's movement and to describe Pearl's wayfaring as enigmatic and nonhuman is perhaps most clearly articulated at the governor's house. At his mansion, Governor Wilson watches Pearl "capering down the hall so airily, that old Mr. Wilson raised a question whether even her tiptoes touched the floor." The question is raised, but the questioning and considering remain only in his thoughts. What he says aloud is not a question at all, but a definitive statement. Aloud, he says to Dimmesdale, "The little baggage hath witchcraft in her, I profess. . . . She needs no old woman's broomstick to fly withal."³⁰ What was curious, speculate, liminal, experimental, and in-between—potentially capable of wandering off and joining some

³⁰ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 52.

other order—has been contained by declaration, a profession of the unreal or other-worldly. Specifically this view of Pearl takes her off the ground. She is air, airy, and moves airily. There is no connection between her toes and the ground. And for the governor, and by proxy the rest of the town, this seeming capacity to fly (and without a broom at that) proves Pearl has “witchcraft in her.” Indeed it proves, as Mistress Hibbins suggests later, that her father is “*The Prince of Air*,” a pseudonym for the devil, and a fitting one that likens Pearl in one swoop with both evil and a dark, unreal, nothing.

In this passage a raised question becomes a matter of profession (before anyone ever hears or can make witness to that question). It is as if in speculation, Pearl *is*. Similarly when considering the possibility that her daughter might be normal and good, Hester puts the question as such: “Is the imp altogether evil? Hath she affections?”³¹ This question contains a foregone conclusion. She may have some affection in her, but she *is* an imp. And though between her mother and the town, the specific nature of what is inside Pearl seems highly contested, the logic is the same. Speculating may seem open to limitless possibilities, but there is in the wondering, a declaration, a quick recourse to the unreal, the other realm that curtails the speculative wandering off that might have taken place here. Rhetorically the declaration and the description circumscribe the object (Pearl and her movements) so that even as we consider her

³¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

oddity and her disorder or different order, we have also already neatly held it at a distance and contained it within an appropriate space.

This designation of “imp” draws a divide between good and bad; normal and queer; child and freak in which all of the former are collapsed into each other just as all the latter are clasped into each other. When the magistrate questions her, he asks Pearl outright, “Art thou a Christian child—ha? Dost know thy catechism? Or art thou one of those naughty elfs or fairies whom we thought to have left behind us, with other relics of Papistry, in merry old England?”³² There are only two positions. Pearl is either/or; child or elf/fairy; here or one of those “left behind us” in the old world of “merry old England”; catechized or naughty; Christian or relic of the Papistry. “Child” comes to stand for Christian, catechized, and present; it comes to stand for being makeable and disciplined. It comes to be just that—a position in which one must stand and stay.

That “elf” comes to stand for everything fantastical, old, and left behind suggests that the declarations made elsewhere that Pearl *is* an elf or an imp are not just metaphorical descriptions used to convey a visceral sense of the aesthetic quality of her movements. Rather that “elf” comes to stand for a whole nexus of remainders and repudiated qualities suggests that these descriptions are less descriptions *of* Pearl and more descriptions put *on* her in order to fit her into one of these loaded social spaces. Such naming creates what Susan P. Casteras refers to as the “grounds of unreality and

³² Ibid., 49.

fantasy.” In her discussion of Victorian fairy images, Casteras argues that assigning “wings” to otherwise romantic images of innocent children allowed artists and viewers to suspend their responsibility to the child. “In *fairyland*, images of not-quite children could be posed in all manners of trauma inducing sexual acts.”³³ Here the comparisons of Pearl to ungrounded, nonhuman entities, whether they be in the affectionate nicknames or near-curses, function in an analogous manner to “wings.” They do what they can to place the scene of this child’s difference and social isolation in a world purged of real pain, or bodily relation to the world for that matter, and thus devoid of any “pressure of feeling.” This recurring rhetorical recourse to the other world, the airy, and flying relegates Pearl’s movements and her existence safely to “fairyland,” a spatial designation that is wholly other and oppositional to the Puritan town.

The scene in which Hester sees Pearl’s reflection in the ceiling mirror at the Governor’s mansion exemplifies how the airy descriptions spatially contain Pearl within a seemingly discrete realm. By way of mirrors, Hester can truly describe the image of Pearl as a removed other. For a moment, Hester casts all that concerns her about Pearl—all that she wants to contain—as only a reflection and created image:

[t]hat look of naughty merriment was likewise reflected in the mirror, with so much breadth and intensity of effect, that it made Hester Prynne feel as if it could not be the

³³ Susan P. Casteras, “Winged Fantasies: Constructions of Childhood, Innocence, Adolescence, and Sexuality in Victorian Fairy Painting,” in *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood Between Rousseau and Freud*, ed. Marilyn R. Brown (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 138 (emphasis added).

image of her own child, but of an imp who was seeking to mould itself into Pearl's shape.³⁴

The imp Pearl must be a negative inversion of "her own child." Pearl's impishness must be something foreign, an artifice or a demon; Hester imagines the image as something over there that is trying to take hold of and mould the original, true, non-impish Pearl over here, with and on the same spot as Hester, the governor, and the minister. And it is only further telling that this mirror and thus the reflection should be so high up at the ceiling that they have to look up. It is as if the naughty imp Pearl does indeed satisfy Hester's early imaginative speculation, "freak" up the chimney, and fly far above their heads and the ground, disconnected and haunting everything all in one move.

In the rigid mirror understanding of the order of things, we must see Pearl as airy and nonhuman. For she is both at home and one with the light and yet seemingly disconnected from her heavenly father who is the Light. She both glows with an inner fire, and desires, nonetheless, to embrace, without fear, the Black Man. She is at any moment ruthless and then strangely compassionate and tender. She is earnest and bold in her disposition and yet constantly rich in hue and ornament in her frock. She is in the market by day wanting to act as she does in the forest and at night. She is being "raised" and yet is amenable to no other rules but her own seeming caprice. She is playful and colorful rather than black or white. In this light, Pearl is too much and too

³⁴ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 47.

“many” to be legible within the binary logic that animates the romance. For indeed as Hester notes, “in this one child there were many children.”³⁵

2.4 Membering the Ground

It does not take long to realize the irony of the rhetorical tendency to put Pearl in the air. For Pearl is nearly the only character whose movements are ever described in a way that suggests contact with a ground, a body, or force other than her own. Characters seem to be transported automatically from point to point. Even if we know they must have traversed some intervening space, they do not walk, let alone run or skip. I focus here on the chapter entitled, “The Governor’s Hall,” precisely because though it describes an important journey to town, it frames the actual movement as subsidiary and inconsequential if visible at all. Outside of the very end of the chapter when Hester ominously sees Pearl reflected back to her as an elf creature, the chapter seems uneventful, full of exposition. The title “The Governor’s Hall” is oddly suggestive of the seeming lack of action and movement particular to this chapter. The drama with the governor and the minister (the interview they have in order to determine how fit Hester is to raise Pearl given Hester’s position as a marked, sinful woman) does not actually take place until the following chapter, and the primary action of the first third to half of this chapter is Hester and Pearl’s journey to the governor’s mansion. The title, however, has already collapsed that movement within a focus on a distinct position.

³⁵ Ibid., 40.

This first third of the chapter and the journey however reveal an enormous amount of motion and action, which might not be easily described in terms of the forward moving plot. It exists in Pearl's movements as a wayfaring alternative to Hester's point-to-point movement. The opening reads as follows:

Full of concern, therefore.....Hester Prynne set forth from her solitary cottage. Little Pearl, of course, was her companion. She was now of an age to run lightly along by her mother's side, and, constantly in motion from morn till sunset, could have accomplished a much longer journey than that before her. Often, nevertheless, more from caprice than necessity, she demanded to be taken up in arms: but was soon as imperious to be let down again, and frisked onward before Hester on the grassy pathway, with many a harmless trip and tumble.³⁶

While Hawthorne describes both Hester and Pearl as wayfarers, and they travel always together, it is only Pearl who touches the ground. Hester, by contrast, "went one day to the mansion of Governor Bellingham." The descriptions of Hester's movements are stark, which make her movements appear economical and purpose driven. She "went" to the mansion. She "approache[d] the door. Hester, with Pearl, "set forth from" and then "reached the dwelling." Her movement here is only a suggestion in as much as she was at one point and is now at another. While the scene shows mother and child standing before the door knocker, we do not see Hester knock or pound. She does not make contact, but rather "give[s] a summons." Similarly, although she states that she will enter the house, the narration describes the movement passively, "so the mother and little Pearl were admitted into the hall of entrance." The passive constructions used

³⁶ Ibid., 45.

in describing Hester's movements deemphasize the movement and highlight the position to which she has moved. They moor her presence, even her arrival, her positioning or lack of positioning to a particular place.

Although there is in this scene a narrative goal and destination (i.e. they need to go to the governor's house in order to determine how fit Hester is to raise Pearl), the comparative flourish and attention given to Pearl's constant motion suggests that something else is at work, something other than just the journey from house to house or scene to scene. Taking place from sun up to sun down and being capable of more, her movements are in excess of what is needed and yet instrumental to both the trip and the narrative. In this scene, Pearl is up, she is down, she is "frisk[ing]," "trip[ping]," and "tumb[ing]." In this one short chapter, Pearl also "stamp[s] her foot," "shake[s] her little hand with a variety," "rush[es] at the knot of her enemies, and put[s] them all to flight," "caper[s] and dance[s]," and of course "r[uns]." The picture of Pearl's constant motion garners more attention than the nature of Hester's movements about which we hear little except in contrast to Pearl's movement.

With wayfaring, life is permeable and happens in movement and in a multitude of ecological connections and relations rather than individual, spatially-delimited stages, spaces, and proper points. Ingold's use of Deleuze and Guatarri's "line of flight" suggests a notion of making contact with the ground that one could easily describe as taking off, although in a real sense, we might upon close attention come to understand

this “taking off” as actually a “giving” and a “giving in.” For Ingold’s notion of wayfaring is also a matter of perception in which to perceive, an “achievement not of a mind in a body” but of a whole organism, “implies” movement. “[T]o be sentient... is to *open up to a world, to yield to its embrace* and to resonate in one’s inner being to its illuminations and reverberations. Bathed in light, submerged in sound and rapt in feeling.”³⁷ Pearl’s movement creates just this type of groundedness in which she is both taking off and giving in.

It is because of Pearl’s wayfaring that there is any such thing as the grassy margins of the street in which the puritanical children play and taunt. It is through Pearl that there is any before or around or about Hester. It is in her foot hitting the ground that there is a ground. Without this attention there would be the “solitary cottage” and the great “mansion” flushed side by side, two extreme positions that demarcate the parameters of the town (physically and socially). The centrality of Pearl’s grounding movement challenges scholar John Rowe’s assertion that the first twelve chapters are merely discrete images in tableaux. This tableaux structure is perhaps a part of the narrative design, but everywhere Pearl insists on a ground that interrupts the discrete, discloses secrets and margins, and brings locations into relation. Even before she could walk, her impish play is what creates the floor of the interior cottage space. It

³⁷ Tim Ingold. “Prologue,” in *Being Alive Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 12 (emphasis added).

is the only description of the cottage interior, which is otherwise described by its outward visage and the threshold that Hester stands in. Hester floats about the cottage as if it were a pure allegory for the distanced and dark interior space of her outcast mind and thoughts. Pearl's play gives the cottage a floor, albeit a "darksome" one. Her play not only suggests some place to dwell, but (in a very Heideggerian formulation) it is the dwelling that builds a place in which to move and live. Following and paying attention to Pearl disrupts the natural juxtaposition of these two extremes—the cottage (and its suggestions of isolation, humility, female simplicity, and interiority) and the mansion (with its suggestions of masculine, ornate, showy, state power). With her movements we find that whole "journ[ies]" and even longer ones lie between and about these places. We encounter the possibility of action, movements, battles won, encounters made, and dances taken place.

Pearl's movements connect with and bring the narrative to several grounds over the course of the novel. As I have mentioned, Pearl's "radiance"³⁸ and her "fantastic sports"³⁹ happen on and make present the "darksome cottage floor."⁴⁰ Similarly—though the minister and Roger Chillingworth (Hester's estranged and returned legal husband) talk about the graveyard and the weeds that Chillingworth collected there—

³⁸ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

the earth stays almost wholly within their dialogue, and for Dimmesdale safely behind the window frame, until they gaze off at a distance to watch Pearl and her mother. Pearl breaks from the contained space of “the footpath that traversed the enclosure” and begins to “ski[p] irreverently from one grave to another.” Her indecorous movement brings to the narrative not just the graveyard, but also the individual tombs (now close enough to skip over) and particularly the “tombstone of a departed worthy—perhaps of Isaac Johnson himself” whose tombstone she “began to dance upon.”⁴¹ Among other landscapes that Pearl touches in her movement are “the moist margin of the sea” where she went “pattering” with her “small white feet,”⁴² “the margin of the brook” which she not only talked to but “lightly danc[ed] upon,”⁴³ the advancing tide and the crowded market place that carried her zigzagging movements. Sea-weed, birds, birch-bark, snail shells, stones, rocks, grass, flowers, horse-shoe, jelly-fish, the white sea foam, and prickly burrs are all objects and parts of the earth that Pearl and her touch animate and are animated by as they bring it into the narrative.

If the “essence of what it means to dwell,” what it means to be a “perceiver-producer,” a wayfarer is “to open up to a world, to yield to its embrace, and resonate in one’s inner being to its illuminations and reverberations,” Hawthorne’s depiction of

⁴¹ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 60-1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 102.

Pearl and her movements, even as it is something he means to fix, might be a quintessential depiction of wayfaring as “a mode by which living beings inhabit the earth.” This opening up to the world is not merely a matter of being in a more natural place.⁴⁴ It is a manner by which one relates to the environment around them. For Hester and Pearl both travel into the market, the governor’s house, and the graveyard. They both go into the forest, but it is Pearl’s movements that attempt to join and move with the forest ground, the trees, the brooks, and even the light.

Perhaps the clearest example of this difference occurs when the two are on their way to meet the minister in the secluded and secret space the forest offers. While they are walking in the forest Hester and Pearl take note of the ray of sunlight that pierces through the canopy of leaves. Even as they approach the light, it always seems in advance of them. It eludes them and leaves them in shadow. Pearl announces her desire to chase and join the sunlight, which she is certain will embrace her. She left her mother behind, ran at a great pace, and “did actually catch the sunshine, and stood laughing in the midst of it, all brightened by its splendor, and scintillating with the vivacity excited by rapid motion. The light lingered about the lonely child, as if glad of such a playmate.” Even when the sun leaves, presumably because of, or at least coincidentally when, Hester comes to join Pearl, Hester observes that the sun seems to radiate from within Pearl as if “the child had absorbed it [the light] into herself, and

⁴⁴ Ingold, “Prologue,” 12.

would give it forth again, with a gleam” In joining the sunlight, the sunlight joins her. This joining is a matter of mutual capture. Pearl articulates her own actions as an endeavor to catch, and the narrative follows this saying that she did successfully catch the sun and by speculating on the idea that she might have found some way to absorb and keep the sun in herself. Yet this picture of Pearl “in the midst of it, all brightened by its splendour” creates a picture not of Pearl holding the light, but of her being enveloped in the light, of the light holding her. This is a rapt encounter and an elemental joining in which something of the sun comes into Pearl’s nature and endowing her with a power to “give [light] forth again, with a gleam.”

The narrative and Pearl herself express a correlation between Pearl’s being a child character and her ability to depart and playfully join the sun. Seeing that the sun continues to evade her and her mother, Pearl announces that Hester is the problem, and that she will go ahead because the light will not run from her. She declares before she runs off that she will be able to join the sun because, “I am but a child I wear nothing on my bosom yet!”⁴⁵ Although Hester corrects the easiness of the “yet” by expressing her hope that Pearl will never wear a scarlet letter, we can take seriously Pearl’s conjecture that the A is not necessarily natural but is a matter of course, a developmental occurrence in the process of becoming “a woman grown.” For Pearl the letter and its attending power and restrictions are a matter of course, like longer legs, or a bosom; for

⁴⁵ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 86-7.

her, the “A” might as well stand, not for its popularly assumed “Adultery” but rather for “Adult.”

2.5 Joining Movements and Joy-Filled Experimentation | Play

For the wayfaring Pearl, who is always in motion, every step is a play, an experiment, a way of relating and moving with the world. In her discussion of childhood experimental education and movement, Liselott Olsson describes movement and learning as means of experimenting and relating that open up what Deleuze and Guattari call “lines of flight.” The struggle in working with and regarding children is

to regain movement and experimentation in subjectivity and learning ... [and] work out how to turn the focus on positions and change as moving from one position to another, into a focus on movement as something that foregoes positions and thereby opens up possibilities for collective and intense experimentation.⁴⁶

As with wayfaring, Olsson’s depiction of taking-off, the “lines of flight” she observes in the teachers and students learning in relation to each other also require a “giving in.”

For Olsson learning happens in collaborative experimentation and collective movements that risk deviating from plans and spurring new directions. Teachers working and moving with children have to be willing to assume that the children are also up to something, that they have desire, which “is never something tameable; [teachers]

⁴⁶ Liselott Olsson, *Movement and Experimentation in Young Children’s Learning: Deleuze and Guattari in Early Childhood Education* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 57-8.

anticipate intense and unpredictable experimentation taking place in between everybody."⁴⁷

Olsson's comparison between learning to walk and learning to surf help us understand Pearl's steps (and Una's boldly stepping) as experimentation and play. In her prologue, Olsson highlights the segmentarity with which we regard even children's learning to walk. Developmental science charts the normative stages of walking: first one kicks, then crawls, then stands. Calling attention to surfing instruction manuals, Olsson shows how learning how to surf can be similarly charted: first belly kicking, then crouching, then standing. Olsson acknowledges the utility of categorizing points and developmental stages in education and in tracking progress, but she also explains that every surfer knows that these points are only the representation of generalized positions, which surfers tend to move through; "[n]obody can predict the movements of the waves and what you learnt on the board [and] on the beach serves you little unless you are capable of *joining the movement* of the sea; you need to *become one with the water*."⁴⁸ Olsson argues that a child's learning to walk is similar to learning to surf despite the fact that as adults we often take for granted the ground as constant and static. "To the same extent [though] that the sea is unpredictable," Olsson explains, "the ground is in continuous movement. The ground walks with the child and the sea surfs

⁴⁷ Ibid., 141-2.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2 (emphasis added).

with the surfer.” Olsson is clear that this joining, this “moving with” involves a “becom[ing] plastic and elastic. They stretch their physical bodies in resonance with the movements of the sea and the ground ... in relation with the other forces and bodies.” To walk or to surf is to embrace, to yield and to give in to “other forces and bodies.”

And yet this “giving in” often looks to the observer like a taking off and getting carried away. For in describing her niece’s efforts to walk, she describes the process as anything but progressive and neatly developmental. The child “would drag herself,” “crawl on all fours,” “install her body on” toys, furniture, people, and anything else. “She would walk sideways or backwards,” “take pause,” “stumble and fall.”⁴⁹ The child’s movement looks so foreign to the set of economical and efficient movements to which adults have reduced the act of walking. There is departure here. While what we mean when we say a child is getting carried away or has gone off in her own world is that she has departed usually joyfully and often imaginatively from any semblance of normative social order, it may be that precisely what we are noticing is the way the child’s learning to walk and the surfer to surf highlights normative social order’s own illusory understanding of itself as fixed in its unity rather than as always departing and getting carried away in relation with other bodies and forces. The picture of walking and surfing Olsson paints suggests that indeed walking and surfing are about departing and getting carried away, but in the context of joining rather than off away from others

⁴⁹ Ibid., 2.

in some singular and private world. For as Olsson explains “seeing a child using her or his body in relation to everything that surrounds that body, it seems that learning to walk is about the joy of increasing your body’s capacity to move through joining your body with other bodies and forces.”⁵⁰ It is this notion of joining and joy and the young child’s privileged relationship to a movement brought about between and with joining and joy that interests me as I pay close attention not only to Pearl’s wayward movements, her presence-ing of the ground, but also to her constant desire to embrace and join, her depiction as a link, and her general embrace of being chained and bonded in relation to others. Thinking about the joining and experimental elements of Pearl’s movements, I posit here that what falls under the rubrics of Pearl’s play can just as well be thought of as a movement of joining and experimentation. Like Olsson my reading operates from the premise that children, Pearl in this instance, are up to something. They are even, if not especially, in their play, doing something, considering something and regarding something as worth consideration.

2.6 Better Pastimes

When Hester sends Pearl off to play, Pearl goes to the shore and attempts to play with her own reflection in a puddle. This encounter with the puddle child is a revision of Hester’s encounter with Pearl’s reflection in the mirror that ultimately breaks from the logic of mirrors and the kind of self building narrative that Hester uses the mirror

⁵⁰ Ibid.

reflection to engage in. There are many instances of Pearl's playful nature, gestures, and romps. They are almost all conflated with her elfishness, particularly in as much as the narrator describes her playful movements in relief of the young Puritans whose capacity to truly play, he seems to doubt. These "children of the settlement," the "most intolerant brood," are described as "disporting themselves in such grim fashions," including "scourging Quakers" and "taking scalps in a sham fight with the Indian."⁵¹ These activities, the narrator later suggests, are only "what passed for play with those somber little urchins."⁵² Pearl in contrast has play imbued in her every gesture. She "dart[s] up and danc[es], always in a state of preternatural activity—soon sinking down, as if exhausted by so rapid and feverish tide of life—and succeeded by other shapes of a similar wild energy." In her movement up and down, Pearl's play parallels the plays of the natural element, so that even as much as the Puritan children will not play with her, she is always surrounded and within a play environment with nature. Her play movement is "like nothing so much as the phantasmagoric play of the northern lights."

I focus on Pearl's encounter with the puddle child because it is the only scene in which Pearl, seemingly encounters a child who is not like the "intolerant brood" who "scorned [Pearl] in their hearts, and not unfrequently reviled [her] with their tongues."⁵³

⁵¹ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 41-2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 42.

She thus attempts to engage this child in play. The scene also stands out because it is interrupted by (or rather it interrupts) the primary action of the drama. Pearl flies off and where the narrative could have stayed with Hester, it too, in following Pearl, takes a diversion. In this way we can regard both Pearl's endeavors in this scene and the scene itself as an experiment with another option, running alongside the main action of the text. Indeed in these interlude glimpses of Pearl, the narrative offers a revision of Hester's earlier imaging of Pearl as an elf other in the governor's mirror. Pearl, we are told,

... flew away like a bird, and making bare her small white feet went pattering along the moist margin of the sea. Here and there she came to a full stop, and peeped curiously into a pool, left by the retiring tide as a mirror for Pearl to see her face in.

Forth peeped at her, out of the pool, with dark, glistening curls around her head, and an elf-smile in her eyes, the image of a little maid whom Pearl, having no other playmate, invited to take her hand and run a race with her. But the visionary little maid on her part, beckoned likewise, as if to say—"This is a better place; come thou into the pool." And Pearl, stepping in mid-leg deep, beheld her own white feet at the bottom; while, out of a still lower depth, came the gleam of a kind of fragmentary smile, floating to and fro in the agitated water.⁵⁴

In this scene Pearl is still "like a bird," and yet here away from the drama about to ensue between Hester and Chillingworth, here on the margins, the shore that is both the land and the sea, we can see how her "like a bird" qualities have less to do with her being disconnected from the earth and more about the "away" and the departure of foregoing her position by her mother's side. For the same sentence that describes her as birdlike

⁵⁴ Ibid., 77.

also calls our attention to her “small white feet.” Freeing herself of any barriers between her feet and the earth, Pearl in her “pattering” can feel the “moist” ground.

With her bare feet in the damp sand—which is to say in the overlap between land and sea, between the walk and the surf where her walking literally goes into the ground—we can see this particular scene as perhaps the example *par excellence* of the nature of Pearl’s movement and how it challenges the narrative’s oppositional logics and its characters’ preoccupation with positions and stations. Although Pearl’s movements are not an endeavor to learn to walk or to learn to surf, they are still a learning and an experimental attempt to move with a body and a force other than her own. Even if ultimately the body she means to join turns out to be a projection of her own, a reflection, her efforts bring her whole body intimately immersed in the earth and water.

The narrator’s calling the mirrored smile an “elf-smile” invites readers to recall the elf child Hester saw in the governor’s mirror. However Pearl approaches this figure as if it is a body distinct and separate from hers. She regards the reflection as a potential playmate, and her attempt to play with this character is an experimental attempt to join bodies and move together. First Pearl invites the reflection to “take her hand and run a race.” For all we are told of Pearl’s disdain for other children, here, where the child she encounters is not clearly repelling her with taunts, stones and stares, she is tender. She reaches out her hand in a desire to join, to make a connection, and extends an offer to

run with and against each other. Although the reader presumably knows the failure this gesture will find, Pearl continues earnestly in her endeavor. For she regards what the reader knows only to be a reflective image as a potential other body and force, something and someone she can join, play and run with. When reaching out does not work, she considers an alternative. She reads the mirror child's similar beckoning as an invitation for her to join the puddle child in her world. She considers changing her initial plan, which was for this child to join her. Instead she takes the child's invitation seriously. Pearl's reconsideration is expressed in movement, with an effort to join. She steps into the pool, "mid-leg deep."

We are left here with what we know will be the failure of this embrace. The other made Other by a logic of binaries and mirrors cannot be joined or embraced. An attempt to do so will always reveal "a kind of fragmentary smile" that floats above the body that is now her own "white feet at the bottom." This fragmentary smile, the curious "gleam" it still manages to "float to and fro" on the surface of the "agitated water" has a disembodied and eerie quality. It is like the smile that remains when the Cheshire cat has gone, and more particularly it reflects the numerous flashing "mocking,"⁵⁵ "ever-ready,"⁵⁶ "peculiar,"⁵⁷ "bright, but naughty"⁵⁸ smiles that Hester

⁵⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 43.

attributes to Pearl's elfishness. The scene breaks here though—not with repudiation of the Other, but with a moving effort to join in play. This step is an experiment. Pearl recognizes that this other child is in a different place, a different world, and her effort to join is not just a step. It is a "mid-leg deep" plunge, and too it is a plunge that suggests that every step to join and move with a body or a force other than one's own, is always a kind of experimental plunge.

The scene is interrupted with what is supposed to be the primary action of the chapter, Hester and Chillingworth's meeting. We do not return to Pearl until the next chapter, but we are told when we leave Pearl that "mean while" Hester and Chillingworth are meeting. Pearl's meeting with her reflection is concurrent with Hester's confrontation with Chillingworth; it is an alternative. When the narrative returns to Pearl, the diction seems less with Pearl; it is as if the impending failure has happened and now we look back. We are reminded of Pearl's "spirit that never deflagged" and that "she had flirted fancifully with her own image in a pool of water, beckoning the phantom forth, and—as it declined to venture—seeking a passage for herself into its sphere of impalpable earth and unattainable sky."⁵⁹ Calling the reflection a "phantom" and explicitly referring to it as "her own image," the narrative repudiates

⁵⁸ Ibid., 61.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 83.

some of the romantic magic and ushers in a sense of the futility of what is now just “fanciful” “flirt[ing].” Still as the narrative tone pushes the impossibility, it also more specifically points to Pearl’s experimental adjustment, and her tireless effort to figure out a “passage,” a path, that would allow for joining and movement towards this other body. But what she had yet to realize is that this reflection is not only her own reflection, but that the whole sphere of the mirror world is one in which movement is impossible except as a puppet-ing gesture for the earth there is “impalpable” and the sky “unattainable.” The elements in this puddle world are illusory. They cannot be moved with because they do not move. They have no body or force, save what we make of them in our imagination.

Pearl’s movement seeks embrace rather than distance and containment, and this embrace depends on touch and gesturing forward, which she tellingly does first with her hand and then, when that does not work, with her foot. For Pearl those gestures are the same. They are both experimental gestures in one movement. She takes a step to meet this mirror child, a step more than the members of her own community have taken to meet her and her mother. For Hester and Pearl are to the town a living reflection (which is also a projection) of the town’s repudiated movements, morality and passions. The failure of this embrace and how Pearl addresses it most distinguishes the movement of her sociality from the other characters in the narrative. For where the town and Hester too, accept the distance, Pearl rejects the image that requires separation. Where

the town, though repudiating, seems fixed on the scarlet letter and Hester as a reflection of their ignominy, Pearl, we are told, “[s]oon finding, however, that either she or the image was unreal ... turned elsewhere for better pastime.”

Pearl’s experiments with the puddle child allow her to observe the dialectical relationship between herself and the reflection. She acknowledges that this mirror way of regarding means only one can be real and the other must be unreal. Still Pearl does not assume her own realness. She does not move so quickly to trap the mirror child as a nothing or abstract negative in a dialectical construction of her own self. Instead she considers that she may be the one who is unreal. She considers the puddle child and her place of existence in a way that the adult characters fail, or refuse, to consider of her. She considers what is so easy not to consider, which is that it may be she, and not the other, who is unreal. She considers that the place of this other child, this potential playmate, might actually be a better place. In this regard being unreal does not negate animation or existence nor (more importantly) does it negate the capacity to live and move in relation.

As striking as this consideration is, what is even more compelling is that upon arriving at this conclusion, Pearl does not care. Her response suggests that there is nothing at stake in this unreal/real binary. What is important is the play and the move toward and with a playmate. At the moment that should have been about connection, the beckoning and the plunge, only a “fragmentary smile” “gleams” through this pool.

Being on the real or unreal side of the mirror is not the problem. The problem is that the mirror other cannot embrace or meet her; in a real way the mirror elf cannot join Pearl in a foot race and together neither of them can move, so Pearl “*turned* elsewhere for better pastime.”

For Rowe, and others, it is Hester that Hawthorne offers as an alternative. He highlights Hester’s potential to the radical and her struggle to synthesize thought and heart. And he of course highlights her place at the margins. “In *The Scarlet Letter*,” Rowe argues, “Hawthorne criticizes the Puritan community for obscuring the origins of the communal in the individual and thus offers Hester’s awakened self-consciousness in the second half of the narrative as an alternative to the unreflective moral life of this society.⁶⁰ For Rowe, Pearl is merely the slate or the site through which Hester works out the nature of this alternative. In reading this scene, however, I have shown that Pearl traverses grounds on her own, that her play has its own explorations, sociality, and movements that also produce alternatives. In going off in search of better pastime, Pearl literally “turned away” from the mirror and from the logic her mother adopts. She also turns away from the organizing logic of the town’s social order. Hester, with her “A,” moves about the town (and Pearl wildly with her) as a mirror. They are a means for the

⁶⁰ John Carlos Rowe, “The Internal Conflict of Romantic Narrative: Hegel’s Phenomenology and Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*,” *MLN* 95, no. 5 Comparative Literature (December, 1989), 1211.

society to exorcise their inner evils and then by projecting them to the margin see them reflected in this outcast mother and child.

The difference between Hester and Pearl is that Pearl's movements escape the mirror, refuse to stay within the confines of the puddle or the air of fairyland or any confined space. It is not that she avoids being in the circle, dipping her toe in the puddle, or being cast as a reflection, but it is rather that she does not accept it as her place socially or physically. Hester, though, as much as her mind leans to lawlessness and independence continues to contrast Pearl's irregular movements and joining and gathering play with her impenetrable isolation and self reliance and her general preoccupation with her place, and position. Throughout the novel, Hester consistently feels herself to be (and is described as) being not unlike that puddle child, inscribed within an impenetrable circle. One of the story's central premises is that the scarlet letter and everything it signifies isolates Hester to an almost supernatural effect. The letter "had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself."⁶¹ Always Hester is described as being in a circle of isolation or ignominy. She cannot escape "the inviolable circle round about her." It is a "circle of seclusion,"⁶² "that magic circle of ignominy."⁶³ Even from the beginning of the

⁶¹ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 22-3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 117.

narrative, she seems untouchable. At the beginning of the story, Hester is that the young woman “whom [having put his hand on her shoulder, the beadle] thus drew forward, until, on the threshold of the prison-door, she repelled him, by an action marked with natural dignity and force of character, and stepped into the open air as if by her own free will.”⁶⁴ The “spell” of the scarlet letter is the isolating circle it draws around Hester; the magic circle is referenced throughout the story as the force that keeps people away and separated from Hester, but in this first scene, it is Hester who repels the beadle’s hand. The gesture, though perhaps understandably so, comes out of a “natural dignity and force of character,” but it is nonetheless part of the illusion that I argue reigns throughout the narrative, which is that she “stepped into the open air *as if by her own free will.*”⁶⁵ The entirety of Hester’s movements appear in the same vein, “as if by her own free will.” Pearl’s father may be the Prince of Air, but it is her mother who does the impossible and steps into the air without ever putting her foot again to the ground.

To walk on the ground, as Olsson pointed out, is to walk with the ground. It puts one ecologically, politically, theologically, and of course physically in relation to other bodies. For us to imagine Hester’s footsteps on the ground, to see her palm or the underside of her foot or any part of her kiss the surface of another body, we would have

⁶⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 22 (emphasis added).

to imagine that something of the magic circle has disintegrated. (And it is a kiss, Pearl's kiss, which breaks the spell.) Hester must touch the ground; we are told that she moves throughout not just the periphery but in and out of people's houses, in the market places and elsewhere. I am not suggesting that Hawthorne meant for us to think about Hester as hovering from place to place. Indeed my contention is precisely that I believe Hawthorne did not intend for us to think at all about how she moves. Somewhere we know, we assume, she walks from place to place, but the point is that we can, and we do, take that walking for granted, as a matter of course that, happening magically, "as if by her own free will," we need not attend to what aids it. She is somber and seems "grounded" in her solemnity, but Hester, like her Puritan peers, is rarely described, if at all, as touching anything, not even the ground. Just as this first introductory step into the novel, curiously elides the ground and stays "into the open air," Hester's movements continue to be void of any mention or description of the ground except by reference when she is said to be standing in one spot. But the problem with this independent movement, just as with that one first step is that it is only ever an "*as if* by her own free will."

The totality of Hester's isolation is constantly challenged by Pearl. Not only does Pearl as a biological relation always pierce that magical circle of isolation, but her practice of movement and play re-imagine the spell. They suggest that if the scarlet letter "had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity,"

it might be also the occasion for entrance into extra-ordinary relations with humanity and other beings. Although Hester might feel a circle of complete isolation about her, the drama of the novel is littered with people piercing the circumference of that isolation (e.g. the reverend, Chillingworth, Mistress Hibbins, and the Sailor and of course Pearl). Most noticeably in every footstep, every touch and embrace, Pearl challenges the isolating notion of "as if by her own will"; her movement suggests instead that a hand on the shoulder or a baby being held are each a joining and melding of bodies. Where Hester comes into the novel throwing off touch and stepping into the air, Pearl comes into the world and the novel touching and being held. Even when she can walk, we are told that "[o]ften, nevertheless, more from caprice than necessity, she demanded to be taken up in arms."⁶⁶ She comes into the world as already a challenge not so much to Hester's morality but to this notion that she has been isolated. From the very beginning Pearl is in the circle with Hester, yet Pearl, despite her being always with Hester (and being, as the narrator openly calls her, a companion) is not company enough. Or rather Pearl does not offer Hester ordinary human relation. She does, however, offer her relations, by both being her relation (her only relation) and by constantly presenting Hester with alternatives. To be clear, they are both lonely. The text is very forthcoming about calling Pearl lonely or deprived of human interaction. However Pearl having been born outside of ordinary human relations (and yet born as all humans are out of,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 45.

arguably, the most intimate of relations), has a wider and deeper scope of what constitutes company. Where Hester pulls inward, withdraws into her mind, Pearl reaches out with her hands and her feet. Hester sees her situation as a fall from a position and embraces this fall by actively withdrawing into her mind, by seeing herself as cast off and utterly alone. Pearl though sees not her position but the light in own movements and interests, and she embraces her life with an embodied practice of getting carried away.

2.7 The Margins of the Shore

When Pearl leaves the puddle child for better pastime she engages in a number of playful activities that we may then regard as constitutive of that “better pastime.” Presented as a list of activities, we can see, in the unfolding of Pearl’s play, a pattern of gathering, becoming and dispersal that I argue revises the liminal passage of Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner’s discussion of *rites of passage*. As Turner explains it, *rites of passages* focus on the passage or movement between stages. These movements can be defined as having three distinct phases: *separation*, *transition*, and *incorporation*. The description of Pearl’s play suggests a similar tri-part movement, but instead of a movement that starts with separation, Pearl’s play starts with gathering and joining. After she leaves the mirror child, a play that would have insisted on starting (if not remaining) with separation, engages in a number of play activities. She “made little boats out of birch-bark, and freighted them with snail shells.” She “seized a live horse-

shoe by the tale," gathered and dispersed jelly fish and five-fingers, played in the water, and through pebbles at birds until she actually hurt one and was "grieved... to have done harm to a little being that was as wild as the sea-breeze, or as wild as Pearl herself."⁶⁷

Each play activity is an instance marked by the gathering, transforming and dispersal, by the movement of the play. That we move from five-fingers to jelly-fish matters little. This is not because either is trivial, but because their being distinctly something called a "jellyfish" or a "five-finger" is not important in this moment. What matters is that this dispersal—this foregoing of a fixed state—brings us back into a joining and into further transformation. The jellyfish melts and joins the ground. Playing with the water is also a play of becoming and transition. Pearl "*took up* the white foam that streaked the line of the advancing tide, and *threw it* upon the breeze, scampering after it with winged footsteps to catch the *great snowflakes* ere they fell."⁶⁸ There are two gatherings here. She takes up the foam, but she catches snowflakes. In the movement, the foam becomes snowflakes, and by the same logic, these snowflakes, as she captures and gathers them, become again, something different.

The variety of her movements is the result of an ever-experimental attempt to join and move with the force and body of the ground. The variety of possibilities is,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 82.

according to Turner, the essence of the liminal, liminoid, and antistructure. Turner compares the playful possibilities that take place in the *limen* as similar to the quarterback in the midst of a play. He explains that in the *limen* is “pure potentiality ... [l]ike the trembling quarterback with all the “options’ but with the very solid future moving menacingly toward him!”⁶⁹ The quarterback has possibilities but must also reckon with the ever approaching future that will require one move, and I add, require one beneficial move for the team and the overall game (as opposed to a merely entertaining move or a move that displays some particular artistic merit of its own accord). In Turner’s picturing, the one quarterback is separated in this moment by the arrangement (or choreography) of the play and inundated with a host of possibilities that must become one choice in a narrow time frame is the liminal. As we move through Pearl’s play however, we see a different picture of the liminal. Pearl’s movements and her play, which are intimately linked, suggests a departing that was never a separation but a gathering that transforms and departs from being a single being. This model might best be expressed as a dance, but to join Turner in the parlance of football, we might think of the movement of Pearl’s play as more akin to the tackle. The tackle in a play is about possession, beholding and being held. In the tackle, the tackled could not be more present than at the moment when tackled and *visa versa*. Yet at the same time, the tackled and the tackler are not themselves, but rather they are, in that moment, a new

⁶⁹ Ibid., 44.

being, an event—the tackle. This is to say that in the getting carried away of play one is arrested from being a single individual and, as play scholar Huizinga might say, seized into relation and play with others. In thinking about artistic play, Johan Huizinga argues by way of Frobenius that “[t]he creative faculty in a people as is in the child or every creative person, springs from this state of being seized. . . So that according to [Frobenius, in play,] we are dealing with a necessary mental process of transformation. The thrill, the ‘being seized’ by the phenomena of life and nature is condensed by reflex action, as it were, to poetic expression and art.”⁷⁰ The artistic play like the sportive play (which is also itself artistic and creative) “takes the form of a ‘seizure’ —being seized on, thrilled, enraptured.”⁷¹ This seizure is an arrest of one’s interest, but it is also manifests in an obsessive or intense assault upon objects and things. To a degree it is the seizure of Pearl’s play that burns Hester so much. For she feels that both Pearl’s constant interest and her physical play arrests and puts a scalding gaze and touch of penance upon her. And literally Pearl does seize at the scarlet letter in her play, and from throwing flowers at the A to planting a wreath of burrs on her mother’s chest, she repeatedly intertwines her mother as the object around which her play moves.

The point of the three stages of Arnold Van Gennep’s “passage,” Turner argues is either to let off steam in order to rejoin the normative society revitalized or to learn,

⁷⁰ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1980), 16-7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

experiment and innovate alternatives that will ultimately assist and reinforce the normative structure. The outside, the inverse mirror image, and the different other are all supposed to bring the individual into a movement that will more firmly allow them to occupy the normative social structure and live out the remainder of their lives contained in the proper spaces. This getting carried away and departing play movement though (whether it be a revision of the *rites of passage* phases or whether it be merely one of the topsy turvy happenings in the liminal transition phase) starts not with separation but with gathering. It ends not with the incorporation into the communal unit, but rather it ends with a dispersal that is often violent, weakening (if not totally destructive). Where *rites of passage* separate to make a stronger reentry, this ludic passage of departure that we see in the movement of Pearl's play and in her walking emphasizes a joining and a transformation and an unsystematic dispersal that makes reentry difficult if not undesirable.

These play activities—these instances of gathering, transforming, and dispersion—escalate in their intensity and combinations of violent transformation and transformative potential. Pearl's final play is the most elaborate and perhaps the most clear revision of the liminal *rites of passage* that would result in the successful incorporation into normative society, all the while reinforcing the strength of the normative order:

Her final employment was to gather seaweed of various kinds, and make herself a scarf or mantle, and a head-dress, and thus assume the aspect of a little mermaid. She

inherited her mother's gift for devising drapery and costume. As the last touch to her mermaid's garb, Pearl took some eel-grass and imitated, as best she could on her own bosom the decoration with which she was so familiar on her mother's. A letter—but freshly green instead of scarlet.⁷²

Pearl gets carried away in this elaborate play endeavor. She gathers all different types of seaweed. In artfully bringing them together, they become some new drapery or creation other than seaweed. They are not only now garments, but they are also specifically the elemental components of her becoming mermaid. They transform Pearl into a different creature, and then even more radically in her seeming reification of the scarlet letter (only now as an eel-grass imitation "A") she also unmoors the letter of its condemning signification. At the very moment where she plays at passing out of childhood, through one of the most common rites of passage, and into a "woman grown," Pearl's playful embrace of that letter makes her and the letter something new. For Pearl, as Karen Sanchez-Eppler and others remark, does not think of the letter as a symbol for adultery or abomination or for that matter any word, but rather when her mother asks her if she knows what the letter means she says, "Yes, mother ... It is the great letter A. Thou hast taught me in the horn-book."⁷³ The letter A is a great letter, and more suited to green than red, given that it is the beginning letter. Pearl recognizes as Tim Ingold in his essay, "Seven Variations on the Letter A," recognizes that the letter artfully drawn, sewed, painted, or crafted or simply written is representative not of any particular word,

⁷² Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 83.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 83.

much less of any condemning ones or ones that would imply some sort of end, but it is rather constantly signifying beginnings and the numerous potentials of signification that an alphabet presents.⁷⁴ Pearl's gathering here of so many elements come together to transform her, the hornbook, the letter and the seaweed too. In this scene meaning is ludic-ly disrupted and signification is transformed, rethought, and spread out again different and strange.

2.8 The Market Place

The normative movement of *rites* is separation, transition, and incorporation. If we see Pearl's transformation at the end of the narrative (her sudden move to sympathy and her vow not to war against all of humanity) as a successful incorporation into the communal order as a woman, we might regard her play as a glimpse into the liminal of *rites of passage*. That is to say we may regard her as a picture of inversion, but the liminal is supposed to stay in the bush or on the margin. To come into town is to come back more clearly immersed in the social order. We have seen Pearl's play movement on the outside margins where it is seemingly contained and set apart, but when she moves out of the margins of the forest and the shore and into the center of the market and public space, her play becomes a threat. The narrative suggests that she is joining a natural play day with like creatures, but the narrative also emphasizes its preoccupation

⁷⁴ Tim Ingold, "Seven Variations on the Letter A" in *Being Alive Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 181-195.

with the maintenance of distinct positions, the appropriate movements, and the decorum each space demands, which in turn frames her reveling on the ground as a threat.

This tension plays out from the moment Pearl and Hester enter the market. Their entrance into the market like other social spaces demands conformity to normative rules that strike Pearl as strange. When they “c[o]me into the market,” Pearl more than once wants to know if the minister will be there “[a]nd will he hold out both his hands to [her], as when [Hester] ledst [her] to him from the brook-side?” After one admonishment to be quiet, Hester again implores Pearl to “[h]old thy peace . . . We must not always talk in the marketplace of what happens to us in the forest.”⁷⁵ Hester articulates the law or the rule. The marketplace, she explains, is not a place for embrace or giving kisses. But already in the articulation, the law is threatened by Pearl who in her wondering about “[w]hat a strange, sad man,” the minister is, is not simply asking for answers from the adult source. She is also thinking and speaking “partly to herself.” She thinks through the various spaces of the forest and the scaffold at night in which she, her mother, and the minister have met and how it is that they can be different on this “sunny” day in the open. Pearl’s questioning might easily be regarded as childhood naiveté rather than as a challenge to the normative way of things, but the fact remains

⁷⁵ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 114.

that when the order of things is explained to Pearl, she neither accepts the explanation nor holds her peace.

These exchanges between Pearl and her mother articulate the tension of being in the market place rather than the forest, but they also, at the same time, because of Pearl's insistence on her own movements and ponderings, suggest a potential undermining of the forest/ marketplace split. For Hester cannot answer Pearl's questions; she can only "hold" peace, reiterate and insist that the position they are in now (in the marketplace) is different and does not allow the same things as their position in the forest. But Pearl is not asking about their positions; she is asking about movement and encounter. She is asking about running to the minister and asking for a kiss. She is not asking about what the market place is for and what ought to be done in it; she is talking about what can be done and what would happen if she moved anyway to the minister. Pearl in her questioning speech and then in her movement challenges the ability of life's dramas to be contained neatly within particular spaces. She wants to know why it is that "[w]e must not always talk in the marketplace of what happens to us in the forest," and her wondering is already a form of wandering away from her mother, a movement of thought that insists that relations happen in the market and the forest, that the line of life is not segmented.

Regarding Pearl as a wayfarer allows us to think about this ludic and liminal manner of being as both not limited to a particular space and as originating in and

gaining its essence from movement. As she comes to market, her play of gathering, transforming, and dispersing—her departing footsteps—threaten the social order that relies on containment, keeping bodies separate, and obscuring relations between them (indeed that is what Dimmesdale tries to uphold).

Like the description of Pearl's play with the puddle child, Pearl's market movement happens concurrently with the major narrative action. In this case it happens at the same time in which Hester stands, thinks, and makes arrangement with the sailor for her, Dimmesdale, and Pearl's departure. Hester and Pearl come into the marketplace together, and they come to the scaffold together, but Pearl, "meanwhile had quit her mother's side." While Pearl quits and departs, Hester accepts the spatial demands and persists in mooring herself to a position. She spends the entire scene at the scaffold: the sailor meets her there; Mistress Hibbins meets her there; she watches the procession there; she hears the sermon from there and ultimately meets Dimmesdale there. The procession takes place and the minister gives his sermon, and she stays at this "spot" as if it encompasses the entirety of her life. The narrative regards Hester's as static, explaining that "Hester stood, statue-like, at the foot of the scaffold." Here she is figured as immobile, as one positioned and specifically constructed and made to occupy or exhibit some particular point. But while she was identifying "her whole orb of life" as being "connected with this spot," Pearl had quit her side and this tethering "spot."

Instead Pearl “play[s] at her own will about the market-place”⁷⁶ and moves across the market place, as if it were an ocean or, at least, as transgressive and liminal as the tide rushing in. Like a ship on the sea,⁷⁷ Pearl moves “to and fro,” “undulate[s]” and even

⁷⁶ Ibid., 116.

⁷⁷ Given the extensive references to water and the sea, it is as if between the sailors and Pearl whose previous scene of play was steeped in the advancing tide and the mighty deep the ocean has flooded the marketplace. Hester who lives in her cottage by the sea leans towards the water without actually like Pearl going barefoot to the shore. In particular, in this scene she come into the market place with the ocean on her mind; she yearns for it as a means of escape: “A few hours longer and the deep, mysterious ocean will quench and hide forever the symbol which ye have caused to burn on her bosom!” (118). Hester comes to the market with the specific desire to make arrangements for her, Pearl, and Dimmesdale’s departure by sea. This trip to the market, this scene, is one last foray into the throngs of the people and the town that have exiled her from the ground, who themselves are always in an effort to be suspended between moral binaries, just above the ground. If the novel has been a constant effort to get from place to place, while repelling all embrace and keeping that first footstep in the air, this move to the sea will finally provide her release. If the ground keeps her tethered but disconnected and isolated, the sea will release her from the parameters of the puritan society and the ground she cannot touch and envelop her, offer the chance of being in relation. Hester sees the sea as the other Puritans do, as a distinctly other realm. Like all spaces it has a distinct function or instrumentality; for Hester the sea is a means to regain relations, to having her family (Pearl and the minister) restored to the status of “family.” It is a means to rejoining her to her European homeland and a place where the letter will have no hold. But what Hester’s leaning and yearnings do not seem to acknowledge is that the sea is neither a discrete or containable space nor is it a means to bringing one to a relation. The water will not support illusions of autonomous movement. To be on or in the sea is already to be in relation to the elements, to consent to join and be carried by them. Not unlike surfing traveling on a ship requires moving with the water and experimentation. In a pre motor power time of sailing, there would be no illusion that to move on a boat is to move in relation to the currents of water and air. Moving in a straight line is almost impossible and generally inefficient. The process of tracking or jibbing (moving the sails back and forth to capture the wind on various sides) keeps the ship and its crew constantly communicating, moving with alongside and against the elements. Tracking results not in a line of transport but a zigzagging motion across the water.

In thinking of the ocean as distinct space, separate from the scaffolding spot that she has lived her whole life at, Hester fails to experience the oceanic deluge of the marketplace. The fluidity, waves, and currents are not however lost to Pearl. First the narrative describes her experience of the procession’s music as being “borne upward like a floating sea-bird on the long heavens and swells of sound.” The music is figured as waves that, carrying Pearl, allow her to lose herself and to “lo[se] for an instant the restless agitation that had kept her in a continual effervescence throughout the morning” (113). This music like water continues in the sound of the minister’s sermon after the procession finishes. The listener “might have been swayed to and fro by the mere tone and cadence” (115). It went up and down, and it “gushed irrepressibly upward” and it “overflow[ed]” the church” (116). While Hester listens anchored to the scaffold, Pearl literally abandons her position in the midst of this torrent. She “meanwhile, had quitted her mother’s side, and was playing at her own will about the market-place.” The meanwhile here is again a signal of

like a boat upon the sea of people “[p]ursu[es] a zigzag course across the marketplace.”⁷⁸

Perhaps most apparently she gravitates to “the swarthy-cheeked wild men of the ocean,” who for their own part saw Pearl as part of the ocean, as a “flake of the sea-foam.”⁷⁹ Her movements bump against and highlight the ludic possibilities in the seemingly normative heart of the Puritan world which keeps all her play and experimental movements frozen and stiff in a different and distant realm. Here her movements highlight the play of the market place, its energy and “diversity of hue.”⁸⁰

Pearl’s movements both threaten the normative order of the market square and reveal the market’s already ludic nature. Pearl in the market emerges in a manner that parallels Turner’s depictions of novices⁸¹ coming out of the bush and wreaking havoc upon the community structure. For as Turner explains, the novices in the liminal rites of passage are vulnerable and weak because they are placed apart and are seen as dead to their previous life and not born to the next one, “betwixt and between,” and yet they

Pearl’s action as happening concurrently to Hester’s listening to the sermon. The meanwhile depicts Pearl’s movement as an alternative response or means of engaging the sea of sounds and the sea of the marketplace crowds.

⁷⁸ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 117.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸¹ Turner uses the term “ritual subject.” He explains that ritual subjects might also be referred to as “novices, candidates, neophytes or ‘initiands’” (24).

also are a threat to the community because they are lawless and unreal. Turner describes their ability to come into the town and demand and seize upon what they want. When Pearl comes into the market, she brings her violent seizing play, threatening, like those novices, to wreak havoc. Particularly her movements threaten to unearth anxieties deeply rooted in the marketplace grounds— anxieties about female abduction, going native, and the circulation and capture of human chattel.

At t least to an 1850s reader, Pearl’s movements willfully put her in relations with the very dark and masculine bodies from which 19th-century American literature is so anxious to protect little girls. Pearl’s quitting her mother’s side in the marketplace is neither natural nor romantic but rather suggests all types of literal and literary dangers. Karen Sanchez-Eppler points out that though Hawthorne personally imagined children roaming, unattended in the bustling public places as (perhaps nostalgically) romantic, his writings were not without awareness of the danger his society associated with such looseness. Interested in the connection between children’s rambling and storytelling that she reads in Hawthorne’s specifically juvenile story, “Little Annie’s Rambles,” Sanchez-Eppler illustrates how “[i]n the didactic tradition of early nineteenth-century children’s literature the tale of a child who ‘strayed from her home’ is a familiar conceit, one that reveals the dangers of town and affirms that children should be obedient and at

home.”⁸² To Sanchez-Eppler, Hawthorne’s story, although it seems to break with this didactic warning in order to revel in the child’s “ramble into the world [as] a harmless pleasure that leaves Annie ‘untainted,’” it also consents to include, at the end of the story when Annie is safe and found, “the bell of the town crier... that clang of communal order and public knowledge.” The “clang of communal order” makes itself heard with the bell, the crier, but also by establishing a mother’s worse fear (and thus the nation’s worse fear) as being precisely this—a child lost in the streets because she let go of her guardian’s hand.⁸³ Like Annie’s, Pearl’s quitting of her mother’s side puts her at risk of encountering “the same wolf” from little red riding hood, strange men, who will “taint” them, and cause them to fade from existence, as nothing more than a warning tale sounding throughout the town.

In the Puritan America Hawthorne imagines, the danger of the wolf would have manifested in the constant fear of savages and Indian attacks. Pearl’s ramble not only sounds the dangers of juvenile didactic literature, but also signals the potential abduction by natives popular in the captivity narratives. From tales featured as part of Increase Mather and Cotton Mather’s Puritanical child rearing writings to those more specifically literary endeavors of writers like Lydia Maria Child in *Hobomok*, literary white children were again and again depicted as at risk of being kidnapped, of having

⁸²Karen Sanchez Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child’s Part in Nineteenth Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 56-7.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 57.

their birthright of civilization and adulthood compromised. With her already evident inclination to passion, the genre-established threat of Pearl's going native, wild, and denigrating the sanctity of the Christian and the white in her budding womanhood is particularly high.

While Hawthorne casts the story seemingly far enough in the past that it can avoid the major issue of his day, the issue of slavery, the romantic emphasis on the sailor's blackness and otherness and his animal like nature allude not only to a literary tradition of Barbary pirates but also to the real and potential black fugitives that preoccupy the nation's political and social imagination. The narrative repeatedly depicts the sailors as dark, as "swarthy-cheeked wild men of the ocean,"⁸⁴ or as having a "sun-blackened face."⁸⁵ The references to the Spanish Main, to pirates, and Atlantic economies of wealth signal an oceanic narrative of spices, gems and human cargo cast a net over the murky waters of middle passage. The sailor's not actually being African is unimportant for his blackness is suggested enough to make his public embrace of Pearl fretted with antebellum taboos. The narrative reminds us that by their 1850s standards he would immediately be seized upon by the law as a criminal. Even Pearl's own inclination to seize upon the Indian and the blackened sailor as "objects" (interchangeably "human" and "thing") that interest her in the market place also works

⁸⁴ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 116.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

to reinforce the suggestion of a black man that the blackened sailor offers. He is a blackened thief with lewd morals and his reaching out to Pearl, his attempts to “lay hands on her” and to “snatch a kiss,” for the antebellum America readers is a black attempt to kidnap her, to taint her whiteness and her potential for a pure womanhood and make her merely another one of the objects this swarthy sailor plunders.

Pearl’s movements put her in relations that visually to the reader shows Pearl in a position of vulnerability, but considering her playing movements, Pearl who is likely to seize and lay possession on thing and person, emerges as no less dangerous than any other body. Indeed a consistent aspect of Pearl’s play has been its capacity to reify the very power dynamics that marginalize and condemn Pearl and her mother to the isolated outskirts of town. We saw it with her sending the shells away, melting the jellyfish and pelting the birds. Hester saw it too when she witnessed Pearl’s play and saw that though Pearl could transform, [t]he unlikeliest materials—a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower—... the puppets of [her] witchcraft ... [t]he singularity lay in the hostile feelings with which the child regarded all these offsprings of her own heart and mind.” She was always “smot[ing] down and uproot[ing] most unmercifully” these play creations.⁸⁶ Pearl’s play here is different, but not dissimilar from Hester’s projecting undesirable traits on to the mirror child that she may craft the inverse as a separate and negative other, who must stay contained in the realm of reflection. Pearl’s play endows objects

⁸⁶ Ibid., 42.

with life only to eradicate them. She endows them with the life of her resentment and her frustrations and then purges herself of these things.

The potential for Pearl's play to reify a violence that contains, possesses, and eradicates intensifies in the marketplace. For with an eagerness, scarily fitting and encouraged in the marketplace, we are told that "whenever Pearl saw anything to excite her active and wandering curiosity, she flew thitherward, and, as we might say, *seized upon that man or thing as her own property*, so far as she desired it, but without yielding the minutest degree of control over her motions in requital."⁸⁷ Although the Indian and the Spanish sailor are foreign men in the market, and as such might carry the threat of kidnapping, Pearl represents as much a danger to them as they to her (if not more so). Her desire and efforts to seize them and possess is a tackle of play. However tackling these brown men in the market moves within a history of legal, political, and physical violence towards the indigenous by settlers (as well as by many in Hawthorne's contemporary moment). The 1830 Indian Removal Act, the seizure of native lands, the trail of tears and forced removal onto reservation plots, the constitutional seizure of three fifths of enslaved people, slave codes, the 1793 and 1850 Fugitive Slave Act are only some of the most overt examples of the historical and contemporary seizure of indigenous and black bodies in which Pearl's marketplace seizure—her play—at least allusively traffics.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 116 (emphasis added).

2.9 chains

And yet in Pearl's departing play, to possess and seize may also be to care, carry, and to actually regard something or someone. At least for Pearl's own self, being possessed is not a state or quality of total abjection but rather one of seeming delight. To say nothing of her indulgence in people's suggestions that she is inhabited or possessed by a spirit, she repeatedly articulates her own identity in the possessive, as "mother's little Pearl." And she is Hester's Pearl. Hester names her "Pearl" because she was "of great price" and "purchased with all [Hester] had" (and in the marketplace no less). Pearl was "her mother's only treasure!"⁸⁸ This is to say that even though Pearl moves to possess those in the market place, to consume that which interests her, she does so as one who is already a thing, who has been purchased and possessed, but playfully, impishly embraces it.

Inasmuch as there is an appetite and a desire to wage "war" against the world and devour it, there is something scary and oppressive about Pearl's consuming flame. But inasmuch as what she wants to destroy (if we remember her rejection of the mirror image and the narrator's admitting that her hatred for the Puritan children was a response to their scorn of her) is that which causes spatial separations and divisions, and inasmuch as her possession or seizure as it were is what Huizinga might call the seizure

⁸⁸ Ibid., 40.

that takes place in play, the seizure of holding and being held, Pearl's market movements gesture towards an alternative reading of being bound or possessed.

Pearl's play in the market place is indeed like a tackle, a seizure of play and transformation and encounter—it is a collision of mind and action. It is a considering of the other as worth coming to and moving with, worth, in a sense, becoming. Linking her mind and its “wandering curiosity” to her actions, Pearl “flew thitherward” and her “seiz[ing] upon that man or thing [that excites her] as her own property.”⁸⁹ Her tackle with the Indian is brief, but long enough to encourage “growth” and “consciousness” of the other. She “looked the wild Indian in the face,” and he recognized her, and “grew conscious of a nature wilder than his own.” Their gaze is a mutual regarding of the others' nature. In this moment they behold and hold each other. This beginning to regard and hold is clearer and more detailed in Pearl's encounter with the sailor. Leaving the Indian, she “flew into the midst of a group of mariners, the swarthy-cheeked wild men of the ocean as the Indians were of the land.” And although Pearl seizes upon her interests without “yielding the minutest degree of control over her motions in requital” and while it is “impossible” “to lay hands upon her, with purpose to snatch a kiss,” this encounter too is a kind of playful tackle. The mariners behold her; they regard her as intently as she regards them: “...they gazed wonderingly and admiringly at Pearl, as if a flake of the sea-foam had taken shape of a little maid, and

⁸⁹ Ibid., 116.

were gifted with a soul of the sea-fire, that flashes beneath the prow in the night-time.”⁹⁰

For once Pearl is not a bird or a flying creature, and she has been “gifted with a soul,” and she is admired. While the sea image is not an airy one, it is also not one on the ground. The ocean (as the parallel between the Indian and the mariner’s respective wildness so overtly highlights) is the mariner’s land. More specifically the mariner knows what the pedestrian sometimes forget, which is that to move is to become one with, listen, and be in relation to the ocean that carries the ship.

What is suggested with her encounter with the Indian is more explicit in her encounter with the sailor. Pearl moves to the Indian and the sailor because she is curious, because she finds them worth considering. And her play with the sailor’s chain is also about a consideration that requires leaving one’s position and making one beholden to another. Respecting the fact that he cannot catch her or lay hands on her, the sailor must abandon his own position (indeed he is already out of his territory and on land). Instead he attempts to connect and play with her by using a new tactic. Attempting to bring their realms together, just as Pearl had tried to unite with the puddle child, the sailor took off his gold chain. He gave the chain to Pearl, and she began to “twine it around her neck and waist with such happy skill, that once seen there it became a part of her, and it was difficult to imagine her without it.”⁹¹ Pearl actively

⁹⁰ Ibid., 116.

⁹¹ Ibid., 116-7.

dresses herself in his garments, as if to take on some part of him. This expression of curiosity is different from the townspeople's curiosity about Hester and the scarlet letter.

In the same scene we are told that

[t]here were many people present from the country round about, who had often heard of the scarlet letter, and ... had never beheld it with their own bodily eyes. These... now thronged about Hester Prynne with rude and boorish intrusiveness. Unscrupulous as it was, however, it could not bring them nearer than a circuit of several yards.

These curious viewers seize only with a distancing gaze. They do not come to Hester nor dare dress themselves in her chains. They cannot even move, but rather "[a]t that distance they accordingly stood, fixed there by the centrifugal force of the repugnance which the mystic symbol inspired."⁹² They stay fixed and away from her. No one would give up their position for hers. No one desires to adorn themselves with Hester's garb, especially not her flashiest accessory, the scarlet letter. Indeed it is only Pearl who fashions herself with an A of her own making, who imagines something worth taking up in the outcast's appearance and accoutrements.

The chains, twined around her neck and waist, have no capacity to keep her in that spot nor do they give the sailor authority over her. His chain though is precisely that- *his* chain, his clothes, his self. We are told more than once how particular the garb is to the sailors, how it defies the rules of acceptability within the settlement and it marks the sailors as distinct. The story, particularly when it comes to Pearl, pays close attention to garment and dress, and it regards the putting on and taking off of clothes to

⁹² Ibid., 117.

also be about putting on and taking off of experiences and connections. For earlier Hester in regarding her long ago past thinks that “[a]ll other scenes of earth—even that village of rural England, where happy infancy and stainless maidenhood seemed yet to be in her mother’s keeping, like garments put off long ago—were foreign to her in comparison.”⁹³ Here “all other scenes of *earth*” other than the “wild and dreary” forest home of sin is forgotten. The earth, her childhood, her native land are all taken off like a garment, where the gesture of taking off is akin to forgetting and/or being separated from. Pearl though puts on dress as she did earlier when she fashioned seaweed so as to make herself a mermaid woman with a eel grass A on her chest. To dress herself in the sailor’s garb is not to lose herself but to bind their existences, to take upon herself something of the sailor’s tastes, and his things, as well as to accept the gesture with which he gave it to her. The chain does not put him in command of her, but it does put them in an intimate relation. He cannot not “lay hands on her” nor steal a kiss. Nor can he demand service of her, for when he asks her to relay a message to her mother regarding the travel plans Hester was making with him earlier, Pearl quickly replies that she will carry his message, “only if it pleases me.” He cannot own or demand her, but this chain, which we never see her remove, gathers, joins and bonds them in her play.

This vision of the chain that takes place in the market place between Pearl and the black-faced Spanish sailor is a playful re-visioning of the metaphorical appeals to

⁹³ Ibid., 35.

chains throughout the novel. Jean Fagan Yellin argues that the repeated images of Hester with chains align Hester with antislavery feminist iconography like Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave* and Harriet Hosmer's *Zenobia*.⁹⁴ Citing Elizabeth Cady Stanton's reference of "Hawthorne's grand woman,"⁹⁵ Yellin argues that antislavery feminists read Hester as a radical feminine character. Yellin though argues that there are limits to Hawthorne's feminist imaginings. Indeed she argues that Hester never breaks free of the chains, that she causes no rebellion or rupture, and that in the end Hawthorne inscribes her even more thoroughly into a conservative vision of the female outside of the public sphere. For Yellin Hester returns to the site of her transgression not to rebel but to help other women adjust to the order of things and to work within the dark space of the domestic is a conservative move that keeps her heavy under the chains of female bondage.

I argue though that even before Hester's return, chains and links and enclosed circles are more complex images in the narrative, and that particularly Pearl's willing and gleeful dressing of herself in the chains of some marketplace man invites us to rethink the chain and link not only as the chain-link of patriarchal (and white) enforced bondage but also as a kind of umbilical relation of carrying and mutual dependence. The image of chains or linking chain appear in two prominent ways in the

⁹⁴ Jean Fagan Yellin, "The Scarlet Letter and the Antislavery Feminists," in *The Scarlet Letter and Other Writings*, A Norton Critical Edition, ed. Leland S. Person (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 641.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 632.

narrative. On the one hand there is the chain of ordinary human relations and social order from which Hester has been severed; this chain is broken. Even as she laments the “links of flowers, or silk, or gold, or whatever the material,” “the fragments of a broken chain” that she must cast away, there is everywhere in the narrative iterations of a chain wrought in ignominy that is as strong and heavy as iron, and as earthy as footsteps treading over “wild and dreary” forest pathways. This is “[t]he chain that bound her here,” the narration explains. It “was of iron links, and galling to her inmost soul, but could not be broken,”⁹⁶ and yet this picture of the chain as pure abject ignominy does not account for the narratives repeated articulation of a chain of mutual connection between outlawed peoples. In the very next lines after the aforementioned quotation about the unbreakable bonds of the scarlet letter, the narrative suggests that “it might be that another feeling kept her within the scene and pathway that had been so fatal.” This feeling of connection is to Dimmesdale, and she feels it again when she see his resemblance in Pearl and then when he realizes his suffering under the watch of Chillingworth. She explains this connection as “the iron links of mutual crime.”⁹⁷ This link of mutual crime is a kind of relation opened up (and yet routinely repudiated by the idea of a magic circle of isolation) by this common sin and shared fall into darkness. Hester’s earlier imagining of being also tethered by a feeling other than shame relates to

⁹⁶ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 35.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 73-4.

her hope in the potential of meeting Dimmesdale on the ground. Part of the reason she did not flee the town was that “[t]here dwelt, there trode, the feet of one with whom she deemed herself connected in a union that, unrecognized on earth, would bring them together before the bar of final judgment, and make that their marriage-altar, for a joint futurity of endless retribution.”⁹⁸ Here marriage, the linking of spirits and bodies (humorously the old ball and chain) is recognized as the connection of one who can metonymically be identified as feet trode-ing the earth. It is in the “pathway” where these feet had trod that Hester wishes to stay. “[L]inked in a mutual crime,” she recognizes the ground as shared and connecting her to Dimmesdale.

For Hester there is both the lament of the broken chain and ambivalence of this iron chain of criminal relation, but Pearl’s gestures revision broken and emphasize the idea of linking. With Pearl the fragmented need not illustrate the broken, which is to say with Pearl, broken is not necessarily a sign of abjection or death but rather the condition for the possibility of making different connections. She can embrace the broken or fragmented piece as not the dim remains of societal excrement, but as an element with its own unique and different shape and inner glow that relates to the world around her in a different way. She is biologically, physically, and metaphorically and in movement acting as a link. She is the manifestation of the chain link between Hester and the minister. The chain really does become her. Her becoming a chain is most explicitly

⁹⁸ Ibid., 35.

pictured in the midnight scene at the scaffold in which the three stood hand and hand with Pearl in the middle. Here “[t]he three formed an electric chain.”⁹⁹ “[A]nd little Pearl,” the minister imagines, is “herself a symbol, and the connecting link between those two.”¹⁰⁰ The joining of bodies here by way of touch (all of which takes place for Hester and Pearl en route home, and for the minister, in the midst of a somnambulatory journey) is not superficial. It deeply infuses their natures and selves together. “The moment that [the minister joined hands], there came what seemed a tumultuous rush of new life, *other life than his own* pouring like a torrent into his heart, and hurrying through all his veins, as if the mother and the child were communicating their vital warmth to his half-torpid system.”¹⁰¹ This “tumultuous rush,” this “new life,” this “other life” not of the individual but of those bound together is the possibility of chains and links becoming a life cord.

That the chain here is a life giving link, indeed a metaphysical umbilical cord, asks us to reconsider once more Pearl’s uninhibited play with dark men in the market. Several years later Hawthorne takes his trip down south for the purpose of wanting to see for himself the effects of The Civil War. In his essay, “Chiefly About War Matters,” Hawthorne writes about seeing on this trip a group of black fugitives making their way

⁹⁹ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 71.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 70 (emphasis added).

north. He describes the site of these “contrabands, escaping out of the mysterious depths of Seccessia” as “one very pregnant token of a social system thoroughly disturbed.” Even though Hawthorne (enjoying how their “rude” “garb [appeared as if it] had grown upon them spontaneously”) regarded these black peoples as “picturesquely natural” and “not altogether human,” he takes note of a historical link between these “faun”-like creatures and “[his] own race”:

There is an historical circumstance, known to few, that connects the children of the Puritans with these Africans of Virginia in a very singular way. They are our brethren, as being lineal descendants from the Mayflower, the fated womb of which in her first voyage, sent forth a brood of Pilgrims on Plymouth Rock, and, in a subsequent one, spawned slaves upon the Southern soil,—a monstrous birth . . .

True to his romantic taste for myth and epic, Hawthorne here provides something of a creation story of American slavery and race relations. In this story the white Puritan and the black African are born out of the same “fated womb.” They are brothers. Though the latter, black brother appears as “a monstrous birth” both are born up out of the ships at the shoreline, and this makes for an “instinctive sense of kindred” desire for white people to help their young black brothers. For Hawthorne, only brothers are born out of this feminine ship, which is perhaps why he can only imagine a brotherhood in which the “white progeny,” the older brother, “offset[s] [the] dark one.”¹⁰² But when Pearl in her enigmatic and departing movement takes the black-faced sailor’s chains and twines it round her waste and neck, she is not a brother, and she is not trying to offset

¹⁰² Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Chiefly About War Matters by a Peaceable Man,” Eldritch Press, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://www.eldritchpress.org/nh/cawm.html>.

some lack in the sailor. Instead—while she may not be the woman Hawthorne means to make of her—she offers here a more feminine gesture. Linking herself with him, she acknowledges a shared umbilical relation of the dark hold and the wild sea and of the liminal shoreline; she “steps so boldly” not so much into a shared bondage as into a shared life and a monstrous birth.

3. Black Limbs

This ballet doesn't work if the corps de ballet doesn't. . . . the corps makes visible the growing tension in the music - it is crucial as their lines intersect in the series of arabesque voyagés (traveling arabesques), that every leg is held firm and steady, every arm and head be exact. Ballet is art that moves, those movements have to be coherent, serving the overall design, or the painting becomes chaos. At that crucial moment - every leg, arm, head and skirt become one head, one arm, one leg, and thus one synchronous movement and except for a single leg which only once - way in the back - flew higher than her sisters - deserved the applause they received.¹

-Shelia Orysiek Review of San Diego Ballet's 2007 performance of *Giselle*.

In my endeavors to consider the possibility of Topsy's movements as an explosive commonness in what has come to be regarded as the negative cliché of her figure, I am most interested in Shelia Orysiek's description of that "single [rogue] leg" in its too high and excessive *developpe*,² moving out of place (and subsequently to some degree out of time) and yet still communicating ballet's ultimate boon of lift and flight. And in doing so it suggests always the interplay between constraint and movement that gives ballet its appeal, makes it legible and moving, but that also makes it fecund — as modern dancers and others have come to celebrate — with possible articulations that remain occluded in the regulated body of the dance.

¹ Sheila Orysiek, "California Ballet Dances Giselle," San Diego Jewish World, accessed October 6, 2013, http://sandiegojewishworld.com/2007-sdjw/2007-10-sdjw/2007-10-07sunday160/index2007-10-07sunday.html#sheila_orysiek.

² *Developpe* is in ballet a large drawing up and unfolding of the leg into a high straight line parallel to the torso. It gets its name because the movement is thought of as a development that requires both an intense flexibility and rigorous training.

But first we must step back and think about this machine of limbs, the *corps de ballet*. In the same sentence, and with not the slightest concern about any contradictions, Orysiek poses ballet as both an “art that moves” and as a “painting,” the latter being an art historically defined by its arresting and framing the perceived image into a two-dimensional stillness. The contradiction is startling save that it is one deeply rooted in ballet’s narrative of its own modern ontology. Early 19th-century ballet critic Jean-Georges Noverre explained that “[a] ballet is a picture, or rather a series of pictures connected one with the other by the plot...”³ And yet it was the dynamic and asymmetric choreographing of bodies, the break away from the static shapings of symmetry (connected to traditions of portraiture) and towards the moving between levels that created ballet’s affective art. The contradiction, then, is also the accepted truth of ballet; ballet is an art of moving pictures. And it is precisely within this art of moving pictures that the *corps de ballet* becomes instrument and instrumental, being not only the framing structures of the picture but also the darker mechanics of its movements, and the breath and spirit that give texture and render visible the affective notes of those pictures.

The *corps de ballet* as Orysiek explains it here (and her review echoes the testimonies of many others) “makes visible” by becoming invisible. That is to say each

³ Jean-Georges Noverre, “From *Letters on Dancing and Ballet*” in *What is Dance?: Readings in Theories and Criticism*, ed. Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 10.

dancer, each limb, each step abdicates its singularity (or its recognition as such) in order to become one *corps*, “one head, one arm, one leg.” In this oneness, they metamorphose from a machine of working people to simply a working machine and a mutable cipher. Even this collectivity they give over to the music and become the visible and physical manifestations of the music’s drama. They become the “signature” of the musical sign, physical validation that the music is legible in a semantic order. Likewise with its “lines intersect[ing]” and “every leg ... held firm and steady, every arm and head ... exact,” the *corps* functions as the frame, perspective lines, and architecture of the ballet. It is both the ballet and not the ballet. It is not the ballet in as much as the ballet is a narrative dance, a romance or tragic plot, with specific meanings and messages played out by the individual expressive pictures created by the principal characters and soloists. And yet the *corps de ballet* is, like faith, the very substance and evidence of the ballet’s unseen: through it, emerge the ballet’s tensions, moods, timing, and its anonymous social—its common. Inasmuch as “[t]he ballet doesn’t work if the *corps de ballet* doesn’t,” the *corps de ballet* is the limbed labor of the ballet. This is not to diminish the enormous amount of work from the spotlighted dancers, for they are also laborers in the pictures, but I mean to point out that the *corps de ballet* is the dark labor of the ballet whose labor is both essential and essentialized not in the singular dancer but as a mass or an ordered multiplicity. It is not only disciplined into “serving the overall design”

that makes the picture “coherent” as a “picture,” but they become the design, edifying in as much as they are the lines and joints of the ballet’s edifice.

“Ballet is an art that moves” —most certainly Orysiak meant to play on physical and affective movement here, but it is less certain that she meant to think of it in terms of political movements as dance critic Randy Martin suggests when he titles his participatory study on the intersections of dance studies and politics, “Critical Moves.”⁴ And yet not unlike a proletariat (and yes, the historical class formulation of the *corps de ballet* would put it in dancing motion with the laborer of mills and factories and also with the female labor of domestics and sex workers), it is in its function of making visible the “tension” of the music, of rigidly keeping things precise, always fecund with the possibility of a revolt, of a rogue leg that makes in the same dance a different line. This line of flight is an explosion from within for it is both a fuller realization of ballet’s ideal (higher and flying) and an error, for it like the bodies of the black freedmen, a problem, exceeding the perfect execution of the role previously assigned it, dancing not so much with autonomous individuality (for this dancer is still but a leg, a part of her sisters) but demonstrating the multiplicity at work in the one and the possibility of an alternative move.

This emphasis on an orderly and unified body, the necessary but auxiliary role of making legible the overall design, and the making visible by abdicating singularity in an

⁴ Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

invisible labor begins to reveal how fitting it is that at the end of chapter twenty of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (UTC), in which the much-abused and so very black, slave girl, Topsy, is introduced to Ophelia and the narrative, Harriet Beecher Stowe's narrator remarks that Topsy "has been fairly introduced into our *corps de ballet*."⁵ Thinking about the project of "bring[ing Topsy] up right"⁶ as a choreographic one of bringing her into a *corps de ballet* recasts the many conversations on the narrative role Stowe ekes out for Topsy. In highlighting a tricky but fundamental relationship between domestic pictures, movement, grace, and black limbs, I propose we consider Stowe's narrative as a kind of ballet. Thinking about the project in terms of dance calls attention to Stowe's theological revisions of the Holy Ghost, her conflations between ideas of growth and development and emancipation, and her elevation of the home to a public sphere, which is to say her attempt to make domestic pictures acceptably moving via the containment of improper movements to a *corps de* black limbs. Thinking about the narrative in terms of dance also invites us to focus on performance and the practiced body in the narrative. In this chapter I argue that thinking about the project of bringing Topsy up right as a choreographic project allows us to rethink Topsy's narrative work in a way that not only illuminates avenues within the much articulated limitations of Topsy's role as imagined by Stowe but also makes us witness to an excess stirring in Stowe's language. This is to

⁵ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Bantam Classics, 2003), 287.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 286.

say that in the words (the prose we have overtly and more tacitly thought of as “bad”) Topsy might hook other meanings and escape might be precisely and much more than the unregulatable black surplus Stowe imagined her to be.

I organize the chapter in four parts: In the first section, I situate my desire to move with Topsy amidst a long tradition of loathing Topsy as a flat minstrel caricature. I call attention to the fact that most of what artists and scholars have responded to in their disgust for Topsy is not so much Stowe’s text but rather the many reductive adaptations of Stowe’s (not unproblematic but more textured) narrative. Indeed I suggest that Stowe encourages such a reduction by way of framing her narrative endeavor as an attempt to make moving pictures, an attempt to offer still images. The pictures or visual impressions (rather than any particularly poetic force of Stowe’s language) have received the widest circulation and attention in national and academic imagination. In these stills, though, Topsy is a problem not only to Ophelia, but also to the image and to representation. In the pictures, the lawless movements (and the play on words and syntactical breaks) that emerge in Topsy’s gestures can only show up as a “just so ugly” black blur and a primitive lack that the narrative must redeem (if possible) by its sentimental development. Focusing on Topsy as a moving force in and underneath the narrative enables us to imagine Topsy differently or rather enables us to consider what it is Topsy’s gestures invite us to imagine. In particular thinking about the narrative project as a dance, sets us up to think about not just the choreography of

the narrative—what Stowe, by way of Ophelia and others, wants for (and out of) Topsy—but to also think about (to borrow from dance scholar Randy Martin’s *Critical Moves*) what dance is “for the dancer” who steps “in the midst of [that] crisis, ... break, [and] rupture,” which dance seems to “generate.”⁷ In this way if we wandered off with Pearl and took seriously the tenor of her footsteps, we will now turn with Topsy and take seriously the articulations of her bends. Instead of taking Stowe at her pictures, I think about the puncturing words, and the imaginative force between words that haunt the development of Stowe’s moving pictures with all kinds of opacities, non linear trajectories, elisions, and gaps.

In the second section I articulate Stowe’s narrative designs for Topsy, Eva, and the St. Clare household in terms of dance, specifically in terms of a narrative and domestic ballet. I attempt to show what I see as Stowe’s domestic ballet: a tripartite narrative interplay between dance, domestic, and grace. I highlight first a charged spiritual parallel between Stowe’s invocation of the *corps de ballet* and her invocation of the Holy Spirit as an ordering force. I then, focusing on a range of Stowe’s writings, tease out a trend of her simultaneous repudiation of public dance and cooptation of theatrical and balletic rhetoric in her descriptions of the spiritual and domestic spheres. On the one hand Stowe arrests ballet’s physical embodiments of grace in her sanctified characters and ballet’s tendency to elevate the picture and make it moving by way of

⁷ Martin, *Critical Moves*, 1.

streamlined, orderly and yet still melodramatic posing of the body. On the other hand her tendency to regulate the frenzied labor of the limbs (which the stage too indecorously puts on display) into the dark realms and lower creatures, so that while present and animating keep the higher ideals untainted. Having established a pervasive connections among dance, domesticity and grace in Stowe's writings, I end this section by asking us to think about Eva, Ophelia, Tom, and all of the St. Clare household as dancing in Stowe's domestic ballet, so as to suggest that when Stowe's narrator introduces Topsy into the *corps de ballet*, it is not merely a passing metaphor, but the reigning logic of black limbs, moving bodies and grace in Stowe's domestic ballet. As I move to the third section, I illustrate the way in which what gets rendered as Topsy's missteps/mistakes can be read as improvisational challenges to being brought up into that laboring corps. Finally I suggest that Topsy's conversion, at least from the point of a bodily articulation, is a fiction. If the project of bringing Topsy up right is a choreographic project of bringing her up right and upright, as I hope I have convincingly argued it might be, even as much as Eva's saving of Topsy is a moral salvation, it must manifest itself in some change in the quality, direction, shape or type of Topsy's movements, which it does not readily seem to do.

Finally I conclude by thinking of the implication of Topsy's dance, its potential articulation of a theory of emigration down and a theology of the ground. Suggesting a parallel between Topsy's dance and William Dudley's performance of Alvin Ailey's "I

Want to Be Ready,” I offer some potential ideas about what kind of thought, spirituality, and way of being in the world? might be at stake in Topsy’s proclivity for the ground.

In this move to conclude, I hope to lay out questions about care, growth, verticality, and performance that I will ultimately delve into with greater detail in the next chapter as I discuss Harriet Wilson’s Frado, the indentured mulatta so often portrayed as Topsy’s literary redeemer.

3.1 “I Ain’t Gonna Be No Topsy”

There is a great deal of scholarship on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which concerns itself only cursorily, if at all, with Stowe’s prose and more specifically with the many stage,⁸ fiction⁹, material culture¹⁰ and cinema adaptations of the novel.¹¹ Dealing with UTC as

⁸ See Bruce McConachie, “Out of the Kitchen and Into the Marketplace: Normalizing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* for the Antebellum Stage,” *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 3 (Winter 1991): 5-28; Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

⁹ Barbara Hochman, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Reading Revolution: Race, Literacy, Childhood, and Fiction, 1851-1911* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011); and Joy Jordan Lake, *Whitewashing Uncle Tom’s Cabin: Nineteenth-Century Women Novelists Respond to Stowe* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); and “Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race,” *Social Text* 101 (December 2009): 67-94.

¹¹ Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Daniel Stein, “Rememorizing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: The Transformation of Race Melodrama in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” in *Melodrama! The Mode of Excess from Early America to Hollywood*, ed. Frank Kelleter, Barbara Krah, and Ruth Mayer (Heidelberg: Winter, 2007), 263-82.

the “great leaping fish” that Henry James¹² named it, these scholars endeavor to follow the leaps of what Sarah Meer in her study of minstrelsy and UTC calls, “Uncle Tom Mania”¹³ rather than (what I argue might be the turbulent waters) of Stowe’s prose. Out of these waters, however, Stowe’s characters, particularly Topsy, are constrained to a point and cannot move or signify in any other register than the narrow roles assigned for them.

Particularly Topsy always appears as a site of racist caricature, a hideously lawless pickaninny who is as comically ugly on the outside as she is humorously immoral in her words and actions. Robert MacGregor’s 1994 article traces the divergent paths of Topsy and Eva in the cultural imagination. As he explains Topsy’s legacy on the stage and in advertisement (arguably even in the 1991 Benetton campaign) persists as the figure of a black devil always in negative opposition to the sweet white angel child.¹⁴ Eva is everything that one wants, and Topsy is everything that the product or narrative proposes to fix. This is to say that secretly and not so secretly everyone is ready to declare, as performer Mae Barnes declared, “I ain’t gonna be no Topsy.” In his article exploring Stephen Foster’s “pathetic” songs, James Olney highlights Barnes’s

¹² Henry James, “From a Small Boy and Others (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913) *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and American Culture A Multi-Media Archive, accessed March 7, 2014. <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/articles/n2auhjat.html>.

¹³ See Meer.

¹⁴ Robert M. MacGregor, “The Eva and Topsy Dichotomy in Advertising,” in *Images of the Child*, ed. Harry Eiss (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994), 287-306.

rejection of the Topsy role people expected her to play.¹⁵ The songs, which were so readily adopted by minstrel shows and how they revised narratives like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* put Barnes's blackness in performative relationship to Topsy. She rejected Topsy as a flat caricature. Though interestingly she declared that she would play Eva, a character that seems no less flat than Topsy. The issue then is not the flatness, but the blackness of Topsy or the idea that Topsy seems to suggest to people, which is that blackness is flat and lacking. Indeed Elizabeth Young argued that 'Topsy constitutes a blackface projection of white femininity, in which inversion is at once utopian fantasy and demonized grotesque.'¹⁶ In this sense Topsy literally is a flat shadow. Building on Young, Michelle Ann Abate argues that Louisa May Alcott provides the example of how Topsy's lawless blackness enables literary white women, like Jo March, to unmoor themselves from the constraints of white domestic femininity.¹⁷ The blackness of Topsy here (though useful) is a flat mask, animated and embodied by a white performer. Again in 2007 Robin Bernstein suggests Angela Grimke Weld's play *Rachel* as a revision of UTC's Topsy by presenting an authentic black child character in contrast to Topsy's

¹⁵ James Olney, "'I Aint Gonna Be No Topsy' Because 'Paris is My Old Kentucky Home,'" *Southern Review* 37, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 155.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women's Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 30.

¹⁷ Michelle Ann Abate, "Topsy and Topsy-Turvy Jo: Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and/in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*," *Children's Literature* 34 (2006): 59-82.

comic imperviousness to pain.¹⁸ In her 2011 *Racial Innocence*, Bernstein continues exploring Topsy's pickaninny legacies by analyzing the everyday racist performances of black violence perpetuated in the various reimaginings of Topsy in American material culture.¹⁹ As is most apparent in Olney's title and in Bernstein's premise, Topsy outside the text does not fare as much more than a deplorable site of a racist imagination. In the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that we know, which is always, it seems, a knowing of its afterlife, Topsy's only role (whether we laugh at it or deplore it) can be a flat figuration of black deviance that good-hearted whiteness can at least try to correct.

This emphasis on UTC as a cultural object whose efficacy happens outside the novel rather than in anything specific in its language, characters, or plots may stem from the grounds upon which UTC was "rescued" in the 80s from being a bad novel, which itself depends upon fixing Topsy as only a site through which the novel accomplishes its work. Prior to the 1980s, UTC was regarded by many intellectuals, as James Baldwin so baldly phrased it, "a bad novel."²⁰ Ann Douglas highlights UTC for its "excessive" feminine sentimentalism, its "camp," which she suggests might have pandered to popular (read low) sentiments but did not earn it a place among a high literary

¹⁸ Robin Bernstein, "'Never Born': Angelina Weld Grimke's Rachel as Ironic Response to Topsy," *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 61-76.

¹⁹ Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*.

²⁰ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984), 14.

tradition.²¹ Baldwin also particularly objected to Stowe's feminization of her black male character, Uncle Tom, and her failure to imagine or retain any other black (fully developed) characters. But in the 1985 *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins argued that the novel's popularity and sentimentalism, far from being grounds for dismissal, ought to be considered evidence of the novel's significance in the world. Situating Stowe's middle class reader as steeped in religious and sentimental conventions and sensitive to affective tropes (that academics today would regard as naïve), Tompkins presents Stowe's deployment of popular conventions and sentimentalism as a deployment of a 19th-century-female rhetorical power that recognizes how to move her readers.

Tompkin's argument, though, hinges on moving discussions about the novel away from "modernist thinkings" about a piece of literature as a discrete form and separate from the world, as "merely represent[ing the world] ... in a specifically literary language whose claim to value lies in its uniqueness." Tompkins instead suggests that Stowe's literature had and was meant to have "[sentimental] designs on the world"; it was indeed "attempt[ing] to change things."²² In order to make this shift though, she asks her readers to

set aside some familiar categories for evaluating fiction--stylistic intricacy, psychological subtlety, epistemological complexity--and to [go outside or beyond the text in order to]

²¹ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 3-4.

²² Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 66.

see the sentimental novel . . . as a political enterprise, halfway between sermon and social theory, that both codifies and attempts to mold the values of its time.²³

The academy's turn to examine structures of power and deconstructionist analysis in the 1980s further facilitated this shift from the language inside the text to the affect outside the text. Consider how Gillian Brown's *Domestic Individualism* links Stowe's narrative to the promotion of a domestic economy and matriarchal utopia.²⁴ The explicitly Foucaultian reading of Richard Brodhead's 1993 *Culture of Letters* presents UTC as in and shaping changing theories of discipline and child rearing from a whip-wielding sovereign to the dispersed technologies of disciplinary intimacy disseminated by affect.²⁵

To be clear Brown's and Brodhead's analysis importantly attend to Stowe's narrative in conversation with its contemporaries. Together they and others have challenged us to think about the network of various narratives and archives that produce and are produced by literature, and they have paved a way for thinking about what literature has and can do. They lay the groundwork for Elizabeth Ammons in her discussion of UTC to insist that "[w]ords do have the ability to transform people and

²³ Ibid., 67.

²⁴ Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). See also Gillian Brown, "Getting in the Kitchen with Dinah: Domestic Politics in Uncle Tom's Cabin," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (Autumn, 1984): 503-523.

²⁵ Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

affect events"; literature can "change the world."²⁶ I contend only with the false opposition between the texture and affect of the words and the novel's effect in world. For just as Ammons highlights Stowe's UTC as a novel from which we can learn how literature can change the world, she also iterates more casually what Tompkins first implied, which is that there is a distinct line to be drawn between "giv[ing] us pleasure in the beauty and power of language" and writing to "expose what's wrong in the world, to affirm, what is right and good, and, in every case... ask[ing] us not simply to understand but to act."²⁷ Action happens by way of circulating pictures that "impress" (to use Bernstein's term)²⁸ and move outside the text, separated from the specifics of language.

Topsy in this formulation becomes, as Stowe presents her, instrumental for demonstrating the novel's potential work in the world. Tompkins argues that "[Little Eva's death] proves its efficacy [which is in fact the efficacy of the whole novel], not though the sudden collapse of the slave system, but through the conversion of Topsy, a motherless, godless black child who has up until that point successfully resisted all attempts to make her 'good'" but now filled with Eva's love is saved from her lesserness,

²⁶ Elizabeth Ammons, *Brave New Words: How Literature Will Save the Planet* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 45.

²⁷ Ammons, 38-9.

²⁸ Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*.

“redeemed” and made almost constitutionally “different from what she used to be.”²⁹ Similarly Brodhead’s reading presents Topsy as part of a “work[ing] through,” a “vindicat[ing,]” and “broadcast[ing]” of the “problems set by middle-class disciplinary theory”³⁰ articulated by Horace Mann, Charles Bushnell, and others in the pedagogical communities in which Stowe was steeped. In the story Topsy is doubly disciplined by the old regime of a feudal slavocracy, and her subjection to the new regime of disciplinary technologies and the psychological control manifested through Eva’s rhetoric of care and affective bonds. But Brodhead’s reading also narratively fixes her as a site for thinking through cultural shifts. She is only the conduit by which Stowe can show the transformative powers of Eva’s love.

If Eva becomes the heroine, the juvenile, feminine, angelic subject, Topsy becomes *the* object of the novel, which is itself not the problem. The problem is that the novel imagines that objects must be made, that they are not already doing something or up to something. We can see this dynamic most clearly in Gillian Brown’s reading of Stowe’s narrative as a call for a utopic domestic economy. In this instance Brown is speaking about Dinah (the cook in the St. Clare household), but the unregulatable excess Ophelia encounters in Dinah sets the stage for Ophelia’s being constant aghast at Topsy’s presence. Similarly Brown’s critique of Dinah stands also for her critique of

²⁹ Tompkins, 70 (emphasis mine).

³⁰ Brodhead, 42.

Topsy. According to Brown “[t]he time-honored incontinence to which Dinah is attached is not merely backward kitchen technology, but the political economy that enslaves her. Her habits, Brown suggests, manifest less her eccentricities, her own movements, as much as they suggest ‘the spirit of the system under which she had grown up.’” Tying waste and excess to desire, Brown argues that “[w]hat makes Dinah’s imperious and ‘erratic’ kitchen government incompatible with proper domestic economy is its reference to her desire rather than to a ‘systematic order.’”³¹ Though Brown’s observations about abolitionist women’s alignment with domestic economy and a truly revised domestic utopia is convincing; it cannot be lost on us that the argument comes at the cost of Dinah’s self-crafted agency, for the lynch-pin of Brown’s argument is that Dinah (like Topsy, and all the other black candidates for reform) have no concept of what they are doing; they are simply mindlessly, and pathetically in its painful irony, contributing to the system that oppresses them. Similarly for Brown, Topsy offers only an “ironic confusion of words.” That is to say we as the readers see what Ophelia and St. Clare do not see and what Dinah and Topsy cannot “even begin to imagine.”³²

Brown is not the only one to present Topsy as ignorant and lacking. Arguments about Stowe’s cultural efficacy depend upon highlighting Topsy (and to a degree the

³¹ Brown, “Getting in the Kitchen...”, 504.

³² Brown, 509.

other black characters) as a lack. For it is in the narrative's project of bringing Topsy up right that it articulates its aims and its hopes and its belief that the feelings it induces in its reader can change society. Jim O'Loughlin, borrowing greatly from Brodhead, explains that

[i]n Stowe's account, what is most intriguing about Topsy is that she is a character without personal narrative....The problem of Topsy as presented by Stowe, is that she is a character without character, a site where different discourses converge, but which have no influence in shaping her.³³

In the effort to give character and ultimately change, convert, and save Topsy, Topsy herself must be rendered as an intentional site of black, unruly, and heathen excess. Only when Eva's love and concern over time touches Topsy and connects her to the world does she "move from caricature to character" in Stowe's eyes.³⁴

While minstrel shows and Tomitudes focus on Topsy as a site of excess, academic attention has focused on Topsy, whether in protest or laud, as a site of making. Yet focusing on Topsy as a site of making presumes the narrative's success; it takes Stowe's experiment of bringing Topsy up right and upright not at its words but at its design. This is to say, we may be reducing Topsy paradoxically to the macro, that is to the structural "articulations" of Stowe's "moving" pictures—those narrative effects and dynamics with traceable legacies outside the novel, on the stage, material culture, counternarratives, and cinema. This reduction to the macro freezes Topsy outside the

³³ Jim O'Loughlin, "Articulating Uncle Tom's Cabin," *New Literary History* 31, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 580.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 581.

water of Stowe's prose and in the air of Stowe's intent and the role the narrative most clearly develops for her and means to develop her by. But a commitment to the ethics of close reading and a belief in the poetic force of the word(s) takes us not away from the picture or figure of Topsy but into the role where at the level of language and movement she might signify something(s) else. In following her movements and excessive gestures, we break into the (di)stilled nature of Stowe's pictures of development to understand what might be Topsy's insistence on her growth as radically prior and resistant (by way of its excess) to Stowe's development pictures. That is why Stowe is imagining by way of Ophelia a proper child development and ordering of Topsy's black body as synonymous with emancipation and abolitionist efforts; in the minor articulations of Topsy's gestures her childish and undeveloped movements find their own fugitive way out.

The impulse in (liberal) academic discourse to read Topsy as a site of making that is as an excess out of which something must be made, might best be understood with a recourse to Linda Williams' discussion of racial melodrama. Williams—who has remarkably little to say about Topsy given her extensive attention to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in her discussion of the origins of an American racial melodrama—argues that the melodramatic is not merely a degraded form of excessive feminine sentimentalism that exists as a subgeneric mode to the more masculine defined classical modes of cinema and narrative in America, but rather that melodrama is *the* American mode of dealing

with any type of controversial subject but particularly race. Williams importantly identifies as the heart of supposedly classic cinema and realist films the same melodramatic impulse to use, among other things, “prolonged climatic action” or “infinite varieties of rescues, accidents, chases, and fights” in order to make “moving pictures”³⁵ that are generally associated with more explicitly labeled female melodramas. “Moving pictures” here refers not only to their cinematic mode, but also to their capacity to move people emotionally, as well as to their being simultaneously rooted in action or characters and events that physically move. Williams’ analysis opens up a whole field of necessary reconsiderations of the relationship between subgenres and classics as well as the question of what kinds of ideologies and ways of processing ideas about race get embedded into these films that, as she says, avail themselves in the latest “trappings” of realism.

Williams’ analysis, however, also evinces a desire both to elevate the feminine genre and to repudiate the “excess” of the melodramatic mode. Williams elevates those genres usually thought of as feminine melodramas by illustrating that the melodramatic mode that had been pinned to the feminine as a means to degrade it is in fact a mode not particular to the more feminine genres but one that is essential to those classic narratives that critics of the feminine genre’s melodrama would have regarded as more sophisticated and high-brow. In bringing the melodramatic to the center (away from the

³⁵ Williams, 21.

feminine margins), Williams means to make it normative and not excessive.

“Melodrama,” Williams explains, “can be viewed, then, not as a genre, an excess, or an aberration, but as what most often typifies popular American narrative in literature, stage, film, and television when it seeks to engage with moral questions.”³⁶ Interested in the melodrama as a central mode of realist films, Williams views any such binaries “whether between classical and excess, or classical and modern, or classical and non classical” as ineffective in their making the melodramatic “some kind of deviation from a more ‘harmonious’ ‘norm’”³⁷ or as “that which the ‘classical’ cinema has grown up out of.”³⁸

Embedded in this various but consistent need to suggest that melodrama is at the center rather than the margins, we can see in Williams a conflation between the excessive and the childish and undeveloped (that which one grows out of). For Williams the melodramatic mode is not an “infancy and childhood” of cinema, but rather it is precisely a development—a means of making legible otherwise ambiguous moral positions. It is perhaps for this reason that her extensive use of UTC as a touchstone for her analysis focuses primarily on Uncle Tom and the way in which his sufferings and sensational narrative movements make moral issues legible. Topsy’s

³⁶ Williams, 17.

³⁷ Williams, 23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

character, though, presents a problem for Williams' analysis of the melodrama. For Topsy is penned as an excess, as the "very blackest of her race," and she is not a character whose sufferings render clear moral legibility. Children's seeming imperviousness to physical punishment is met as much with laughter as with disgust, sadistic desire, and sympathetic feeling. The very idea of melodrama as a mode of making morally legible and developing "moving pictures" breaks down with Topsy. Eva's suffering in relationship to Topsy, her saintly embrace, and her martyr's tears bring Topsy into William's melodramatic mode, but the melodramatic, like Aunt Ophelia, cannot make sense of Topsy's own wild movements the melodramatic.

While Williams recognizes Peter Brooks as being among the first and few to treat the melodramatic as a specifically modern mode, she highlights the limitation of his argument by pointing to his title. She explains that "his subtitle, *The Mode of Excess*, betrays the sense in which it is seen as a *deviation* from the most 'classical' realist forms."³⁹ What she takes from Brooks is the notion that "melodrama is most centrally about being able to read an occulted moral truth, and the assigning of guilt and innocence in a 'lost sacred,' post-enlightenment, modern world where moral and religious certainties are no longer self-evident."⁴⁰ However part of what Brooks points out is not necessarily just about being able to read, meaning being able to identify and

³⁹ Williams, 18.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

locate, the moral truth. It is also about the process of reading more generally, that is of recognizing and participating in an interplay of multiple and excessive possibilities of meaning, shifting through combinations of signs and significations. Brooks describes the melodramatic mode as a mode that wants to leave nothing unsaid. The melodramatic is not against realism, but rather it is a means of marking what is powerful and animating in realism as its excess.⁴¹ Where Williams means to make melodrama a central mode of development of moving pictures, of normalcy, Brooks' reading of the melodramatic assigns what is powerful and important about the melodramatic to its many deviations. He is not as interested in its capacity to illicit one particular move but in the kind of movement of gestures and articulations it evidences. William's insistence on thinking of the melodramatic as a means of developing "moving pictures" rather than as a mode of excess makes it difficult for her to consider precisely what she sets us up to consider, which is the possibility of an explosive excess, a gesture that escapes in these "moving pictures." Following Topsy's movements I argue is a return to the melodramatic as excess and as feminine, childish, and black—the not developed but growing.

⁴¹ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess: with a New Preface* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

3.2 “*I Believe in the Holy Ghost*”

If, as Elizabeth Ammons points out, Stowe’s narrative “constitute[s itself] foundationally as spiritual texts... [that] seek, like an evangelical sermon, to produce a conversion experience, to enact a spiritual revolution in the reader or listener”⁴² than any response to Stowe’s narrative has to be a theological response. Stowe’s religious understanding of grace can help us understand her rhetorical appeal to dance and physical grace. Dance (as ecstatic movement), the word, manifestations of the unseen, the bringing up and conversion of a heathen body, and that irregulatable something else, to say nothing of Stowe’s own pastoral proclivities, come together in Stowe’s understanding of the Holy Spirit. In “What is to be Done?” the last chapter of *The Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1854), Stowe calls northerners to action using a variety of rhetorical appeals, but specifically by appealing from the pulpit, lacing her text with subtle and overt religious references, out and out religious calls to unity, and at one point, in a move she identifies as common to all Christian faiths, she invokes the Holy Spirit. “*I believe in the Holy Ghost,*” she writes.⁴³ Set apart in italics, it is both an example and the actual utterance. It is an example of creed, which she has just declared all the Christian faiths share, but inasmuch as it is separated by punctuation and formatting, it is also an utterance, an actual moment of invoking the Nicene Creed, if not also the Holy Ghost.

⁴² Ammons, 54.

⁴³ Harriet Beecher Stowe, “What is to be Done?,” in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin: A Casebook*, ed. Elizabeth Ammons. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 37-48.

This invocation exemplifies a kind of “stowe-ic” excess.⁴⁴ For Stowe righteousness, justice and grace (and abolition) come by way of order and ordering and a seemingly attendant evacuation of desire,⁴⁵ but in her rhetorical appeals, the conventions she tries to establish, the pictorial figures she sketches, and the narratives she orders, her words, like these italics, escape with a spiritual gusto. Stowe writes:

We come now to the consideration of a power without which all others must fail—“the Holy Ghost.”

The solemn creed of every Christian Church, whether Roman, Greek, Episcopal, or Protestant, says, “*I believe in the Holy Ghost.*” But how often do Christians, in all these denominations, live and act, and even conduct their religious affairs as if they had “never so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.” If we trust to our own reasonings, our own misguided passions, and our own blind self-will, to effect the reform of abuses, we shall utterly fail. There is a power, silent, convincing, irresistible, which moves over the dark and troubled heart of man, as of old it moved over the dark and troubled waters of Chaos, bringing light out of darkness, and order out of confusion.⁴⁶

This passage manifests the problems (in which also stirs the alluring and potentially hopeful slippage) of Stowe’s prose. For on the one hand her appeal to *I believe in the Holy Ghost*, which appears in italics, is a rhetorical move, an appeal to what she presents as a universal convention of the creed. On the other hand, though, she attempts to bring that

⁴⁴ James Olney, “‘I Was Born’: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature,” *Callaloo* 20 (Winter, 1984): 69.

⁴⁵ See Brown, 90.

⁴⁶ Stowe, “What is to be Done?,” 42.

appeal into her own “design,” as Jane Tompkins⁴⁷ might say, theologically revising the spirit by conflating this profession with a Pauline cry for order.

Stowe, not unlike Oryseik in her elision of moving art and painting, pairs with no nod towards the contradictions, a “trust” in the Holy Ghost with a valorization of “order.” But unlike Oryseik, whose conflation seems supported by ballet’s understandings of its own ontology, when we look at the scripture from which Stowe draws, it seems as if Stowe conflates (and thus reduces) the Holy Ghost with Pauline instructions and admonishments for order; that is to say she presents religious doctrinal rule as the Spirit. The first passage she references in the above excerpt comes from Acts 19:1-2 (NIV). Paul has come to Ephesus and found that there are those who had been baptized by John the Baptist but had not heard of the truer baptism of the Spirit of Christ. In Stowe’s invocation, acting as if one did not know about the Spirit is a means to implicate the complacent and those who call themselves Christians but have not responded to the abolitionist call. However at the end of Acts 18, we see more clearly that among these who did not know about the baptism of the Spirit was Apollos, who was not at all complacent. He was in fact “fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John.”⁴⁸ When two followers, Priscilla and Aquila, educate him about the Holy Spirit,

⁴⁷ Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*.

⁴⁸ Acts 18:25 (NIV).

it makes his knowledge of “the way of God more accurat[e]” as if to reiterate that it was not wrong before that education. What we read here is not the confusion/clarity dichotomy that Stowe implies is the difference between those without the Spirit and those with the Spirit, for the passage itself suggests that the Spirit was already “fervent” in Apollos if not fully realized. In Stowe’s logic there is nothing going on outside of the ordering light of the Holy Spirit. There is only the “dark and troubled waters” of “confusion” and “chaos,” but here something is going on with Apollos. The Holy Spirit seems to be with him in what doctrinally must be the chaotic state of his unaware soul. The Spirit works not just as a light defining the dark he still dwells in, but as force burning and moving him.

If we continue to look at this passage and particularly at the one from 1 Corinthians that Stowe goes on to reference, we understand that already there is a fundamental flaw with Stowe’s characterization of the Holy Ghost as an ordering light. For indeed as we read on, we might be able to say that if not disorder, than that which is in excess of order (as it appears in this world), is in fact a common attendant to the manifestations of the Spirit. What we read at the beginning of Acts 19, which Stowe cites, is Apollos’ meeting with Paul in Corinth. Paul asks Apollos and those with him if they received the Spirit when they were baptized, to which they reply, as Stowe quotes, that they did not know about the Spirit but were baptized in John the Baptist. Paul then explains the difference between John’s baptism of repentance and Christ’s baptism of the

Spirit, and they received the Spirit when he laid hands on them. What happens next is not a binding or an ordering of their previous teachings but rather an explosion and outpouring. For we are told “the Holy Spirit came on them, and they *began* speaking with tongues and prophesying.”⁴⁹ The arrival of the Spirit does not manifest in a reigning-in or ordering but in an outpouring of that which has filled them within.

It is true that in this last reference to 1 Corinthians, Paul says, “God is not a God of disorder but of peace,” but again in the larger context of the chapter, this reminder of God’s relationship to disorder comes precisely because Paul means to address the potentially disorderly and chaotic manifestations of the Spirit. Rather than call into question whether the Corinthians have actually received the Holy Ghost, he elucidates how the “illegibility” of some manifestations of the Spirit, like speaking in tongues, is “edifying” between the individual and God but cannot, because it is not legible to others, edify (build up) the Church. The Holy Ghost again and again in Acts and in the Letters appears as something less than or perhaps more than orderly. It is part of Paul’s mission in trying to build up the One Body of the Church to lay down regulations and systems for the “harmonious” enactment of the many parts of the body with their many different gifts of the Spirit in the Church.⁵⁰ And even Paul is clear about this distinction

⁴⁹ Acts 19: 6 (NIV).

⁵⁰ Interestingly, given Stowe’s ministerial inclinations, it is also in this chapter that Paul announces (as part of his ordering instructions for the Church) that women ought not to speak in church or the public spaces, but reserve their questions for their husband and father at home.

between the orderliness of the Church and the workings of the Holy Ghost, for he does not proclaim that the Holy Ghost is a Spirit of order, though it *is* the Spirit and not necessarily God that he has most clearly been speaking about. Though the oft cited verse is that “God is not the God of disorder but the God of peace,” these not immediately legible manifestations of the Spirit to which Paul must give order ought to make us constantly aware that disorder, though it may be an antonym for God’s peace, is not necessarily a synonym for God, much less the Spirit, which escapes the binary logic of our perceptions and legible articulations. Indeed this same Paul, along with Silas, following the Holy Spirit and teaching Christ’s word, was imprisoned for purportedly “throwing [the Romans’ colonial] city [Macedonia] into *confusion* . . .”⁵¹

What we have then is Stowe’s misconstruing of the Holy Spirit in Stowe’s chapter. Nevertheless it remains an invocation in? of? the Nicene Creed and the Holy Ghost. This italicized utterance *I believe in the Holy Ghost* is a profession of faith that escapes Stowe’s usage. Stowe employs the utterance, set apart, repeated, and marinated on, at least for its rhetorical power, the feeling of invocation of the Ghost, of the great shaker and mover. The invocation is not reducible to Stowe’s intents. It, for all her theological errors and dubious readings, still sounds that fire of the possessed and moving tongue. It works, as invocations must, in spite of Stowe, at the level of the script and the word. As an act of citation, borrowing, or even theft (if we were to hold Stowe

⁵¹ Acts 16:20-21 (NIV).

to any kind of contemporary norms of citation) the utterance, *I believe in the Holy Ghost*, has a life of its own that is not reducible to Stowe's order. All those readers or listeners familiar with the Nicene Creed, indeed those who would recognize the reference of this statement as one that binds all Christian denominations, would know it in the context of a litany of profession, with a chant like cadence that initiates and comes forth from it. That is to say it is hard to hear *I believe in the Holy Ghost*, without also being moved to continue *the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, whom with the Father and the Son is worship and glorified*. There is a rhythm of the creed for those who know it as a practice that pushes in and through this line. Not only does the line call on the Holy Ghost, open theologically the possibility of the Ghost's immediate response and real time possession, but it also communicates such by reference to a part of a collective, poetic, spiritual utterance that has its own life that Stowe cannot contain in one line. For it is in the invocation of the excessive mystery of the Ghost and her failed attempt to order it into a particular picture of the ordering Spirit that we hear the sonic intensity, witness a break in the prose, and can imagine if not feel the rushing in of just that which she fails to capture. For in its visual and sonic and performative leaning, to say nothing of its theological force, this phrase allows that which is not capturable to capture the prose, the speaker and the audience.

There is a parallel dynamic between the mandate put upon the *corps de ballet* for that "exact" lines, intersections, and synchronization that Orysiak views as necessary to

make the picture of the ballet legible and the ordering procedure with which Paul provides in order to make the many mysterious outpourings of the Spirit legible in the one body of the Church. Stowe, not unlike Orysiek, conflates the movement with the picture, the Spirit with the order put upon it. But nevertheless one leg always escapes, and Topsy, we are told more than once, is “a limb.” These rogue limbs, despite the narrative’s reflex to reify the disciplining order by calling them errors or exceptions, illuminate something else. To say nothing of what the dancer feels in that moment of too much flight, they release for the watcher the power of the Spirit that animates--the Ghost that haunts--the machine or the *corps* and edificial body of the Church. The *corps de ballet* may be an abdication of singularity and visibility, but it is haunted by all these legs and potential flights (which as Paul admits would still edify God if not others in the Church). Bringing Topsy into the *corps de ballet* brings her into the dancing body of Stowe’s domestic narrative; it is an attempt to discipline her and frame her into a particularly auxiliary role that presumably highlights its values and ideologies in the pictures of the principal domestic dancers. And yet the relationship between the *corps de ballet* and the body of the church, that place where the Spirit dwelleth and worketh within, reveals something in excess of Stowe’s design. Just as the invocation of *I believe in the Holy Ghost* stands as an utterance set apart and moving in spite of Stowe’s attempts to fix it into a particular picture, so too we ought to consider the movement of Topsy’s black limbs as flying a little higher than her those of her sisters.

3.3 The Domestic Ballet

In her 1843 story, "The Dancing School," Stowe brings the parallel between the ordering of dance in the *corps de ballet* and the ordering of the Spirit in the Church together in the intersection of the domestic. Appearing in two installments, not only in *The Boston Recorder*, but also in the *Christian Reflector*,⁵² *The New York Evangelist*,⁵³ *The Boston Recorder*,⁵⁴ and the *Weekly Messenger*,⁵⁵ this story imagines a correlation (albeit not an equation) between the disciplining steps of dance and the disciplining steps of domestic habits, the former bringing one superficial grace but spiritual infamy and the latter, leading one steadily into the grace of the body of the Church. The story never enters the dancing school, nor do we, for that matter, witness any dancing; in fact dance itself (as rhythmic movement) is not the problem. Mrs. Seldom, the story's Christian mother, faced with the dilemma of whether or not to let her uncommonly beautiful daughter attend a dancing school, poses the question:

Why is one kind of motion so much worse than any other? Why is it worse to move to music than to move without music--worse to exercise in dancing than on horseback, or in

⁵² Harriet Beecher Stowe, "The Family Circle.: The Dancing School," *Christian Reflector (1838-1848)* 6, no. 16 (April 19, 1843) 64, accessed March 10, 2014, American Periodical Series.

⁵³ Harriet Beecher Stowe. "The Dancing School." *New York Evangelist (1830-1902)*. 14 n14 (April 6, 1843), 0-1, accessed March 10, 2014, American Periodical Series.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, *Boston Recorder (1830-1849)* 28, no. 17 (April, 27, 1843): 65, accessed March 10, 2014, American Periodical Series.

⁵⁵ Harriet Beecher Stowe, "The Dancing School: Part II," *Weekly Messenger (1841-1844)* 8, no. 35 (May 17, 1843), 0-1, accessed March 10, 2014, American Periodical Series.

any other way? There is, I think, a great deal of prejudice upon this subject, among religious people, to which I am not sure it is my duty to conform.⁵⁶

Although it is not addressed further in any explicit detail, this passage at least in questioning holds open a continuity between dance and riding or skipping or sweeping the hearth. The answer that the always-on-hand Mrs. Clarke (the voice of authorial and Godly wisdom) gives does not address the link between dance and other movements, but it does make explicit that the problem with dance is not the dancing. Even though she advises against the dancing school, she explains that “it is not because [she] think[s] there is any more harm in one kind of motion than another; or any mysterious sinfulness in the particular motions of dancing. As far as [she] can see, it is in itself a very innocent and graceful amusement.” The problem is not with dance but everything around it: the balls, the dress, the food, the drink, the public displays of male/female interaction, and exposure to worldly attractions that will inevitably lead away from the eternal desires of a Christian heart. Indeed the story presents dance as not only a gateway but the first step in an unalterable path to infamy. For Mrs. Seldon, deciding against the advice of Mrs. Clarke, lets her Isabella go to the dancing school. The second part of the story, published in a separate installment,⁵⁷ chronicles the fast and total demise of little Isabella who ultimately dies (perhaps because of the unhealthy exposure to night air after a

⁵⁶ Stowe, “The Family Circle: The Dancing School,” 64.

⁵⁷ Stowe, “The Dancing School: Part II,” 0-1.

dance) without a thought or a care for her Savior. The story portrays a set of inevitable causal relations, with learning to dance as the instigating incident.⁵⁸

The construction of dance in this story offers insight into how dance figures in Stowe's other rhetorical appeals, and particularly into the domestic ballet of the St. Clare house in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. For underlying the concern is an understanding that dance makes people; it figures them into particular beings. More generally, it suggests that people must be made in this systematic disciplining of the body. For the question of whether or not to send Isabella to the dancing school is so intensely explored that it is taken for granted that dancing is something one must be taught in a school, attached to a set of social and cultural ideas that must be accepted as part of the dance, and that this teaching will thus make the child into something too worldly. Neither mother, though, considers that if Isabella does not go to the school, she may nevertheless spring about in her own way, learn steps from her friend who is already signed up for the class, sway to the hum of bees or a hymn stuck in her head, or imitate the gesture of animals and things about her. For Stowe, in this story and others, even as she depends upon it, cannot account for the fluid, the stolen, or the just "growd" nature of movement and dance any more than she could account for the excessiveness of the spirit.

⁵⁸ Dance here figures as a kind of gateway drug or disease much as it will in Ishmael Reed's re-visioning of Stowe (particularly Topsy and her "just growd" dancing nature) in his *Mumbo Jumbo*.

The story takes issue with dancing precisely as a learned behavior with attendant learned (worldly) ideologies that make the dancer into a particular figure. For though Mrs. Clarke details a list of health concerns regarding the ball-going practices of “fashionable” youth, her real objection is that the time, money, and effort put into learning to dance and attending balls would be better spent in a different choreography, in “tak[ing] pains to form in them [the children] habits of daily devotional reading and prayers; they [parents] suffer them to seek worldly and trifling associates, to read all kinds of books, and mingle in all kinds of amusements.” It is not that the child should be deprived of “amusements,” or the learning of interesting occupations and intricate steps, but that those steps ought to encourage domestic and spiritual reflection rather than build up a frenzied excitement. Surely, she exclaims, “youth is the season for amusement, but it is not the only thing that it is the season for—it is just as much the season for education: and above all, it is the season for religious impression, and the formation of religious habits.”⁵⁹ Though Mrs. Clarke does not say overtly, Stowe’s title the “Dancing School” emphasizes not just the dancing but the fact that this dancing is a “school” or schooling. The semantic framing of the issue as “amusements” versus spiritual education might detract from the real issue or the assumption undergirding the story, which is that dance is not just trivial and light but begins a kind of disciplining into the world that is social rather than spiritual.

⁵⁹ Stowe, “The Family Circle.: The Dancing School,” 64.

The problem with dance is its public and social sphere that puts one too much in the world; it inevitably leads one to want not just to dance but to dance with others (and indeed, as we see, it is relations, connectedness, and duets that Topsy steals back from Stowe). The remedy for this danger lies at home and in the learning of domestic and religious gestures rather than social steps. Mrs. Clarke explains that Isabella ought to learn (as her daughters do) the techniques and amusements “but such as [can be] provide[d] for her at home,” like “books,” “singing,” “music,” “embroidery and fancy work,” “drawing and her little garden in the summer, and her house plants in winter” in addition of course to “rides and walks, and [carefully selected and accompanied] social visits.” Mrs. Clarke is explicit that these “amusements” should be both preplanned and instructive. The same way the managing of the house should be minutely accounted for, the movements of the child should be explicitly choreographed and set to an ideal domestic timing. Bringing up the child involves bringing entertainment and movement into the home, creating a kind of domestic ballet that is no less active, no less disciplined, and no less social. However it accrues not just a physical but also a spiritual grace, bringing children up in the temple of the domestic, literally molding them and making their steps in line with the architecture of the domestic, which being itself a spiritual temple is also part of the architecture of the church. The domestic ballet maintains propriety and simplicity by keeping the movements isolated to the family, to “home games and sports, in which her parents join with her.”

Indeed the story communicates that dancing (or movement) in itself is not a problem, but rather the social and public nature of dancing and dances; that dancing is perhaps “innocent,” “graceful,” and connected to a range of other “motions” — indeed it seems that it may also be useful in its potential to emphasize general disciplining of the body and the “habituation” of particular steps as a means towards grace; and that the best way to inoculate against the danger of public and social dance is to practice your daughter in a range of wholesome domestic steps rather than in the fashionable steps of the dancing school. These three premises are at the heart of Stowe’s rhetorical recourse to dance, particularly ballet (that dance, which argues for all the aspects of dance Stowe and Mrs. Clarke enjoyed—grace, discipline, uprightness, and virtue).

The rhetorical appeal to dance in Stowe’s picture of the domestic, though, is still fraught with an underlying need to repudiate the social and public aspects of dance and ballet proper, while still finding allusions to dance and theater valuable in her rhetoric. For example, in “The Daughter of Herodias” published in the *Christian Union*, Stowe arrests the popular language of theater and drama in order to highlight Biblical narratives as a parallel, and indeed, even keener drama. Stowe opens the article declaring that “[i]n the great drama of the history of Jesus many subordinate figures move across the stage.”⁶⁰ In looking at these minor or “subordinate figures,” Stowe

⁶⁰ Harriet Beecher Stowe, “The Daughter of Herodias,” *Christian Union (1870-1893)* 8, no. 18 (October 29, 1873): 342, accessed March 10, 2014, American Periodical Series.

focuses on Salome, the daughter of Herodias. Acknowledging Salome as a great favorite of artists, Stowe explicitly refers to the “annals of modern theater” as providing her and her readers with ample examples of “what inconsiderate transports of rapture crowned heads and chief captains and might men of valor have been thrown by the dancing of some enthroned queen of the ballet,” so that we ought to be readily able to imagine how Herod succumbed to Salome. The comparison implicitly expresses Stowe’s contempt for the dancing of the ballet, but it also illustrates the theater and the ballet as inhabiting a complex place in Stowe’s narrative parlance. Stowe makes open rhetorical appeal to the stage, theater and dance. While we are supposed to revile Salome’s dance (and the many artistic revivals of it) we are not supposed to revile “the great drama of the history of Jesus.” Repudiating the dance and the stage, Stowe nevertheless co-opts the language and the idea of the stage to redirect us to the more important spiritual play. Indeed as a piece of writing, the article makes use of a public space and having a reading audience in order to shine a spotlight on one of the “many subordinate figures [that] move across the stage” of the Bible. This rhetorical appeal to the dramatic allows Stowe to arrest for her own writing, her religious and domestic pictures a kind of public standing, a stage, but that is one that nevertheless falls on the right side of ballet and bodily propriety. Her literary usage of dance, particularly ballet, seems to suggest that ballet with its popular public cache, its embodiment of grace, its pictures of earthly transcendence, and

divine purity (to say nothing of the nuanced disciplining of the body with which these boons are attained) made ballet central to Stowe's domestic visions.

The problem with ballet and the stage for Stowe was its public impropriety, its display of the body, and bawdy gestures. In this respect Stowe would have shared the opinion of a Miss Sedgwick of New York who, after viewing the ballet *La Gitana*, featuring premier, early 19th-century ballerina Marie Taglioni (arguably the ballerina who ushered in a valorization of balletic technique), wrote ambivalently about Mlle. Taglioni in *The New Yorker*. Titling the article, "An American Lady's Opinion of the Opera," Miss Sedgwick says of Mlle. Taglioni, "No praise of her grace is exaggerated. — There is music in every movement of her arms; and if she would restrict herself within the limits of decency, there could not be a more exquisite spectacle of its kind than her dancing." The grace that Sedgwick notices and appreciates, indeed almost "admire[s]," is the result of techniques that allow Taglioni to produce an illusion of effortless floating that changed the direction of ballet. *Giselle*, famous for being technically demanding, was created and first performed in the same year as *La Gitana*. When Ms. Sedgwick laments and scolds, asking "could not this grace be equally demonstrated with a skirt a few inches longer and rather less transparent?" she is pointing to exactly this turn in ballet towards aerial heights, which included a greater feminizing of ballet, a tendency to shorten and make the tutu secondary to the dancer's legs and feet, and to highlight the skilled dancer's technical manipulations of the body. It is precisely being able to see

the workings of these limbs that Miss. Sedgwick finds objectionable, explaining “...when she realised her leg to a right angle with her body, I could have exclaimed, as Carlyle did, ‘Merciful Heaven! Where will it end?’” The technique—the disciplined manipulation of the body and the formation of particularly nuanced poses into a language of basic figure—is what allows for the raised leg to become a right angle, for all of this contorting to be done “with her body.” But the article, brief as it is, goes on in a very illuminating way. For it acknowledges conflicting readings of Taglioni’s figures. Where Sedgwick herself believes this raised limb to be a lewd gesture, she remarks that a certain “Mrs. _____” quoted a French woman, who said, of Taglioni, ‘One must be virtuous to dance like that.’” Though Sedgwick derides this contributor, she also reveals that in this right angling and raised body some would read virtue, and indeed Sedgwick’s own acknowledgment of a grace above any other in Taglioni’s movements seems to recognize that virtue. For Sedgwick the problem lies in female propriety, “For surely,” she says, “a woman must have forgotten the instincts of her sex before she can dance even as Taglioni does.” Consequently the only way Taglioni’s grace (and potential virtue) can exist for Sedgwick is for her to make Taglioni a third gender. “And I would divide the world, not as our witty friend _____ does, into men, women, and Mary Wollstonecraft’s, but into men, women, and ballet-dancers.”⁶¹ The parallel to

⁶¹ Miss Sedgwick, “The Ballet--An American Lady’s Opinion of the Opera,” *The New-Yorker (1836-1841)* 11, no. 22 (August 14, 1841): 341, accessed March 10, 2014, American Periodical Series.

Mary Wollstonecraft here importantly aligns the ballet dancer with women's rights and education as well as with Wollstonecraft's daughter, also called Mary, but better known as Mary Shelley and better known for *Frankenstein*, whose first popular publication happened in 1831 and was well known by the time this review appeared. The ballet dancer comes to stand in for the monstrous, the educated female, and worse, that clan of women who would train not only their bodies into such contortions but have the audacity to lift their skirts and show the world the labor of their legs.

Miss Sedgwick's ambivalent exaltation of grace and denigration of the female contortion that make that grace are exemplary of the domestic ballet's tricky formulation, for on the one hand the grace and illusion of ballet represented the picture of virtue (and perhaps too some attractive female power), but on the other hand the technique and athleticism called into question the ballerina's position as a lady. For the lady must be as technically superior but never dare to show the complex labor and discipline it takes to create that intimacy with the air and levity that in both the dancer and the lady gets called grace. But just as she suggests in "The Dancing School," Stowe posits the domestic sphere as the resolution of this problem of the ballerina's fraught grace. Bringing the ballet into the domestic, Stowe still repudiates the public displays of dance, but co-opts the rhetoric, valorizes physical grace, lightness, the picture of transcendence. Still Stowe has another problem. For Sedgwick's complaint connects technique and discipline (aspects of ballet that Stowe wants to align with domestic

efficiency and spiritual disciplining) are also associated with female impropriety as an indecorous demonstration of bodily labor.

Yet if we consider at the serialized publication (also in the *Christian Union*) of Stowe's "My Wife and I; or Harry Henderson's History," we can see that she secures the air of innocence, grace, bodily discipline, and upright comportment of ballet without any of the worldly vices, dangerous appeals to the social, or base desires by bringing it rhetorically and imagistically into the domestic while at the same time assigning actual gross movements and excessive frivolity to her narrative's "more lowly creatures." In chapter XLI, Jim and Hal speak of Hal's engagement to a Miss Eva. Teasingly Jim remarks "And you and Miss Eva Arsdel are going to join hands and play Babes in the Woods." To which Hal replies, "No... We are going to play the interesting little ballet of 'Man and Wife.'" This is a ballet in which his role is to work for her, to bring home "dividends" which she will use to manage the house. In this instance, the very core of the domestic operations from its heterosexual breakdown of roles becomes a dance, a movement between the sexes that makes the home, or what we might call a "domestic ballet."⁶² Indeed as the story progresses ballet becomes even more domesticated. In a postscript displayed in chapter XLVI, Hal Burton, having just talked about the kitten he plans to give to the children, writes that "[w]hile I have been writing, Whisky and Frisky

⁶² Harriet Beecher Stowe, "My Wife and I; or Harry Henderson's History.: Chapter XL. Congratulations, ETC. Chapter XLI. The Explosion," *Christian Union (1870-1893)* 4, no. 12 (Sept. 20, 1871): 180, accessed March 10, 2014, America Periodical Series.

[kittens] have pitched into a pile of the proof-sheets of your *Milky Way* story, and performed a ballet dance with them so that they are rather the worse for the wear.”⁶³ Here dance appears embodied in animals who presumably provide innocent and natural amusement while leaving the spectator respectfully a spectator. At the same time, though, this separate and lowly movement animates the entire scene. Depicted as kittens, the ballet and the dancer make a mess of the writer’s papers and engages him in the movement by encouraging him not only to witness but to be so moved as to write about the performance, and in doing so the addressee of the letter, the author of the *Milky Way* story, and the author of the letter, and the kittens are all in a moving and circulating relation. Engaging in dance connects propriety of the upright spectator and the decorously still subjects to the pleasure of lower animals’ bends and activity.

But it is in the final chapter that we can most clearly see why Stowe might incorporate these odd genuflections to ballet and the theater. For in this chapter we can see that this appeal allows Stowe access to both excessive movement and picturing of a virtuous stage that communicates a message of propriety and uprightness, but at the same time still purports itself as a quiet domestic interior. The chapter begins with the narrator inviting the reader to consider the domestic setting:

⁶³ Harriet Beecher Stowe, “My Wife and I; or Harry Henderson’s History: Chapter XLV. My Wife’s Wardrobe. Chapter SLVI. Letters From New York. The Universal Empyrean Harmoniad, Being An Exposition of the Dual Conglomeration of the Infinite,” *Christian Union (1870-1893)* 4, no. 15 (October 11, 1871): 229, accessed March 10, 2014, American Periodical Series.

Dear reader, fancy now a *low-studded* room, with crimson curtains and carpet, a deep recess filled by a crimson divan with pillows, the *lower part of the form* taken up by a *row of bookshelves, three feet high*, which ran all round the room and accommodated my library. *The top* of this formed a convenient shelf, on which all your pretty little wedding presents-statuettes, bronzes and articles of *vertu*—were arranged. A fireplace, surrounded by an old fashioned border of Dutch tiles, with a pair of grandmotherly brass and irons, rubbed and polished to an extreme of brightness, exhibits a wood fire, *all laid in order* to be lighted at the touch of the match.

This description continues pointing to the wife's dressing the house in perfect arrangements of flowers, vases, and other details. The description reads like stage directions in a play, informing the prop master and the director of the kind of setting to be erected. Stowe places an emphasis on vertical and horizontal lines and right angles. The verticality of the curtains and bookshelves is emphasized by her attention not only to the height of the bookshelf and what is on top of it, but also by the contrast with the "low studded room" and the "lower part of the form." The carpet, the top of the shelves and the mantle of the fireplace (bordered by neat geometric square tiles) create horizontal lines that intersect with these verticals to form right angles, creating a picture that is indeed "all laid in order."

As the chapter goes on it makes more explicit its rhetorical appeal to theater and the arts. In this highly domesticated scene, the language of theater and ballet begins to seep in. First the spectacular display of the fire is described as "a pure *coup de theatre*, a brightening, vivifying, ornamental luxury." In the light of this theatrical performance, Bolton pulls from his pockets what he proclaims to be "a pair of ballet dancers that will perform for you gratis, at any time." they entice the kittens with cork and strings to

engage in “wonderful leaps and flings and other achievements,” which Bolton not only calls “ballet dancing,” but also Alice goes as far to suggest that the kittens be called “Taglioni and Madame Celeste” (after some of the most famous ballerina’s of the century). The mixing here of ballet and domestic play with kittens and the hearth of the fire has a curious role of linking the intense intimacy of the house, which the narrator describes as something apart from the world with a still important staging, a public private. For even though the narrator claims that “the house was in a sort of measure ‘our house,’” that “[t]he world was one thing and we were another,” she also frames this other house world as viewable and open to some on-looking audience, when at the end it closes the scene again with an overt reference to the theater, explaining that “now while we have brought all our characters before the curtain and the tableau of the fireside is complete, as we sit there all around the hearth, each perfectly at home with the other, in heart and mind with even the poor beasts that connect us with the lower world brightening in our enjoyment, this is a good moment for the curtain to fall on the fortunes of My Wife and I.”⁶⁴ Like Harry who opens UTC or Topsy (Stowe’s even more infamous dancing child), these kittens provide the ultimate economized entertainment. They are free (performing for you gratis whenever you please), they are miniature, and by virtue of their species difference, they seem to invoke pleasure and move without

⁶⁴ Harriet Beecher Stowe, “My Wife and I; or Harry Henderson’s History.: Chapter LI. My Wife Projects Hospitalities. Chapter LII. Preparations for Our Dinner Party. Chapter LIII. The House-Warming,” *Christian Union (1870-1893)* 4, no. 19 (Nov 8, 1871): 292, accessed March 10, 2014, American Periodical Series.

demanding participation or any kind of messy intertwining of relations. Yet still they dance for and as part of the whole of the domestic ballet; it is their movements that “connect us [graceful and proper ones] with the lower world” without tasking anyone to fall or join them on the floor.

Stowe’s tendency to pit domestic grace against dance and, at the same time, co-opt the language of ballet to describe the domestic drama persists throughout her writings. Not unlike Isabella, Lillie in *The Pink and White Tyranny* dances herself into infamous positions,⁶⁵ but then in *Dred*, little Tomtit, the lowly, but somehow charming slave who Nina thinks must be “made of air,” “pirouette[es]” across the floor as he does his domestic tasks.⁶⁶ Again public dance can lead to no good, but Stowe’s domestic ballets manage to arrest the picture of grace in ballet, and they maintain the pristine quality of that grace by bringing black limbs into a regulated dance that animates the home, makes the picture move as it were, and renders more visible by relief the propriety and grace of the domestic sphere.

3.4 The St. Clare (Ballet) Company

In UTC, if not in all of Stowe’s writing, there is perhaps no more memorable picture of grace than little Eva. She has been pictured as an “almost divine,” “angel,”

⁶⁵Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Pink and White Tyranny*, 1871, Project Gutenberg (Release May 14, 2004) accessed March 10, 2014 <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/12354/pg12354.html>.

⁶⁶ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2001), 57. Documenting the American South, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/stowe1/stowe1.html>.

“fairy,” “canary bird,” a “little lady” with “slender hands.” She has been described as “gliding,” “buoyant,” and “flying hither and thither, with an undulating cloud-like thread.” All-and-all she has the “aerial grace, such as one might dream of for some mythic and allegorical being”; she is Stowe’s perfect domestic ballerina, almost a literary and domestic counterpart to Mlle. Taglioni. Eva’s movement bares striking similarity to the sylph in Filippo Taglioni’s 1832 ballet *La Sylphide*. Eva dances in the same line as Mlle Taglioni (Taglioni’s daughter and the original sylph) and her protégé Emma Livry-- for whom the role of the sylph was reinvented in 1836 by August Bournoville and who not unlike Eva dies young and tragically and is thus immortalized as perfection in people’s memories. Dance historian Lynn Garafola identifies the Sylph as the defining figure for romantic ballet’s history, a figure that continues to get thought and rethought today.⁶⁷ The sylph is an airy nymph that the romantic audiences loved to see on stage. The desire for that airiness inspired much of the 19th-century advances in technique, for it takes an enormous amount of technical skill and working with and into the laws of physics to transform the naturally pedestrian human into a seemingly aerial creature. Garafola explains that even when the romantic aesthetic for fairies passed, the technique ballet had acquired to meet that demand remained as the *sine qua non* of classical ballet. It is this technique that “modern” dance also acquired even as it is typically

⁶⁷ Lynn Garafola, “Introduction,” in *Rethinking the Sylph New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet*, ed Lynn Garafola (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 1-10.

characterized by a more intimate “grounded” aesthetic. The illusion of floating, or “ballón,” happens by a series of nuanced adjustments of the body in the air that masks that a leaping body is, like every other gravity bound object in the air, a projectile. Accompanied by light white fabric and dancing *en pointe* dancers strove to achieve the illusion of the sylph who appeared everywhere, fluttered, and barely traced the ground.

For her own part, or Stowe’s part, Eva dances a distinctly Christianized version of the Sylph.⁶⁸ The original Sylph appeared as an otherworldly temptation from outside the home, moving into the domestic sphere as a temptation that threatens the marriage structures and leaves her lover wretched and outside his community. In UTC, however, Stowe brings the little fairy into the house, so that rather than the nymph, she becomes the enchanting and always elusive angel, whose presence brings to light a whole moral play in which those who desire her (like the original sylph) are left vanquished and with

⁶⁸ If Stowe does not out-and-out call Eva a Sylph, she does call her 1840 character Eliza (a potential forerunner for little Eva and to some degree the quadroon Eliza) a Sylph in the *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, and *Ladies’ American Magazine* piece titled “Eliza: From My Aunt Mary’s Bureau.” Both Eliza and Eva die young, and their deaths are surrounded by divine portends. Eva, like Eliza, leaves behind a lock of her hair, and that hair seems to retain something of the spiritual power the girl’s manifested in their life. Like Eliza, Stowe crafts Eva as having an angelic quality about her, a kind of divine, nearly ineffable quality about her, that “once seen, could [not] be easily forgotten.” Like Eva who is seen as “always in motion,” and “no more contain[able] in one place than a sunbeam or a summer breeze,” (UTC 165) Eliza’s qualities were not those that could be set in stone as beauty. As Aunt Mary explains, “A sculptor could not have found a model in her small child-like features; but for the rich bloom of colouring, for everything that gave an idea of brilliancy, united with the most ethereal delicacy and frailty, the painter or the poet need have looked no further” (“Eliza”). Through this connection with Eliza we can see Eva as not only angel but also something of the sylph, or at least her image of the angel is highly influenced by the image of the sylph. Harriet Beecher Stowe, “Eliza.: From My Aunt Mary’s Bureau,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book, and Ladies’ American Magazine* (1840-1843) 20 (January 1840), 24, accessed March 10, 2014. American Periodical Series.

the weight of their own misdoings. Through an application of several subtle and skillful techniques, the narrative manages to garner a picture of her as moving without ever touching the ground. In a manner very similar to Pearl, the narrative insists on Eva's position up above the ground. The difference, though, is that the narrative romantically celebrates Eva's unearthliness by turning the sylph into an image of celestial intimacy with God and Christ rather than as the frighteningly unreal pagan-like creature that the narrative of *The Scarlet Letter* imagines for Pearl. Nevertheless Eva is decidedly described as having "fairy footsteps," and the similarities between her and the sylph are compelling.

Little Eva's movements, like those of Taglioni dancing the Sylph, appear unsoiled by the touch of the ground, so ethereal as to be regarded by Tom (and ideally, by association, the readers as well) as "something almost divine." Like the Sylph who tempts the young engaged James Ruben, Eva in this opening scene has a seemingly limitless movement; "she was always in motion." One moment she is "behind some dusky cotton-bale, or ... over some ridges of packages...." Then she is at once with the fireman "looking wonderingly into the raging depths of the furnace," and then "[a]non [with] the steersman at the wheel." "Several times she appeared suddenly...."⁶⁹ Similarly, in the confinement of the carriage, we are told that "[a]s the carriage drove in, Eva seemed like a bird ready to burst from a cage, with the wild eagerness of her

⁶⁹ Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 165-6.

delight."⁷⁰ Like Pearl, she is repeatedly referred to as a bird, and her embraces too are things that happen in the air. She hugs her mother "in a sort of a rapture."⁷¹ She "fl[ies] across the room; and, thr[ows] herself into [Mammy's] arms."⁷² Later for Tom, Eva "alighted, like a bird, on the round of his chair behind him, and peeped over his shoulder."⁷³

Like the Sylph, her lightness comes by seamless (narrative) technique and by way of draping her repeatedly in white and gold. With the exception of perhaps her blue eyes, the narrative most often describes Eva by her pure lightness and whiteness (particularly as she gets sicker, which is also to say in her case, closer to the divine) and the royal gold of her hair. Eva is "[a]lways dressed in white"⁷⁴ and at least three times, she is compared to a cloud. When touched by sympathy for Old Prue, "[Eva's] cheeks grew pale, and a deep, earnest shadow passed over her eyes."⁷⁵ Lest we think of Eva as a nymph, she goes always about with her halo of golden hair. Her "long golden-brown hair," like her whole self, "floated like a cloud around [her neck and bust]."⁷⁶ Her

⁷⁰ Ibid., 185.

⁷¹ Ibid., 186.

⁷² Ibid., 187.

⁷³ Ibid., 268.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 166.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 248.

“golden head” is “visionary.”⁷⁷ Eva’s alternately “golden hair” and “golden head” is mentioned eleven times. It is so much a part of her essence that dreaming about her (in her time of illness) St. Clare sees not the golden hair, but the “golden halo” of which the hair was always reminiscent.⁷⁸ Even in death Eva never touches the ground or darkens. Her death is viewed as a miraculously white affair, the whole room shrouded with white sheets and white flowers.

When we look more closely at how it is Eva “moves up,” we can see that this whiteness and halo’d fluttering above the ground are not indicators of some actuality but of a seamless (narrative) technique of Stowe’s domestic ballet. Let us look again at the narrative’s declaration that Eva always wore white:

Always dressed in white, she seemed to move like a shadow through all sorts of places, without contracting spot or stain; and there was no corner or nook, above or below, where those fairy footsteps had not glided, and that visionary golden head, with its deep blue eyes, fledged along.⁷⁹

This passage, like the dancing ballerina, involves some rather subtle techniques that allow it to defy if not gravity than the logics of this earth. For her white garb makes her like a shadow, despite the fact that shadows are not white, but dark. But without any

⁷⁶ Ibid., 165.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 166.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 360.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 166.

seeming explanation, Eva becomes the impossible white shadow. Similarly she is conspicuously always dressed in white and yet never accrues a “spot or stain.” The implausible fact imparts to her white garb (the outer symbolization of her inner purity) a miraculous capacity, for even the most delicate care could not make the boat and all the places Eva goes (the furnace, the steering room, and the place where the shackled slaves stay, to say nothing of the dusky cotton bales she plays about) free of dirt. But her clothes stay white in large part because she is lifted off the ground. Her footsteps, as they are narratively imagined, are lifted up by the implication of wings.

If the narrative labor of keeping Eva white, afloat, and divine is hard to see right now, we need only look to the character of Miss Ophelia. Indeed we can see the designs of Stowe’s domestic ballet perhaps most clearly in Miss Ophelia who enters the narrative as kind of *maitre de ballet*,⁸⁰ charged with protecting and guiding St. Clare’s prima ballerina, ordering the company of the house and making sure all the various dancers know the choreography and maintain adequate technique. The work of the domestic ballet is more readily visible in the instructress Ophelia’s operations. She walks a line between uprightness and propriety linked to and manifested in the mastery of domestic techniques and household economy and the almost, un-lady-like revealing of the labor

⁸⁰ Both Filippo Taglioni and later August Bournoville were *maitres de ballet*. During the popularity of the *ballet russes*, the *maitre de ballet* was also the choreographer as well as the teacher. Even then they were responsible for the creation and preservation of ballet technique. In 1820 a *maitre de ballet* in Carlo Blasis in Italy wrote the first book recording balletic techniques, called *Traité élémentaire, théorique, et pratique de l’art de la danse*.

of the body and the fancy footwork it takes to move about the floor. In Ophelia domestic techniques and physical labor and choreographed movement come together. She embodies the increased emphasis in systematization of the domestic arts (which took place alongside ballet's growing emphasis on technique) in the 1830s and 40s.

Articles, some complete with detailed steps and charts, began to appear in a number of magazines in order to instruct women (particularly young wives) in the necessary techniques of the art of housekeeping. Gillian Brown was among the first to highlight Stowe as steeped in this emphasis on domestic method or, as Brown says, domestic economy. Brown argues that Stowe offers readers a picture of a matriarchical reformation of domestic economy connected to abolitionism and the elimination of a slave economy driven by surplus and desire. In highlighting Catherine Beecher (Stowe's Sister) and her essay *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, Brown situates Stowe deep within this increased emphasis on domestic technique. Brown also, though it is not really her intention, hints at what I show to be a shared problem between balletic and domestic arts, which is the potentially unfeminine aspects of their increased attention to technique.⁸¹ For while Brown spotlights Ophelia and Mrs. Bird (and some others) as Stowe's embodiments of a radical reform of the domestic economy, Mrs. Bird stands as the only actual ideal image of domestic reform. She has all of the efficiency and

⁸¹ See Gillian Brown's discussion of Stowe and Catherine Beecher's "Domestic Economy"; in particular see Brown's assertion that "[i]n doing away with the taints of the marketplace Stowe's purified domestic economy must ultimately do away with blackness, the mark of incongruity and exogamy," *Domestic Individualism*, 59.

technique but manages to dress these skills in the skirts of motherly affection and generosity, so that the effort is imperceptible, and the home glows with an almost magical attractiveness. Miss Ophelia on the other hand, though “the slave of the ought” and communicating efficiency in her every move, is colder and at least until she too is moved by Eva and Topsy’s example, performs her duties perfectly but without the grace of genuine feeling and love. As Brown points out, Stowe in her *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* published a few years later in defense of the authenticity of UTC, proclaims Ophelia to be technically superior, as “unflinching[ly] conscientiousness, clear [in her] intellectual discriminations between truth and error and great [in her] logical and doctrinal correctness,” but “lack[ing]” Mrs. Bird’s transcendent grace, that “spirit of love” that brings the other qualities to a divine height.⁸² Mrs. Bird is a romantic image of the mother. A Bird, like Eva, she doesn’t even touch the ground. Ms. Ophelia (tellingly not a mother, and only through mothering is she transformed) does the steps perfectly but not with the right affect. The dynamic here mirrors a problem occurring in ballet with its shift from the romantic desire for the illusion of the fairy to the more classical emphasis on the technique that makes such height possible.

When Miss Sedgwick expresses admiration for the grace of Mlle. Taglioni but abhorrence for the nuanced workings of the Taglioni’s body, she could not have thought of levying a similar critique of Miss Ophelia, whom Stowe writes as a model, if not the

⁸² Brown quoting Stowe, *Domestic Individualism*, 24.

gatekeeper of New England domestic virtue (second only to Mrs. Bird). And yet the black domestics of the St. Clare house do levy a similar critique. When Ophelia comes to the St. Clare house, she commences a “vigorous onslaught on the cupboards and closets of the establishment.” Opening and reviewing “the store-room, the linen-presses, the china-closets, [and] the kitchen and cellar,” Miss Ophelia makes sure that “[h]idden things of darkness [are] brought to light”⁸³ in a manner not dissimilar from the shortening of the ballerina’s skirt, and making more transparent what ought to be according to Ophelia, Taglioni and the other *maitre de ballets* of the early-mid-nineteenth century, a technically rigorous and skilled set of limbs and extremities. And not unlike Miss Sedgwick, the servants of the household, upon seeing these domestic skirts thrown up for review, first proclaim suspicion about “dese yer northern ladies” and how lady-like they really are. The cook Dinah expresses this critique both to Miss Ophelia and then more explicitly with the other servants. Dinah implores Ophelia to leave the kitchen alone and to her rule, “If Missis only will go up stars till my clarin’ up time comes, I’ll have everything right; but I can’t do nothin’ when ladies is round, a henderin.” But Ophelia will not leave or go upstairs. Instead Ophelia declares that she is “going through the kitchen, and going to put everything in order” and “expect[s] Dinah] to *keep* it so.” To which Dinah responds “Lor, now! Miss Phelia; dat ar an’t no way for ladies to do. I never did see ladies doin’ so sich; my old Missis nor Miss Marie

⁸³ Stowe., 234.

never did, and I don't see no kinder need on 't."⁸⁴ Here Dinah is clear that this venture of going through and ordering, of implying technique to the domestic arts, of indeed even being involved in the "downstairs" dance of the kitchen is not something one "see[s] ladies doin.'" And then after Ophelia does begin to go through the details of the kitchen "with a speed and alacrity which perfectly amazed Dinah," Dinah announces later "to some of her satellites, when at a safe hearing distance," "Lor now! If data r de way dem northern ladies do, dey an't ladies, nohow' and she reiterates once more that she doesn't "want ladies round, a henderin,' and getting my things all where I can't find 'em.'"⁸⁵

But Dinah's emphasis on upstairs versus downstairs also begins to hint at how it is that Stowe resolves the problem of ballet. It brings us back to the kittens on the floor. Their leaping gets labeled as a ballet, and certainly the references to the stage, the emphasis on verticality and grace impart something of the ballet's aura onto the domestic scene in the story, but the kittens themselves take on the labor of limbs. They are brought into the house, their turns and bends expected "gratis" provide entertainment and the occasion of the entire scene, but they also remain lowly, on the ground, and separate from the decorous bystanders. They are frenzied, "useful," but not intentional or artists. They provide the necessary animation but also the necessary

⁸⁴ Ibid., 238.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 239.

relief that shows the domestic picture as still, upright, and gracefully sanctified. Ophelia has come downstairs to Dinah, breached the heights of ladies and lifted up the skirts of the house to look at the dark laboring limbs that both articulate the movements and by contrast show the “good lady” and the young Eva as indeed ladies and graceful. Ophelia wants to train the limbs of the house into one synchronized order, which is to say she wants to make the kittens, the lowly creatures, ballet dancers, but rather than principals like Taglioni or Celeste or even soloist, Stowe through Ophelia imagines for these black limbs a stunning place in the *corps de ballet*.

3.5 Topsy’s Turn | A Hooking Dance

To think about Topsy’s narrative role in terms of dance means to think about the narrative’s attempts to choreograph her into the upright disciplined movements of the *corps de ballet*. Topsy’s role then in keeping with the way scholars have come to understand her function is to be a quick study but not yet a proper ballet dancer. She is supposed to have all the excessive potential, but none of the form, discipline, cognition or grace to be initially? a proper dancer in this domestic ballet, let alone a good one. Certainly the text plays up Topsy’s latent potential. She is described in terms of animal like prowess. She is “lithe as a cat, and as active as a monkey,” charming as a “glittering serpent,”⁸⁶ as much “amusement” as “the trick of a parrot or a pointer.”⁸⁷ Her successes

⁸⁶ Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 282.

in learning always prove “surprising”⁸⁸ “as if by magic” from some “conjurer.”⁸⁹ Interestingly it never appears as “miraculous” or evidence of some divine gift. While perhaps it may be easy to accept Topsy’s semantic curvings as childish errors, we have to willfully consent to the narrative denseness in order to believe that Topsy’s somerset is an accident. One does not accidentally do a cartwheel or a flip. It is the manifestation of a skill. Similarly in the rhetoric of dance, being a quick study at steps is not just a sign of potential for one day being good. Rather it is evidence of already being good, for being quick to master choreography is as much about practice and familiarity as it is with natural ability. In this respect Topsy is a practiced and knowledgeable dancer literally in her bending and in her everyday movements about the domestic ballet.

Indeed the problem, as the narrative admits, is not that she cannot do tasks when she chooses but that she is inconsistent and “she didn’t very often choose.”⁹⁰ Despite this recognition of Topsy’s choice, the narrative refuses (and so has much of the scholarship on the text) to consider that her not choosing to do this is also a choosing to

⁸⁷ Ibid., 287.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 283.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 282.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 283.

do something else. The narrative frames this not-often choosing squarely within a dynamic of obedience and mischief. These are the only two kinds of steps Stowe as choreographer has imagined for Topsy, and the steps themselves are reductive. Mischief is an illegible and unsignifying opacity devoid of any meaning. This is to say there is no reason or purpose in mischief other than a simple opposition to being obedient. As Marie St. Clare explains, "it's only because [Topsy] liked to do mischief. She knows she mustn't pick flowers,--so she does it; that's all there is to it."⁹¹ While St. Clare may be amused by the mischief and Ophelia troubled and Eva sympathetic, and Stowe confidently hopeful that she has the narrative solution to Topsy's mischief, mischief is still understood as error, ignorance, illegibility, a shallow misstep by a rogue leg. It can only figure as a nothing from which arguably something can be made or not made. But focusing on movement and Topsy's gestures as in dance troubles our ability to write the deviation off as a nothing. Focusing on movement instead invites us to imagine that what shows up as nothing is the articulation of a different performance.

In this section I attempt to show that though Stowe crafts Topsy to be unregulatable and chaotic, Topsy is precisely the lawless excess Stowe imagines her to be, which is to say Topsy's growth and movements are not wholly representable or containable within Stowe's narrative designs. She issues forth a limb that flies differently and that like the Holy Spirit causes the tongue and feet to move in a different idiom. I

⁹¹ Ibid., 325.

identify that excess by highlighting two aspects of the Topsy narrative that do not seem to be a part of Stowe's design or at least not the design that scholars have articulated for the last thirty or so years: I first suggest that to bring Topsy up right or upright into the *corps de ballet* is a matter of bringing Topsy into a laboring service suitable for black limbs. I then point out that we might read Topsy's chaotic and ignorant articulations as alternative forms of signification and knowledge—put more baldly we might assume that Topsy is up to something. What we see is in fact an improvisational disruption of the choreographic project that confuses not just Ophelia but might have, had she not been sure of her narrative control, confused Stowe as well. My second line is to cast doubt on the kind of conversion narrative UTC presents itself to be. I suggest that not only was Topsy up to something, but she retains her general difference despite the narrative's curious claims that she has been converted. For if something has changed, it is the narrative and its characters' capacity to see Topsy, to humor that she was there, and moreover to join her on the ground, the hooked over and curved spine of her dance.

3.6 Black Limbs

To bring Topsy up into the *corps de ballet* is to bring her not out of laboring service but into the more pervasively disciplined and efficient movement of Stowe's narrative labor. And it is precisely a move into a traditionally constricted service that Stowe's antislavery vision imagines for the black peoples it hopes to emancipate. Consider a letter written to Eliza Follen (a prominent abolitionist writer) in which Stowe

tries to answer Mrs. Follen's questions about the woman behind UTC. Near the close of the letter, Stowe remarks rhetorically about the value of black labor. She writes:

If anybody wishes to have a black face look handsome, let them be left, as I have been . . . [with] not a single servant in the whole house to do a turn. Then if they could see my good old Aunt Frankie coming with her honest, bluff, black, face, her long, strong arms, her chest as big and stout as a barrel, and her hilarious, hearty laugh . . . they would appreciate the beauty of black people.⁹²

What I want to emphasize here is the way black people's "beauty" and their "handsomeness" arise out of their useful domestic turns, and in the parlance of Stowe's domestic ballet this utility is already evinced in the black face, big chest, and the "long, strong arms." Here Stowe is talking about her actual life and "free" (though more than likely indentured) black labor in the north, but it illustrates almost too perfectly the domestic choreography I argue that Stowe's narrative envisions for her black *corps de ballet*. In particular it highlights a conflation between "turns" and domestic chores, and it highlights the indexing of that potential utility in black limbs.

The domestic ballet in UTC, particularly as narrated through Ophelia, is precisely about putting black limbs into proper, useful turns. We see it first with Dinah, who also sees and resists this effort on Ophelia's part. Gillian Brown argues that when Dinah insists on her chaotic and disorderly way of running the kitchen she is participating (always unknowingly) in the very system of slave economy (of desire and surplus) that oppresses her. In Brown's reading, it is Ophelia who can see the link

⁹² Stowe, Harriet Beecher, "Letter to Mrs. Follen," in Elizabeth Ammons, ed., *Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Case Book*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 21-6.

between domestic order and abolition. As convincing as this reading is, it is troubling that it comes at Dinah's expense: at the expense of presuming her ignorance in her position, and at the expense of arresting and rendering silly and confusing the artistic throne she has found on the downstairs floor. For what Dinah seems to know as she keeps ushering Ophelia back upstairs is that Ophelia does not want to bring Dinah upstairs to the place of grace or the table, but that she would rather order the downstairs movements of the house, to make technically proficient the laboring limbs of the ballet that work under the domestic skirt, so to speak.

Indeed when Stowe's narrator brings Topsy into the "*corps de ballet*," it is not a passing metaphor, but a part of a tripartite logic of dance, domesticity?, and grace (what I am calling a domestic ballet) that persists throughout Stowe's writing and depends upon a *corps de ballet* of dark limbs. Literally UTC highlights black characters' limbs; indeed Stowe even seems to reserve the word "limb" for describing the commodified legs and arms of her black characters. As opposed to "arms" (which the narrative primarily employs to portray image of mother and child) or "legs" (mentioned only a scant few times), the novel, its slave traders, auctioneers and others repeatedly take note of the value of black limbs: We watch the white men in the Kentucky inn size up the seemingly Spanish "newcomer," who readers know is actually Eliza's fugitive husband. Although they assume the man to be free, foreign and wealthy, they take note of his darkness, and they size him up with an anatomical exactitude that bears similarities to

slaves being sized up on auction. They note his “well-formed aquiline nose, straight thin lips, and the admirable contour of his finely-formed limbs, [all of which] impressed the whole company instantly with the ideas of something uncommon.”⁹³ And yet at least in the novel, what we are told is rare or uncommon gets repeatedly imaged so as to be the novel’s norm. We see again at the auction the value of good limbs. As soon as this poor slave mother’s young son “was up” on the block, the narration explains that his “fine figure, alert limbs, and bright face raised an instant competition, and half a dozen bids simultaneously met the ear of the auctioneer. . . .” His mother too, being so close? to the block and the market, is described by her “trembling in every limb [as she] held out her shaking hands towards [her boy].” The novel which has over forty images or references to mothers holding their child in their arms, depicts this mother-child image as a display of severed and bought limbs.⁹⁴ It happens again when the slave mother on the boat with her child is described as holding her child in her arms and the baby as reaching at her with his hands until a white man comes by and takes an interest in purchasing her child, at which point the mother and child lose arms and hands for the more commodifiable and attractive limbs. Even at ten months, the baby is “strong of his age, and very vigorous in his limbs. Never, for a moment, still.”⁹⁵ Both of these

⁹³Ibid., 122.

⁹⁴Ibid., 137.

⁹⁵Ibid., 144.

examples of mothers wrenched from their children highlight the way the affection of holding in arms, as well as the protected and potentially dangerous notion of holding arms, becomes less affective and protective as they are put into market as limbs.

Stowe even opens the novel with her exemplary picture of good limbs, the dancing black child, Harry. In Harry the horror of public dancing and the potential of putting black limbs to work for the domestic ballet (or the domestic novel) come together. In regards to the latter, Stowe makes great use of his dance. A large part of the story's dramatic pictures are put literally and literarily into motion by way of Harry's dancing and because of the value of a black child's attractive and manipulable limbs. Harry is Eliza's son, and it is his Jim Crow jig that draws the attention of the slave trader, Haley, to whom Mastrer Shelby is in debt. (Haley's presence in the house opens the house and the dance up to the dangers of the public and market spheres.) Being aware of Haley's desire for her child, Eliza sets her mind to abscond with him before the transaction can be completed. Their escape is one of the novel's two major plot lines. Mixed with singing and imitations, Harry's dance offers a "comic evolution of his hands, feet, and whole body." His "flexible limbs" allow this "remarkably beautiful and engaging" octoroon to assume the "appearance of deformity and distortion" as he curves his spine so deeply that he appears to have a humped back,⁹⁶ and it is this transformation that amazes and attracts. His "flexible limbs," his lightness of skin, racial

⁹⁶ Ibid., 3-4.

and gender ambiguity render Harry plastic and allow the narration and the characters to make of him anything they need (from a doll, a boy, a girl, a pet, etc.).

To be black in this dance is to have and to be good limbs, stretched and made long and upright by [the training] Ophelia will give but always still, the laboring extremities, particularly the dark legs that in romantic ballet ought to remain properly under skirts, lifting the whole white body and had up in a divine manner towards the heavens. All these black limbs are a part of the narrative's *corps de ballet*. Their importance arises not as singular characters but out of the patterns that emerge in their synchronized figurations. Only Tom proves to be such an exemplary set of limbs that he emerges out of the *corps* to a principal role. The title might suggest him to be the principal role, but not unlike the increasing feminization of ballet (where male dancers were valued for their strength but seen as ugly and boxy in their form and thus were regulated to the shadows of the spotlight) Stowe's domestic ballet, as scholars have repeatedly shown, values the feminine and, except as antagonisms, male characters take supporting roles to the prima ballerinas. Indeed at least in the St. Clare house, the locus of Stowe's domestic ballet, Tom partners Eva as a *pas de deux* partner. Like a true ballerina, Eva as the narrative goes on depends more and more on Tom to serve as the very mechanics by which she ascends into airy grace. Arguably all the black bodies in St. Clare's house serve as strong auxiliary limbs that lift Eva up and help her reach this space of moral transcendence. They are limbs to her body in the same way she relishes

them as members of the house. But more than anybody Tom comes to Eva as the perfect complement, the ultimate *pas de deux* partner. He is dark and strong where she is light, so that she may, by optical illusion, appear as a bright light in the air. He can lift her without calling attention to his own needs or his own physical limitations (or that is the limbs that define his singular self). He can do it so effortlessly, seemingly naturally, that none of the attention is ever drawn away from the ethereal quality of her ascent.

Towards the end, as she becomes frailer and frailer, she literally depends on Tom to move. But this emphasis on Tom's limbs was always a significant part of their bond. That Tom has good limbs is one of the first things announced when St. Clare looked to purchase him. Having already proved himself an invaluable (and superior to St. Clare's) set of limbs when he saves Eva from drowning, Tom catches St. Clare's attention and leads him to approach Haley to inquire about him. Haley immediately declares, as evidence of Tom's worth, "just look at them limbs,--broad-chested, strong as a horse."⁹⁷

And though Eva wants Tom (at any price) because she wants to make him happy, she is also quite taken with his limbs, particularly as she herself grows weak and her own limbs less capable. Indeed making Tom happy becomes a curiously reflexive gesture about letting Tom make her happy, which by the end of the story becomes letting Tom- as he has always done- act as her limbs. For "it was Tom's greatest delight to carry her little frail form in his arms, resting on a pillow, now up and down her room, now out

⁹⁷Ibid., 169.

into the verandah....” Though St. Clare also likes to carry his daughter, both Eva and the narration are clear about Tom’s superior limbs and his reducibility to what those limbs can do. For St. Clare’s “frame was slighter” and he has other things he can do for daughter. But Eva knows that Tom only has this one thing, and Eva knows “too [that] he [Tom] does it easier than [St. Clare] can. He carries me so strong!”⁹⁸

No one expects Topsy to rival Tom as such an exemplary black limb, and indeed she could not for as a female Topsy’s movement out of anything like the *corps de ballet* would rival rather than support or lift up Eva. Just as Ophelia does not mean to bring Dinah upstairs but rather to bring the design and the order of the upstairs to the downstairs mechanism, so too the project of “bring[ing Topsy] up right” begins with an exercise of stretching Topsy’s limbs into service, teaching her how to make a bed, how to “appear in her turn” as a black limb in Stowe’s *corps de ballet*. But Topsy called three times by the other black servants “a limb.” She does not have good limbs that can be put to work; she is a limb, where limb refers to a mischievous and thieving child but also a monstrously rogue member of the –an impossible limb with its own conscious and its own turns.

3.7 Turning Down the Bed: An Additive Hook

That the first lesson Topsy receives in the project to “bring her up right” centers on making Ophelia’s bed rather than, for example, teaching Topsy how to make her own

⁹⁸ Ibid., 332.

bed (which she may or may not have) is indicative of the limitations of Stowe's antislavery vision. In Stowe's domestic ballet, black limbs only find their dance (happily) in the *corps*, exhibiting their grace, not so much by what they do, but by what they do *for* the other (white) characters. The project of "bring[ing Topsy] up right" casts itself as an experiment in uplift, in whether or not Topsy can be made into a darker version of Eva, rather than a wholly opposite creature. Curiously, though, Eva never appears making her own bed, let alone anyone else's bed. Indeed, as her liberal treatment of her apparel on the steamboat shows, Eva is actually quite careless and disorderly about her belongings. Yet Topsy's lesson must begin with service, for it is in exhibiting domestic utility that Stowe's black characters become beautiful "in [their] turns" as they hold up domestic grace by keeping its frenzied footwork in the dark of black feet.

Topsy's first lesson begins with Ophelia, like a true *maitre de ballet*, *walking Topsy through the choreography of making her bed*:

Now, Topsy, I'm going to show you just how my bed is to be made. I am very particular about my bed. You must learn exactly how to do it. . . Now, Topsy, look here;—this is the hem of the sheet, —this is the right side of the sheet, and this is the wrong; — . . . Well, now, the under sheet you must bring over the bolster, —so— and tuck it clear down under the mattress nice and smooth, —so, — do you see?. . . But the upper sheet . . . must be brought down in this way, and tucked under firm and smooth at the foot, —so, —the narrow hem at the foot.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 276-7.

Like choreography, these instructions are only partially renderable in the scripted text. Jennifer Brody argues that hyphens and dashes do not contain as much as suspend. They performatively alert us to a sonic utterance, a breath, and a potential collapse or mixing of meanings in this break that is in excess of the seeming two-dimensionality of the script.¹⁰⁰ And here, too, we see that from under the bridge of the dash emerges all that the narrative does not picture: all of Ophelia's accompanying movements, which take place through and between the script. The repeated use of the word *so* also marks with short expenditures of breath where Ophelia exerts bodily labor, where she must stretch her torso across the bed or twist and extend her arm to pat down the sheet. Topsy listens to the words and reads the gestures. Part of what happens in these breaks, the narrative will tell us shortly, is that Topsy seizes the opportunity to hide a pair of gloves and a ribbon in her sleeve. If Topsy in this moment is learning (to make the bed) by reading and listening to Ophelia's steps, then reading here is not just a process of recitation as Ophelia imagines it to be, but one of (re)interpretation. Topsy's theft is a departure that is inseparable from Ophelia's choreography. It is the "hard to catch" art of hooking and repurposing a moment and a relation.

If we read closely the actual theft, we can see that what gets written as innate moral shiftlessness may be an additive gesture growing in the very soil of Stowe's language. The narrative recounts the theft as follows:

¹⁰⁰ Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 85.

...we will add, what Ophelia did not see, that, during which time when the good lady's back was turned in the zeal of her manipulations, the young disciple had contrived to snatch a pair of gloves and a ribbon, which she had adroitly slipped into her sleeves, and stood with her hands dutifully folded, as before.

Here, not unlike the black help that Stowe praised in her letter to Eliza Follen, Topsy moves in turns, but Topsy does not just move properly "in her turns." When Ophelia turns her back, she not only signals a movement that Topsy, as pupil, will soon repeat when it is her proper time to do so; she also provides a turn that Topsy, as one ready to dance, improvises upon immediately. When it is Topsy's proper turn, the narrative pictures her as executing the choreography of making the bed perfectly, "exhibiting, through the whole process, a gravity and seriousness with which her instructress was greatly edified."¹⁰¹ Neither instructress nor narrator can see that Topsy has already "exhibit[ed]" and exceeded her turn by making use of Ophelia's turn. While theft as an act of taking might seem to be a subtractive move, this gesture, like her infamous declaration that she was not made but just "grow'd," is wholly additive. It relies upon Topsy's adding another step to Ophelia's footwork and upon her adding other articles to her person and increasing the bulk in her sleeve. Even the narrator must regard the theft as additive, as something "we will add" (with so many dependent clauses and impossible shifts in the tense) rather than narrate in time with the sequence of events, and subsequently the reader can only ever experience this theft as an additive—a small outgrowth of the narrative action.

¹⁰¹ Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 277.

The problem or rather the blindness lies precisely in the narrative's declaration that it will add what Ophelia did not see. As Jim O'Loughlin makes clear, Stowe's narrative plan relies on her ability to control and make something of Topsy, not only in the story by way of Ophelia, but also in her narrative. For Stowe depends upon being able to "move [Topsy] from caricature to character."¹⁰² In this way the narrator and Stowe constantly presume that Topsy's additions and ironies lay squarely within the purview of its own intended construction (rather than as something that grows out of its misconstructions or out of that which remains missing in its constructions). The narrative can only see Topsy's successes as indicating her potential to be made into something she is not yet. It cannot see her as a force already moving in the text (picking up choreography) and indicating alternative interpretations (improvising precisely where Ophelia and Stowe mean to delimit her moves). Busy portraying Topsy as lack, it does not see that Topsy *has* her lack, which is to say that what Stowe pictures as lack is not an empty negation but an accumulation of improvisatory deviations. Specifically thinking about her contrivance to snatch the ribbon and the gloves, we might call Topsy's improvisatory movements, "hooks." In 19th-century parlance, the word *hook* referred to just such petty thefts as lifting a ribbon with a turn of the hand and a tuck of the sleeve. But a hook also alludes to a bending and a deep curvature. Hooks act as joiners, linking one body to another, and in this way they are additive instruments,

¹⁰²Jim O'Loughlin, "Articulating 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,'" *New Literary History* 31, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 580-1.

joining different verses, lines, and bodies together. Inasmuch as Topsy's minor moves are not only bound up with growth and theft but also replete with physical bends, bows, spins, and falls, we do well to refer to her improvisations against Stowe's choreography as a hooking dance.

What is particularly arresting about Topsy's hooks is the way in which they repurpose by bringing together both what appeared to be nothing and what appeared to be an immutable and discrete subject. For in this scene, Topsy has hooked more than gloves. She has hooked Ophelia's movements (and Stowe's sentences). Responding to Ophelia's turned back with her own gestures, she brings the two of them together in dancing relation. This theft is important given Ophelia's and, more subtly, the narrative's resistance to moving with Topsy. When Topsy, in her initial interview with Ophelia, replies to questions about her parentage by insisting that she "never was born," Ophelia declares, "You mustn't answer me like that; I'm not playing with you."¹⁰³ Unlike the adults around Tom Sawyer who, Judith Fetterley argues, consent to and play along with Tom's shenanigans,¹⁰⁴ Ophelia does not mean to move or dance with Topsy. It takes conversion (Ophelia's, Topsy's or the narrative's?) for Ophelia to take ownership and literally move with Topsy to the North. But for now Ophelia has envisioned herself prescribing steps for Topsy to follow as opposed to a duet. Nevertheless Topsy has

¹⁰³ Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 274.

¹⁰⁴ Judith Fetterley, "The Sanctioned Rebel," *Studies in the Novel* 3, no. 3 (Fall 1971): 293-304.

done just that, dropped her illusory stance apart “with her hands dutifully folded”¹⁰⁵ and moved in response to and with Ophelia, revealing them as connected and part of the same dance.

Topsy’s joining the dance is a shock to Ophelia because, not unlike representatives of ballet (or later modern dance) when it became a high art, she cannot see how her own dance is inextricably linked with Topsy’s illegible and primitive hooks. To Ophelia, Topsy’s heathen debasement has nothing to do with her. Indeed as she, in all her northern righteousness, tells her cousin Augustine St. Clare, it is “*your* [southern] system [of Slavery] that makes such children” (emphasis added).¹⁰⁶ But Topsy’s choreographic alteration implicates Ophelia as engendering the occasion of, if not the technique for, her theft. For it is at the moment of narrating Topsy’s theft that we see Ophelia and the narrator lost in their manipulations: the one deep in her domestic art and the other in her narrative *articulation* of what presumably only she sees, so that neither Ophelia nor Stowe *see* Topsy or their own zeal. However Topsy’s hooking movements underscore the domestic labor of Ophelia’s limbs. Literally “turned” around “in the zeal of her manipulations,” Ophelia is not separate but occupies a shared space of bending and turning with Topsy and the other black servants. More like one of Dinah’s torrents of culinary inspiration than she or Stowe could ever stoop to

¹⁰⁵ Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 277.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 281.

acknowledge, this zeal calls into question Ophelia's propriety as a New England lady evacuated of desire's excess. It highlights Stowe's need for a *corps de ballet* of black limbs that, rightly ordered, can render visible the movement, labor, and attending passion in a manner that would leave Ophelia and Eva framed in the dance but still poised in grace.

Now let us hook back to the narrator's proclamation that Topsy has been "fairly introduced into our *corps be ballet*, and will figure, from time to time, in her turn, with other performers." When it says that Topsy will "figure, from time to time, in her turn," the narrative most explicitly means that Topsy (though we leave her now) will appear again in her prescribed role and in proper sequential order. The narrative calls attention to both its own staging and its thinking about that staging, not as a theatrical staging where the actor is expected to add something, but rather a staging of moving pictures, a figuring, where the characters are properly fixed in their lines. And yet this wording is just too true (and Topsy is too precisely what Stowe imagined her to be) to stay fixed in any particular signification, for it is precisely "in turns" [in Ophelia's turn, the narrative turns, the "turn of the hand," and the physical hooking] that Topsy appears where Ophelia (and perhaps, Stowe) cannot see.

Topsy's hooks interrogate the narrative's persistent antislavery investment in developing, bringing up right, cultivating, and making (blacks into) people. In her hooks, we can read a constant recognition (if not insistence) that making things is a violent project even if it produces something desirable or legible or beautiful (none of

these being synonymous). For Ophelia and Stowe are not the only ones who transform *objects* and make *things*; Topsy for her own part makes many things: doll clothes, turbans, performances, bouquets, and a little keepsake out of the lock of hair and book, which Eva gave her. But unlike the project of “bring[ing Topsy] up right” or Ophelia’s general design to bring the St. Clare house into the order of the domestic ballet, Topsy’s creations are always seen as disruptive and grotesque. One of the black servants, Rosa, initially sees the keepsake as a stolen object and tries to apprehend it from Topsy. The creation initiates a physical altercation, and even when Eva’s father, Augustine St. Clare, recognizes Topsy’s claim to her creation, which is to say restores the peace it had disrupted, he notes her creation as curious and hard to read (albeit vaguely touching). Marie St. Clare offers a more blatant protest to Topsy’s proclivity to make things. She accosts and punishes Topsy for making the bouquet of flowers for Eva. Marie St. Clare’s reaction highlights not the bouquet or Topsy’s artistry, but the violence of pulling flowers out of her masters’ garden, of destroying, and stealing what is not hers in order to make this bouquet. Indeed Topsy’s creations are always seen as thieving missteps that are but further instances of her first theft of the ribbon and gloves.

Most bewildering are Topsy’s occluded performances—those instances where she steals objects, time, and place in order to dress up the bed posts, butt her head against the pillows, make a turban of Ophelia’s shawl, and play pretend in front of the mirror. All of these movements happen in stolen time and in confrontation with the

supposedly calming effects of the “closet”¹⁰⁷ in which Ophelia has tried to contain Topsy’s movements. They happen “instead of making the bed” and after Ophelia has “locked her up, and [given] her a hymn to study.” They also, like the flowers, happen at the expense of hooking things (not unlike the ribbon and the gloves) that do not belong to her. She takes not only the time and the space, but also the shawl, the sheets, the pillowcases, and alas the straw that threatens to break Ophelia’s back, Topsy hooks her bonnet-trimming. Once again Ophelia has not seen or expected Topsy’s movements: “. . . what does she do, but spy out where I put my key, and has gone to my bureau, and got a bonnet-trimming, and cut it all to pieces to make dolls’ jackets! I never saw anything like it, in my life!”¹⁰⁸ Ophelia is fond of remarking on how enigmatic and impossible it is to see Topsy. Yet given the entire choreographic project of bringing Topsy up right and Ophelia’s specific function to bring her and the St. Clare house into technical order, Ophelia’s inability to recognize Topsy is odd. For nowhere does Topsy so mirror Ophelia’s project of developing “virgin soil”¹⁰⁹ as she does in these stolen moments of repurposing Ophelia’s linens. What we can see in Topsy’s making doll jackets (in addition to evidence that she is better at needlework than the narrator acknowledges) is that Topsy sees something different in the bonnet-trimming and that she imagines

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 332.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 280.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 275.

alternative possibilities for the moments allocated for learning hymns. Hooking the trimming, she makes something new. It is important that Ophelia registers the horror of this new creation, of the cutting away of the previous material, which already had a perfectly good purpose as far as Ophelia was concerned. For it is precisely against that violence of being all cut up and refashioned that Topsy's movements turn. It is not that making things is bad; indeed there is something charming and caring (and certainly for Stowe, something terrifically domestic) about Topsy's making doll jackets. Still the outrage Ophelia experiences is also an insistence that such creations do not come out of nothing. They are bound up with the theft, destruction, and refitting of previous bodies, existences, and socialities. In this way Topsy's performance of making the doll jackets turns against the grain of Stowe's antislavery narrative, by indeed resisting the project of being developed and calling attention to the violence of imagining what is already growing and moving as a nothing, waiting to be made.

3.8 “Never Was Born [Again]”¹¹⁰

Topsy's movements continue to resist this narrative effort to “bring her up right,” and ultimately I argue, they cast doubt on the efficacy of what scholars have identified as the affective linchpin of Stowe's antislavery narrative—Topsy's spiritual conversion at the hands of the sympathetic evangelizer, little Eva. Focusing on Topsy's movements particularly in relationship to the movements of others enables us to

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 274.

recognize that the sense that Topsy has been converted emerges not out of some great change in Topsy's character and actions. It emerges out of a narrative scaffolding in which the narrator, Eva, and St. Clare all offer timely declarations of Topsy's amazing change. The narrator tells us that "[y]es, in that moment, a ray of real belief" reaches Topsy's interior.¹¹¹ Eva proclaims that she "think[s] Topsy is different from what she used to be."¹¹² Astonished at Topsy's sentimental tears and keepsake, St. Clare tells Ophelia that Topsy "is capable of a *real sorrow*," and thus "is capable of good." And Ophelia confirms that "[t]he child has improved greatly."¹¹³ Yet without these declarations, the change the narrative wants us to see is not as dramatically apparent; Topsy's propinquity to turn and curve, to hook over and revel in the occluded improvisational space persists. If anything at the level of physical articulation, it is not Topsy but Eva and Ophelia who change in their upright physical stances. Their movements more so than Topsy's appear to undergo a conversion or a shift from an aerial theology where grace comes from a distant above to a theology of the ground in which salvation happens in a movement down and grace in a fugitive stealing away.

Prior to her conversion, the narrative depicts a large part of Topsy's devilishness as a tendency to do (disruptive) things in secret and to hold "a perfect carnival of

¹¹¹ Ibid., 321.

¹¹² Ibid., 325.

¹¹³ Ibid., 351.

confusion”¹¹⁴ when Ophelia is not looking. In addition to the hooking behind Ophelia’s back and the playful chaos in the closet, Topsy’s pranks and revenge plots all happen when Ophelia does not see, when “not a scrap of any direct evidence could be found” to tie her to “the mischiefs done.”¹¹⁵ Topsy’s missteps are never quite capturable but rather show up only as a sudden and intrusive mess that constantly perplexes Ophelia. What perplexes her is not only the mess but also the abrupt appearance and its implication that Topsy is constantly, when unseen, moving out of time and out of step with the domestic choreography. Topsy’s sudden appearances, usually accompanied with an air of “gravity” and “dutifully folded hands,” are repeatedly marked by a look or an exclamation of shock from Ophelia. After Topsy’s theft and false confession, the narrative tells us that Ophelia “looked perfectly bewildered.”¹¹⁶ Her complaints about Topsy to St. Clare also include a declaration of not being able to see: “‘I don’t see,’ said Miss Ophelia to St. Clare, ‘how I’m going to manage that child . . .’” and a little later, “I never saw such a child as this.”¹¹⁷ In these instances, she cannot believe her eyes, less so for what they see now than what it is they have failed to see previously.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 284.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 283.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 279.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 281.

And indeed if Topsy's heathen confusion is marked by constant illegible movements in a secret and disordered darkness that Ophelia cannot see, Stowe writes Topsy's conversion as a deluge of light and a matter of becoming visible. Eva occasions the conversion by first seeing Topsy when the adults can only complain and talk about her. As a "silent spectator," Eva sees Topsy. She beckons to Topsy with an equally "silent sign," which Topsy sees, and together they adjourn to "a little glass-room" where Eva's evangelizing work can shine bright. As she asks Topsy about her misbehavior, Eva is moved by Topsy's unfamiliarity with love, and she proclaims in great and tearful affect, "O, Topsy, poor child, *I love you!*" This declaration of love supposedly marks the beginning of Topsy's change, demonstrated first in her "large, bright drops" of tears, but evinced mostly by the narrator's telling us that "[y]es, in that moment, a ray of real belief, a ray of heavenly love, had penetrated the darkness of the heathen soul!"¹¹⁸ That Topsy should be penetrated by "rays" and a "heavenly love" light enough to dispel darkness, brighten her tears, and make her affectively and spiritually visible is only underscored by the fact that they are sitting in a glass room through which St. Clare and Ophelia are able to look on and bear witness to this conversion. Where much of the problem with Topsy is her opacity and the lurking sense that she is doing things in secret, here she is on perfect display to the angel Eva, to antislavery mistress Ophelia, to her legal master St. Clare, to Stowe, and the readers.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 321.

If this newfound light and sudden visibility are the signs of conversion, how are we to regard the fact that Topsy's very first post-conversion appearance is conspicuously not an appearance? The scene opens with a picture of Eva, "reclining" with her Bible and "little transparent fingers." We do not see Topsy, but with Eva, we hear the commotion and a "smart slap":

"What now, you baggage!—what new piece of mischief! You've been picking the flowers, hey?" and Eva heard the sound of a smart slap.

"Law, Missis! They's for Miss Eva," she heard a voice say, which she knew belonged to Topsy.

"Miss Eva! A pretty excuse!—you suppose she wants *your* flowers, you good-for-nothing nigger! Get along off with you!"

In a moment, Eva was off from her lounge, and in the verandah.

In this passage, we never see Topsy's theft or the confusion she creates (nor her potential fear or hurt). Once again (as if to replay the conversion scene) Eva saves Topsy. This time she saves Topsy not from sin but from (the evil of) Marie St. Clare. It is here in this second salvation that Eva, in her sympathetic generosity, offers Topsy what, I argue, is more fundamental to picturing Topsy's conversion than tears or declarations of love; she gives Topsy a job, or rather she gives Topsy her command, her "wish [that Topsy'd] arrange something every day [for her empty flower vase]."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 324.

In Eva's moral logic, which is the moral reasoning par excellence in the novel, Topsy's wanting to do something for Eva is a marker of her "[being] different from what she used to be" and of her "trying to be good." Still without agreeing with her cruelty, we do well to acknowledge that Marie St. Clare's inability to see the difference in Topsy's movements is not wholly ungrounded. For pulling up the flowers without permission and making them into a neat arrangement is not so different from going into the drawer, picking out a piece of nice fabric, cutting it all to pieces, and making it into doll clothes. The two acts are similar in their small appropriation (or hooking) of something that belongs to her master, uprooting it, and in some way permanently altering it in order to make something beautiful of her own creation. Nor is the generous desire to give a gift a new development; Topsy has been generous before, if not toward the dolls for whom she makes the clothes, then toward the children with whom she shares her questionable bounty. Between this act and her past antics, there are two primary differences, which allow Eva to regard this act as evidence of a conversion: first and foremost, though the narrative would have us believe Topsy is becoming generally more generous, what is actually different is that this action is for Eva. The other difference is that Topsy now participates in a perfectly legible activity for a member of the *corps de ballet*. The ballet is littered with flowers: dancing flowers, strewn petals, flowers in hair, flower waltzes, and girls in the *corps de ballet*, holding up a rose as they move back and forth in their synchronous motion. In romantic ballets such as the *La*

Sylphide and in the classic ones like *Giselle*, a girl from the *corps de ballet* once in a while has the privilege to present a flower or a small bouquet to one of the principal dancers. Eva here is (Stowe's Christianized version of) the sylph, and Topsy, in bringing her flowers, has made a step (which with Eva's wish becomes a routine) that is legible to the choreography of Stowe's domestic ballet. While Marie St. Clare's protestation allows Stowe, via Eva, to more thoroughly announce proof of Topsy's conversion and say that "Topsy is different than she used to be," in this scene, Topsy's movements are not different but rather reframed.

If we pay close attention, we can even see that Eva's declaration that Topsy is different is not a position she argues consistently. For Eva counters her mother's idea that Topsy is not a "good-for-nothing-nigger" by suggesting not so much that Topsy is good, but that perhaps something can be done with Topsy's desire to try. Even if, as Marie St. Clare believes, Topsy will "have to try a good while before *she* gets to be good," Eva suggests (in a manner that does not contradict her mother) that perhaps now Topsy's movements can be set to some good task. And again when Marie St. Clare exclaims that "[Topsy]'s just so ugly, and always will be," Eva does not refute Topsy's ugliness. Instead she says, "But Mamma, [it's different] to be brought up as I've been with so many friends, so many things to make me good and happy." The "but" here is not a negation of Topsy's ugliness. Eva's response is an explanation for Topsy's deficit; it is an iteration of mitigating circumstances. Such a response, though, as

sympathetically righteous as it is, holds open a tacit assent to Marie St. Clare's initial propositions. The only counter Eva really offers in this exchange is to her mother's emphatic assertion that "you can't make anything of the creature!"¹²⁰ For Marie St. Clare that Topsy cannot be made into something is connected to her ugliness and her goodness. While Eva does not refute these latter two, she counters the first by giving Topsy a task, so that even if Topsy must continue to be a "nigger," she need not be a "good-for-nothing-nigger"; now, at least, she is good for something.

Despite Eva's proclamation that Topsy is different, this scene suggests something to the contrary. From its opening spotlight on Eva (rather than Topsy), its discussion of Topsy's disruptive mischief, and Eva's tacit assent to her mother's suspicions and disgust, the scene suggests that what gets styled as a conversion is not a change in Topsy. It is instead the narrative's gradual inscription of Topsy's movements within a culturally legible role. The conversion is not so much in Topsy's doing good as much as in Eva's specific commanding that makes Topsy's doing for Eva legitimate and thus good. Topsy's bringing the flower is a move that the narrative can make something of. It is legible within multiple ideologies at work in the narrative: In an affective register, Topsy loves Eva, and doing good for one you love is a sign of feeling and acting on love. In a religious symbolism, Eva stands in for Christ, and a desire to do something for Eva is a sign of Topsy's spiritual capacity to want to adore the one who is most deserving of

¹²⁰ Ibid., 325.

being adored. And then of course, in the economy of the household, Eva is Topsy's mistress, and her wanting to do something for her is exactly the legible role that the proslavery Marie St. Clare (and the antislavery Stowe reveling in black domestic turns) can understand. Here in her moral magnanimity, Eva inscribes Topsy within a legible role of service.

Lest we be tempted to believe that it is only as a function of Marie St. Clare's cruelty that Topsy appears still as enigmatic and hard to see, let us consider the next scene when Eva distributes locks of her hair to the household in order that they may have something by which to remember her. In this scene, Topsy's post-conversion moves continue to trouble Ophelia's blind spot. After Eva gives all the servants a lock of her hair, Ophelia, "who was apprehensive for the effect of all this excitement on her little patient, signed to each one to pass out of the apartment." Uncle Tom and Mammy hang behind and say a few extra words, but Ophelia ushers them "gently from the apartment and [then she] thought they were all gone; but, as she *turned* Topsy was standing there" (emphasis added). Once again Topsy appears "in turn." She comes up out of nowhere, which is to say out of the places Ophelia cannot see. Startled, Ophelia asks, "Where did you start up from?" In a response that bridges pre- and post-conversion turns, Topsy replies, "I was here."¹²¹ *I was here* is a radical formulation for Topsy who is supposed to be Stowe's origin-less absence—her "never was born" invention. *I was here* calls

¹²¹ Ibid., 330

attention to her being, not only in the present “here,” but also in a “was,” in a past tense, an existence before Ophelia could see her. Even in the name *Topsy*, Stowe meant for Topsy to appear as that which comes up out of nowhere, which is to say, as that which appears to have had no existence before the viewer sees it. Topsy though has not just sprung up, but she “was [already] here,” already growing in the scene and in the prose. *I was here*. Topsy’s reply quietly corrects the assumption underneath Ophelia’s exasperated question; her response implies that she did not start up nor startlingly just begin. What startles is the persistence of her presence. Even now after her conversion, *I was here* echoes (in its brevity, tone, and sentiment) Topsy’s earlier claim, “I spect I grow’d.”¹²² It reiterates her initial insistence that she has been about the very ground, where Ophelia, so busy trying to order and make something of her, has failed to see her. *I was here* is a verbal articulation of what her hooks and fugitive steps have been rendering palpable throughout the narrative. And indeed, at the end of this scene, as if in some acknowledgement that the unseen and occluded space is the necessary condition and location of her existence, Topsy, when finally “passed from the apartment by Ophelia” goes like all the others, but she goes “with her eyes hid in her apron” even as “she hid the precious curl [like the ribbon and the gloves] in her bosom.”¹²³

¹²² *Ibid.*, 275.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 330.

This small verbal resistance to the idea of being suddenly new and visible only becomes a more emphatic and moving physical articulation of her hooking existence as the narrative continues. The scene in which Topsy goes to pay respect to the recently deceased Eva may begin with Stowe's earnest attempts to picture the new flower-bearing Topsy as changed—indeed converted—into the *corps de ballet*. I argue though that by the end of this scene Topsy's physical movements refuse any such development and if anything, compel Ophelia's physical conversion from the up right(eous) to the (com)passionate lowly. When Topsy goes to pay her respect after Eva's death, she once again appears, carrying a flower, and the flower once again becomes evidence of her conversion. The scene begins with Rosa who has already been decorating the site of Eva's body with "a basket of white flowers," putting one in Eva's hand, "and with admirable taste, dispos[ing] other flowers around the couch." Topsy tries to enter the room, "her eyes swelled with crying" (for the loss of Eva), and she is "holding something under her apron." Rosa tries to bar her entrance, and Topsy pleads, "O, do let me! I brought a flower,—such a pretty one!" She "hold[s] up a half-blown tea rose bud," but Rosa, like Marie St. Clare, is suspicious and dismissive of Topsy's offering. As she refuses Topsy, St. Clare, standing by the body of the deceased Eva, imbibes something of the angel child's narrative role. He intervenes, announces that "[Topsy] shall come," and allows her to "la[y] her offering at the feet of the corpse." Here again Topsy comes holding up a rose like a good member of the *corps de ballet*. As Marie St.

Clare initially noticed, there is something superfluous about Topsy's flower. Like Eva's sick bed, the mourning room is already covered with flowers. Topsy is not offering something new. But indeed the narrative does not want her to offer something new. The uniqueness in her particular arrangements is lovely and to be appreciated, but more importantly to Stowe's domestic choreography, Topsy with her flower offerings, appears to have joined the ranks of Rosa and the other black limbs about the house, waving flowers and happily doing something for Eva.

Despite this seeming success in bringing Topsy up right, of converting her, Topsy is no less excessive in this scene than she had been elsewhere in the narrative. Her rose gift might be evidence of her being brought *up right*, but her movements show no particular proof of coming *upright*. For after Topsy makes her legible and appropriate offering, "suddenly, with a wild and bitter cry, she threw herself on the floor alongside the bed, and wept and moaned aloud." The other characters cannot make her less excessive or make her stand up straight. Ophelia, wanting her to rise, says, "Get up child." Unlike Jesus speaking to the paralytic, Ophelia's words do not move Topsy. She does not or will not stand.¹²⁴ Before Topsy's conversion, the narrative explained that the problem with bringing Topsy up right was not that she could not do things "when she chose—but [that] she didn't very often choose."¹²⁵ Here, just after

¹²⁴ Ibid., 339.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 283.

Topsy with her rose has danced a perfect sequence in the *corps de ballet*, she breaks with the proper steps, she falls down, and she does not choose to get up. The others must stand in “a moment in silence” around Topsy. The contrast between their silent standing and her loud expressive horizontality is so great that it casts doubt on the idea that Topsy has been made uniform and efficient in the *corps de ballet*. If she is the picture of a Christian conversion, then she reveals a lack of conversion in the others who, far from seeming to be with her in one body, remain physically separate and opposite her.

This abdication of a vertical stance and this movement down was always a part of Topsy’s confusing and illegible hooking movement. Let us consider her opening dance:

[Topsy,] the thing struck up, in a clear shrill voice, an odd negro melody, to which she kept time with her hands and feet, spinning round, clapping her hands, knocking her knees together, in a wild, fantastic sort of time, and producing in her throat all those odd guttural sounds which distinguish the native music of her race; and finally, turning a summerset or two, and giving a prolonged closing note, as odd and unearthly as that of a steam-whistle, she came suddenly down on the carpet, and stood with her hands folded . . .¹²⁶

Topsy’s penchant for the turn, which engenders her improvisational hooks, is not limited to a motion across the ground. Although the narrative development may be interested in a forward panorama of pictures across the novel, Topsy’s motions are not so much concerned with moving across as they are with going down into the ground. For in “turning a summerset,” Topsy turns down. In this movement, she makes a hook

¹²⁶ Ibid., 271.

of her spine and folds over her center into a physical curve. Topsy's movements dramatize not only an intimate use of the ground but also a proclivity for "[coming] down on the floor." Her "tumbling," which we see later as an example of her "talent for every species of drollery,"¹²⁷ also involves a more extensive curvature of the spine and so too does the bend in the body required for Topsy to "bu[tt] her woolly head among the pillows" or "hang her head downward from the tops" of the bed posts. When Topsy throws herself at the foot of Eva's bed with a loud moaning, she articulates herself physically and sonically within the same aesthetics of curving and going down—"getting down" as it were—with which she first appears in the narrative. Her moan here reminds us of those "odd" and "guttural sounds" that came from the back of her throat and marked her as a race apart. Here she is once again out of step and in "a fantastic sort of time" apart from the rest of the household. All these movements physically hook and require an abdication of a vertical stance. Again and again Topsy drops her head and releases her center into the forces of the ground and gravity. These moves are extreme plays upon the bent head in which her station in life and the pious Ophelia would pose her. These moves do not escape the bent head by striving for verticality, but rather her hooks move into the posture expected of her, revealing a whole other life and dance behind the servant's posture. Giving her a rose and putting her at the mourning site of the beloved white child (as opposed to old Prue), the

¹²⁷ Ibid., 282.

narrative may try to scaffold Topsy within a context that is legible to the viewers, but Topsy's movements here are just as much a spectacle of difference and great feeling and falls as they were in the beginning (pre-conversion) when the narrative was quick to call her a goblin and a heathen.

Ophelia does eventually move her, but not, I argue, before Topsy moves Ophelia—not just in sympathy but in her physicality. Early in Ophelia's attempts to educate Topsy, the narrative explains how Ophelia constantly "supposed that Topsy had at last fallen into her way, [and thus] could do without overlooking," only to find that Topsy, once out of view, abandons all of Ophelia's steps. In those moments what Ophelia wants is for Topsy to fall in line and in step with the domestic ballet, but what we see in this scene is Ophelia's realization that what Topsy wants, indeed what she compels, is a fall. When Topsy throws herself onto the ground in an emotional torrent, Ophelia wants her to get up, but it is actually Ophelia who moves first. It is Ophelia who must abandon her upright position with everyone else and bend over if she has any hope to "rais[e Topsy] gently, but firmly and [take] her from the room." Instead of passing her from the room as she did previously, she must this time move with Topsy in order to make her declaration that she too can love (or at least try to love) Topsy. Here Ophelia gives into Topsy's hooking turn and finally "play[s] with" Topsy. It is this move to the ground and with Topsy that (along with her illuminating tears) was already crucial to Eva's saving grace. Her initial saving declarations of love happen only after

the two children move together, Eva “stoop[s],”¹²⁸ and they embrace on the floor. And again in what I call Topsy’s second salvation, we see that in order for Eva to rescue Topsy from her mother, she must first move “off from her lounge”; this move off is a move down from the exalted place of her sick bed (or sacrificial alter) to the ground.¹²⁹

In this falling light, we must reconsider the narration’s declaration that “from that hour, [Ophelia] acquired an influence over the mind of the destitute child that she never lost.”¹³⁰ Yes, it seems that in this moment, Topsy becomes less trouble and more completely amenable to Ophelia’s guidance, and certainly as Ophelia will make a move to legally possess her, Topsy is closer to being hers. However what we see is not nearly as one-sided as the narrative has encouraged us to believe. In reading the bodily gestures, we see that part of the reason Ophelia has a stronger hold of Topsy is that she has bound (in her bending) herself to Topsy’s movements. She has been moved, hooked, bent, and grounded by Topsy. If there is a conversion, it is not solely (if at all) Topsy’s, but also Eva’s, Ophelia’s, and the narrator’s. Perhaps most importantly, if there is a conversion it is not a matter of making something from nothing; it is not the appearance of a new creation but rather a capacity to see the same movements in a different way.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 325.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 324.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 340.

3.9 A Theory of Emigration | A Theology of the Ground

“Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the state wherein they were created.”

Topsy’s eyes twinkled, and she looked inquiringly.

“What is it, Topsy?” said Miss Ophelia.

“Please, Missis, was dat a r state Kintuck?”

“What state, Topsy?”

“Dat state dey fell out of. I used to hear Mas’r tell how we came down from Kintuck.”

St. Clare laughed.

“You’ll have to give her a meaning, or she’ll make one,” said he. “There seems to be a theory of emigration suggested there.”¹³¹

Like her hooks, this seeming misapprehension about the connotation of the word *state* highlights the movement of going down. Scholars have regarded Topsy’s verbal hooks as an “ironic confusion of words and origins”¹³² that is at best a part-comical, part-pathetic “affront ... to reason” and at worst a “blackface projection.”¹³³ But what if Topsy is not confused? In paralleling the catechesis creation story and her knowledge about her own ontology, Topsy forces us to think about what it means to go down. In

¹³¹ Ibid., 286.

¹³² Gillian Brown, “Getting in the Kitchen with Dinah Domestic Politics in Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” in Elizabeth Ammons, ed., *Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin: A Case Book* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 95.

¹³³ Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania*, 40.

¹³³ Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 30.

neither of these examples does one actually go down or fall. Falling and going down are rather ways of thinking about the emigration in pictorial terms. The Garden of Eden is not a place one can fall from nor is the south below the north except on the flat surface of a map. Her observation connects her own story to the divine first parents, and it puts her physical falls and downward motions in a theological relief that continues to ask what it means to fall and to go down. As a repetition of the idea of going down, the catechesis, her own story, and her movements are all connected. However, inasmuch as her movements involve a physical move down, a releasing of the core and giving over to gravity and the ground, they push up against the expressions, “falling from grace” and “coming down south.” They interrogate a difference that retraces the fall not as a leaving or a descent into abjection but as an abdication of the vertical and singular stance that isolates (from the very networks of care, play, and improvisations that have animated black artistic, intellectual, and spiritual traditions). Perhaps then, we need ask, what if St. Clare is right in his joking? What if Topsy is suggesting a theory of emigration, one that focuses on the movement and the relationship between falling and coming down, where coming down is also about being grounded, connected, and ready?

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In a 1986 performance of Alvin Ailey’s *Revelations* solo, “I Want to be Ready,” dancer Dudley Williams engaged in what performance studies scholar Danielle

Goldman identifies as a series of controlled falls set to a slow and syncopated spiritual also called “I Want to be Ready.” As Goldman notes, even in his many upward gestures to heaven (raised heads, praying hands, and lifts), Williams keeps returning to the ground; he falls back, buckles under, tumbles over to the floor. All the while, the music crones, “I wanna be ready/ I wanna be ready/ I wanna be ready, Lord.”¹³⁴ Like Topsy’s movements, the piece seems to suggest that salvation is not a look upwards nor a practice of sustaining height (a goal that is as theologically unsustainable and hubris-filled as the Tower of Babel), but rather as, Goldman explains, a “perpetual readiness”¹³⁵ by a continual return to and engagement with the ground.

The solo is about three and a half minutes long. The first third of it is entirely grounded and might be described as a triumph of the limbs. Through rolling motions, contractions, and pulls, Williams’ torso seems to want to raise him up from the ground, but his limbs continue to move along and into the floor. The arm and hand lift in the torso’s gentle wave but fall back to the ground three times. The third time, the hand lands emphatically, demanding that the body shift its weight. In this shift, all the limbs go down and stretch the torso to the horizontal. When the torso tries again to raise Williams to a table position on all fours, the limbs begin a controlled set of lengthening

¹³⁴ “Dudley Williams (1986),” April 26, 2010, Video Clip, accessed October 11, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bADQzyg00g>.

¹³⁵ Danielle Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 2010), 5, 113.

and contracting. The impression is a crawl that goes nowhere but reaches desperately and manages to keep the torso low and the whole body engaged with the ground. All of these efforts to bring the torso up require that the limbs bear weight and carry the torso's dream of verticality. This is to say that the whole body never really goes up without some limbs going down.

To be ready is to struggle to stay down, to return, and to keep being carried by the ground. Williams rolls out of the stylized crawl onto his back where he rocks side to side, like a narrow boat on the waters. The movement is reminiscent of early education scholar Liselott Olsson's comparison between ground and water when she juxtaposes learning to walk and learning to surf.¹³⁶ Here the body moves with and about the ground like a boat, acknowledging what we forget in our everyday walking, which is that all of this movement happens not independently of but with the ground. And in this boat, Williams has put the core down but not to rest. With his back down, the torso bears the weight. The shoulders begin to hover, and the limbs escape (still with the body but) away from the weight-bearing role they had previously sustained. When the torso moves up the entire body must align and move toward this upward development. Now with the torso laid down, the limbs grow and find themselves, with here-and-there an accenting gesture—legs diagonal: one straight and one bent; arms perpendicular: the

¹³⁶ Liselott Mariett Olsson, *Movement and Experimentation in Young Children's Learning: Deleuze and Guattari in Early Childhood Education* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1-3.

upstage arm extending straight up with open palm and the downstage one bent and unfolding out on a horizontal. This growth of the grounded limbs moves through many silhouettes (fetal curl, helpless infant, desperate prayer), but at its most intense, just before Williams gives up the shape entirely and moves into another part of the sequence, the silhouette appears, indeed transformed, not as the signification of a human action, but as a seedling—a life not (or “never was”) born but growing. For a suspended breath, Williams is a plant with limbs growing out of the ground of the stage.

To be ready is to be, as the choreography suggests, on and moving toward the ground, moving and growing, and as the lyrics pronounce, ready to die. But what dies here is the core or the *corps* of the upright and singular body. The dancing body and its beautiful arabesque get laid into a horizontal labor for the multiplicity of the body’s limbs. In the return of the body’s core to the earth, the black limbs, which had been animating it, escape into something else; they come not so much up, as out, and in multiple directions. What we see here, particularly as it is framed within the music of grace and salvation, is a choreography that sounds the tenor of Topsy’s constant improvisations down. Indeed Topsy is at least three times referred to by Rosa and Jane as a “limb,” and her hooking moves might also be called a revolt of (black) limbs. Improvising, she is like Williams rocking back and forth, recognizing the ground (in and of Stowe’s narrative) as not static, but like the sea, composed of many currents and always changing.

Both Topsy and Williams continually try to bring the body down in what we might call a theology of the ground. In the Ailey solo there is a repeated bodily, lyrical, and musical insistence that to be ready for the Lord is to be ready to die, where death is both about the end of a human's mortal life and about an abdication of the vertical or the high up. It is not a social death but a departure, where departure is, as Édouard Glissant argues, "the moment when one consents to not be a single being,"¹³⁷ — the moment when one consents to grow and also be plant, infant, floor, and ground. Williams' expressive falls and Topsy's throwing herself down and moaning call to mind so many Biblical instances of people falling down in the face of the Holy Spirit (perhaps most famously Paul) as well as of the enigmatic and rarely attended to instances of Jesus writing in the ground (as part of his rescuing the adulteress) and spitting and mixing his hands in the dirt (as part of his healing of a blind man). It also brings to mind the less enigmatic but no less challenging moment in which Jesus bends over and washing his disciples' feet, demanding they follow this preferential treatment for the lowly and its movement down. There the ground is not empty or incidental. There something is moving on and in the ground literally, politically, and spiritually, and the readiness, care, and hooking departure needed to get at this something might be what Topsy as limbed movement gestures towards.

¹³⁷ Manthia Diawara, "Conversation with Édouard Glissant Aboard the Queen Mary II," trans. Christopher Winks. University of Liverpool Black Atlantic Resources. http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/csis-2/blackatlantic/research/Diawara_text_defined.pdf (October 11, 2013). [Original source "Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic" Exhibition Catalogue (2010: Tate Publishing, London)]: 2.

4. The Pranking Dance of the “Never Was Born”

In 2003 when asked about what it was like to dance while pregnant, the darling of ballet Julie Kent after first assuring that it was perfectly normal, perfectly natural, recounted that it was interesting to feel the baby kicking in performance:

I started feeling the baby move right before I went onstage—it was usually during “Dorian.” It wasn't a huge movement—just a tiny little elbow or little hand or foot, but I definitely felt the two worlds as one. . . .¹

The strangeness of feeling a baby kick during a performance is also the strangeness of realizing that inside the choreographed dance, the wombed, not-yet-one (occluded but palpably present) makes other quickening untrained movements that are not confined to an unnoticeable interior, but present to Kent and to those *paus de deux* partners who must now, even more so, “t[ake] as wonderful care of [her] as they always do.” Where according to early 20th century dance critic A.K. Volinsky, Kent as a ballerina ought to be creating the picture of one “soaring away from the ground and fre[e] . . . of unnecessary supports,” her carrying brings more attention to the always present but shadowed need for care necessary for her to achieve that illusion of aerial heights, which, Volinsky argues, makes ballet the ideal expression of man’s noble and free soul.² The growth inside her has taken possession, if not of her then of the dance; the growth has made its

¹ Kourlas, “The Ballerina with a Belly,” Interview, *New York Times* (Dec 21 2003) accessed December 8, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/21/arts/dance-the-ballerina-with-the-belly.html>.

² A.K. Volinsky, “From the Book of Exultation: The Vertical: The Fundamental Principle of Classic Dance,” *What is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*, ed. Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford U Press, 1983), 255.

supports visible and highlighted what Volinsky might have called its “crooked social[ity].”³

This chapter is about just such an incredible haunt of the wombed growth—a thing that interrupts the choreography by putting a bend in its shapes, making it heavier, and most significantly interjecting all kinds of kicks and quickening movements that are not discrete but “bring the two worlds as one” changing the dance even if only slightly. Julie Kent’s child was at this point not-yet-born, but looking at the not-quite-on-stage but still present movements of the “tiny little elbow or little hand or foot” may help us think through how we might reconsider Harriet Wilson’s Frado, as dancing with Topsy rather than as Topsy’s corrective. Indeed in Frado’s pranks, she makes palpable and un-ignorable Topsy’s “never was born” but growing steps.

If the *corps de ballet* is the dark labor of the ballet, the not-yet-born child’s kicking in Kent’s womb is its haunting counter movement. These wombed moves are also the movement of occluded limbs in the dance, but the growing movement of these limbs (undeveloped and untrained in the choreography) are always threatening the ballet with its quickening movements, its curving interruptions of lines, its increasing weight, pulling the whole upright body to the ground, and its urging of an expectant labor. It makes unavoidable what Topsy’s improvisational hooks constantly suggested, which is that beyond the visible and in the ground, growth is moving in excess of an upright and

³ Volinsky, 256.

disciplined development. Frado's movements, as the movements of the purported protagonists, bring Topsy's "never was born" but growing falling center (or rather always a little off center) stage.

For the Bellmonts' New England two story white house is indeed a haunted house as suggested by both Julia Stern in her reading of Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* as a gothic genre and Priscilla Wald in her reading of the signatory "Our Nig" who narrates under/with Wilson as an uncanny return of what the Bellmonts and the nation repress.⁴ It may be though that what haunts this house is not, or not only, the villainous surrogate mother who wreaks havoc on everyone, especially Frado, her mixed race indentured ward.⁵ It may not even be the transcendent narrative persona who constantly troubles the Bellmont with her "sassy-tongued"⁶ critical perspective. The uncanny exposures of Frado's suffering (of her claims to childhood) may not disturb the racist figure of the pickanniny or make Frado, as Robin Bernstein says, "Topsy's true redeemer."⁷ What

⁴Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

⁵ Julia Stern, "Excavating Genre in *Our Nig*," *American Literature* 67, no. 3 (September, 1995): 439-466.

⁶Harryette Mullens, "Runaway Tongue: Resistant Orality in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Our Nig*, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and *Beloved*," in *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 244-264.

⁷ Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 57. For comparisons between Topsy and Frado see also: Carla Peterson, "Capitalism, Black (Under) Development, and the Production of the African-American Novel in the 1850s," *American Literary History* 4, no. 4 (1992): 583; Elizabeth Ammons, "Stowe's Dream of the Mother-Savior: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and American Women Writers before the 1920s," *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 155-95; Carol J. Singley,

haunts the narrative may be what remains of Topsy, that impossible growth, stirring and swelling deep in the vertical structures of the physical and narrative house. Having been abandoned by her mother and already born, Frado is not a “not yet born” like Julie Kent’s wombed growth, but indentured in the Bellmont house, placed in its hole as the “nig” it means to reproduce without ever birthing out, Frado is like Topsy, the “never was born” with which the household unbeknownst to itself is pregnant and possessed. Stirring and growing in the house, Frado too makes tiny kicks –little pranks— that we (even if we cannot see) can feel like the quickening gestures of Kent’s wombed-but-in-the-dance child.

4.1 A Two-Story Development | *Our Nig* and the Vertical Aspirations of the Authorial Subject

Like the ballerina *en pointe*, Wilson’s novel appears to have its own vertical “exaltation.”⁸ From its very title the narrative works (and plays) on a vertical line:

OUR NIG;
or,
Sketches from the Life of a Free Black,
In a Two-Story White House, North
Showing That Slavery’s Shadows Fall Even There
by “OUR NIG”⁹

Adopting America: Childhood, Kinship, and National Identity in Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 119-34.

⁸ Volinsky, 255.

⁹ Harriet Wilson, *Our Nig or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, In a Two-Story White House, North. Showing that Slavery’s Shadows Fall Even There* by “Our Nig.” (New York: Random House, 1983), iii.

The house, we must be made aware, is a two story house. Two stories here not only alludes, as Wald argues, to the layering of stories¹⁰ that emerge in the narrative's "double voiced representations";¹¹ it also spatially orders the narrative's "multiple self-positioning"¹² in a vertical hierarchy. These stories are stacked. The house and its stories are North, importantly they are not "in the North," just "north," so that what is foregrounded here is the verticality itself. Even visually the subtitle, given its length and line breaks, appears as its own vertical structure down the title page, noticeably with "Our Nig" at the bottom. Indeed the novel is replete with what appears to be its vertical and upright aspirations. It starts with Mag, Frado's mother, and her social fall. It locates the initial problem of the story in her having "sundered another bond to her fellows" and "descended another step down the ladder of infamy."¹³ Inversely the whole tale of Frado's subjection and self-emancipation is a tale of the struggle to rise up from the bottom of the ladder. Indeed once Frado liberates herself from the moorings of the Belmont house, the narrative is (almost suspiciously) conspicuous in its articulation of a desire for elevation: Frado we are told "felt herself capable of elevation," a "new

¹⁰ See Wald.

¹¹ Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: the Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹²Katherine Clay Bassard, "Beyond Mortal Vision': Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* and the American Racial Dream-Text," in *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, ed. Helene Moglen, Barbara Christian, and Elizabeth Abel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 187-200.

¹³ Wilson, 13.

impulse" for "self-improvement."¹⁴ Suddenly "Frado [is] anxious to keep *up* her reputation for efficiency" (emphasis mine)¹⁵ and "help herself" and "take care of herself."¹⁶ But it is after all her desire to achieve this elevation that "pressed [her] far beyond prudence" causing her, with each upward striving, to come down sick and incapacitated.¹⁷

Whether viewed as the triumph of "speech acts, or its felt absence,"¹⁸ writing,¹⁹ or entrepreneurial production and exchange,²⁰ scholars, being primarily interested in Wilson as the author, have marked the protagonist's liberation from the Bellmont house of oppression as also marking a necessary separation between author/narrator and the oppressed child, Frado. Wald points out that "[t]he discrepancy between the first-person chapter headings and the third-person narration marks the representation of a

¹⁴Ibid., 124-5.

¹⁵Ibid., 118.

¹⁶Ibid., 124.

¹⁷Ibid., 118.

¹⁸Laura Doyle, "Ontological Crisis and Double Narration in African American Fiction: Reconstructing *Our Nig*," in *Thinking the Limits of the Body*, ed. Jeffery Jerome Cohen and Gail Weiss (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 97.

¹⁹See: Wald, Tate, and Mullens.

²⁰John Ernest, "God's Economy and Frado's Story Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig*," in *Resistance and Reformation in Nineteenth-Century African-American Literature Brown, Wilson, Jacobs, Delany, Douglass, and Harper* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1995), 55-80.

self as an other—or the recognition of the alterity of the self.”²¹ And Katherine Clay Bassard, also commenting on “the sudden disappearance, after chapter 3, of first-person pronouns in the chapter headings,” explains “that the threshold of the Belmont house marks a narrative and textual boundary,” where the narrator (and subsequently the author) deny their previous autobiographical connection to the protagonists. The narrative instead shifts into a “different narrative mode” —“life” as it were giving way to “myth.”²² Only when Frado leaves the house, indeed rises above it, and returns to “life” does the narrator reassert the autobiographical mode and thus reclaim a connection between writer and protagonist. Frado’s departure from the Belmont house is then not only commensurate with her becoming adult (growing *up*), but also with her becoming a speaking narrator and writing author, which is to say (as the concluding allusion to the Biblical Joseph suggests) becoming a transcendent and prophetic seer. Ultimately it is a becoming other than the dependent and lowly, Frado, who as Wald argues, is “left alone in the house to be its historian.”²³

Focusing on Frado’s physical movements (which even in her indenture repeatedly cross the Bellmonts’ threshold) interrupts the focus on the agential haunt of the free, adult, authorial self that the narrative appears to develop. The articulations of

²¹ Wald, 168.

²² Bassard, 196.

²³ Wald, 170.

Frado's physical movements are not reducible to what Bassard identifies as Wilson's "multiple self-positionings"; for ultimately movement is about the haunting refusal of position—more specifically a refusal of an upright stance in favor of an embodied departure that depends, like the dance of the wombed-child or Topsy's hooking dance, upon giving up the singular (the stance) and getting carried (away). Though in the end development of this two-storied narrative house, the novel appears to claim a capacity for elevation and a display of authorial achievement as a speaking subject, the lowly and child Frado, as Laura Doyle says, "still awaits a protecting embrace."²⁴ This chapter focuses on Frado's pranking movements as performances that playfully kick at the narrative's ambivalent vertical aspirations. These performances, I argue, evince the occluded movements of the wombed-but-growing one in the house whose desire for embrace is not a desire for independence and elevation but for a mutually dependent care and getting carried (away) that like Topsy's hooks, get down.

4.2 The Dance of the "Never Was Born" | Frado & Her Prank

That the narrative calls Frado's play *pranks* should be invitation enough for us to think of these playful movements as haunting performances not of the subject but of the object—claiming not personhood but the animation of its own thingliness. *To prank*, as in to make a practical joke, refers to a trick, a joke whose efficacy is not in a play on words but in the creation of a scenario or an event that puts one in the joke, where the

²⁴ Doyle, 96.

joke is on someone. But *prank* not only refers to a practical joke. It also refers to the dancing movements of children and nymphs, to the kick of laboring animals (i.e. a horse or mule), and less commonly, but perhaps most appropriately in regards to Wilson's novel, *prank* refers to the sudden and unexpected animation of an otherwise inanimate object. When the wind blows a hat off one's head or when a shadow startles by announcing itself as an intruder in the night—the wind and the shadow have pranked.²⁵

In her 2011 *Racial Innocence*, Robin Bernstein argues that childhood is a performance directed by what she calls “scriptive things.” Though Bernstein reads Frado's performances as exposing her suffering, revealing that she is a sensate being and vulnerable and therefore successfully performing child (as opposed to the invulnerable and insensate figure of the pickanniny), I argue that Frado, (as abject and laboring object) in her movements might be more aptly an example of Bernstein's scriptive thing. Invoking Heidegger's distinction between object and thing, Bernstein explains that the difference between the object and the thing is subjective and unstable. She provides the example of a knife, which for a novice cook is just another instrumental object, but for the master chef, is a thing. Even the novice, though he might see the knife as an object, finds when it slips and nicks his finger, that it compels him to a certain set of behaviors. The knife here becomes a thing, a scriptive thing, compelling a performance of pain and

²⁵ “prank n¹, n², n³, v¹, v², v³.” *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2014) accessed March 8, 2014, http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/search?searchType=dictionary&q=prank&_searchBtn=Search.

annoyance. Acting upon this script, that is moving in response to the sudden animation of the inanimate, Bernstein calls a “danc[e] with things.” In this way the prank of the inanimate object is a particular (becoming thing) dance that in its uncanny movement, moves us.²⁶

My reading focuses on three of Frado’s pranks, which I regard as dancing performances of the “nig” object that Frado is thought to be, as little kicks in the narrative, and dances that step with Topsy’s hooking. I read these “pranks” similarly to how Joseph Roach reads what he calls “circumatlantic performances,” which is to say I read them as spectacular re-presentations of Frado’s past and the movements of her marginalized present. Like Roach’s understanding of circumatlantic performances, Frado’s pranking performances make visible this hidden life while also revising it. They are surrogating performances that represent and revise in such a way that interrogates and responds to the oppression and trauma from which they emerge.

Like Topsy’s dances, they improvise by replaying and revisioning the narrative’s dominant symbols, namely of verticality, and major narrative plots. In this way they become physical articulations of that necessary “disruption—[that] departure [from] or ... break with conventional semantics and /or phonetics” that, as Mae Henderson argues, the “expression of a marginal presence” must make in order to “rewrit[e] or [reread] the dominant story, resulting in a ‘delegitimation’ of the prior story or a displacement’

²⁶Bernstein, 72.

which shifts attention 'to the others idea of the story.'"²⁷ Frado's pranking gestures generate yet another layer of subtextual articulation in *Our Nig*, one that allows us to "actively imagin[e]"²⁸ not only the articulation of a free authorial self, but also the dependent a/object "Nig." I could have included in this discussion the incident in which Frado slights Mrs. Bellmont by having the dog Fido lick the dish clean. Mad that her son has insisted that Frado sit at the table as an equal, Mrs. Bellmont tries to snub Frado by refusing her a clean plate. Instead she insists that Frado can eat off her own plate. Frado though plays Mrs. Bellmont and equally sly snub by calling the dog over to lick Mrs. Bellmont's plate clean before she uses it. The slight being that she would rather eat after a dog than Mrs. Bellmont. The scene so entertains the Mrs. Bellmont's son that he gives Frado a coin for the show. This scene displays Frado's playful and smart resistances to Mrs. Bellmont, but it is not necessarily a premeditated prank, and it is very much an immediate and legible response to Mrs. Bellmont's snub. In this chapter, I am interested in Frado's pranks, which though premeditated appear as something of an enigma if not to the Bellmonts than to the narrative. They are interruptions in the narrative that exist only to show a spirit of childish mirth that gets suppressed in the

²⁷Mae Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition," in *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Hilde S. Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 133.

²⁸Ronna Johnson, "Said but Not Spoken: Elision and the Representation of Rape, Race, and Gender in Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig*," in *Speaking the Other Self: American Women Writers*, ed. Jeanne Campbell Reesman (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 98-9.

oppressive Belmont house. The rooftop prank, and the sheep prank because these pranks are premeditated and because they happen outside the literal Belmont house, which is to say they figure like those quickening kicks, little pranks that can be felt outside of the body of the house (if not also the narrative) that conceals it.

4.3 No Fire Next Time / Smoke Today

Although we are told that Frado and her sibling provided their father, when he was still alive, with the joy of infantile pranks,²⁹ the first example of Frado's pranking performances occurs after Frado has been abandoned in the Belmont house. For a little while the Bellmonts allow Frado to attend the local common school.³⁰ Frado entered the school with hopes that seemed initially as if they would be dashed by the children who stood ready to scorn her for being black and noticeably poor. However the teacher, Miss Marsh, intervenes, reminding the scholars of their duty to embrace and love and to judge not by the superficial. This intervention proves successful, and the narrative over a few swift lines explains that Frado became very popular with the children, much to the dismay of the Bellmonts' daughter, Mary. After a brief account of Mary's failed attempt to subdue Frado, the narrative comes back to its gloss of Frado's schooling. Only now, without introduction or comment, Ms. Marsh is gone, and the teacher, known as the

²⁹Karen Sanchez Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 40-51.

³⁰ For more on Frado and the School, see: Eve Allegra Raimon, *The "Tragic Mulatta" Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Antislavery Fiction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 120-45.

“school master,” is male. We learn that Frado is not just accepted by the students but has become an essential part of their community. Like a school of fish they swim together and offer her protection. Frado, “thus shielded and countenanced,” “would venture far beyond propriety,”³¹ which is to say that if cared for and held, she could get carried away. An example of one such prank entails Frado’s procuring a cigar and a light, smoking the cigar, and then puffing the smoke out and into a crack in the schoolmaster’s desk. When the teacher calls the class to order and begins the lesson, he pulls open the drawer and out comes a great cloud of smoke, at which the instructor immediately cries out “Fire, fire.” Before he notices that the smoke is cigar smoke he has already noticeably lost his composure, and thus chagrined, he does not even attempt to seek out the culprit.

This prank teaches us how to read Frado’s pranking dance. Most importantly this prank calls our attention to the embodied haunt in the dark-and-taken-for granted spaces; it asks us to consider not the illusion of the exposed spectacle, but the material of the performance and the performer—the life, as it were, behind the masking veil. The narrative describes the prank as follows:

The Teacher’s desk was supplied with drawers, in which were stored his books and other etceteras of the profession. The children observed Nig very busy there one morning before school, as they flitted in occasionally from their play outside. The master came; called the children to order; opened a drawer to take the book occasion required; when out poured a volume of smoke. ‘Fire! Fire!’ screamed he, at the top of his voice. By this time he had become sufficiently acquainted with the peculiar odor, to know he was

³¹ Wilson, 38.

imposed upon. . . [Frado] had provided herself with cigars, and puffing, puffing away at the crack of the drawer, had filled it with smoke, and then closed it tightly to deceive the teacher, and amuse the scholar.³²

Filling the drawer with her exhaled smoke renders visible the swell and gathering that can happen in a small dark space. The smoke stirs in the thought-to-be-empty space or that space thought to be used only for holding the master's instruments and "etceteras." But the smoke, like Frado shut up in the Belmont house, finds a crack and issues forth an alarming "spark," the sign of "pent up fires [about to] burst forth."

That there is no fire does not overshadow the fact that there is the smoke, unseen, billowing as its own ghostly haunt. While most apparently the prank hinges around the artifice that compels an unnecessarily intense alarm, the performance of the "unseen" and undeveloped makes materially manifest the fact that the threat that is not, when it emerges, what we thought it would be, is nevertheless still there and moving as the thing it is, precisely in the place where we thought there was nothing. The smoke filling the drawer calls attention to the drawer as, like Heidegger's jug,³³ not being empty but filled with that which can be displaced and give way to a holding. The empty is not empty, nor superfluous. The desk may not have a fire in it, but it is not empty. It is

³² Ibid., 38-9.

³³ In his effort to answer the question, "what is a thing?" Heidegger uses a jug as his example. Heidegger argues that the jug's thingliness is not a matter of the ceramic materials that form the sides and the bottom. For Heidegger this material only shapes the void which then shapes the material. It is the void that does the work of holding the water we pour into it, and it is the void space between the ceramic material that gives over that water, thus the essential thingliness of the jug depends on the negative space, on what we think of as nothing or emptiness. See: Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins First Perennial Classics, 2001), 161-84.

filled not only with the playful resolve of Frado's fiery spirit ready to burst out, but literally with her breath.

The aesthetics of Frado's prank ensures that what haunts is the exhaling exhaust of her body. Frado could have simply put the cigar butt in the drawer and closed the drawer. With some careful positioning and propping the cigar, she could have left a smoking cigar in the desk with little to no risk of an actual fire. Instead in a deeply embodied poetic gesture, she smokes the cigar herself and carefully puffs her exhalations back into a small opening in the drawer, so as not to lose any of the smoke. What stirs in that closed drawer then is the smoke and air passed through her lungs and nose and mouth. What rises up and frightens the master is alarming because it is the material evidence of Frado (who has been "unseen" by him) and her exhaust and her stirring spirit, where spirit is wholly amorphous, but still material and sensible. There is no physical fire in the master's drawer, not of the kind he thinks he is responding to, but what there is instead is Frado's breath, her exhaustion, the smoke that rises up from fire of her spirit (if not also the Spirit) bursting out and pouring forth in the form of a punctuating prank that interrupts the school master's attempt to call the students to order.

The prank not only interrupts the schoolmaster's lessons, but it also interrupts the larger theme of education as an essential path to black uplift. For the efficacy of Frado's time at the school does not lie in her acquiring any particular knowledge. In

recounting her prank, the narrator mentions that the drawer into which Frado puffs smoke contains one of the teacher's textbooks. Unlike Olaudah Equiano or Frederick Douglass, Frado is not the least interested in the book. She neither yearns to hear the words of the "talking book"³⁴ nor attempts to steal some forbidden fruit of knowledge when the master is not looking. For Frado to not even show the smallest sign of curiosity about a word or character or some aspect of that book marks a radical departure from an African American literary tradition (even as Wilson's text is supposed to mark its beginnings) and its investments in the liberating possibility of literacy and the possibility of writing the self into a subject. Indeed her disinterest in the book is emblematic of the fact that we never see Frado "learn" anything in the school. She refuses (though does not destroy or damage) the (school) master's tools. What is attractive to Frado is the seemingly empty, negative space in the drawer, which the master takes for granted as a nothing to be filled with his "etceteras." It is not that Frado disdains education. She does not destroy the book, and she does learn to read and write, and after all, we receive all of these autobiographical gestures by way of a book. Still the prank holds open the possibility or an acknowledgment of a performative resistance that though it pours out volumes does not find its agency in being an author or a lettered subject. Education, literacy, schooling, and knowledge mastery are the things of the self-

³⁴Henry Louis Gates, "The Trope of the Talking Book," in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 127-69.

reliant, independent, and upwardly mobile. Indeed later when Frado is of age and gone from the Bellmonts, Wilson notes Frado's new impulse for improving herself through good books. Still right now, in this particular pranking addition to the choreography, what preoccupies Frado is neither elevation nor the self-reliance that educational development promises but rather the community and concealment of the school—what can be gathered and held in the drawer.

As will the other pranks, this prank revises other parts of Wilson's narrative. In particular the prank's reliance on alarming artifice recalls Frado's husband Samuel, and how we find out through Wilson's account of his confession to Frado that he was only pretending to be a fugitive slave in order to make money on the abolitionist lecture circuit. Like the school master, the "hungry" abolitionists rise to high alarm at the fugitive slave whom they take to be the dark smoke signs of a southern fire burning the nation. The schoolmaster took any smoke to be the sign of fire (that is all other possible significations are reduced to the most alarming and most anxiety producing). It is clearly the visual that sends the master into this high state of anxiety, screaming "at the top of his voice"³⁵ for it is when, as a secondary line of inquiry, he recognizes the distinct smell of the cigar that he embarrassingly realizes the fright was not necessary. In much the same way, the abolitionists so mired in the limitations of a hyper attention to the visual cues of racialization, see Samuel as black and male and are then ready to view

³⁵ Wilson, 38.

him as a fugitive slave. Like Frado, Samuel intentionally plays into that assumption, giving them exactly the contours of the fugitive they imagine.

Read on its own his cynicism and the fact that he never reveals the hoax, that it is only revealed/exposed by way of Wilson's narrative, suggest that the illusion of fire and smoke is indeed an empty threat. For Samuel seems to accept that his performance is nothing more than a way to get over and get by (as if finding a way is a little thing). Frado's performance hinged around thwarting the master's expectations, but Samuel seems only to live into them, never shining any small light of exposure that would then resist and challenge the desire for that performance. While Frado's performance is her prank, Samuel performs but the prank is Wilson's. For Samuel never tells his secret to anyone but Frado as far as we know. It is Wilson who takes up the project of thwarting expectations and revealing the performance. Making the exposure he does not, Wilson allows for Samuel and his cynicism to appear as just a hollowed out humbug sham. But Frado's prank suggests that surreptitious gestures exist in the performance itself. There is potentially, in the spaces of the hollowed out humbug, some bodied spirit, which, though not the fire it ostensibly signals, can nevertheless penetrate and choke.

The prank also suggests that what is wanted is not fire, not the wholesale destruction of the book, the desk or the school; rather what is wanted is to fill, expand, and depart and to make such spirited endeavors palpable. Crude and imperfect as it is, what we do know of Samuel is that his "humbug" performance allowed him to depart,

to “leave her to lecture,” “embar[k] at sea,” to undertake “unprece-dented” “absences” and a “long desertion” to New Orleans and finally to depart from the world all together.”³⁶ Frado’s performance with the smoke reminds us that the artifice of his performance has real effects in this world, on his capacity to get carried away, on the abolitionists who though they may see him only for what they presume him to be are nevertheless manipulated by what he is.

4.4 “High Glee” | *The Hold of the Hole*

Frado’s play on the barn roof, while only a scant three (arguably five) sentences, does enormous work of calling attention to Frado’s occluded life in her cramped room and her constrained daily movements on the dangerous ladder that leads to that room. It also spectacularly revisions the dynamics of her prescribed quotidian and shows Frado as that haunting spirit, swelling in the dark enclosure and smoking out the Master’s developed order. This particular prank happens early in the chapter entitled “Departure,” which begins with an account of Frado’s sadness about James’s leaving: the loss of a friend but also of her hopes that he may marry and carry her away from her life at the Bellmonts and her burdens. In a manner that links a longing to be carried and cared for to a playful getting carried away, this prank immediately follows this expressed concern about departure and being carried away. With little to no transition, the narrative explains that at times Frado “would utter some funny thing for Jack’s

³⁶Ibid., 127-8.

benefit.” Though the following scene is neither a verbal articulation or specifically for Jack’s benefit, the narrative provides it as an example of one of these moments:

On one such occasion, they found her on the roof of the barn. Some repairs having been necessary, a staging had been erected, and was not wholly removed. Availing herself of ladders, she was mounted in high glee on the top-most board. Mr. Belmont called sternly for her to come down; poor Jane nearly fainted from fear. Mrs. B and Mary did not care if she ‘broke her neck,’ while Jack and the men laughed at her fearlessness.³⁷

The Bellmonts watch Frado’s spectacular performance as the abolitionists watch Samuel or the Schoolmaster watches the smoke coming out of the desk. Although their responses critically illuminate the Bellmonts’ respective responses to Frado throughout the narrative—Mrs. Belmont’s and Mary’s cruel disinterest, Mr. Belmont’s ineffective intervention, Jane’s debilitating alarm, Jack’s puzzling amusement—they are all one in the same response. Mainly they are the same in that each reveals that though they are watching (indeed mesmerized by), these spectators do not see what they are looking at. Their responses are only to the alarm they think is signaled by a child on a roof (the potential that she will fall and break her neck). But ladders and roofs are intimate parts of Frado’s occluded quotidian. Indeed they are the essential features of the architecture in which the Bellmonts have constrained Frado, so that even the well-meaning concern and anxiety seem like Johnny and Janey-come-lately responses to Frado’s plight.

For when Frado climbs the roof and “avails herself of ladders,” she replays in spectacular revision the spatial and social dynamics of her everyday life. Being on the

³⁷Ibid., 53.

roof calls attention to the physical and political constraints of the small room the Bellmonts assign Frado, and the climbing of ladders recalls the movement necessary for Frado to reach that room and the everyday performance of ascent and descent by which the Bellmonts mean to discipline her steps. When Frado first arrives at the Bellmont house, Mrs. Bellmont relegates her to the L-chambers. This ambiguous room is defined by its smallness, its slanted and lowered ceilings, little light, and stuffiness, and most of all by Jack's declaration that the six year old Frado, "the child[,] would soon outgrow those quarters."³⁸ Jack's observation is about how physically little the room is and how Frado, while young and small, might fit now but will inevitably get bigger, and what is now a little smallness will become impossibly tight. In response Mrs. Bellmont remarks that "[w]hen she DOES, she'll outgrow the house."³⁹ According to Mrs. Bellmont the room is "good enough for a nigger,"⁴⁰ and to her Frado will never outgrow being a "nigger" or, as the Bellmonts call her, "nig." Consequently Mrs. Bellmont ignores Jack's initial protestations about this room and his observation that Frado would "be afraid to go through that dark passage, and she can't climb the ladder safely."⁴¹ This room buried deep in the architectural development and spatial design of the house is narrow and

³⁸Ibid., 27.

³⁹Ibid., 28.

⁴⁰Ibid., 26.

⁴¹Ibid., 13.

dangerous to enter not only physically but also figuratively because it is a constant reiteration of Frado's constrained social place. It is a hole separated from the rest of the house by a dark passage and an unsafe ladder. It requires passing the fancy rooms in which she does not belong, while also being located above the kitchen and keeping her tethered to her primary sites of work.

Mrs. Bellmont styles her encounter with Frado just as Stowe styles Ophelia's encounter with Topsy; the project of having Frado live in this house is a project of *training her up* in a particularly rigid domestic way. But unlike Ophelia who sees her bringing Topsy up right as also synonymous with Godly childrearing practices and righteous antislavery endeavors, Mrs. B (one of Stowe and Ophelia's fellow good New England ladies) makes no pretense towards Frado's development. For what it is that Mrs. Bellmont means to train Frado up into is precisely "the nigger in the child," the "nig," that she "do[es]n't mind."⁴² When Ophelia confines Topsy in the closet, it is temporary and based on her "hopes of some indefinite moral virtues supposed to be inherent in dark closets,"⁴³ but Mrs. Bellmont never intends to bring Frado out of the cramped space. Rather she means to queer Frado in the closet and to fit Frado to the tightness of that space as a means of fitting her to a particularly domestic laboring position where she can "make [Frado] do [her] work." Where the limits of the *corps de*

⁴² Ibid., 40.

⁴³ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Bantam Classics, 2003), 280.

ballet might be an unintended or un-thought consequence of Stowe and Ophelia's good but loaded intentions, Mrs. B deliberately means for training Frado up to be a means of keeping her down.

In this formulation, the roof and the ladder, which Frado's performance highlights, are essential to constraining Frado to the shape and movement of "nig." While this is part of the Belmont design it is also part of Wilson's narrative design; it is part of her effort to highlight the totalizing forces of Frado's abjection so as to later highlight the achievement of the narrator's rise above it. Specifically we are told that in Frado's "unfinished" room in the L-chambers "the roof slant[ed] nearly to the floor, so that the bed could stand only in the middle of the room." The ceiling is a physical reminder of Frado's lowered social and economic ceiling. Frado's room though it is on the second story of the two-story white house north like the other fancy rooms does not have high ceilings or ventilation. As pictured here and later, the slanting from the roof makes the ceiling in Frado's room so low that a full grown (though still young) Jack has to bend his head. One cannot stand up straight in this room, and thus it mandates that Frado grow into a bent head position, her head and shoulders always bowed down and facing the ground and the kitchen below her. Here the spatial-political aspect of Mrs. B's "training up" Frado into "nig" literally molds Frado's growth and "development" into a bent, service-trained gaze. For Mrs. B, putting Frado up, training her up, "shut[ting her] up," and "bring[ing her] up" are all ways of containing her. They are

dramatic ways of lowering her by putting her so close to the low slanting ceiling that she is always aware of and bent under the physical and social limitations prescribed for her in this house. In this way we need to understand that though Frado is put in a vertical high place in her room above the kitchen, this is not at all a sign of transcendence or levity, but a constant reminder of the little to no possibility of her having any kind of comfortable relationship to a vertical stance or upward aspirations.

Frado's availing herself of ladders renders visible her otherwise occluded everyday movement up and down the ladder to her room, and as such it makes the Bellmonts, as well as the readers, witness to that unseen movement. Every day Frado physically enacts what she is not supposed to be able to do (at least not "safely") but is forced to do nonetheless. For Jack proclaimed from the beginning that the young Frado will be afraid of the dark passage and that she "can't climb the ladder safely." Mrs. Bellmont shows no care to alleviate either the fear or the danger, and indeed they may be exactly the tools she needs to inscribe Frado within this inferior space. For Mrs. B blocks Frado's movement (where block means both to choreograph and to hinder) in such a way that any gesture of ascent on Frado's part presents a potential risk to her health in a way that transforms her everyday movements into a disciplining performance that constantly communicates the futility of Frado's even thinking about uplift as achievable or sustainable. Having to climb a dangerous ladder every day in order to get to a place of rest cultivates a bodily association among danger, ascent, and

any idea of repose or escape. When Frado later seeks Aunt Abby's advice about leaving the Bellmonts, Aunt Abby "map[s] the dangers of [Frado's] course [and] her liability to fail in finding so good friends as John and herself."⁴⁴ This advice is effective partly because the Bellmonts have already mapped the dangers of breaking out of her role in the steps they compel her to take every day.

Here in the prank, however, Frado both puts her otherwise hidden movements on display and resists the abjection her position is supposed to compel by revising her relation to the architectural and spatial tools of her oppression. Not only does the performance declare that the roof literally and the ceiling socially cannot contain her, it undermines her oppressors and their racist designs by featuring not her pained abjection on the ladder, that pain Wilson is constantly exposing, but rather her joy, and her fearless capacity for getting carried away. Regardless of whatever fear Frado might have had of this dark passage and unsafe ladder or of taking flight, here in this roof top performance, she is fearless. "Availing herself of ladders, she was mounted in high glee on the top-most board." In the latter half of the sentence the emphasis on Frado's achievement of height is three times reiterated with "mounted," "high" and "top-most." She does not just go to the roof; she takes this ascension to its utmost possibility. Foregrounding her glee undermines the seeming totality of the Bellmonts' designs and suggests that like Br'er Rabbit in the briar patch, precisely in the tools (the slanting roof

⁴⁴ Ibid., 108.

and the dangerous ladders) meant to oppress her, emerges not the possibility of a life, but the possibility of life, the smoking exhaust of her own exhausted spirit. Indeed the attention to the ladders not only summons the ladder that leads to Frado's room but also the figurative ladder that opens the novel. In the opening narrative, Frado's mother, Mag, falls off the figurative social ladder and into "infamy," first in her seduction and in bearing a child out of wedlock and then in her marriage to a black man and finally in her giving birth to black children. What we see in the pranks then may indeed be something of a playful Br'er Rabbit return that reveals the site of abjection, where no life is thought to live, to be in fact a natal site of sociality—something like a home.

In addition to exposing by revisioning the Belmont choreography and challenging its passive spectators, this prank on the roof interrupts the menacing power of Mrs. Belmont's words that allow her to haunt Frado's childhood. Frado's tenure in the Belmont house is framed by Mrs. Belmont's declarations about Frado's relationship to the Belmont roof. Frado's incarceration officially ends when, having already suffered not her own kindness, money, time or space once, Mrs. Belmont refuses Frado a place to stay during her sickness, proclaiming that "she shall never come under this roof again; never! Never" And the narrator in a rare moment of very detailed dialogue tagging, adds, "she repeated, as if each repetition were a bolt to prevent admission." And indeed we might say that each "never" is a kind of speech act. For in the narrative Mrs. B's bolting, "never! Never" do shut the door on Frado's tenure at the Belmont house. They

are her last words to or about Frado in this novel, and they bring us back to her initial encounter with Frado, when she made the declaration that “[w]hen [Frado] DOES [outgrow those quarters], she’ll outgrow the house.” Here Frado, now eighteen years old, and having left twice (arguably three times) has returned. She does not return to be a servant but rather to be the sick ward, the carried and cared for one. Ostensibly then she asks for a different room if not literally then socially. She has outgrown (though not necessarily developed) this L-room and the domestic labor Mrs. Bellmont was able to extract from her child body. And now having outgrown that space, she has indeed, as Mrs. Bellmont’s “never! Never!” tries to make official, outgrown the house. But Frado’s prank up on the roof undercuts the power of Mrs. Bellmont’s speech. It is true that in this moment Mrs. B has garnered authority to keep Frado from coming in the house or getting even the most meager of the Bellmont’s care, but her words have no bearing on fulfilling what would be their symbolic narrative symmetry, for Frado’s performance has already interrupted Mrs. B’s ability to say when and under what condition Frado will succeed or outgrow her room.

Indeed it is precisely the persistence of Frado’s growth, despite the arrest of her development, to which this prank calls most attention. Despite Jack’s prediction that Frado (at six years old) will soon outgrow her room, it is twelve years before Frado leaves the house or her room. Her time in this room through puberty and adolescence without any change eerily suggests that perhaps the room does arrest her growth. Yet

what the prank (occurring four years after she entered the house) suggests is that Frado (even if arrested in development) does grow. She grows differently, perhaps, with the muscles and tendons needed for climbing and availing herself of ladders being particularly toned; still she grows. Moreover in her growing she not only appears to avoid suffocating in what must be the increasingly pinchy tomb of her room, but she also takes comfort in the room; the “uninviting and comfortless” become for her a “safe retreat.”⁴⁵ Where Mrs. Belmont and Mary (her explicit oppressors) do not care what happens to her and the passive spectators do not carry her away, this hole becomes a holding womb that if no one or nowhere else will, gives way for her growth. In the room, which the Bellmonts thought so little of, a thing is conceived, and the house is pregnant with the growth of the one whose development it meant to arrest. The image of Frado in this small room summons other cramped space narratives—the also performing Henry Box Brown⁴⁶ in his cargo box, the also child Frederick Douglass sleeping and hiding in the cabinet, and (though published after Wilson) the most infamous Linda Brent in her simultaneously described tomb-like garret and womb-like den. In this recurring trope of the body growing bent in the hole, we see that maternal haunt is not in the gothic monstrous mother⁴⁷ or the absent and longed for mother

⁴⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁶ See Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

figure⁴⁸ but in the wombed holding. This holding hole, in its interplay between tomb and womb, recalls the middle passage and brings Frado's growth in communion with diasporic departure⁴⁹

Indeed something is growing, moving, quickening in the occluded spaces, and the pranks are the palpable expressions of that movement and a life within. The "departure" then that makes necessary a substitute and a surrogating performance is not for Frado death, as it is for Roach, nor is it a literal leaving the house as the chapter title suggests. Instead growth itself is a departure not because the child is necessarily becoming adult and less suitable to perform "child"⁵⁰ but because growth is not the subtractive process of making an individual, but rather the additive movements of becoming more than a singular being, of growing into and with the room, of availing oneself of ladders like so many extended appendages.

⁴⁷ See Stern.

⁴⁸ See Tate.

⁴⁹ Diawara, Manthia, "Conversation with Édouard Glissant Aboard the Queen Mary II," trans. Christopher Winks. University of Liverpool Black Atlantic Resources. http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/csis-2/blackatlantic/research/Diawara_text_defined.pdf (October 11, 2013). [Original source "Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic" Exhibition Catalogue (2010: Tate Publishing, London)]: 2.

⁵⁰ See Bernstein.

4.5 Coming Down | Frado the Good Shepherd

In Frado's high glee we may be tempted to read her prank as a claiming of the vertical, if not as a foreshadowing of Frado's self-liberation from the house. Indeed such a reading may be what Wilson intended. For in juxtaposing this prank with the following one, she reiterates Frado's capacity for height and her refusal to be thrown. However that this performance doubly calls attention to the danger of ascending the ladder (for the young Frado and her mother) and that it should highlight Frado's natality at the end of the ladder as well as calls attention to the way that the room meant to be a tomb-like hole of social death has become a maternal holding suggests that we ought not be so quick to read Frado's high glee as a valuation of a vertical position or triumphant stance of an individual on her own two feet. Particularly as we consider this next prank, I argue that height gained in these pranks is not a matter of claiming height, but rather it is a reach meant to be given over. Like the smoke rising, which also disperses in its ascent, Frado's pranks haunt vertical aspirations with an abdication of the possibility of occupying any such on high positioning. The sheeping prank reads as follows:

Strange, one spark of playfulness could remain amid such constant toil; but her natural temperament was in a high degree mirthful, and the encouragement she received from Jack and the hired men, con-stantly nurtured the inclination. When she had none of the family around to be merry with, she would amuse herself with the animals. Among the sheep was a willful leader, who always persisted in being first served, and many times in his fury he had thrown down Nig, till, provoked, she resolved to punish him. The pasture in which the sheep grazed was founded on three sides by a wide stream, which flowed on one side at the base of precipitous banks, The first square moments at her command, she ran to the pasture with a dish in her hand, and mount-in the highest point

of land nearest the stream, called the flock to their mock repast. Mr. Bellmont, with his laborers, were in sight, though unseen by Frado. They paused to see what she was about to do. Should she by any mishap lose her footing, she must roll into the stream, and, without aid, must drown. They thought of shouting; but they feared an unexpected salute might startle her, and thus ensure what they were anxious to prevent. They watched in breathless silence. The willful sheep came furiously leaping and bounding far in advance of the flock. Just as he leaped for the dish, she suddenly jumped to one side, when down he rolled into the river, and swimming across, remained alone till night. The men lay down, convulsed with laughter at the trick, and guessed at once its object. Mr. Bellmont talked seriously to the child for exposing herself to such danger; but she hopped about on her toes, and with laughable grimaces replied, she knew she was quick enough to "give him a slide."⁵¹

The prank seems to be a resistance to being thrown down, and the narrative underscores this resistance by emphasizing Frado's capacity for height. First, juxtaposing the roof scene amplifies the image of Frado in a high place. Additionally Wilson repeats many of the rhetorical decisions used in the first scene. Perhaps most conspicuously the narrative repeats the word "mounting." The acts of climbing a roof with ladders and moving to the highest part of land in the pasture are brought together in this single word, and the word itself aligns both acts with a more exalted climb up a mountain. There is also a parallel formulation of Frado's previous "high glee" in the now "high merriment." And the responses to the two pranks also parallel each other; we see Mr. Bellmont and the men anxious to the point of being breathlessly silent that Frado might fall. Their breathless anxiety recalls Jane's near faint, and again we see Mr. Bellmont with a noticeably sympathetic concern that remains wholly incapable of manifesting in any action. And once more the whole prank causes the men an extreme amount of

⁵¹ Wilson, 53-5.

laughter in a way that confirms the narrative's idea that this prank is an example of Frado's odd ability to amuse herself for the benefit of others. Everything about how Wilson has structured this scene suggests that it is a reiteration of the roof prank and that together their parallels suggest by way of amplification that these performances are meant to highlight Frado's capacity to throw off constraints and elevate herself.

Although Wilson's narrative (or at least the signatory "Our Nig"'s narrative) works hard to style Frado as constantly triumphing over a lowly position or a fall and achieving elevation, what we see in the scene and its allusive replaying/revisioning of other scenes is a serious challenge to the desirability of such a claim. For the height in which that narrative gleefully inscribes Frado is a position undergirded with extreme anxiety because it is fundamentally dangerous, untenable, and antithetical to the care and carrying for which Frado longs. Particularly for those trying to climb up, the ladder always threatens death with every possible misstep. Watching from the view point of Mr. Belmont "with his laborers," we see this anxiety very clearly. They are afraid of Frado's mounting the highest spot; they are "anxious to prevent" a "mishap" in which Frado might "lose her footing," fall, "roll into the stream" and "drown." It is all they can do to "watc[h] in breathless silence."

Mr. Belmont's and the men's worry harkens back to the opening with Mag. Mag's fall is predicated first on her attempt to "ascend" to that lofty angel seducer, so conspicuously never pictured but located on high. It is Mag's attempt to socially move

to the “highest point” that causes her to fall, far lower than she had ever been. Here Frado embodies that risky metaphorical ascent, but Frado, whose very condition of possibility (biologically and otherwise) resides in the fall into (the black abyss of) infamy, does not mean to occupy permanently this highest point. It is not a destination or an escape from her condition as her mother saw it. Rather falling is as part and parcel to Frado’s choreography as it is to her condition for existence. The height that she mounts here is embraced for a moment most specifically as a ruse, that is to say that she mounts this spot with the specific intention of trying to show that the greedy and aggressive occupation of this spot is not sustainable because it is only ever standing in the first place on a sort of illusion (propped up by so many knocked down nigs).

Frado’s choreography depends upon a fall off the y-axis and vertical orientation. For she neither tries to hold her ground nor does she like Mary and the sheep (that was once Frado herself) insist on teaching by way of physical force and compelling the sheep to move. Instead she, having studied and practiced his routine steps, moves in line with him and his expectations until the very moment in which he was about to win and dominate once again. Then Frado “jumped to one side.” In this energetic move to the side, Frado reveals her mounting of the highest point of land not as an occupation but as a tactical ruse. She reaches for an “up” position only to give that “up” away, to give up her position, and depart. The prank is not designed to claim or keep a high position (the way the sheep’s leap was meant to claim and keep the dish of food). Frado’s

performance hinges around literally side-stepping the vertical formulations of status, power, command (embodied both in the sheep's being the leader of the flock and her acting as shepherdess of the flock). The prank itself works only because she concedes to let the sheep be the higher one. She knows that the sheep who has thrown her down so many times is greedy; she has witnessed and knows by experience and practice that he will outpace his fellow sheep, insist on being first, leap up with a gusto in order to snatch the boon of the dish, and consume the anticipated bounty. She does not try to keep him low. Instead of being knocked down, she gets down. This strategy of abdicating the vertical is the heart of the prank, and it articulates a kind of creative, nonviolent resistance within the act of falling off the Y-axis. !

As John Enrest remarks, Frado's sheepish prank replays and rewrites what she experienced of Mary's punitive pedagogy earlier in the narrative when Mary tries to teach Frado her social place by making her low and causing her to fall into a river.⁵² The greedy sheep's falling or rolling into the river reminds us of Frado's near plunge into the water. In her effort "to use physical force 'to subdue [Frado],' to 'keep her down,'" Mary tries to "compel her to cross over" a stream on a "single plank" bridge. Mary "dragged [Frado] to the edge, and told her authoritatively to go over." When Frado did not immediately comply, when she "hesitated, resisted,," Mary having "placed herself

⁵² Enrest, 55-80. For more on Frado's interaction with the sheep, see also: Karen L. Kilcup, "Frado Taught a Naughty Ram: Animal and Human Nature in *Our Nig*," *ELH* 79, no. 2 (2012): 341-368.

behind the child," "lost her footing" in the "struggle to force [Frado]." This trick (though it could hardly be called a trick) ended up not with Frado's fall, but with Mary's "plung[ing] into the stream."⁵³

Brought together with Frado's movements, which depend just as much on the fall as the move up, we can see that this first scene of Mary's abuse is not about Frado's triumphant resistance to being made low as much as it is about the problems of forcing one's way up. For Frado's resistance comes not by way of her achieving height or superiority over Mary nor does it come from her taking a stance. Rather Mary loses her footing only in that moment when Frado "hesitat[es]" and gives up any certainty of position while Mary herself invests completely in the certainty and force of her own position. Mary's pedagogical design does not involve reading Frado or working with her movements; rather Mary's sole tool is a reliance on "force." When Frado pranks the sheep, she asserts her authority, particularly the command of her own physical capacities, playful choreographies, and the "command of her time," but she does so in a way that not only presumes but responds to the sheep as one who has and will assert his sense of self authority even if he is a sheep, a creature long associated in western tradition with subservience, following, and mindlessness. Frado does not attempt to drag her sheep or even knock it about, perhaps most obviously because the sheep has

⁵³ Wilson, 33.

knocked her down before, but perhaps also because she knows intimately what Mary cannot imagine, which is that even sheep resist.

4.6 “*Soon Shalt Thou Lay the Body Down*”

Looking at the many examples of a longed for movement down and especially when we look at this particular prank with its overt references to the pastoral, the Good Shepherd, and notions of the first shall be last and the last shall be first, we can view the prank as contributing to both Topsy’s theory of emigration down and her theology of the ground. Frado’s pranks ultimately value falling as a condition for the possibility of care/carrying, and they rework Biblical narratives so as to emphasize not the transcendent heaven but the fact that the Good Shepherd comes to “make us lie down.” For while Frado does not explicitly confess Christianity, part of the vertical developments that her pranking movement haunts are the vertical narratives of salvation, where salvation is an upward and disembodied movement, where the deceased James is far up in the sky beyond the stars. Her movements, in as much as they allusively replay and revision notions of Christianity, highlight by agitating the incongruity between Christian theology and individual Christians’ vertical aspirations of gain, power, and superiority. Frado’s pranks make clear as they disturb the vertical orientation of salvation in this narrative; like the social economic ladder, this vertical orientation is ridden with anxiety that oppresses, constrains, and even kills. Both those suffering under and those precariously balancing on this idea of grace long to lie down

on the ground, to be carried and have limbs released. Frado's playful moves, like Topsy's, remind us, however, that such a going down and longing for the ground is already at work in Christian scriptures, although not espoused in the politics of the Christians she encounters.

While Wilson styles Frado's resistance to being brought low as a triumph and inversely her bringing others low as a righteous act of revenge, I suggest that Frado might actually desire to lie down. Her downward gestures express a persistent belief that to fall, to be made horizontal, and submerged under might constitute a necessary cure. In other words, what we see might not be a triumph over being made low as much as it is part of Topsy's theory of an emigration down, where going down is the condition for the possibility of care. In her *Belabored Professions*, Xiomara Santamarina's reading of Wilson's "view from below" claims that though Wilson's narrative responds to classist narratives of black uplift, "[t]he last thing Frado wants is to remain 'dependent.'"⁵⁴ In other words for Santamarina, this view from below is something like Oscar Wilde's notion that those in the gutters might still be looking up at the stars, but Frado turns away from looking upward at the stars after finding it impossible to join James whom she (while gazing up from the gutter of her room) imagined to be just beyond the stars. Again and again what Frado desires is to be cared for and carried, and where she finds

⁵⁴Xiomara Santamarina, *Belabored Professions: Narratives of African American Working Womanhood* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 94.

that comfort is not in the ascendant, the erect or the vertical, but in the hole and in sinking down. When she is sick, standing erect on her own two feet is literally a risk to her life, and she finds relief in “sink[ing] down upon the floor, or a chair,”⁵⁵ and again “sink[ing] down for further rest.”⁵⁶ When she is physically and emotionally exhausted at James’s dying, she (like Topsy at Eva’s death) “sink[s] on her knees at the foot of his bed...burie[s] her face in the clothes, and we[eps] like one inconsolable.”⁵⁷ These gestures may seem inconsequential, but they come when Frado, desperate, reaches for what she can to hold her, and what can hold her is not up; it is down and in the hole. Just as Mag rejoiced that her first child who dies shortly after birth will find respite in the tomb, it is the down in the earth hole that promises to hold Frado. When James dies, we are told that Frado wanted to follow him down into the grave. And indeed again and again the narrative describes her as wanting to be buried, as playing that desire out in her gestures. Although she does not jump in James’s tomb, she nevertheless repeatedly makes a holding tomb of her hands and the sheets. She “buried her face in her hands” as she told Fido her sad lament.⁵⁸ She “buried her face in [James’s] pillow” when James tells her he is going to die.⁵⁹ And she “buried her face in the pillow” again

⁵⁵ Wilson, 64.

⁵⁶Ibid., 82.

⁵⁷Ibid., 97.

⁵⁸Ibid., 75.

when she finds out from the doctor that she might never get better.⁶⁰ Each instance of her burying her face is an instance of her bending over and sinking at least partially down into sheets, or her hand, or the floor. It is an abdication of a vertical line or a stance alone. For in burying her face she seeks the kind of relief of lying down, of being as horizontal. What she wants here is not independence, or to stand on her feet; what she wants is to be cared for and carried.

We can see this valuation of down also in Mary's first fall in the river. Wilson frames this scene as a moment in which Frado resists being made low, but styling this scene as a triumph keeps the vertical orientation in play; high continues to be good, and low is shameful and bad, to be avoided. Frado's prank asks us to rethink Mary's plunge. As Jack says "it was good enough for [Mary] to get a ducking." And even before his proclamation, what we see with Mary's ducking (although she does not seem to appreciate it) is that in being made low and so helpless, Mary for the first time garners the support of the other children that she seems jealous of Frado for having. For here the students come to help Mary out; they "prevent her from drowning" by fishing her out of the water, and in a sense bringing her into their collective notion of school where they all swim together. Going down, she experiences the community that conceals,

⁵⁹Ibid., 96.

⁶⁰Ibid., 120.

carries, and protects, into which Mary being too “self-willed” and “domineering” had not been able to enter.

And again Frado styles her “ducking” of her sister sheep (the actual sheep) as a cure, and one that might work on Mary. Then when Mary does actually die, Frado articulates that death excitedly as a plunge into the river, specifically the Jordan. Inasmuch as Frado’s glee is definitely about Mary’s death and inasmuch as she suggests the Jordan to be a tricky river, Frado’s claiming of Mary’s death as a river is a way of continued retribution, but the Jordan is a complicated symbol. A vast river, it has not been the safest river to cross, but nevertheless it has also been long considered sacred because John the Baptist was baptized there and Jesus himself plunged into the Jordan at the beginning of his ministry. The Jordan is supposed to be a saving water. In this way Frado’s styling of Mary’s death as a plunging into the river is keeping with her argument that a ducking in the river is a cure, is good for, that a going down and under will help.

The theory of emigration down is the undergirding ethos of the prank. The prank was meant to teach, but more specifically it was meant to bring the sheep down. It was meant to bring him down in his haughty and violent behavior by taking advantage of his singular focus on attaining the heights of his assumed prize and his lack of awareness of the landscape and the ground below and before him. The sheep has no concern for the ground; he takes it for granted that it will propel him and that it will

catch him again. What he wants, what he sees as his, is up in the air. But here he has fallen for an illusion of aerial boons, and unlike Mag who does –however abject her fall seems to be—find a ground in her fall, this sheep finds that in his fall, the ground is gone, and he must continue to go down, “down he rolled into the river.”

In this particular prank, this theory of an emigration down lowers the performer and its witnesses to a theology of the ground or an alternative narrative of salvation. Her prank with the sheep rolling into the valley, has not only the pastoral allusion that R.J. Ellis points out,⁶¹ but also, as many pastorals do, it recalls Biblical references to the shepherd. In particular this prank merges an Old Testament version of Psalms 23 with New Testament images of Christ as the “good shepherd” and lessons about the avarice of greed and wanting to be first. Most explicitly one of Frado’s flock desires to be first, to win and “advance,” but more than once Christ, as the Good Shepherd, tells his disciples that “whoever among [them] wishes to be the greatest shall be the servant of all.”⁶² In the parable of the workers in the vineyard, he teaches that “the last shall be first and the first last.”⁶³ And again in warning against the showiness of the Pharisees, Jesus tells the crowds, “But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever

⁶¹ R.J. Ellis, “Our Nig: Fetters of an American Farmgirl,” in *Special Relationships Anglo-American Affinities and Antagonism 1854-1936*, ed. Janet Beer and Bridget Bennett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 65-88.

⁶² Matthew 20:26 (NIV).

⁶³ Matthew 20:16 (NIV).

exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted...."⁶⁴

Frado as a shepherdess enacts just such a law with her sheep who insists on being first, on exalting himself and being the greatest. The prank isolates him, and he is not able to come to the fold or the real repast until night time, making him effectively the last.

The prank on the face of it seems not terribly Christ-like, given its deception and Frado's triumphant glee. And while it is not my argument to say that Frado is Christ like in this moment intentionally or otherwise, her prank and Wilson's rendering of it traffics in these Biblical tropes in which Christ, although not a prankster, is constantly gesturing down. The New Testament is littered with Jesus' getting down ministry: washing the feet, bending down to make a paste in the dirt, writing in the sand, lowering the paralytic, calling Zacharias down from the tree, praising the woman who stooped and washed Jesus' feet with her tears and her feet, lying prostrate in the garden, and others. All of these are examples of the Christ Shepherd coming to "give rest" and be the fulfillment of the Old Testament Psalm 23, which styles "The Lord [as] my shepherd; I shall not want."

Although Frado's reworking of these Biblical choices does not necessarily highlight her endorsement of or participation in Christianity, it does speak back to the Christianity in which these tropes purport to participate. Her movements also point out another element in these Biblical scripts that has been occluded. For in the traditional

⁶⁴ Matthew 23:12 (NIV).

pastoral, what is recalled of Psalm's 23 is only the first line. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." This is the idyllic shepherd and sheep guided seemingly free of toils and cares in the green pastures and river. It is a picture that renders invisible the labor of the peasants working the field, and it pictures salvation as a leisurely and manicured elsewhere land. However the next line of Psalms 23 is "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." The green pastures are idyllic, but to make one lie down implies a mandate, a kind of force or compelling in some way that belies the sense of easy harmony. What is important here is the lying down and the being compelled to do so. Part of what it means to have a shepherd and to have no wants is not to be built up, but to be brought down into the horizontal, to lie down. Frado's prank is designed to shepherd in just this way, and its performance highlights the non-idyllic possibilities of being made to lie down. This is not to say that laying down is not still something of needed relief, but rather this is to say that relief is not idyllic or romantic.

The haunting power of this theology of the ground made present by the stirring of the occluded but growing one is that Frado's prank not only brings the rambunctious sheep down, it also brings down her spectators, literally makes them lie down in green pastures, convulsing and possessed with a laughing spirit. R.J. Ellis in his reading of this scene as part of Wilson's apastoral depiction of new England farm labor calls attention to the reader as sharing the spectators' position when he remarks that "[i]t is easily possible to join in with the watching men" as they laughingly enjoy Frado's trick.

Ellis continues, though, by suggesting that even as we are invited to this easy position, “perhaps the text cautions us not to be readily drawn to their merriment.”⁶⁵ According to Ellis, we should be cautious about being drawn into their merriment because looking at the novel as a whole we can say that this entertaining trick depends on Frado’s youthfulness. He points out that she is still healthy in this scene, but ultimately her health will not sustain her, and she will be robbed of this type of playful resistance. Indeed in Ellis’s reading the men’s “anxious” and “breathless” watching is warranted as the readers watch her whole narrative unfold, realizing that in the grand scheme of the injuries she will endure, this fear becomes fact. While this reading is perfectly plausible and importantly brings the reader into the narrative as the spectators that they are, it seems that it clings a bit too strongly to the novel’s end developments (to Frado’s only tentatively sound physical development) at the expense of considering Frado’s moving growth.

Frado’s declaration that “she knew she was quick enough to ‘give him a slide’” is just as important as any other part of the performance. For it is not the climbing and jumping, or the playing with verticality and then abandoning it alone that makes this scene so haunting, it is Frado’s almost otherworldly prescience about what she “knew.” The knowledge professed here includes a knowledge of the dynamics of the flock, the movements of sheep, the layout of the land, timing, and of her own physical and mental

⁶⁵ Ellis, 79.

capacities to interact (enter into action) with all of these (not to mention the connections to her later prescience about Mary's death). What we are seeing here is not an unpracticed coincidence or luck, but evidence of a whole set of practices, knowledge, and choreography. If Frado is aware of what she can do in this moment, which is to say if she is aware of physical capacities here as a young child, we have every reason to believe that when her physical capacities change, her awareness of her body and what she can do will be able to account for this change and that she will choreograph a different performance. Ellis implies that what is needed is a type of resistance that lasts into adulthood, but what is needed might be just the resistance needed for today.

Still Ellis's aligning the readers and the men together is important. I concur that the narrative does seem to admonish a strict and easy identification with these spectators, but not because we might learn that the performance is unsustainable but rather that we might realize that the performance is intensely immediate. It is so immediate that we could be brought down by it, like the men, literally possessed by a merriment (whose exactly is not clear). The sheep is not the only creature to be made low or to have been brought down by Frado's performance. In the very next sentence we are told that "[t]he men [Mr. Bellmont and the workers] lay down, convulsed with laughter." They who have been distant spectators, not rushing and leaping at her, but nevertheless not calling out to protect her either, are also made low. True they are made low with laughter but this being brought down to the ground echoes a directional

movement of the sheep, suggesting that despite their distance, despite the fact that they are not the one charging, despite the seeming good nature of their spectatorship, they too will be brought down. And as with the sheep, being made to lie down is for them perhaps a necessary lesson.

Indeed the prank, this palpable kick from the womb of Frado's occluded growth, is a haunt in an almost classic manner. For here it is the performance that has arrested the men's breath and then brought them down to the ground, "convulsing" as if possessed by some spirit, on the ground with laughter. And they are haunted by a spirit--not the spirit of the dead or disembodied, but of the one made to be socially dead who nevertheless dances in step with the growth of the never was born, the one that gives over the spirit and gives up away.

4.7 Exhaustion | A Group Crawl

Our Nig is haunted not by the need for Frado's elevation, but rather by the question, *how is a black body to move in a white environment, in a two-story white house north, where whiteness and a vertical upright stance are aligned?* This is a question that follows Frado and Wilson even after they have risen up and "elevated" themselves from the Bellmonts house. Although emancipated, Frado is still moving in white northern structures, which prizes standing on one's own two feet and independence, when for her standing is increasingly difficult and the ground is not a stable source to be taken for granted.

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Wearing a brown suit, African American performance artist William PopeL made his first crawl in 1978 in Times Square. PopeL who describes himself as the friendliest black man ever designs performances that while playful also shock and interrupt some of our most basic assumptions about moving in the world. PopeL's "crawl," perhaps his most famous performance, challenges our assumption that we must move in a perpendicular relation to the ground. In a move that undergirds just how oriented around the vertical (phallic) stance the modern city is, PopeL, as Andre Lepecki explains, "gave up verticality" in order to crawl. Highlighting PopeL's conversations with Heidegger and Fanon (as well as with his mother and other community members), Lepecki elucidates how PopeL's crawls move after Fanon's "stumble against the fact of his blackness." For Fanon had imagined himself a modern man, a *flaneur*, walking in Europe, only to be jarred when a white boy yells, "Look a Negro." Being thus marked by his blackness, his terrifying blackness, by the signifier of racial difference, there is as Lepecki points out, only one move left for Fanon. He is left only with the crawl. It is such a crawl that PopeL's performances (in varying cities, for miles, sometimes in a suit, sometimes in a superman outfit) enact.⁶⁶

⁶⁶André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 100.

Yet what Fanon does not see, but what PopeL's performances make clear is that the stumble can also be a willing refusal, that the crawl need not only be the lack imposed (the only movement left to the black body). Crawling is also a whole abundant way of encountering the world not available to the vertical orientation that treats the ground as but the foundation for its singular and individual rise in the air (that unnecessary support from which ballet is always trying to be free). This is to say, as PopeL says, "the black body is a lack worth having," and the crawl is a move that makes evident the abundance in that lack—the whole repressed in and escaping in the hole. Having participated in a crawl in Berlin, Lepecki explains that "On the ground, the first thing the group found out is that the terrain of cities and buildings has nothing to do with a planar surface. The smoothest ground is not flat. The ground is grooved, cracked, cool, painful, hot, smelly, dirty. The ground pricks, wounds, grabs, scratches. The ground, above all weighs in."⁶⁷ Indeed what is interesting about PopeL's crawls is that they are also invitations; he provides the occasions for group crawls, where others can participate in "understanding what happens once one gives up the privilege of the vertical and enters into a different relationship to effort and mobility."⁶⁸

⁶⁷Ibid., 99.

⁶⁸Ibid., 100.

Let us conclude by considering a video recording of one such group crawl in Portland, Maine in October 2002.⁶⁹ The camera from the vantage of driving along the car looking at the sidelines, peers over and between parked cars, peers through the spiked iron gates of a cemetery, lingers on a flagpole stretching the American flag up to the sun and into the windy sky. Finally the camera settles on a group of bystanders, congregated on the sidewalk. They appear to be awaiting something, and then we hear a woman urging people to keep it moving. Suddenly a woman in a hoodie bends down to the ground and begins to crawl. Then another woman behind her and another.

The camera captures these crawlers between the legs of the still standing who seem now not unlike the bars of the cemetery gates. Following the crawlers, the footage makes several cuts. Sometimes it gets low and ahead of the crawlers so that we can see their faces –laughing, panting, breathing. Hovering above their bodies, we see them sprawled out, vulnerable to literally being stepped on. From the profile crawlers the crawlers are a squiring mass: somewhere between slugs in their slowness and fish in their slender and collective horizontality. Some laugh; some sing; a man lights a cigarette, but always their contorting labor is visible. Towards the end of the short video, we see PopeL himself. Until his appearance there have been no other visibly brown people in the video. His clothes are tight and tattered; his face glistens with

⁶⁹“William Pope. L Crawl in Portland, Main, October 2002,” November 9, 2009, video clip, accessed March 8, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga5CWsJQapQ>.

sweat as he passes by trash. Having crawled in a gray business suit, the transformation in his appearance is more startling than it is in the others. Where they appear as if they have finished some yard work, PopeL appears as one turned out, one to whom something has happened—in him the exhaustion and the effort of the crawl and the encounter with the ground, the necessity and strain of giving up a vertical stance are all visible.

But the video does not end with PopeL but rather with a child of about two years of age. She runs up along a crawling woman (her mother?), drops to her knees and then her hands. She starts to crawl and then examines her hands. She turns to the woman as if remembering that once someone told her not to touch the dirty city ground. The woman tells her that it is okay, and the child resumes crawling (though not in the tactical military crawl that many of the other adults including PopeL use in order to protect themselves). The woman and the child move alongside each other for a few moments. Then the child rises and slides to her knees, then back to a crawl, then up on her feet; she toddles ahead, then turns around and drops to her knees ready to crawl some more. Among PopeL, the woman, and this child we might find a place and a movement for Frado. That is between the exhausted and turned out black body, the maternal, and the infantile prank of the one who seems to know with a “high glee” that the vertical must be given up again and again not only because it is not sustainable and

because it will not provide a necessary network of care but also because crawling is its own vibrant saturation of labor and kinesthetic communion—exhaustion, and joy.

5. Conclusion | Between “Play” and “Hooking”

As I conclude let me return to the hand-drawn flyer calling for black children’s participation in the 1965 Selma march, which I mentioned in the introduction.¹ In the introduction I referenced the flyer as evidence of the fact that black children had to miss school in order to participate in the movement. It was the radical nature of their absence from the institution of normative development and the necessity of their derelict and childish movement in the Movement that arrested me. Indeed at the start of this project, it was the tension in “playing hooky for freedom” and the flyer’s allusions to an iconic picture of childhood generated in the 19th century that guided much of my exploration of the importance of children’s physical movements, childishness, and departure.

The idea of “playing hooky for freedom” was a recurring point of consideration in my exploration of the relationship between childishness and blackness, between minor moves and Movements. Pearl’s grounded flight, Topsy’s hooking dance, and Frado’s pranking play illustrate the potentially generative movement between *play* and *hooking*. I have called this movement growth and shown how it challenges the constraining and subtractive force of child, narrative, and national development. But something about *playing hookey* doesn’t quite get at that growth; indeed it seems to

¹ “flyer distributed by the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) to encourage students to join the Selma to Montgomery march when it arrived in Montgomery,” Example Flyers From the Selma Voting Rights Campaign. Web. Civil Rights Movement Veterans, Tougaloo College, accessed March 16, 2014, <http://www.crmvet.org/docs/selmaf.htm>.

suture over that radical force, make it more legible and digestible in a way that services normative development. Let us look again at the flyer and its desire to image these two black children within the visual rhetoric of an iconic American childhood. Here we see what appear to be a black boy and a girl running away (presumably from school). While perhaps benignly charming at first glance, there is something awkwardly forced about this attempt to image black children within this rhetoric of child. The boy's strap of books is anachronistic (book-straps being more common in the early 20th century and not terribly popular by 1965 when children often carried bags), and the girl too seems awkward with her braided pigtails flying in the wind. The pigtails' ability to be airborne calls to mind a number of Norman Rockwell images of white girls with pigtails, but such an image seems at odds with the flyer's desire to suggest that the child has kinky-textured hair, for kinky plaits hold shape and would not fly in the wind).

In drawing these black children into the lines of (a raced white) American childhood, the image not only forces black children into a figuration of child that depended upon their exclusion, but it also erases by making inconsequential the risk the children who responded to this flyer ran in their departure from the proper institution of development. Indeed any illegality potentially associated with "playing hooky"² is already undercut in the flyer by its topmost declaration that "School's Out!" *Playing*

² Note: Twain and other 19th century sources use the spelling "playing hookey." 20th-century uses of the phrase, as we can see in the flyer, often leave out the 'e,' spelling the phrase as "playing hooky." Since I am working primarily in the 19th century, I will use "playing hookey" except when I am making direct reference to a 20th-century source that uses the "hooky" spelling.

hooky ceases to be a viable formulation if school is out. If there is no class session to skip out on, one cannot be said to have played hookey. Indeed even as the flyer calls for a fugitive movement (truancy—a flight away from the institution of normative and singular development), it downplays that call to fugitivity by way of figuring these black children into more iconic and romantic notions of the child and child's play. The image it presents and the tropes it invokes bespeak a very different story of the child and of child's play from that lived by many children whose absence (while it might have been playful or pleasurable) was not a game.

The problem here is not unique to the flyer but rather essential to America's modern understanding of boyhood and to the phrase *playing hookey*, which is also to say it is a problem that emerges in Mark Twain's shaping and popularization of that term in his 1876 *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (ATS)³ to which this flyer alludes. As I come, not to a conclusion, but yet another turn, I want to unpack *playing hookey*, a move by minors that Twain makes major. In Moncure Conway's London review of ATS, he marveled at how "[e]very movement of boy, beetle, and poodle, is described not merely with precision, but with a subtle sense of meaning in every movement. Everything is alive...."⁴ That constant movement indeed makes ATS attractively animated and fecund

³ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, ed Beverly Lyon Clark (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007).

⁴ Moncure Conway, Review, *Examiner* (London June 17, 1876) in *Mark Twain Day by Day: An Annotated Chronology of the Life of Samuel L. Clemens. vol 1.*, ed. David H. Fears (Banks, OR: Horizon Micro Pub., 2008), 539.

with the life and sociality of even that which is considered trash, dead, outlaws, insignificant, and easy to pass on. Yet while Twain's animation seems to rely on (exploit even) the mutinous movements of truants, fugitives, and the undeveloped-but-growing, it also minimizes or forgets altogether the riskiness of these gestures and the alternative social of growth, sharing, and going down that I have argued such gestures communicate. Indeed *playing hookey* is not so much about growing as it is about expanding the space of development, about spacializing childhood (or more specifically boyhood)⁵ in the wilderness and the town. It does not ask the child to leave the school forever or sever any kind of permanent position in the normative order, but rather in its etymology and in Twain's popularization of the term (which is integral to the term's etymology), *playing hookey* presents this flight and departure from school as a game that gives the child a wider space of movement and enables her to explore while reifying the lines of culture and normative order. There is much that can be said about ATS and order, about rule-governed games as opposed to play, about childishness and blackness in Twain, but what I hope to show here is that Twain's *playing hookey* is a romantic revision of truancy that displaces not only the illegality of truancy but also the weight of black fugitive movement and ultimately the growth, the joining of bodies, and the sharing—something like a commons—that both of these minor flights constantly make

⁵ Bill Brown, "American Childhood and Stephen Crane's Toys," *American Literary History* 7, no. 3 Imagining a National Culture (Autumn 1995): 443-476.

manifest. Ultimately Twain's *playing hookey*, while it glorifies the flight of the truant, aligns its values with singular development, national pride, privatization, and capitalism. But these were the same values that reformers in the midcentury associated with the promise of the (common) school and the need for compulsory education and anti-truancy legislation. Between *anti-truancy* and *playing hookey*, there is not a change in values, or even let us say a shift away from the school as the locus for those values, for Twain is still invested in the school both as a necessary point of opposition and for its instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. We might say, though, that between *truancy* and *playing hookey* the space of the school, the space of normative development, has expanded to include a play realm—the forest, hills, caves, rivers—the wilderness.

5.1 Common (Schools) and the Commons

In order to appreciate what I call Twain's post-bellum revision of *truancy* as *playing hookey*, let us consider a tiny bit of the antebellum truancy reform literature, which circulated in New England periodicals as states (most prominently Massachusetts and Connecticut) were passing and implementing the first anti-truancy laws. In particular let us look at another Tom who, like Twain's Tom, also enjoyed skipping school. This Tom, though, was penned before the war and imagined in a northern city, and appearing in the 1850 juvenile story entitled "The Way of Transgressors is Hard,"⁶

⁶ A.A., "The Way of Transgressors is Hard," *Christian Register (1843-1850)* 29, no. 45 (November 9, 1850): 180, accessed March 16, 2014, American Periodical Series.

this Tom is only a minor character. Until the end of the story, he is only a part of a group of “bad boys.” At the end of the story, he emerges as a named character. The protagonist of the story is a boy named John who is persuaded by a group of older boys (of whom Tom we later learn is something of a leader) to skip school. The first place these boys go in their truant flight is to what the story calls “The Common.” In their truancy the common school (where the boys are supposed to be) is put in repeated opposition to something like a commons, which the story renders as ambiguous but threatening. The Common is an area of mixed activity and sounds and play. While the boys generally enjoy, John’s conscience already begins to trouble him, and it taints his ability to fully relish the play.

By the time we get to the end of the story, it is clear that the acceptability of shared space and heterogeneous mixture of movements and sounds has its limits, and the truant child crosses the line. In the final and most active scene, our protagonist is gone. And the rest of the boys wander the streets, get in quarrels, and eventually find themselves breaking into a “fine fruit garden.” The garden is off of a “quiet court” and the property of an owner who “took great pains with his grape vines and trees. To preserve this fruit from thieves on top of the high fence were long pointed iron spikes.” Led by their ringleader, the now-named Tom, the boys climb the trees in order to take some cherries near the fence. The endeavor is not successful. Not only is the fruit sour, but the boys also hurt themselves as they try to flee the site of the crime. Most notably

Tom “in [his] attempt to spring down caught his hand on one of the spikes. It went quite through his hand, and there he hung! His dreadful screams roused all the neighbors . . . and it was dreadful to see him hanging there holding on to the fence by one hand and the blood flowing from the wound.” The primary message of this didactic story is straightforward: truancy is wrong; even a little bit of truancy initiates an escalating series of corruption, punishable by severe bodily injury. The story frames this scene as the most important. Indeed the last line brings us back to the titular lesson that the way of transgressors is hard: here the truant boys’ action appears unambiguously as stealing. They do more than break the law. As the narrative declares, they break “God’s law.” The limits between public and private space are clearly delineated by the iron fence, and Tom appears unequivocally as a headstrong “bad boy,” who simply insists on having the fruits of someone else’s labor.

The certainty with which this story ends belies the tensions running throughout the scene before. Regardless of how much the narrative means always to declare which is the right side and which the wrong side of the debate between private property and a commons, in showing the debate the story opens up room for speculation and the possibility of an alternative to this bold, didactic ending. In the scene before the boys are literally in debate about what constitutes stealing. Before the boys climb the cherry tree, when John, the good little boy, is still with them, they contemplate going to the country to get fruit. The eldest boy initiates the proposal, saying “Let us go out in the country

and get more fruit." To which John, who at this point is already starting to doubt the joys of playing truant asks,

'Where shall we find it?'

'Oh, in any body's garden or orchard.'

'Will people give it to us in the country?'

'No, what a fool you are to ask, but we can take it from the trees,--there is more than they want, and we may as well have some, as anybody else.'

'But that will be *stealing*,' said John, 'we have no right to take it, have we?'

'They have enough,' continued the boy, 'and won't miss what we take; we may as well take it as the birds.'

This conversation about theft is a rather explicit debate not about the line between the private and public but rather between the private and the commons. While John is convinced that picking fruit in the country is stealing, the boys frame the endeavor as something arguably like gleaning. *Gleaning* refers to an ancient practice in which land owners intentionally leave some portion of their fields unharvested in order for the poor and strangers to harvest—to glean. Gleaning comes from Biblical holy codes. In Leviticus, God instructed the people via Moses, saying: "'When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you.'"⁷ In the feudal system, the practice of gleaning took place on portions of land called the

⁷ Leviticus 23:22 (NIV).

commons. But gleaning is not a practice (or not a legal one) in a 19th-century American, capitalist society that values privatization and individual property rights. Still the boys here offer gleaning as an alternative way to understand their otherwise criminal actions. If the story means to equate private property and the fruits of one's own labor with a Biblical paradise (a re-instantiation of the sacred garden), the boys' logic summons the numerous instances in the Bible in which hoarding is condemned and sharing and consideration of the poor and strangers insisted upon. Think how the manna in the desert would turn to maggots if the Israelites took more than they needed.⁸ Or the (foreign) Canaanite woman who compelled Jesus's generosity by reminding him that "[e]ven the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table."⁹ Or how even Jesus and his disciples gleaned, "pick[ing] some heads of grain and eat[ing] them" as they "went through the grainfields."¹⁰ Perhaps the only time hoarding is condoned is when Joseph "store[s] up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea," but he stored this grain under God's vision and for the provision of the people in a coming famine.¹¹

Even John Locke's enlightenment revision of the commons holds open a kind of sanction against hoarding. For Locke the commons is the resources that Nature gives to

⁸ Exodus 16:20 (NIV).

⁹ Matthews 15:27 (NIV).

¹⁰ Matthews 12:1 (NIV).

¹¹ Genesis 41:49 (NIV).

all men in common in order to enjoy or make use of. Importantly in Locke's formulation this common remains useless and chaotic until it has been developed by some part of man's labor. Claiming a natural right to one's own labor, Locke proposes that what a man labors on and develops out of the commons is his property. But even here in what is the central tenet of Locke's formulation of property, he still asks, "But how far has he [God] given it ["all things"] us?" He answers the question, saying: "To enjoy. As much as anyone can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils, so much he may by his labour fix a property in: whatever is beyond this, is more than his share, and belongs to others. Nothing was made by God for man to spoil or destroy."¹² So when the boys point out that the owners have more than they need, they suggest that the owners' natural rights to these fruits have dissolved. Comparing themselves to the birds only further makes their own claims to that fruit a naturalized right, something rooted in a natural order.

John, however, even in his delinquency, establishes himself as the voice of a modern valuation of privatization and individual labor. Not buying into the boys' explanation, John registers his disapproval once again:

'But still it would be stealing,' said John, 'and I am not going to be a thief.'

'You call me a thief, do you?'

'Yes, if you take other folks cherries and fruit,' said John firmly.

¹² John Locke, "Of Property," *The Second Treatise of Civil Government*, 1690, Constitution.org, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.constitution.org/jl/2ndtr05.htm>.

‘Take that then,’ said the bad boy, giving John a blow on the head which knocked him down.

John’s declaration of the sanctity of private property as a line that he will not cross in his truancy, and the boys’ clear disapproval of John’s righteousness marks a turning point in the story. The boys turn away from John, and he returns home, but there is also here something of a bend in the narrative structure. After this argument, we lose our protagonist, and we forego the steady development of narrative action. Something of the climax is undercut in John’s sudden injury and retreat. There is essentially no build to John’s story since this scene is itself constructed as the build in tension to the more climactic garden theft, which does not include our protagonist. We could say that the story is not meant to entertain and does not care about the pleasure of coming to a climax, and that might be true if it stopped there with John, but the story does not stop. Whether for generic pleasure or to develop the intensity of its message, the story needs to escalate the action and the consequences of truancy beyond that to which it is willing subject the essentially-good John. It does this by shifting narrative attention to the nameless boys, allowing one of the boys to step into the center as protagonist, giving him the name Tom.

When we contextualize this story within the larger circulation of anti-truancy texts, we can see that the picture of truancy that anti-truancy narratives like this story want to depict depends on this bifurcation of narrative action and this division between

the “bad boy” truants and the essentially good boy John. In the months leading up to the passing of the first anti-truancy bills in the Massachusetts state legislature in April of 1850,¹³ a bevy of commentaries, reports, and tracts circulated in an effort to promote the common school and truancy reform. These narratives continued to circulate into the fall of 1850 as local legislatures passed ordinances in compliance with the new anti-truancy bills. In the short story’s curious bend and overlapping protagonists, it plays out the same kind of logic we see in other anti-truancy texts, which depicted truancy as a two-pronged problem, primarily because it made a distinction between types of truants. Again and again this literature makes subtle and not so subtle distinctions between the native, American (read white) child playing truant and the perpetually truant (usually poor and foreign) child. In regards to the former there was an anxiety about the children’s losing a place in their developmental trajectory, setting themselves behind in lessons and putting themselves at risk of not graduating, which was a threat to both their own future and also to the future of the commonwealth, which these articles made clear depended upon having children develop into reasoning and economically independent citizens.

These students were like seeds being nurtured and developed for the nation’s tomorrow. Indeed such an idea is precisely how Horace Bushnell in his 1847 *Christian*

¹³ “Truancy,” *The Massachusetts Teacher (1848-1855)* 4, no. 4 (April 1851): 125, accessed March 16, 2014, American Periodicals Series.

Nurture painted the child. Regarding “the child [as] more a candidate for personality than a person,” Bushnell described the child “as a seed forming in the capsule of the parent-stem, getting everything from that stem.”¹⁴ Here and over twenty more times in the text, Bushnell figures the child as plant life. What is interesting, though, is that in Bushnell’s formulation where the child is figured as lacking a capacity for independent movement or animation, any kind of seemingly autonomous movement on the part of the child is construed as a kind of rebellion, an already fugitive resistance that must (in a manner that resembles the aims of anti-truancy legislation) be nipped in the bud (so to speak) by placing the child in the proper location.

Bushnell’s disciplining advice, his nurture, is predicated on a prior recognition of the child’s willful movement. For when a young child refuses to come or toddles away, Bushnell encourages the parents to “[t]ake [the child] up then, when the fit is upon him carry him, stand him on his feet, set him here or there, do just that in him which he refuses to do in himself—all this gently and kindly, as if he were capable of maintaining no issue at all.”¹⁵ On the one hand, the child is imagined as a stationary seed in virgin ground, but on the other hand, developing and cultivating the fruits of that seed entails controlling the physical movements of that child. Not yet a person, the child nevertheless attempts to “lift his will in mutiny, and swell in self asserting obstinacy,”

¹⁴ Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1861) Google Books, 242, accessed March 16, 2014.

¹⁵ Bushnell, 245.

and this mutiny is more often than not expressed in the children's physical movements, their "refusing to go or come, or stand, or withhold in this or that...."¹⁶ For Bushnell, these mutinous gestures are of no consequence as long as adults remember that children can be moved (physically if not also by affection); "[t]he child has no force, however stout he is in his will"; he can be (albeit with kindness and calmness) placed into the desired and proper position. Compulsory school and anti-truancy laws (which included the appointment of truancy officers who would arrest truant children and potentially remove perpetual truants from their homes and place them in reform institution) give the state the legal authority to act as this "nurturing" parent who will respond to the mutinous unregulated movements of the child by placing them in the proper position.

But these essentially good seeds needing to be pruned of their mutinous movements are not the only type of children figured in the story anti-truancy narratives tell about what one writer called "the evil of absence."¹⁷ A second type of truant figures as an amorphous growth, crowding out the urban landscape like so many weeds.

Articles in such periodicals as *The Massachusetts Teacher*, *The New England Farmer*, and *The Common School Journal* described these truants as those children who "are found on the banks of your canals; they swarm in your large cities,"¹⁸ or "the houseless, and

¹⁶ Bushnell, 244.

¹⁷ "Irregular Attendance.: The Evils of Absence," *The Massachusetts Teacher (1848-1855)* 3, no. 11 (November 1850): 333-338, accessed March 16, 2014, American Periodical Series.

vicious, and criminal” out in “the highways and hedges” who must be “*compel[led]* ...to come in” to the feast of the Common School.¹⁹ They were that “large class of children who frequent the streets, wharves, and Railroad Depots of our large towns and cities.”²⁰ This desire to constantly describe truants’ location in the urban landscape and to do so in a diction that likens them to pernicious growths makes a distinction between this class of truants—the bad boy Toms—and the essentially good Jonny seeds. Indeed as in the story, these perpetual truants are crowding the streets and climbing the trees of private gardens like unwanted vines destroying other’s labor and choking their fruit where fruit here refers not just to the cherries but to John’s potential, the fruit the common school means to develop in him. The boys put that development at risk not only because they tempt him to want something else besides the respectable norm, but also physically; the blow to the head turns out to be so severe that John loses a month of school and in that absence, we are told, he also loses the opportunity to win a medal.

The inclusion of this detail about the medal is important. The medal is a symbolic token of the fruits of competitive economics and individual development, which the common school means to promote. The unregulated movements of the bad

¹⁸ “The Public Education of the People,” *The Massachusetts Teacher (1848-1855)* 3, no. 3 (March 1850) accessed March 16, 2014, American Periodical Series.

¹⁹ “The Duty of Government: In Regard to General Education,” *The Common School Journal (1838-1852)* 12, no. 6 (March 15, 1850) accessed March 16, 2014, American Periodical Series.

²⁰ “Irregular Attendance.: The Evils of Absence.”

boy trample over John's just germinating consciousness, rationale ideals, and work ethic. The bad boys cause John to lose out on this development. Indeed as one writer explains, this class of perpetual truants threatens to "corrupt the morals of all the youth in the *land*" and "[w]hat a *field* of labor is here presented"²¹ as if the youths in the land were a prize crop and the truants insidious weeds. These plant and wild growth metaphors suggest (as both Locke and Rousseau might have) that the child is a part of the undeveloped but fertile commons in need of development. The distinction, though, between seeds and weeds is a distinction between a good child from whom the common school can harvest a productive, fruit-bearing citizen and that other bad class of children who, like weeds, always remind us that the landscape and the social order are constructions, which if not constantly and carefully attended will be encroached upon by unruly, undeveloped growths threatening to bring the fruits and spaces of development back into an illegible and uncivilized commons. Truancy, as a mutinous movement, brings seeds and weeds dangerously close to each other. In the tense interplay between the common school and a commons, which truancy makes present, there is a shift from a notion of *common* more generally as that which people share or hold in common to a notion of *common* that refers to a general norm or a representative type (that which the common school can produce). Truancy becomes a contested action

²¹ "Irregular Attendance.: The Evils of Absence," (emphasis added).

that puts the two types of common in opposition and occasions the latter to problematize and present itself as the solution to the former.

5.2 From Tom to Tom

Twenty-six years after “The Way of Transgressors...,” Twain imagines his Tom Sawyer boldly and almost respectably skipping school. That tension between *common* as a (sometimes fugitive) sharing together and *common* as a norm, which truancy brought to the surface, appears to have dissolved. In Twain, we do not see the illegality and the riskiness of truancy, which reformers were at pains to highlight. For Twain, Tom Sawyer’s mischief is a matter of course, and a necessary course at that. His playing hookey seems to be if not a child’s right then a necessary stage in the development of the individual and the community or even nation. By the time Twain pens his Tom, whom Leslie Fiedler identifies as the “Good Bad Boy,”²² compulsory school laws are proliferating across the nation. A middle class, rapidly increasing with industrialization, encouraged the middle class valuing of children as affective objects rather than potential economic resources.²³ The trauma of the Civil War encouraged nostalgia for the idea of childhood and an accompanying insistence on the need to let children be children and

²² Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2003), 270.

²³ See Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Maria Holmgren Troy, “‘The Cleverest Children’s Book Written Here’: Elizabeth Stoddard’s *Lolly Dinks’s Doings* and the Subversion of Social Convention,” in *Enterprising Youth Social Values and Acculturation in Nineteenth-Century American Children’s Literature*, ed. Monika Elbert (New York: Routledge, 2008), 152-3.

be able to play.²⁴ Still concerned with national progress and child development, the nation had come to see play as bound up with freedom and as that to which every child has a right.

But even in this seemingly romantic reversal—the embrace of the bad boy—it is important to remember that Tom Sawyer is not just Twain’s embrace of that bad boy truant Tom, it is also Twain’s reimagining of truancy. In truth, Tom is much more respectful of private property than the bad boys breaking into the garden. He is very much invested in a competitive market that he can corner and a social order that he can dominate. As much as Tom bucks against school and likes to play hookey, we do see him in the school, and there is much of the common school virtues in Tom. (Indeed our Tom Sawyer was just as excited about the chance to win a spelling medal and just as crestfallen to have to give it up as John in “The Way of Transgressors”) And he is constantly bringing to the wild and play spaces the rules and knowledge he has acquired from the school, church, and other societal institutions. He instructs Huck how to write his name, and he is forever informing his playmates about the genre rules that their pretend play must uphold. Twain’s use of the name *Tom* does not claim a mutinous commons of truancy as much as it establishes his protagonist as a common type, for the name *Tom* signifies a representative of a common man, not a commoner, but a common

²⁴ See Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); and Gillian Avery, *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books, 1621-1922* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

type (i.e. every “Tom, Dick, and Harry”).²⁵ In contrast, though, Twain (still with a romantic glow) keeps the dynamic between the essentially good seeds and the perpetually truant weeds in the figure of Huck, where Huck is not only a traditionally Irish name: Huckleberry refers to a plant shrub and colloquially it denotes something minor and insignificant. What we can see here is the way in which the *commons* as a wild growth and the black and feminine moves of the minor are signaled at least in Huck’s name (if not also in the constricted gestures of Jim and Becky), and *common* as a normative type gets depicted in Tom.

In his revision Twain does not just make the truant Tom laudable; he also changes the terms of truancy so that it is not really a violation of private property. Indeed it is not really a violation of public norms or child development. Truancy as *playing hookey* is far more about reincorporation into society (a kind of temporary hiding out and then a seeking or being found that brings the player back in) than it is about escape, fugitivity, or a way out. Indeed where Pearl brings the wild liminal into the ordered space of the market, Tom does no such thing. Tom is very sensitive about social norms and societal expectations. He knows, accepts, and enforces the line between him and Huck. He is aware that Huck is a “pariah”²⁶ and seen as unable to cross into the proper spaces of town and market. On the one hand Tom has no problem claiming his

²⁵ “Tom n1” *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2014), accessed March 17, 2014.

²⁶ Twain, 40.

companionship with Huck as the reason he was late to school in order to garner a kind of notoriety and get himself sentenced to sit next to the girls and Becky. However on the other hand when the boys go to check out the taverns, Tom tells Huck to stay back, for as the narrative briefly remarks, Tom “did not care to have Huck’s company in public places.”²⁷ Again when Huck has just gained entrance into society (via his fortune and the widow’s adopting him), he refuses it, and runs away to his old life. Tom coaxes him back by telling Huck that he “can’t let [him] into the gang if [he] ain’t respectable.” Tom explains that he wants the gang to be respectable because robbers are “more high-toned than what a pirate is.” And yet all of Tom’s pretend characters are bound to strict codes of honor. If anything, Tom brings the order of the market, and the town to the wild play spaces of the forest and the island.

Playing hookey as a term is particularly important to Twain’s romantic revision of truancy as a game. *Playing hookey* is not synonym for *truancy*. It has its own linguistic history that (via Twain) occludes the word *truancy* and the history of truants and truant reforms. Interestingly the term *playing hookey* as Twain uses it is anachronistic. In the same way we can see Hawthorne’s 1850s understanding of childrearing and his daughter Una in his Puritanical imagining of Pearl, we can see something of a post-reconstruction nostalgia for children’s play and “free” spirited childish movements in his antebellum imagining of Tom’s adventures. But if Tom Sawyer’s childhood here

²⁷ Ibid., 132.

takes place sometime between 1838 and 1848 (based on Twain's approximation in the preface)²⁸ then the action of skipping out of school would more likely been called *truancy*, and *truancy* was a problem in northern cities where unsupervised children were more an issue than in the south. In the south, compulsory school laws didn't pass until later (Mississippi being the last to adopt such laws and not until 1918), and children's absence from school was accepted as necessary, for children's labor was essential in the primary industry — farming. Indeed the expression *playing hookey* linguistically was not used widely until after the war, and much of that popularity was owing to the popularity of Twain's ATS. *Playing hookey*, however, is not Twain's neologism. According to linguist John Sinnema the phrase *playing hookey* comes from the Dutch *playing sloejkehe* (and just *hoekje*), referring to a child's game of hide-and-seek. *Playing hoejke* came to refer to a petty form of truancy when the term *hide-and-seek* became the dominant way for describing *hoekje* and other similar games, all bearing different names from their respective ethnic traditions. While *hide-and-seek* displaced *playing hoekje* for the title of this game, the phrase *playing hoekje* was able to find an afterlife because of the popularity of the terms *hook*, *hooking*, and *hook it* coming from English parlance referring to a minor theft (and increasingly in 1820s to prostitution). A childish stealing of one's

²⁸ Ibid., 5.

self, what had in fact been known as truancy or most benignly as *playing truant* began to be thought of as *playing hoekje* or rather *playing hookey*.²⁹

Twain's ATS was central to the popularization of this romantic version of truancy. The Bartlett Dictionary and the OED (citing the Barlett Dictionary) list its earliest usage in ATS. Twain not only uses the expression *playing hookey*; it is also the organizing principle of his narrative. Indeed we can see in the very opening chapter that *playing hookey* as it appears in ATS retains much of its association with a game like hide-and-seek. And in large part the anachronism of the term does the work of romantically displacing the anxiety, illegality, and material consequences associated with truancy. Where truancy was perceived as putting a child at risk of being left behind, outside, and at odds with progress, civilization, and normative development Twain's *playing hookey* is part of what Judith Fetterly might call a "sanctioned rebellion"; it is just play—a game of hide-and-seek that is just as much about reincorporation into the normative order of society as it is about the thrill of an individual's singular adventure.

From the opening scene, we can see that *playing hookey* not as fugitive departure, but as a hide-and-seek game, is the organizing principle of his narrative. *Playing hookey* as it appears in ATS slips the disruptive potential of playing truant into the more playful

²⁹ John R. Sinnema, "The Dutch Origin of Play Hookey," *American Speech* 45, no. 3/4 (Autumn-Winter, 1970): 205-9, JSTOR, accessed March 16, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/454834>.

activity of playing hide and seek. The narrative mentions Tom's playing hookey in the first chapter. The first lines read like a game of hide-and-seek.

"TOM!"

No answer.

"TOM!"

No answer.

"What's gone with that boy, I wonder? You TOM!"

No answer.

The old lady pulled her spectacles down and looked over them about the room; then she put them up and looked out under them. She seldom or never looked THROUGH them for so small a thing as a boy; they were her state pair, the pride of her heart, and were built for 'style,' not service—she could have seen through a pair of stove-lids just as well.³⁰

In this movement of seeking the hidden, we enter into the adventures not from Tom's perspective, not from the position of the hiding one, but from the seeking adult, Aunt Polly. Tom is not present in the narrative, but his absence is already part of what reads like a game of hide-and-seek in which Aunt Polly is "it." As she explains, there is already something "gone with" the boy, already something absent and playing hookey about Tom that not only she, but also the reader and the narrator must search out. What this opening drives home is that this is a story about looking for Tom, who is good at hiding and playing hookey. And looking for Tom, right from the beginning, turns out to be a tricky business for a number of reasons, not the least of which being that the adult

³⁰Twain, 11.

looking for Tom, the only character with whom we have been presented to identify thus far, is impaired in her vision.

This notion of an obstacle to the adult's ability to see the child is an important theme in *ATS*. Indeed the blindness highlighted in Aunt Polly's glasses is even in this first scene reiterated in the fence over which Tom disappears. After a bit of cunning deception, Aunt Polly is able to unearth and lay hold of Tom who had been hiding in the closet. Her seizure though is only momentary. For just as she is about to punish Tom—"the switch hover[ing] in the air"—Tom, via a trickery much like her own, distracts Aunt Polly and makes a break for it.³¹ Tom escapes Aunt Polly's punishing grasp and disappears over the high fence. Once Tom is gone, Aunt Polly laughs and laments the boy's ability to trick her and escape punishment once again. In her ponderings about the difficulty of disciplining Tom, Aunt Polly concludes that "[h]e'll play hookey this evening," and she will be "obleged to make him work, tomorrow, to punish him." The narrative confirms Aunt Polly's prediction, for in the next paragraph, we are told that "Tom did play hookey, and he had a very good time."³² Importantly here we do not see Tom's play of hookey. His hookey is something that happens on the other side of the fence which Aunt Polly (and at least in this moment) the readers cannot see. In this way the fence as an obstacle to Aunt Polly's vision (and now the readers) is paralleled with

³¹ Twain, 11.

³² *Ibid.*, 12.

Aunt Polly's state-issued and blinding spectacles. For Aunt Polly everything Tom does on the other side of that fence constitutes his playing hookey adventures, which she can't see but is sure happens. Yet we have already witnessed that even when Tom is on the domestic side of the fence, Aunt Polly can't see him. Everything that happens on the other side of Aunt Polly's glasses (all the minor moves of so small a thing as a boy) are hidden from Aunt Polly who in her own playful way is always looking. In this manner the movement of Tom's playing hookey (as a disappearing over the fence) is already prefigured in the hide-and-seek relationship between child and adult with which the narrative opens (and which it continues to reiterate throughout the narrative).

This central theme of looking for what Susan Honeyman called the "elusive" child³³ fits both with Mark Twain's intention for *ATS* to be "a study of a boy" and the enduring reception of the narrative, not as a study but as a classic of children's literature (as the "boy's story" Twain specifically did not intend it to be but for financial reasons marketed it as anyways).³⁴ In terms of a study, the narrative sets itself up to examine that which seems un-examinable, what Aunt Polly and the readers can't see, the movements of the child, both the general type of child (and Tom, Twain tells us, is a composite character, a representative type) and the remembered child that adults used

³³ Susan Honeyman, *Elusive Childhood: Impossible Representation in Modern Fiction* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2005).

³⁴ Mark Twain, "Twain to Howells, 5 July 1875," in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, ed Beverly Lyon Clark (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), 254. Twain tells Howell that "[i]t is *not* a boy's book, at all."

to be.³⁵ This looking for the child other and the child past animates much of the dynamics of children's literature as well. Gabrielle Owen argues that children's literature is able to get at the way in which adults (even in the act of composing a literature for children) constantly fail to see what the child is up to or rather that the child is up to something. Imagining a reversal, children's literature entertains the idea that the myopia is not with the naïve child who does not know how, for example, to draw within the lines, but with the adults who are tethered to their own limited narratives and delimiting ways of seeing. Here Twain opens *ATS* with precisely such a reversal where Aunt Polly, even as she calls Tom and even as he is hiding from her, is the elusive thing she imagines him to be. The scene turns out to present another example (indeed a prior example) of this adult myopia in looking at the child. That Aunt Polly's "difficulty" in finding Tom hinges not on her old age or some inherent blindness, but on the willfully adorned state-issued mechanism for seeing suggests, as Owen argues, that if the relation between adult and child is an impossible one as Jacqueline Rose so famously claimed, then it is an impossibility that is socially constructed, not necessarily innate.³⁶

³⁵ Ibid. "Preface," in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, ed Beverly Lyon Clark (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), 5.

³⁶ Gabrielle Owen, "Queer Theory Wrestles the 'Real' Child: Impossibility, Identity, and Language in Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan*," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* (2010): 255-73.

This opening, as it merges the blindness playfully assumed in hide-and-seek with the going elsewhere of truancy, sets up Twain's narrative as that which will transcend adult blindness. In this first chapter the narrator stays with Aunt Polly, makes us intimate with her limitations in finding Tom. If the fence, like her spectacles, stands as a border between the adult civilized world (in this moment epitomized by Aunt Polly and the domestic sphere) and the wilderness of free play beyond, the narrative promises in the preceding chapters to cross that impenetrable border. It promises to follow Tom in his hookey, the condition for the possibility for adventures.

Playing hookey is about hide-and-seek and what can be seen behind the blinding lens of adult spectacles, what happens over the fence. In the narrative all of that which escapes the normative adult order, what in *The Scarlet Letter* would have been a marker of Pearl's otherworldly impishness or in UTC a marker of Topsy's so very black, goblin spirit gets benignly constituted here as "just play." The difference between *truancy* and *playing hookey* is that *truancy* is "for real" and *playing hookey* is "just play." Twain's narrative is preoccupied with this distinction between the "for real" and the "just play." Not only do we get the narrator's infamous distinction between work—"whatever a body is *obliged* to do"—and play as "whatever a body is not obliged to do,"³⁷ but we also get the boys' philosophical examination of the difference between *hooking* and *stealing*. "[I]t seemed to them, in the end, that there was no getting around the stubborn fact that

³⁷ Twain, 21.

taking sweetmeats was only 'hooking,' while taking bacon and hams and such valuables was plain simple *stealing*—and there was a command against that in the Bible."³⁸

Stealing is "for real" with "real" consequences, but hooking seems to operate in an acceptable realm of "just play," given over to the (boy) child. Scholars from Judith Fetterley to Gillian Brown have commented on the way *ATS* blurs the line between real dangers and "just play" in a way that always allows Tom to be reunited with the town and adult world essentially unscathed.³⁹ "The game," as Fred See points out in his discussion of Tom's predilection for games, "preserves the possibility of ordering and remembering knowledge and this preserves the race; it keeps structure alive."⁴⁰ As a game, a child's play, Tom's playing hookey always already bespeaks reincorporation and the child's institutional space in a normative order even as it is precisely truancy and a childish departure from that order that it means to make a game of. Indeed as a

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁹ See Judith Fetterley, "The Sanctioned Rebel," in *Critical Essays on The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, ed. Gary Scharnhorst (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1993), 119-29. Fetterley posits that "The focus of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is on the harmony between Tom and his community and on the satisfactions of the symbiotic relationship between them" (128); Gillian Brown, "Child's Play," in *The American Child A Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 13-39; Forrest G. Robinson, "Social Play and Bad Faith in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*," in *Critical Essays on The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, ed. Gary Scharnhorst (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1993), 160-178; Sanford Pinsker, "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Play Theory, and the Critic's Job of Work," in *Critical Essays on The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, ed. Gary Scharnhorst. (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1993), 221-227; Fred G. See, "Tom Sawyer and Children's Literature," in *Critical Essays on The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, ed. Gary Scharnhorst (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1993), 179-200. Pinsker and See discuss Tom's playing as an experiments in/explorations of the line between order and chaos—the parameters of society and its governing law—without having to incur the lasting consequences of the real.

⁴⁰ See, 185.

game, hide-and-seek or playing *hoejke*, Tom's playing hookey helps reify normative order. The point of hide-and-seek is not to wholly avoid capture; underneath the game, there is a desire to be found. No one wants to hide so well that the seeker gives up and they are left alone. Indeed very young children will even give themselves away or give you a hint if it appears you are having a difficult time in finding them. Tom always makes himself found; *playing hookey* here is tethered to development. Tom's play is a rehearsal space for narratives of normative order. Joan Menefee, L. Moffitt Cecil, and others⁴¹ have also noted the way in which Tom's play prepares him to respectfully own property (human or otherwise), to be "the guardians of freedom and justice" in ways that adults have failed,⁴² and to perform heterosexual masculinity.⁴³ Reading Twain's ATS as children's literature, See points to Tom's constant crossing of borders and his bridging the ordered space of adult normative order and the un-sequenced terrain of child's play. And even though Twain never meant to write a boy's story, See thinks about Tom's border crossing not as Twain's attempt to study the space of boyhood so much as an attempt to communicate to the child (an exemplary children's literature) the

⁴¹ See: Joan Menefee, "Good Masters: Child-Animal Relationships in the Writings of Mark Twain and G. Stanley Hall," in *Enterprising Youth Social Values and Acculturation in Nineteenth-Century American Children's Literature*, ed. Monika Elbert (New York: Routledge, 2008), 227-243; L. Moffitt Cecil, "Tom Sawyer: Missouri Robin Hood," in *Critical Essays on The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, ed. Gary Scharnhorst (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1993), 113-8. See also Brown and Fetterley.

⁴²Cecil, 113-8.

⁴³ See Glenn Hendler, *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

limits of play. ATS, like the genre of children's literature, "answers a need—of culture, and of the self; it lets us know where the wild things are, and the way back."⁴⁴

But such a description of children's literature, of Tom's border crossing movements in ATS—that movement I am highlighting as *playing hookey*—begs the question, what about the wild things? What about those bodies and movements that mark the space of the wild but can never come "back"? This is my fundamental problem with *playing hookey*; here we return more precisely to what makes me uneasy about the "playing hookey for freedom" flyer. At base *playing hookey* assumes an institutional position, and it heralds the development of the independent individual. Put another way Tom's playing hookey is not a departure into the margins or the fugitive space; indeed, like all his play, it puts him at the center, makes him the captain, the leader, the boss, the hero—makes him exceptional even as he comes to stand for the normative American type.⁴⁵ If playing hookey is put forth as the constitutive movement of normative American boyhood, the movement that allows the boy to be both courageous explorer of the wilderness and torchbearer of American values and progress, then we must acknowledge that not all Twain's children can play hookey.

⁴⁴ See, 186.

⁴⁵ In a July 5, 1875 letter to William Dean Howell, Mark Twain explains that he "didn't take the chap [Tom] beyond boyhood" because he was sure that "[i]f [he] went on, now & took him into manhood, he would just be like all the one-horse men in literature & the reader would conceive a hearty contempt for him," in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, ed Beverly Lyon Clark (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), 254.

Huck and Jim and arguably Becky all have a contentious relation to the hookey, which makes Tom the ideal boy. They are integral to Tom's ability to play hookey, but they cannot be said to participate in it. They are something of what Fred Moten might call "constitutive—supplement[s]." ⁴⁶ Jim provides the labor and the listening ear for Tom's adventures to take place. Huck provides Tom with what he romanticizes (not unlike his subsequent readers) as a pure ideal of freedom, but Huck is not free in the way Tom actually aspires to be free. For Tom, put simply, wants to acquire. He wants to develop wealth, fame, and the power of leadership. Tom wants to rule and run things. Huck wants to run (away from the widow and the chance to be regulated and incorporated into society). Huck moves outside the very developmental structure that will ensure Tom's capacity to be a free and productive citizen (Judge Thatcher's investment in his future, the town's belief he could be president). Put more baldly, Huck and Jim don't go to school, and thus they cannot be said to playfully escape it.

While Huck and (if we consider *The Adventures of Huck Finn*) Jim too articulate the expanse of Twain's imagination—his desire to fly into the fugitive and lawless—Becky figures in a highly constricted space. She is always placed (usually satirically) in constraints of a stereotypical feminine sentimentality. In this way she is essential to keeping Tom's playing hookey just play or let us say something from which he always wants to return. While Becky goes to school, and Twain allows her (only with Tom) to

⁴⁶ Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2008), 180.

give the other scholars the slip (once in their courtship walking home and then more dramatically in the cave when Tom and Becky stray from the group and end up lost in the caverns), Twain cannot imagine Becky as capable of escape. Even when she is in the dark of the wilderness, she is defined by her inability to move, her capacity to get trapped by walls, and her readiness to sit down and cry. Indeed Twain cannot imagine any kind of valuation in Becky's tears, her skirting the parameters,⁴⁷ and certainly not in her inclination to sit down. In the cave, Twain writes "it was dreadful to think of sitting down . . . moving, in some direction, in any direction, was at least progress and might bear fruit; but to sit down was to invite death and shorten its pursuit."⁴⁸ The horror here of sitting in the dark seems to prefigure Twain's configuration of the colonized person as "the person sitting in darkness."⁴⁹ Although the essay is critical of U.S. imperialism, its satire or facetiousness lie in its suggestion that it is only America's blind conviction that sees the colonized person as sitting in the dark. The colonized man is not

⁴⁷ Think about how when Becky refuses Tom's apology gift (the doorknob), both Becky and Tom are upset. Tom's reaction is to "marc[h] out of the [school] house and over the hills and far away, to return to school no more that day." Indeed the text privileges his running so much that when the next chapter begins, it picks up with Tom's "dodg[ing] hither and thither through lanes until he was well out of the track of returning scholars, and [his] f[alling] into a moody jog." By contrast, Becky's movements are hemmed in by the school. "She ran to the door; [Tom] was not in sight: she flew around to the play-yard; he was not there." And eventually "she sat down to cry again and upbraid herself." She is left in the school and in that chapter where she must "hide her griefs and still her broken heart" on her own. Mark Twain, 50.

⁴⁸ Twain, 150.

⁴⁹ Mark Twain, "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (New York: Anti-Imperialist League of New York, 1901) American Studies at the University of Virginia, accessed March 16, 2014, roads.virginia.edu/~drbr/sitting.html.

just sitting in the dark but aware and preparing. In this formulation, though, sitting and the darkness are still problems.

And yet this connection between the colonized person, darkness, and sitting ought to be enough for us at least to consider sitting as a radical and interrupting gesture. Indeed even as the flyer calls children to “play hookey for freedom,” it is calling for them not only to march, but also to sit down and sit in. And in Twain too if we let go of Tom’s glorious play, what kind of revolution might we find in the minor moment in which Huck recounts how he “don’t ever act as if [he] was above [Uncle Jake (an enslaved man owned by Joe Harper’s father)]. In full appreciation for Uncle Jake who “gives [Huck] a little something to eat if he can spare it,” Huck exclaims that “sometimes [he’s] set right down and eat *with* him.” But in front of Tom (who has nothing to say about this moment) Huck adds sheepishly “a body’s got to do things when he’s awful hungry he wouldn’t want to do as a steady thing.”⁵⁰ And indeed when a body is hungry, Tom sits too (and in the dark no less) with Becky in the cave, and they too eat together, a piece of their “wedding cake.” Here when they are hungry the play wedding cake and even the symbolism embedded in “real” wedding cakes give way not to a more important real but to a material reality of bodies and dependency, of needing not to be discrete figures in a proper order, but of needing to join together, eat together, sit together, grope in the dark to find a way out together.

⁵⁰ Twain, 135.

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Biography

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